

“Real Entrepreneurs Don’t Go It Alone”

Keynote Address

This keynote address has won four awards including a 2014 Cicero Speechwriting Award, presented by Vital Speeches of the Day, in the Leadership and Management category.

The speech drew upon a local historical event to anchor the opening and closing remarks. One entrepreneur attending the event rushed up afterward, greeted the speaker and said, “You made me feel like an astronaut!”

Here are two excerpts.

EXCERPT 1 (SPEECH OPENING)

In 1959 – right here in Dayton, Ohio – 31 military test pilots landed at Wright Aeromedical Laboratory, determined and eager to be selected as our nation’s first astronauts.

Here they endured one of the most grueling experiences of their lives.

For six days and three nights, these 31 men were tortured to see if they could withstand extreme physical and psychological stress – and emerge all the better for it.

In the end, 24 were sent home. But seven made it through – with flying colors – and were rewarded by making history.

These seven took part in Project Mercury – America’s first manned space program – and became known as the Mercury Seven.

They were cheered. They were celebrated. They were honored as American heroes.

Now why am I telling you all this?

I believe that all the physical and psychological trials those 31 men endured weren’t much different from the ordeals entrepreneurs face as the world tests their tolerance for fear, risk and failure – roadblocks on their path to small business success.

Make no mistake: Entrepreneurs are tested every single day, every step of the way:

- Are they bold enough to risk their entire life's savings to commercialize a new technology?
- Do they have all the right stuff to endure agonizing setbacks?
- Are they willing to put their family's well-being on the line – with no guarantees?

Or will they fail and go home – just like those 24 unsuccessful astronauts back in 1959?

Failure. That's the fate an entrepreneur faces today without something very important – something called nurturing – and that's what I want to talk to you about today.

EXCERPT 2 (SPEECH CLOSING)

Over the years, experts have debated whether entrepreneurs are born or made – or whether they're some combination of nature and nurture.

According to a 2011 report by Ernst & Young, entrepreneurs may share some common traits, but these leaders are **made** – not **born**. In effect, **nurture** wins out over **nature**.

The report also said the three biggest barriers to small business success are funding, people and know-how.

That tells me if we provide two of these three ingredients – people and know-how – entrepreneurs are at least two-thirds of the way there to building the small businesses needed to bolster our economy.

The late Professor Albert Shapiro of The Ohio State University talked about this debate another way. He said: "Entrepreneurs are not 'born' ... rather they 'become' through the experiences of their lives."

And so I ask you to consider this: What expertise can you lend – what impact can you make – to help the entrepreneurs right here in Dayton become who they are supposed to become?

And entrepreneurs? My message to you is this: Your tolerance for fear, risk and failure will continue to be tested every step of the way on your journey toward success.

But when you continue to pass these tests – time and time again, with help from those who have gone before you – we will do the same thing for you that we did for our nation’s Mercury Seven astronauts:

- We will cheer you.
- We will celebrate you.
- And we will honor you as American heroes.

Thank you. ◀