

→ Technology

WE'RE ALL MAKERS

I WOULD LIKE TO CONVINCE YOU THAT INNOVATION IS A PARTICIPATORY SPORT. LIKE GOLF OR TENNIS OR KAYAKING, IT'S SOMETHING ANYONE CAN DO AND ENJOY. WE HAVE OUR OWN REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING. HOWEVER, AN IMPORTANT REASON IS THAT WE CAN DO IT WITH OTHERS WHO SHARE OUR PASSION.

Participation is not necessarily easy. It comes with two challenges. One is getting started. The other is getting better. Both are hard in different ways but also very satisfying. Eventually, you begin to think of yourself as a golfer, a tennis player or a kayaker.

Eric Von Hippel writes in his book *Democratizing Innovation* that users generate new ideas and products. He uses the example of extreme sports to make his case. A kayaker sees the need for a new shape of kayak that would navigate certain rivers. He cannot buy that kayak, so he makes it himself. Others see him using his new design and ask where they can buy it. When he tells them that he made the kayak, they ask to buy one, and he begins to consider going into the business of making them for others. He has become an accidental entrepreneur, where his passion created a new opportunity. According to Von Hippel, there are many good examples where users become makers.

Users become makers because they are immersed in learning and discovery. Many



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makers today are exploring such things as 3-D printers, high-altitude balloons and new ways of sensing in the physical world. They learn to see where innovation is needed, and they discover new problems to solve.

Making is really something all of us do. We cook, we create, we write, we grill food and grow flowers, we sew and solder. We are tinkerers. We are problem-solvers. We figure out how to do things. It's what makes us human.

The world around us is made and shaped by makers. As Steve Jobs said: "Life becomes much broader once you discover ... that everything around you was made up by people no smarter than you."

Once you start to participate in life as a maker, you will recognize your own ability to create something new or improve something that already exists. You realize that anyone can innovate. ●

DALE DOUGHERTY is one of the forefathers of the modern-day "Maker Movement." He is the founder and publisher of *MAKE*, a magazine that focuses on do-it-yourself (DIY) and do-it-with-others projects involving everything from engineering, computers and robotics to arts, crafts and food. He is also the developer of the Maker Faire®, a traveling showcase of DIY approaches. Dougherty was recently honored by the White House as a "Champion of Change."

