

Supercoach® Entrepreneurial Training: Features and Benefits

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This paper was written to communicate the **unique features** of Supercoach® Entrepreneurial Training (SET) and why these features offer **significant benefits** for instructor/coaches and science/technology entrepreneurs (and most types of entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs, we have discovered). This is not meant as a critique of anyone's specific material or content.

History: Ballard was inspired to create SET after serving as first Management Fellow for the Springboard Program of CONNECT, an entrepreneurial assistance program from the University of California, San Diego (1996-97). During a 10-month fellowship, she provided one-to-one coaching to over 60 early stage high technology and life sciences entrepreneurs. The centerpiece of her work was called a "springboard" where each entrepreneur presented a 15-minute briefing of their business plan to a 'dream' panel tailored for their unique needs. The entrepreneur then received an hour of feedback and advice from their dream panel. Ballard's fellowship funding required four such presentations a month, which was satisfied fully in her 10 months at CONNECT. Each month an average of 80 experts in technology, business, marketing and finance proofed her work with the entrepreneurs. Their collective feedback to entrepreneurs informed the design of the Supercoach® content. A separate fellowship with Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland followed (2000). This two-month fellowship partially funded the actual documentation of the coaching philosophy, system, tools and techniques that became SET. Ballard took another full year to finish and then deliver the first 4-day workshop to train others (Glasgow, Scotland, 2001).

Differentiation of content: SET fills a deep gap between the homey war-story books on starting businesses (here's-how-I-did-it-now-you-do-the-same) and the how-to-write-a-business-plan books that never actually tell entrepreneurs how to fill in the blanks in their templates. SET provides a set of exercises that enable first-time entrepreneurs to uncover the context-specific information they need if they are to shape viable business concepts. SET stresses **oral communications** of the business plan, recognizing that one will **talk**, not write, oneself to business success, by attracting key stakeholders.

SET was originally designed for Science and Technology ventures: SET was created from coaching sci-tech entrepreneurs from UCSD and the community, where there was no business or management school to provide business assistance or resources for new sci-tech ventures.

Initial focus on science/technology differentiation, not the marketplace distinctive competence: based upon Ballard's SBIR/STTR Program successes and those of hundreds of clients spanning a dozen years, SET focuses sci-tech entrepreneurs **first** on "what's possible" technically, demonstrating their knowledge of state of the art, articulating the pace of change of the state of the art, communicating how their science/technology moves that state forward, and quantifying how their science/technology is different and better than other approaches, **at the science/technology level**. SET uses science and technology planning and communicating methods such as roadmaps, and widely adopted technology maturity gauges such as technology readiness levels (TRLs). If sci-tech entrepreneurs cannot differentiate themselves at the science/technology level, they cannot be expected to determine or communicate a distinctive marketplace value proposition.

It is dangerous for sci-tech entrepreneurs to focus on marketplace needs first (see Clayton Christensen's *Innovator* book series). The marketplace cannot always know what is possible technically, so the needs expressed by the marketplace can force entrepreneurs to focus on solutions that are dead upon marketplace arrival. It is dangerous as well to focus on what is scientifically possible. In SET, the entrepreneurs perform **iterative** science/technology/product roadmap planning between *What's Possible* and *Marketplace Pains*, with the final product(s) in the plan reflecting these iterative investigations between these two roadmap layers. Experts have observed that the SET approach using roadmap planning is new and innovative, and it has been confirmed by technology roadmap planning experts worldwide (Dr. Robert Phaal, Cambridge UK; Richard Albright, Virginia). The SET roadmap planning approach is one of the most valued in EnableVentures' SBIR/STTR workshops held nationally since 2002.

Intellectual property and related protections are considered early: SET has entrepreneurs consider their IP assets and protections before there are any conversations with the marketplace. Without this consideration, entrepreneurs can accidentally violate their patent positions, such as mistakenly make an offer to sell, or before considering trade secret vs. patent protection or other methods of IP safety.

Top-down design approach: SET uses modern systems engineering approach to the business planning process, with holistic business plan exercises in the very first session. These deceptively simple one-page exercises force entrepreneurs to consider the typical 'silos of business areas' like marketing, sales, finance, product development and how they are interrelated and interdependent. The exercises help entrepreneurs focus and screen their business planning research results, particularly when they do not have the traditional market research planning know-how that business experts have. Sci-tech entrepreneurs are very easily overcome by their market research and cannot logically link their technological innovations to specific customers with clear quantification.

Bottom-Up Revenue projections: SET focuses entrepreneurs' creative energies on **first** asserting and defending their revenue forecasts, and then, counting all the costs associated with delivering those revenues that reflect the value of their solutions for their customers. Traditional planning methods result in sci-tech entrepreneurs spending all their creative energies counting costs in great detail; they are most often unable to defend their sales forecasts with credibility. SET takes the position that all stakeholders are investing in the entrepreneurs' abilities to make sales, not count costs.

Focus on value creation documented by the Profit and Loss: SET teaches **business process** financial planning, starting with the P&L or Income Statement (not sources/uses of cash or balance sheet). The P&L is the financial statement that documents the creation of value for stakeholders and reflects most strategically and directly their business plan assumptions and key milestones. The SET approach ties their P&L to their one-page plan to show holistically how the two are integral and directly related.

Manufacturing and Operations Plans considered before Financial Plans: SET has entrepreneurs consider all aspects of manufacturing, fulfillment and related operational areas such as key suppliers, **before** the financial plans are finalized. These plans are considered as part of their strategic alliances evaluations. SET uses value chains (networks) analyses, performed in a unique way: value chains (networks) are created and then the *flow of money, products/services* and *value creation* are mapped

onto these chains/networks) **before** they finalize their manufacturing, operations, and strategic alliances plans, and **before** the financial plans are finalized. SET has entrepreneurs consider design for manufacturing and design for producibility, a subject that is almost never included in any modern entrepreneurial textbook (Kathleen Allen's books are exceptions).

Continuum of Programs, Courses: SET has been successfully used across the spectrum of entrepreneurial maturity levels, from high school innovators and inventors (MIT/Lemelson Foundation InvenTeams), for-credit college undergraduate and graduate courses (ASU, Baylor University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, University of Strathclyde), collegiate entrepreneurship programs (NCIIA's Advanced Invention to Venture Program) and professional development entrepreneurship programs (ASU Technopolis, University of Jyväskylä, University of Oulu, JAMK University of Applied Sciences - Finland). SET has been in continual use nationally and globally, since 2001.

Coaching philosophy: SET defines coaching as stepping in temporarily, in a structured way, to show entrepreneurs what questions they need to ask and to show them how to find the answers to these questions. It is not about suggesting or finding the answers for them. In the specific domain of entrepreneurship, coaching imparts a gift of skill in viable business creation that entrepreneurs can repeatedly use themselves and pass on to others. Supercoach® instructor/coaches hold the entrepreneur accountable to what the entrepreneur says she wants to accomplish and checks for consistencies using SET exercises with one-to-one facilitation. Supercoach® instructor/coaches are taught to ask questions and to guide business-planning efforts by the entrepreneurs and to offer specific advice only when asked. They are taught to avoid creating a dependency with entrepreneurs; rather, they are to provide access to training, information and resources the entrepreneur requires for business planning and execution, and including connections to others who can be of value to them.

While one-on-one facilitation is very effective in helping early-stage entrepreneurs, the consistency varies and there is little in the way of formal training to develop such skills for this effective form of assistance. SET was developed to specifically address the development of instructor/coaches for early stage sci-tech entrepreneurs.

SET is used nationally and globally: SET offerings have included nearly 4,000 participants from nearly every state in the US, and from over 30 countries around the globe from these EVI licensee partners: Arizona State University (USA), National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance (200 USA universities and colleges), University of Strathclyde Hunter Center for Entrepreneurship (Scotland), JAMK University of Applied Sciences (Finland), Baylor University (Texas), and New Jersey Institute of Technology (New Jersey). Countries represented by these partners include: Turkey, Japan, Ireland, Mexico, Canada, India, China, Singapore, United Kingdom, Germany, France, UAE, Peru, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Israel, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, South Africa, Pakistan, and Switzerland.

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