

Interim Report

Alterna Center for Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship

With generous support from the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation

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Introduction

July 3 – It is clear when passion and profession align. Work doesn't feel like work. It's much too fun. But maybe that's how it should always be? I don't take this joyous alignment for granted as I now begin my third month in Guatemala supporting [Alterna](#) as a volunteer consultant building capacity for a diverse group of enterprising social entrepreneurs. It's been a challenging process to provide this training in a context far different from my familiar bubble in Silicon Valley. Creating and delivering curriculum becomes just as much about cultural awareness as it does about the hard skills of entrepreneurship. But the process is much richer for it, and the learnings for student and teacher, even richer still.

A bevy of workshops

I arrived at Alterna during one of their busiest workshop schedules of the year. In a span of 8 weeks I helped deliver 6 workshops over a period of 10 total days and more than 50 entrepreneurs served. Overarching workshop themes included: market analysis, business modeling, design thinking, prototyping, financial analysis, creating impact models, pitching, and much more.

In addition to drawing from my master's degree and work experience, it's been a process of learning Alterna's methodology – and being tasked with improving it. After each workshop we sit down for a period of fierce feedback, reviewing slide by slide, recalling what worked and what didn't, and brainstorming ideas to improve flow, learning outcomes, and the manner in which content is delivered.

Delivering entrepreneurship knowledge is an exciting challenge. Entrepreneurship really isn't something you learn in a classroom, it's something you learn by doing. A large part of what I have done is to tackle this learn-by-doing mindset by designing new tools and activities that wrap concepts into hands-on environments, challenging the entrepreneurs themselves to think critically, rather than rote. I expect to continue this creative work in the weeks and months to come.

Negotiating activity with real investors!



A friendly competition in communication



A cultural mindset

Context is king. I left San Francisco for Guatemala partly to experience the learning that comes with a world (both professional and personal) that is not one's own. With empathy as my compass and harvesting the creativity found beyond my comfort zone, I have enjoyed also being the student as much as the teacher.

One of the most interesting learnings so far emerged when I designed and implemented a negotiation-based activity. Entrepreneurs were given business scenarios and choices of partnerships they could forge to overcome obstacles described in those scenarios.

One such partnership choice was a government funding program. NONE of the entrepreneurs selected this option as their negotiation partner. They expressed doubt over bureaucracy, pervasive corruption, and other local dynamics that I had not thoroughly anticipated.

Their reality, of being an entrepreneur in a developing country, became clearer to me. The reality of teaching entrepreneurship in a developing country did as well – and I am thankful that they are as much a part of the design process as I am. I recognize now that it shouldn't be any other way.

A look ahead

I still have 4+ months ahead of me. In those months I'll continue to revise and refine Alterna's methodology to train entrepreneurs. I'll dive deeper into transforming our "classrooms" from lecture halls to environments of creativity and experiential learning. And I'll do my best to carry daily learnings forward so that my support is contextually relevant and culturally appropriate.

And as I become more Guatemala literate, more in-the-field savvy, and more culturally aware I intent to reflect on the doors that are opening for my life and for my career as a result of this opportunity and the insights that have come with it.

For now, with gratitude and excitement, I eagerly get back to what we call work, and what is actually a whole lot more.