

Are Cubs fans like entrepreneurs?

TECH MATTERS | Book's look at lovable losers recalls other frequent failures -- biz starters

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Is it possible to really understand what races through the minds of entrepreneurs who slide head first into their businesses?

The National Business Incubator Association estimates that four out of five companies will strike out swinging within their first five years of existence. It seems irrational that so many entrepreneurs sacrifice their economic security and mental health when their chances of succeeding basically hover around the Mendoza Line. Of course, it is also illogical to passionately follow and believe in a baseball team that hasn't won a World Series since the first long-distance transmission of radio waves. Maybe these two things have something in common.

After reading *Your Brain on Cubs, Inside the Heads of Players and Fans* (Dana Press, 165 pages), there is a mound of evidence to support the claim that the "magical thinking" which exists between entrepreneurs and Cubs fans alike is actually part of a neurological condition. Thankfully, this condition seems to be benign at worst.

"Though some might point to the past century as evidence that hoping for a championship requires losing one's mind," writes co-author Jordan Grafman, "the hope in fact comes from a part of the brain called the pre-frontal cortex."

While the book (which was published earlier this year with promotional help from the Illinois Science Council) focuses on what literally makes Cubs fans tick, you don't have to go into too many extra innings to see how its lessons can be applied to founders of early-stage businesses.

Common habits the book somewhat clinically diagnoses among Cubs fans include delaying gratification, maintaining convictions, ignoring undesirable evidence and adapting personal identities to a greater cause. Of course, all of these are traits of most entrepreneurs.

Members of both groups ultimately choose to ignore the overwhelming evidence around them that they will probably fail in their endeavors. This is a good thing. Entrepreneurship is the engine of business innovation, and the world would be in a sorry state without its continued practice. As for the Cubbies, a return on investment one century in the making will reveal itself in October after we move Soriano down in the lineup and acquire a flame-throwing number two pitcher for the rotation.

Entrepreneurial aces

While hope springs eternal for entrepreneurs of all ages, it is the teenagers who tinker in the formation of new businesses who oftentimes bring the freshest outlook to the process. The trick, of course, is to harness their imagination and enthusiasm in order to create tangible business plans that are complete with things like financials and structured PowerPoint presentations.

This is the task of the Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center's Future Founders program, which on May 6 awarded upwards of \$20,000 in cash and prizes to next generation entrepreneurs from a trio of South Side high schools. Winning the \$3,500 first prize at the Future Founders business plan competition hosted at the ESPN Zone was Rodney Walker, a senior at Ace Technical Charter High School.

Walker's company, Forever Life Music & Video Production, produces videos and other custom entertainment for special occasions. Walker's classmates Ryan Braswell and Devin King won second prize for their company, Ultimate Gaming, which hosts video game tournaments and may one day run a summer camp for gaming enthusiasts.

Students from Chicago Vocational Career Academy and Gwendolyn Brooks College Prep also participated in the competition, which was also organized by the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship and spearheaded by CEC managing director Scott Issen. Motorola and Harris Bank also contributed to the program.

Burciaga meets Bush

A decade after founding IT consultancy smartTECHS.net in his apartment, George Burciaga last month scored some face-time with another George who also happens to serve as leader of the free world.

Burciaga, who is 33 and a native of Pilsen, was honored as a runner-up for the national small business person of the year award April 22 during a ceremony in Washington, D.C., hosted by the U.S. Small Business Administration. President Bush personally greeted Burciaga, who was previously honored as the Illinois small business person of the year.

"It was great to have him recognize not only us as an emerging firm, but also the importance of small businesses that are the largest part of our economy," Burciaga said.

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