

DISTINGUISHED ADVERTISING AWARD
ENTREPRENEUR EXCELLENCE



One young businessman has mastered the art of the start-up—and this is only the beginning.

BY MONICA LINK

Most people associate college students with coursework, dorm rooms and more textbooks than you can count. Josh Linkner was not your typical college student.

Instead of cramming for tests and spending all his free time at frat parties, Linkner started his own computer business. A few years later, he sold it and moved on to multi-million dollar ventures. "I've always had the entrepreneurial spark," he said. "I was 20 years old and had never taken one business class, so I hustled and figured it out."

There are millions of hopeful entrepreneurs hoping for their dreams to come true, as Linkner's did. And as the economy slump continues, small businesses are looking to banks for loans. But money is not the only key to a successful start-up—innovation is important, too. And Linkner is an innovation expert.

In 1999 he founded ePrize, a successful internet advertising firm. Today he serves as the company chairman, presiding over about 400 employees across several major metro markets. He also launched another venture to help new businesses in the struggling Detroit market, called Detroit Venture Partners. The group includes successful businessmen looking to make a difference. Former NBA

star Ervin "Magic" Johnson is one of the partners in Linkner's group.

The New York Times bestseller—he made waves with his 2011 book "Disciplined Dreaming"—told The Suit that he believes everyone has creativity; it's all about the discipline we use in cultivating it. In the book, he outlines the five steps of disciplined dreaming: ask, prepare, discover, ignite and launch. It's a method that has worked for him many times over, and his goal is to spread the word.

"There is a need for creativity. We live in a world that is so fast-moving and competitive," Linkner said. "There are so many people who think we're either born creative or we're not. But creativity is 85 percent learned behavior, and all of us have enormous creative capabilities." Those talents can come in many forms; Linker explained how his skills as a jazz musician influenced his business. He applied techniques he learned as an artist—improvisation and imagination—to his entrepreneurial ventures, and success quickly followed.

The United States economy is a tough fix, but Linkner has his own ideas on what we can do to turn the tide. "I think we need to focus on entrepreneurship," he said. "Job growth is coming from small business. And people need to be more creative; it gives them

a competitive advantage. There is a thirst for creativity around the world. Creativity cannot be outsourced."

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