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# Education for entrepreneurship: An interview with Tim Draper

Can entrepreneurship be taught? Silicon Valley venture capitalist Tim Draper believes it can and has established the Draper University of Heroes to do just that.

**Tim Draper**, founder and managing director of venture-capital firm Draper Fisher Jurvetson, recently created Draper University of Heroes, an immersive Silicon Valley boarding school and online program offering courses in entrepreneurship mostly for students aged 18 to 26 years old. In this interview, Draper explains the gap he believes the school fills and why the private and public sector must think creatively about education. What follows is an edited transcript of his remarks.

## Freedom to fail

Draper University is an experiment. It is a new kind of education. People said to me, “Entrepreneurship can’t be taught.” And whenever somebody says I can’t do something, I always think, “How would I, if that were a possibility?” Now, I’ve always had an interest in education. In fact, I had a tremendous education. I went to Andover, and Stanford for electrical engineering, and Harvard Business School.

But something was missing. And I think that was the ability to fail. In the current education system, I think people generally learn by rote, and they are rewarded for not making mistakes. And I think in this new world, I would envision people making a lot of mistakes. I want this education system to adjust itself to this new world. We are much freer. There are many, many more opportunities all around the world now to create new things and make our lives better. And I think that our education system has to catch up to that. If you had to capture Draper University in one little phrase, it would be, “Go ahead, take the chance, and don’t be afraid to fail.”

## Teaching entrepreneurship

You apply to Draper University at [draperuniversity.com](http://draperuniversity.com). And if you get in, this is what to expect: every program is different. We change it every single time. You can't expect a standard curriculum at Draper University. We get 50 different speakers. They all come in. They speak about what is relevant at that time for them. The first part is all called "future." We don't teach history at Draper University. We teach future.

And future is predictive analytics, and science fiction, and projecting what could potentially happen. Then we have survival training. During survival training, the students get both urban and rural survival training. Some of it is very brutal, sort of militaristic, and some of it is just mental-anguish survival training.

You don't know what's coming next. We could make you paint a picture, or you could go car racing, or you might have to rappel a giant cliff. And all of this is a part of entrepreneurial training. And then, at the end, they all come together. It all focuses on an individual, two-minute presentation to a panel of venture capitalists. So all along the way, they're building their own business—but it's all group oriented. So you live and die by the team you have been placed with.

The only grades we give are the team scores. And team scores are all tied to extraordinary behavior, spectacular failures, and big successes. I don't think academically it would make total sense to a lot of professors, but I think if they look at the entire program, they'll see how extraordinary it is and how we really are changing a lot of people's lives for the better.

## Think stupid

The school is fun. They learn things without realizing they're learning them. They learn things by doing things and shaking things up. What we do is we tell them to come up with the stupidest ideas that they can possibly come up with. And it turns out that some of those ideas, when tweaked, become the smartest ideas ever.

I always say this, "What do penicillin, electricity, Reese's peanut butter cups, and Velcro have in common?" They were all invented by mistake. And we're looking for people who will make a lot of mistakes, so that something like that will happen and they'll go off and become great successes. I expect people who come out of Draper University to go start businesses, or create revolutions, or change big businesses for the better. □

**Tim Draper** is the founder of Draper University of Heroes. He also serves as a managing director of Draper Fisher Jurvetson, a venture-capital firm he cofounded in 1985.