

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-business-school-of-extreme-aerial-surfing>

Entrepreneurship isn't just a sport; it's extreme. John Seely Brown, Deloitte Center for the Edge's Independent Co-Chairman, paid attention when suddenly five of the globe's top aerial surfers originated from the same place. Why the sudden regional success? Though fierce competitors, they all knew one another and collectively benchmarked from other surfers. They recorded and studied one another's achievements and flaws, and appropriated ideas from adjacent verticals, such as skateboarding, mountain biking, etc. Collectively, they improved their personal performance, and simultaneously built up the local ecosystem en masse. Seely Brown points out these passion-fueled tactics and suggests that entrepreneurs use this model to expand their personal performance and build success to benefit their business community.



## Transcript

It's extreme surfing.. It turns out that I spend, for lucky reasons, three months a year in Maui.. And this kid, who is, by the way a world champion now, lives next door to me.. And I've had a chance to observe how basically five kids have come together to create a cohort to engage in incredible fast learning to reinvent aerial surfing to the extreme edge, and now all become world champions.. And Maui, up to now, has never ever produced a champion in its history.. So an interesting question, what happened? If just one kid had done it, and this kid is pretty talented.. That would be interesting but not worth studying.. The question is, how did they all become? But what's going on here? Why do I bring it up? How did this become possible? So I had a chance to live with these guys, had dinner with these guys because they're, as I said, 200 feet from my house.. They find me kind of weird.. I find them interesting..

Now, the obvious thing is they came together and they said, "Somehow we're going to learn as much as we can from each other." And they formed this amazing ability to critique each other on the fly almost all the time and compete like mad with each other the rest of the time.. It's not surprising.. These guys have extreme passion in order to be able to push themselves to the edge.. They fail continuously.. By the way, when you fail sometimes out there, it's really bad; you get really messed up.. So this is not an easy fail, but it didn't stop them one iota.. Another thing they do is, again obvious, is they get all the DVDs of all these champion surfers around the world.. They bring them in to their living room next door and they sit there with iMovie and a few other thing, and they go through this thing frame by frame by frame, studying each move, seeing how and what they can do about this.. They dash down the hill until they surf, try it out, back up, so on and so forth.. Another thing they do, and you actually saw it in the water there, is very near, the very end, you saw Dusty almost land on somebody..

Well, that was a cameraman trying to grab a picture of Dusty performing.. The goal Dusty has to know - let it be known he's about to go surfing and videographers flock from all over the place.. But what they really do is they now equip with their own video cameras, and now others, they go out and they practice and capture their own moves, come back almost like a design studio, by the way, and they critique each other's moves, try to part some, and look at how they can do something better.. One of the most interesting things to me, and an idea that I think comes through a lot of stuff that you guys must be thinking about is, how do you get the best ideas from adjacencies? How do you start studying things like it? Well, obvious things like skateboarding, I think Dusty is a champion - not a champion, but a damn good skateboarder, too.. So, you go out and you study these skateboard moves, and then you say how do I appropriate a skateboard move over here into what I'm doing over here? It's not just skateboarding.. It's actually mountain biking.. It's actually motocross.. One the most recent moves that happened is, actually, Dusty will let the board get way out in front of him that actually was picked up.. It's called the - I forgot the exact name of it, but I call it the motocross move.. It came from motocross extreme performance and the way you can actually see these guys with their motorcycles out in front of them flying over an edge..

He said, "Bet I can kind of appropriate that." Okay, those are obvious in some ways.. Two more things, is basically Dusty has gained - understand local ecosystems.. They understand spikes.. What they do is they're constantly flying all over the world, circulating across - around the world, going to every kind of local talented place, competing with those surfers, looking for new moves, and so on and so forth.. In fact, when I have to talk to Dusty, it has to be, of course, by Skype.. I have no idea what country he's going to be in.. He circulates the globe.. But it's interesting how they have figured that out, as we all would expect, that there are seats of incredible talent.. I got to go and visit those things, and then how do I appropriate new ideas, how do I build relationships in those spikes of incredible capability, and what can I learn from them.. And then, how do you

productively interact with folks so that now, people come to them to show them things? They don't have to go out..

Now, we might say all this is pretty clear.. If you actually think about entrepreneurialism, I think any of you would say these aren't necessarily bad strategies to think about yourself, but I think the key to me is somehow, first of all, it's not that they're just passionate about surfing; their passionate about extreme performance.. And that's what pushes them to the edge and to try all kinds of things.. But, secondly, they have a deep questing disposition.. This means anywhere they go, they look for new ideas...