

## Catherine Rohr | Founder & CEO, Prison Entrepreneurship Program

What do Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, corporate America and prison have in common? They're all passions of Catherine Rohr.

Like all good graduates of the University of California Berkeley Haas School of Business, Catherine Rohr entered the workforce with grand plans for success. She made her market splash at Summit Partners and American Securities Capital Partners, where she generated \$32 million in equity investments and worked with 4,000 CEOs. As a three-time marathon runner and California State Wrestling Champion, Catherine fit right into the slice-n-dice business environment of venture capital and private equity.



During a weekend trip to Texas, Catherine was introduced to an even more hard-hitting environment—prison. The experience challenged her perspectives and led to a 180-degree shift in the way she applied her business skills and experience.

Expecting prison to be a place filled with wild, caged animals, Catherine was cut to the core to find prisoners who were deeply human—passionate, moldable men thirsty for change. Catherine immediately recognized their ROI potential. What if she equipped these men with legitimate business skills?

Enter the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP). Catherine started PEP spontaneously on another prison visit in May 2004. Since then, this one-of-a-kind program has received national attention for its results:

- A return-to-prison rate of less than 10%
- An employment rate of 98%, and
- A rapidly growing network of entrepreneurial start-ups.

PEP's results are evidence that Catherine is still a venture capitalist at heart; she's just working with a group of slightly higher-risk entrepreneurs.

The soul of PEP is its supporting cast. PEP has recruited more than 1,000 CEOs, venture capitalists and entrepreneurs as volunteers. Hundreds of MBA students from schools like Harvard and Stanford help PEP graduates develop sound business plans and re-enter society as productive citizens.

Under Catherine's leadership, PEP has stirred the national media pot, receiving coverage by *NBC Nightly News*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Economist*, *National Public Radio*, *Entrepreneur Magazine* and *Deal Maker Magazine*. PEP has also earned numerous awards, including:

- *Fast Company's* Social Capitalist Awards as a "Rising Star"
- Texas Governor's Award for Criminal Justice Volunteer Service, and
- Manhattan Institute Award for Social Entrepreneurship.

But for Catherine, it's not about stellar numbers and media accolades. It's about life change. It took a life transformation for Catherine to be obedient to her calling, and she's proud that her aspiring entrepreneurs also embrace a changed lifestyle and thrive in the "free world."

Catherine resides in Houston. She actively trains in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and competes in submission grappling tournaments. In her spare time, she also enjoys cooking and scrapbooking.