

Disruptive Technology in Action

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Business Solutions that Create New Customer Servicing Models Event Highlights

Delivered Feb 11, 2014 by the Entrepreneurs Committee

Innovative concepts were on the agenda for the evening, an alternative venue set the stage and a bustling reception kicked off the evening for the FWA panel discussion on Disruptive Technology.

After everyone filled or refilled their glasses and plates and settled in, Diana Merenda, a member of the FWA Leadership Team and co-chair of the Entrepreneurs Committee, opened the content portion of the event with noted appreciation to the sponsors and introductions of the moderator, Sharon Lewis, and the three panelists: Alexa von Tobel, Founder & CEO of [LearnVest](#), Sonia Ahuja, EVP of [BrightScope](#) and Josefina Jervis, CEO of [openDoctors](#). Sharon, a member of the FWA

Leadership Team and co-chair of the Membership Committee, started off the discussion with a reflection on the term “disruptive technology”. She talked about how many of the technologies that are ubiquitous today are probably cliché in hindsight, and that the genesis of many of them, including the companies represented on the panel, were a result of taking the unheard of and turning it into the expected.

The panelists were given an opportunity to introduce themselves and talk about their “aha” moment – what drove them to do what they are doing today. Alexa Von Tobel talked about her belief that financial advice should not be a luxury item and that her mission is to flip the financial world on its head and bring financial planning, which has traditionally been reserved for the wealthy, to the masses. She is doing this through her company, LearnVest, and her book, *Financially Fearless*, a New York Times bestseller. LearnVest, which has raised \$45 million in capital, infuses 2014 technology with age-old financial planning practices.

Josefina Jervis calls her role as CEO of openDoctors the “dream job she never wanted”. She was working full time in the corporate world when she was approached with the opportunity to get involved with a software venture. Initially hesitant, she talked to friends and investors and got her “aha” moment from realizing that there was a real need out there for openDoctors, which offers a comprehensive online platform that allows patients to schedule appointments and services. They began with the scheduling of mammograms, but have since expanded to many other services. Josefina believes that an increasing busy world, such a platform is



Entrepreneurs Committee Co-chair
Diana Merenda with Nicholas A.
Photopoulos of StoneShot

essential to ensure that everyone, especially women, don't neglect regular checkups and necessary preventative health appointments.

Similar to Josefina, Sonia Ahuja was also "recruited" for her role as EVP of BrightScope when she was working as Chief Strategy Officer for a broker dealer in San Diego and realized that the online space was important in the traditionally offline investment management research world. She recognized a gap in the financial services sector – a one-stop shop for research and information for the wealth management industry.



In responding to a question from Sharon on keeping a pulse on evolving marketplace activities and customer expectations, all of the panelists agreed that their companies are driven by customer feedback. They spoke of the formal and informal channels through which they seek to find their next "aha" moment or business enhancements that will further disrupt the industries they serve.

With two mothers and a newlywed on the panel, work-life balance was clearly a highly relevant topic. The universal theme was discipline and also doing what you love, which will make it less of a struggle. Josefina, a mother of two young sons, talked about being realistic, acknowledging the expectations you have for yourself and holding on to your core values. Sonia, mother to a 6-year old daughter (who is totally plugged into Sonia's work!) spoke about prioritizing and being disciplined about time spent on specific activities. For example, she has a self-imposed 30-minute limit every morning for checking social media. Alexa had some very practical tips for being more efficient – have a goal each day and start with the hard things first. One of the interesting things Alexa does is to eat the same thing for breakfast and lunch almost every day, as well as wearing a similar outfit every day – this way, she is saving time by cutting out the small decisions!

The panelists had a lot to say and even more to add with questions from the audience. When asked about their mentors, each panelist had a slightly different answer but the underlying theme was to have a variety of mentors, be it from different generations like Alexa has or for different purposes like Josefina. Sonia said she learns from everyone around her.

A particularly thoughtful question that resonated with everyone in the room addressed perseverance: specifically, the ability to manage high levels of risk with uncertainty and the inevitable thoughts on quitting. The panelists unequivocally agreed that quitting was never an option. They advised that even thinking about quitting or thinking about an exit strategy was a waste of energy. With respect to risk, they asked us to think about this question – will you be happy when you look back at your life when you are 80 years old? The consensus was that you would feel bad about what you did NOT do or TRY to do rather than the opposite.

Alas, there was one thing lacking at the event: sufficient time. The audience was enthralled with the dialogue and had many more questions to ask. The venue accommodated additional time for networking. Everyone left with a new motivation, even inspiration, some great tips on becoming more productive and thoughtful reflections on whether we are doing what we love.

A hearty thank you goes to our generous sponsor, [StoneShot](#) and our venue sponsor, [AlleyNYC](#). Both sponsors couldn't have been better choices for the event. StoneShot, a digital marketing agency for financial institutions, is disrupting their industry with radical new tools and methodologies for data mining, communication and presentation. AlleyNYC, whose motto is appropriately "Be Awesome", is an entrepreneurial hub where teams and individuals collaborate to spawn and grow new businesses.

Kudos to all involved.



Nicholas A. Photopoulos, StoneShot; Entrepreneurs Committee Co-Chair Diana Merenda, Sonia Ahuja, Brightscope, Alexa von Tobel, LearnVest.com, Josefina Jervis, openDoctors and Moderator Sharon Lewis

