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# The Freedom to Create Your Destiny

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## The Freedom to Create Your Destiny

**KNCY Extension Update**

**May 24, 2012**

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Welcome to the Extension Update! My name is Connie Reimers-Hild, and I am an Extension Educator focused in leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship at the Kimmel Education and Research Center in Nebraska City. In today's Extension Update, I am going to discuss one of the most important elements of our lives: Freedom

The world is changing....fast! Rapid change is occurring in all sectors, including education, technology, science and family. Even the way we pursue our daily living continues to evolve.

Some futurists predict that we are in an era of creating jobs for ourselves because the number of big organizations that employ people will continue to decline. They may be right. On the other hand, this is not a new phenomenon. It has only been in the last generation or two that our mindset shifted from "I want to build my own future" to "I want to get a good job."

While this is a scary thought for some of us, we must also look at the opportunity in the situation. After all, wherever there is a challenge there is also an opportunity!

Entrepreneurial activities, including small business activities, have been recognized as vital components of the U.S. economy for a long time. The United States Small Business Administration defines small businesses as those having fewer than 500 employees. I am sure we can all think of a lot of businesses with fewer than 500 employees, and there is a good reason for this.



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According to a recent report on small businesses in the United States by the US Small Business Administration, small firms account for 99.7 percent of employers in the United States. This means that most workers in the US are employed by small businesses!

The US Small Business Administration also noted that there were 27.3 million small businesses in 2008. Six million of these firms were responsible for 49.6 percent of private-sector jobs in the United States. This means that almost half of the private-sector jobs in 2008 were available because of small businesses.

The bulk of job creation has grown from our small business sector for a long time. Statistics reported by the U.S. Small Business Administration in 2007 demonstrate the significant impact of small business: Small businesses generated 60 to 80 percent of the (net) new jobs in the decade prior to the report and produced 13 times more patents per individual employee when compared to large patenting firms. Further, small businesses produced approximately 55 percent of all new innovations. In the twentieth century, small businesses invented many of the things people use every day, including the airplane, the soft contact lens and the zipper.

We all benefit from developing and supporting entrepreneurial capacity and the innovations that come from these activities. Seriously, could you imagine living without a zipper? Part of developing this capacity includes opportunity recognition and the ability to take calculated risks that move ideas and opportunities forward.

Our very opportunity to be entrepreneurial and create our own destiny is a wonderful freedom we sometimes take for granted as citizens of the United States.

## It is Important to Take Freedom Seriously

We have a unique gift in the United States, and that gift is freedom. The Declaration of Independence guarantees all of us “certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

This means we are free to pursue our lives and our vocations in any way that makes sense to us. Freedom is what makes America so great. What we do with our freedom is up to us. It is our choice. Freedom is our grandest opportunity and should be protected, especially in challenging times. The importance of the freedom to choose is demonstrated by the story of Ewing Marion Kauffman.

After serving in World War II, Ewing Marion Kauffman started working as a salesman for a pharmaceutical company and was extremely successful. When he started making more money than his boss, he found that his sales territory was suddenly limited. Mr. Kauffman's boss limited the sales territory on purpose. After all, an employee couldn't make more money than the boss!

Mr. Kauffman made a decision after his sales territory and income were limited. He quit his job and vowed never to work for anyone else again. He started his business in 1950 in the basement of his home. He generated \$36,000 in sales and \$1,000 of net profit in his first year. By 1989, Mr. Kauffman's business made over \$1 billion in sales and employed over 3,400 people.

Mr. Kauffman wanted to give back to the world and used his knowledge and wealth to form the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, a foundation designed to support entrepreneurship and innovation. The foundation now holds approximately \$2 billion in assets.

Dr. Carl Schramm, the current President of the Kauffman Foundation, wrote a book, *The Entrepreneurial Imperative*. In this book, he notes three things all Americans should remember in the face of gloomy times:

First, “never bet against the American system”

Second, know that being an American is your very best asset

Third, “never count on anyone but you to create your own destiny”

The American system is designed so that we can pursue our passions and dreams, especially in challenging times. Our ability to pursue our dreams and create our own destiny is what makes our country so great.

We all have the freedom to choose what to do with our lives, and we have the freedom to help one another. We have the freedom to pursue our ideas, our dreams and our passions. We have the freedom to create our own destiny.

People like my uncle Jack realized this and helped protect the freedoms we have in the United States. Uncle Jack was a fascinating man. When I was young, all I knew about him was that he was great at hunting night crawlers. In fact, he taught me how to hunt them.

We lived in the apartment above my parents’ TV and appliance store and did not have much of a yard. Luckily, Uncle Jack lived only a few blocks away and had the perfect yard for gathering night crawlers.

When it rained at night, we would walk down to his house with our flashlights and buckets. Dad and Uncle Jack would help us kids hunt night crawlers so we could use them as bait when we went fishing.

There is actually a trick to getting your night crawler. You have to shine the light on night crawlers to find them while they are above the wet ground. But you have to be quick. Too much light scares them back into the ground. You have to remember where they are and grab them quickly yet gently. Then you have to slowly coax them out of the hole a little bit at a time. If you try to force them out, they break.

Night crawlers and people are similar in this regard. If you force individuals down a path they do not truly want to pursue, eventually they break. Humans must find their own path and pursue their own destiny with passion and purpose in order to live their best lives.

I did not understand much about Uncle Jack until I was a young adult. He was a World War II Veteran and served under General George S. Patton during the Battle of the Bulge. Absolutely amazing! He was a World War II hero and I thought he was awesome because of his ability to catch night crawlers!

Uncle Jack and his family sacrificed when he served our country. As Americans, we must remember that our freedom is not free. Many men and women have died, been injured and sacrificed a great deal to provide us with the ability to live our lives the way in which we choose to do so. Taking our freedom for granted dishonors our troops and veterans. It also dishonors their families, who have sacrificed more than many of us can imagine. These people have truly sacrificed for all of us and our great nation. We must honor and salute them everyday. Because everyday we have the freedom to choose how we spend our time.

We must also fight to keep our freedom. We have a voice, and we have to use it. Get out there and vote. Just make sure to read the fine print first! Don't believe everything you hear or read. Instead, think critically about your choices before making them.

The bottom line: Cherish your freedom, protect it and use it to create your destiny!

As I am writing this Extension Update, I am reminded of the importance of freedom not only as it relates to entrepreneurship, business development and our freedom to choose but also the importance of preserving it and protecting it for future generations. It is my daughter's birthday. Happy Birthday Raquel! As a parent, I want to do what I can to preserve freedom so my children and other young people continue to have the freedom to pursue their dreams.

This is also a weekend to remember and celebrate those who have gone before us. Their lives and experiences have helped shape the world in so many different ways. I think of my mom, who raised six kids and who always reminded us to cherish and protect our freedom. She loved her country and taught all of us to do the same. I miss hearing her talk about the importance of living in a free country. The information and advice she shared with me is something I am passing onto my children, her grandkids—the next generation.

I want to wrap up this segment with a Coaching Corner designed to give you something to think about over the weekend:

## Coaching Corner

1. How much do you appreciate your freedom?
  
2. How do you demonstrate your appreciation?

I am also challenging you to take inspired action. This weekend, remember those you have lost and take time to give back to those who have served and their families. Give the military families and veterans in your life a token of your appreciation. Both big and small gestures go a long way. Get creative and do something you think they would appreciate.

Also, really think about the fact that you are responsible for your actions and have the freedom to create your own destiny. My parting words for today are a quote from Inez Milholland, a Suffragist in 1909:

“I am prepared to sacrifice every so-called privilege I possess in order to have a few rights.”

Please call or email me, Connie Reimers-Hild, at the University of Nebraska Kimmel Education and Research Center (402) 873-3166 or [creimers2@unl.edu](mailto:creimers2@unl.edu) if you are interested in coaching, training or resources in the areas of leadership and innovation.

The Kimmel team has a number of other university resources too! Visit [kimmel.unl.edu](http://kimmel.unl.edu) for the more information on how UNL Extension can help you plant your personal seeds of success and innovation!



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