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I can't believe it has been a month since I left New York and stepped off the chicken bus in Xela's *terminal!* As my boss and I whipped around the edges of the mountains in the bus we had boarded in Guatemala City, gossiping over life stories, my gaze was fixed on all the farmers cultivating their small plots of land. Their farms were so steep, you'd think they were attached to some kind of rock climbing rope. But, no, every day most farmers in rural villages either climb up these mountains to reach their farms or they climb down to gather raw materials and manual machinery and climb back up to tend to their crop. Land is everything to people here. Guatemalan families regard their land as their source of income, their savings, their food, their home, etc. I will explain below, but understanding and leveraging how Guatemalans value their land has been one of the most important lessons and challenges I have encountered here.

Introduction:

After working at Endeavor with high-impact SMEs in global emerging markets, I chose to work at Alterna in Guatemala to be more involved in the cultivation of social and environmental entrepreneurs that are inspiring the growth of a young entrepreneurial ecosystem. The two week impact investing training program with Frontier Market Scouts at Middlebury's School for International Studies equipped me with resources and tools to use while I work with entrepreneurs at Alterna. As a Social Business Fellow, I have been lucky to have been thrown into a variety of Alterna's ongoing projects.

Alterna is an *Entrepreneur Cultivator*. We support three types of entrepreneurs. Phase 1 entrepreneurs have an idea or have tried testing their idea but have failed and want to figure out a way to succeed. These entrepreneurs are asked to attend our 6 week bootcamps where we supply and train them to use customized tools to help them develop a business plan, evaluate their progress, and drive growth in the directions we have agreed they should focus on. Phase 2 entrepreneurs have a proven concept but are facing challenges in an area. We have developed tools that help us work with them to diagnose their problem and provide solutions. Phase 3 entrepreneurs are looking for outside investment. For these entrepreneurs we work with them to develop concrete business plans, financial statements, one-pagers, pitch decks, revise and practice their verbal pitches, and connect them with appropriately identified outside investors.

Boot Camps: There are two different boot camps we run – one for entrepreneurs who are still at the idea stage and the other for entrepreneurs who have just launched their business. For the diagnostic stage of their business ideas I have built a tool to help them define their distribution channels and how to recruit new clients they want. For the idea stage group I have built two self-explanatory methodology tools to help them build their own business model canvas and to build a clear business pitch. I have also helped build a pricing model tool as well as a financial management tool. Developing these tools really helped me put into perspective the mindset of subsidiary entrepreneurs or at least entrepreneurs working in a developing country. For a generation of entrepreneurs who grew up in schools where they were lectured to from 8am to 6pm and expected to memorize notes instead of question them, it is

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necessary to structure the tools in a clear and simple format stating the purpose of each tool, concise instructions on how to use it, and the practical outcomes resulting from the use of the tool. The tool development process turned out to be much harder than I expected. Most of my time was spent on grasping the appropriate language to use throughout the tool. To do so I reviewed previous tools and attended the current bootcamp in order to observe the type of questions the entrepreneurs were asking and note the types of homework the entrepreneurs really were able to engage with. One of the common challenges we have faced so far is teaching entrepreneurs to separate their family finances from their business finances.

Phase 2 & Phase 3 Entrepreneurs:

I have been working with 3 entrepreneurs. For one we performed a diagnostic test with him and discovered his need for communication outreach so we have given him some tools and ideas on how to reach his target customer, how to get his target customer through the door and purchase something, and how to get his target customer to come back. I have also been consulting for one of Alterna's internal entrepreneurs, Dona Dora, who sells fuel efficient wood-fired cook stoves. We are in the process of applying for their second round of funding and are getting their financial statements in order. For the third entrepreneur seeking \$1-2 million in funding, I am helping them put together a one-pager, developing their pitch deck, and connecting them with a few venture capital firms in the US. Now that I am a month into work, I will be in charge of a few more entrepreneurs – running the meetings, identifying gaps in their businesses during diagnostic sessions, writing alterna-entrepreneur proposals, and executing the use of cultivation tools. In addition, I am working on networking and mapping out the social impact NGOs around Xela. Recently, I have noticed the presence of sustainable business partnerships (“meals on wheels”) where a for-profit business supports an NGO. For example, a company called Quetzaltrackers is a hiking tour guide company who donates all its income directly to a local public school, which is primarily used to fund its teachers. One of the new entrepreneurs I will be working with is looking to opening a food delivery service similar to Seamless in order to support a health NGO he has been working with. My goal over the next month is to understand the NGO landscape and be able to facilitate useful entrepreneur-NGO connections as well as entrepreneur-entrepreneur ones. I plan to start with cultivating relationships with an agro-technology NGO called Semilla Nueva, two health clinics called Mayan Medical Aid and Primeros Pasos, and a disadvantage children's education NGO called Safe Passage.

Internal Operations:

When I first arrived at Alterna they were using Huddle to manage their internal operations and share documents. Starting my first day I designed the build-out for Alterna's salesforce, passed on the layout to our Salesforce consultant, and we are currently in the testing/pilot phase. I am also helping to write a profile template to write for each of our entrepreneurs.

Wrap-Up:

Overall, I have really enjoyed my first month here. What has made my experience particularly great so far has been the people. My co-workers from all corners of the world including Russia, France, Switzerland, Germany, and the US are really inspiring people to work with. Everyone here is dedicated to our mission, work as team players, and really embrace responsibility. I feel like I am not only constantly learning from taking on a lot of responsibility but from co-working on projects. Honorable mention – the CEO of Alterna, Daniel Buchbinder, is in particular a fantastic role model and person to be working for. He works the hardest out of all of us, always speaks with conviction and passion for what he is doing with Alterna, and makes sure he is not only involved in all our projects, but also in our lives. Every morning you can expect to have Daniel come get coffee in our side of the office and chat about the weekend, any upcoming trips, or exciting new updates on Alterna. He is a very good listener, which

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makes you feel comfortable asserting your opinion in meetings and in projects. Meetings with him are always discussions and done very efficiently.

Apart from work I have had the opportunity to travel on most weekends and see all different parts of Guatemala and meet all different types of people. From climbing volcanos at midnight and watching eruptions from one nearby, to meeting the “second best” surfer in Guatemala and convincing him to give us surf lessons, to jumping off cliffs at Lake Atitlan, Guatemala has been a fantastic place to go on adventures.

This coming weekend is Xela’s and Alterna’s first StartUp Weekend! We are all getting very excited to see the ideas people will be bringing to the table!