

# Peter Cooper: The coolest entrepreneur of all time

by RAFI KRONZON on JANUARY 3, 2011



A couple of nights ago, I stumbled upon an incredible documentary on PBS called "Mechanic to Millionaire: The Peter Cooper Story". If you didn't catch it, the [web site](#) of the film gives you a good synopsis of his life. He was alive from 1791-1883, and became one of the richest, and most respected men in NYC.

In my mind, he is the entrepreneur that we should all strive to be. He is my 2011 role model. Why? Simple:

1. He wasn't afraid of failure: With only a sixth-grade education, he worked as a hatter, coachmaker's apprentice, cabinet maker, and brewer. He started his own grocery store. He developed a cloth-shearing machine, and some chain pulling device, all of which failed.
2. He persevered: He didn't give up. He bought a bankrupt glue factory, learned everything he could about glue, turned it around, and started his fortune.
3. He never stopped innovating: Glue led him to patent edible Gelatin, paint manufacturing, dry goods, and other businesses. He invented the steam engine (yup), became an iron magnate, and was instrumental in laying the first transatlantic cable.
4. He kept his core values: Through all his business dealings and wealth, he was a modest, religious man – something that never changed.
4. He always gave back: Even from early in his life, he was involved in NYC politics, especially in education, which he never got because there was no such thing as public school. He was also involved in the anti-slavery movement and in the plight of Native Americans.

I'm going to spend 2011 striving to be more like Peter Cooper. Who's your role model?

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