

Advancing Enterprise 2005

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Speech by Simon Woodroffe, Founder, YO! Sushi and YO! Company at Advancing Enterprise 2005.

Enterprise culture.

Thank you, thank you so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Entrepreneurship is cool, what a great thing to hear, isn't it?

Goethe, Goethe is one my heroes from 200 years ago. He said, 'When you know where you're going and when you're truly committed the world conspires to help and support you in all sorts of ways that you could never have believed possible, including the provision of financial assistance.'

The last three words of that particular quote have comforted me many times when I have woken up at 4 o'clock in a cold sweat thinking, 'How am I going to survive,' because when I was growing up as a kid and when I was in my teens, I was going to be a millionaire by the time I was 20.

I remember getting to 20 and it was sort of the end of the 60's, and we were doing peace signs, you know, and meaning them, and I thought, 'Well, I'm having a good time, I'll put it off till I'm 30,' and then I got to 40 and I was running out of time. I was going to be a millionaire by the time I was 39½!

It's a famous story now; I met a Japanese man in a restaurant, a guy I knew, and we were having lunch and he said to me, 'What you should do, Simon, is a conveyor-belt-sushi-bar with girls in black PVC mini-skirts.'

We never did the mini-skirts but two years later, I opened that first restaurant in Soho, and if I knew then when I was a kid growing up what I knew now, I would have done that 20 years before, but when I was growing up, my Dad and the careers advice officers and all of those people, they said, 'You can't start businesses, 75% of them fail.'

What they didn't actually say was that although 75% did fail the people who did them then went on to do successful things afterwards. You know, there was a culture in the country in those days that said you couldn't be an entrepreneur. It was safer to go and to get your qualifications and go and be a corporate slave.

Today it's as safe to be an entrepreneur. Most kids growing up today are probably going to have ten or more jobs through their career, and there's a spirit, I sense, there's a spirit in the country today that entrepreneurship is something to aspire to.

There is a spirit, and it comes from the government as well; the last five years we've sensed this new sense of entrepreneurship. It's come from the Prince's Trust, it's come from many, many places, but there is a spirit afoot that we are in a new world, the cusp of a new world, I call it.

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And you know, we come from a culture from hundreds of years ago, and politically incorrect as it may sound in this current climate, but you know, we went out and built the Raj, we went and explored the world in the days of Captain Cook. We were leaders and we stood up for what we believed as a country.

In the 60's, we were the creative country, we took The Beatles, we took Mary Quant, we took fashion out to the rest of the world, and I sense today there is a sense again of what I call "the purse of creativity", that we can take out around the world in the next 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, think big, 60 years.

60 years it was from the time the Wright Brothers flew their first aeroplane to Man's landing on the moon in a period of slow change effectively. Just think what the next 60 years is going to bring with that entrepreneurial spirit. And I think that in the same way as we've heard this week, you know, how it is not until we solve the inequality and poverty in the world that we will have a world in which we have a safe place in which to build businesses, in which to build things and live. And in the same way, I believe that it's not until we build an entrepreneurial society where we have driven individuals, happy in their work, large, large numbers of people happy in their work, driven to do what they want to do, getting out of bed because they want to do it in the morning, that we will truly have a place that we expand and be a major, major player in the world.

When I was growing up, I remember I was going to be a fireman, I was going to join the Royal Navy, and today the kids that are growing up want to be footballers, they want to be pop stars, they want to be film stars, that's their aspiration, and I think that tomorrow and the next day and next day, the kids that grow up in this new world, as we throw off the greyness, the greyness of business and have a more delightful and exciting and creative sense of business, the kids will grow up in the playgrounds and say, 'I want to be an entrepreneur.

Just like some of the guys who are going to be our guests here today. But to start us off, we have an American, and I remember as I used to come back from America in the 70's and the 80's and the 90's even, I'd come back stimulated by the optimism of America

As I came through the greyness of Heathrow, you know, some of that sort of passion about what I was going to do would sort of dribble away. You know that feeling. So who better to have than to start off, somebody who comes from a culture of entrepreneurship, Carl Schramm from the Kaufman Foundation, who knows a lot about that. Carl, come on, come and tell us about it. Terrific!