

Final Report

Alterna Center for Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship

With generous support from the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation

Alan Pierce



I came here with passion for my project fading, but after these 5 days, I am on fire again for what we are doing and what we will achieve. ~ Rossana, Guatemalan social entrepreneur

Introduction

Tears were present in the circle on the last day of our intense 5-day social entrepreneurship training. They communicated emotions of gratitude for new friendships, for new business partners, and for renewed motivation to forge ahead with impactful business enterprises.

Myself and the [Alterna](#) team had been designing and planning this workshop retreat for months. Over the 5 days, and in this final moment, I knew the stress and the long hours leading up to it were more than worth it.

Professional fulfillment, at least for me, is about people. About serving and empowering. And in witnessing such “human” moments, in being a part of their creation, I know I am in the right place, serving to the best of my ability.

In these last six months, thanks to the training I have both received and given, that ability has immensely improved. As I transition out of this volunteer experience, I reflect on those human moments that marked the evolution of this professional and personal path.

The human moments

The Alterna Team

It’s a delicate balance to strike when your best friends are also your coworkers. For me, this is how it was, how it is, at Alterna. While challenging at times, I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way. I played basketball with the Director, hiked volcanoes with our consulting team, and even lived with other Fellows. We had fun and we also challenged each other professionally.

The human element that I enjoyed most was our shared sense of pride at a collaborative job well done, whether that meant supporting each other in designing a business



case for a workshop, or developing a new financial tool, or creating a fun new activity for the entrepreneurs. I’m not sure I’ll ever have such a nourishing professional community again. But now that I know how it feels, how to manage and even create that community, I can seek to create that wherever I end up next.

Quetzaltenango

What is locally known as “Xela,” and now for me as another “home,” holds a place in my head and heart filled with human moments.

Moments like: standing lost on the side of the road trying to catch a micro bus home and, without me asking, a little girl gently telling me that I need to actually go in the other direction.

Moments like: meeting neighbors for the first time standing huddled in the street at 1am in the morning after a large earthquake, and soaking up their warmth and concern.

Moments like: weekly conversations with Sandra, the sweet owner of a local café, as I get my *chile relleno* fix and catch up on her local take of all the town gossip.

In a place which on the surface and at the outset felt very foreign, I experienced a strong sense of community and belonging. I think ultimately, this made me better at my job. Able to empathize, to meet entrepreneurs emotionally where they are, I could move beyond feeling like a gringo out of water and dive into being a full version of “me” with roots and a sense of place in a culture far different from my own.

As I continue consulting in Latin America in the future, I believe engendering this cultural identity will be one of my most valuable and most powerful lessons learned.

The entrepreneurs

In the final moments since my last report, we have delivered nearly two weeks combined of entrepreneurship training. I alluded to one of those human moments in the introduction, which was one of many.

The other that stands out involves the young social entrepreneur I have been working with 1-on-1 over the past three months. At first solely professional, our relationship has evolved through the excitement, and the stress, of sharing his entrepreneurial journey. Two weeks ago, he messaged me a series of photos of him, his team, and one of his first clients, constructing his rainwater collection cistern in a rural community in Guatemala.

For him, witnessing the gratitude of a client (and making his initial sales!) was one of those special human moments. And his sharing it with me in gratitude for our process to that point was one for me as well.

It is these kind of professional human moments, and the feeling that they generate, which remind me why I am doing what I am doing, and fuel me to continue pursuing this path of service to social entrepreneurs.

What's in a number?

Moving from the qualitative to the quantitative, I also want to share some of the hard numbers behind those human moments.

I arrived in early May and leave mid-November, 6+ months living and working here in Guatemala. In that time these are the numbers that have accumulated along with the experiences...

28: Designed and/or implemented 28 days of entrepreneurship training for Guatemalan social entrepreneurs.

150+: In those days of training, we reached more than 150 entrepreneurs who all have a vision to use business as a force for positive change in their country. And who now have a little more training to make that vision a reality.

2000+: To reach those 150+ entrepreneurs, we traveled more than 2,000 kilometers around Guatemala. From off-the-grid eco-lodges to more modern hotels, a focus on inclusion and diversity took us back and forth across this beautiful country.

1100+: In reality, this number is likely higher, but these six months supporting the Alterna Center for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship account for more than 1,100 hours



volunteering. I wouldn't change a thing about it, except perhaps a few more hours of late night office pizza parties.

In the end, these are numbers through my lens. What gives me hope and drives me to this work, is the number of people who will benefit from the work of the entrepreneurs we have served.

Whether that's through who they hire, the communities they source from, or the clients they serve, if we have done our job to help them create impactful enterprises, those are the numbers that really matter.

