

Interview with Entrepreneur Daniele Diab



Following the launch of the Global Social Venture Competition, Daniele Diab, Founder of Myschoolpulse, was selected by ESSEC Business School, for having the best social entrepreneurship project amongst applicants from Lebanon and the region, in 2011, thus, having the opportunity to benefit from a targeted coaching program and technical assistance to develop the project successfully.

How did the Myschoolpulse idea come up? And what is it's main activity?

The origin of Myschoolpulse lies in unspeakable adversity when, three months into his school year (5^e in the French school system or 7th grade in the American school system), Paul Yared (12 yr), was diagnosed with osteosarcoma (bone cancer) which is one of the most aggressive forms of cancer. Treatment started immediately, on Christmas Eve 2008. Despite the side-effects caused by high dose chemotherapy, Paul nevertheless insisted on carrying on with school. That meant getting his professors to give him private lessons at home or at the hospital. In June 2009, Paul received a stellar grade report. Sadly however, his cancer was already out of control, and he passed away in the summer.

Because every sick child has the right to dream, learn, and hope. Because education is vital to sick child's mental health and dignity: Myschoolpulse is a non-profit organization whose primary aim is to provide children in Lebanon, suffering from a life-threatening illness, with the opportunity to continue their school education and engage in certain extracurricular activities, while undergoing treatment.

What motivated you to apply for GSVC?

Applying to the GSVC competition was, for me, a way to reflect one additional time on Myschoolpulse's strategy. It was also kind of a validation mechanism that would prove whether the Myschoolpulse venture is solid and should be pursued and scaled. Being part of the GSVC was also a means to raise awareness for Myschoolpulse. Finally, the benefits to the winners such as networking opportunities as well as intensive help from ESSEC students motivated me to apply.

How did Berytech support your initiative?

Berytech has taken the position to represent the GSVC organizers in Lebanon and has done it very well! Berytech has helped me throughout the application process. Berytech also offered to provide Myschoolpulse with post-competition support (especially on the networking and brainstorming fronts).

How do you define social entrepreneurship?

I very much agree with the definition provided by Sally Osberg and Roger Martin in Social Entrepreneurship: The Case for Definition, "The social entrepreneur should be understood as someone who targets an unfortunate but stable equilibrium that causes the neglect, marginalization, or suffering of a segment of humanity; who brings to bear on this situation his or her inspiration, direct action, creativity, courage, and fortitude; and who aims for and ultimately affects the establishment of a new stable equilibrium that secures permanent benefit for the targeted group and society at large."

What pieces of advice would you give to social entrepreneurs? And what would you say are the top three skills needed to be a successful social entrepreneur?

The top three piece of advice I would give to anyone who wants to get involved in social entrepreneurship are:

- 1) It's all about passion– you've got to truly believe in the cause you are serving and really willing to fight to improve the situation of the target segment you are looking after.
- 2) Perseverance is crucial– be ready; it's going to be a marathon, not a sprint.
- 3) Get your hands dirty! Business plans and strategies are great but don't get stuck in your office, go get your hands dirty in the field

As for the most important skills any social entrepreneur should develop, they are:

- 1) Leadership – the ability to be able to step up and motivate a group of people towards a shared vision is of the utmost importance.
- 2) Empathy and ability to build long term relationships – you will need the buy-in of many stakeholders and players to build and grow your organization. You therefore need to be able to put yourself in their shoes and think of ways to make it easier for them to be involved.
- 3) Structure and ability to organize and quantify impact – what does not get measured does not get done!

What are the main challenges that you're facing and how are you overcoming them?

Initial phases of setting up Myschoolpulse were challenging and exciting yet what is even more challenging is the scaling phase, whether it is on the human resource side, on the operations, or on the fundraising front. It requires lots of perseverance and also a constant balance and careful attention to the equilibrium between funding and deployments of funds. It also implies managing and aligning and motivating a larger pool of people towards a common vision.

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