

How The Startup Studio CHANGED

my World View

By Chau Pham, WPS Entrepreneurial Studies Graduate

EMPOWERED Being Empowered

Despite having been born and raised in a family of entrepreneurs, I never envisioned myself capable of developing and launching new business ventures while still in high school. It all changed when I met Gary Conroy—the founder of The Startup Studio—whom has enlightened me as to my hidden entrepreneurial spirit and has further empowered me to embark on my career in business.

What happened proved to be serendipitous as it was in my junior year of high school, Conroy launched his Entrepreneurial Studies courses, and I was amongst the first few students that followed him since the beginning. Gary Conroy has long embraced a mission to equip students as early as the stage of secondary education with the soft skills that are especially crucial in the moment of disruptive technology, the skills that recruiters are looking for most but are not typically taught in school.



The current school system has not changed much since the industrial era and still values a rigidly structured curriculum in which students are forced to do repetitive, arbitrary tasks and systematically retain information just to pass tests. Our school curriculum, in some measure, restricts out-of-the-box thinking and fails to prepare students with the skills needed such as critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication, and leadership.

In a Wall Street Journal survey of nearly 900 executives, 92% said soft skills were equally important or even more important than technical skills. Sadly, 89% said they have a difficult time finding people with the requisite attributes. As qualified workers with strong soft skills are increasingly in high demand, and yet in short supply, the unique hands-on experience and interactive learning platform embedded in the wide-ranging programs at The Startup Studio are an invaluable asset in education and also to the future labor force.



STORY in
Motion 

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Even though the course that I took with Gary was only a semester-long, it inspired and enlightened me more than anything previously as I learned first-hand how to find creative, efficient, and sustainable solutions and master the craft of research, building business plans, pitching, and funding. I had an opportunity to team up with other peers to identify some problems worth solving, create a value proposition that we could test in the market, and turn our ideas into a real product that customers actually need.

Through it all, I became aware of the power of failure. I have come to terms with the fact that true leaders are willing to listen to constructive feedback. They understand the power of making mistakes and learning from those mistakes. One predominant reason why startups fail is that they don't listen to the market and admit their failures to pivot in a better direction. In fact, 42% of startups fail because

they create products that the market does not need. It is inherently due to the founders' lack of self-awareness to let go of their egos. They are blinded from the fact that they have created perfect products and nobody is entitled to tell them what to do.

Having the opportunity to tell my story and pitch my ideas in The Startup Studio's class empowered me to conquer all my fears.

FAILURE

Power in Failure

Early on in this course, I fell into the similar trap of marrying to my original ideas and putting tremendous effort into perfecting my products while being incognizant of the feedback.

What changed my mindset was that Gary would give me opportunities to do things differently, first-hand experiencing different approaches and their effectiveness. Admittedly, there is enormous power in failure if we know how to learn from it. And the power of failure is not a tacit knowledge

that we can learn by reading books or taking classes. It is a skill developed by experiential learning—a primary instruction methodology that has a significant impact on students and as well contributes to the real success of The Startup Studio.

RESPONSIBILITY

A Great Responsibility

Realizing the unparalleled values that The Startup Studio offers, I felt a great responsibility to provide students in my home country of Vietnam an opportunity that I was fortunate enough to have, an opportunity to break away from the academic norms and see how the real world works, an opportunity for these young adults to blossom to their fullest potential. On top of that, another inspiration that fueled me to take the lead on this journey to Vietnam was my father. He has always striving to leverage the talents of today's youth and empower them to become the future leaders of the world through education, which is one of the reasons he founded V Startup—an innovative enterprise that provides pioneering solutions in education and other fields.

Thus, I joined The Startup Studio and have been working doggedly since then to bring the two companies together and align their missions by bringing entrepreneurial education to Vietnamese students. Together we successfully launched two Learn To Start



workshops in last year alone with the participation of more than fifty students and young professionals in each workshop.

We have also developed a strong presence particularly amongst Vietnamese universities and have been working closely with The University of Danang—the nation’s leading university consisted of eight high-ranking and well-recognized campuses to provide university students a series of uniquely designed workshops starting from January 2019.

In a sense, being a part of The Startup Studio and working to enlarge its footprint is one way that I make use of the skills I have flourished through the program. I can see how much of Vietnam I brought to the US. I was insecure of my imperfect English pronunciation and terrified of public speaking to the extent where I would try to avoid public speaking situations at all cost.

But having the opportunity to tell my story and pitch my ideas in The Startup Studio’s class empowered me to conquer all my fears.



LEADERSHIP

Becoming a Leader

Until this point, I have delivered many successful elevator pitches, and I am now together with Gary teaching and leading many workshops in Vietnam. If I could give my peers just advice, then it would be start failing now. It is the soft skills and your experience that are going to be what make you stand out. have grown looking back to the time when I used to be a fearful residential student.

AUTHOR

About the Author

Chau Pham is a serial entrepreneur whose mission is to uncover hidden leadership talent and empower communities through entrepreneurship education. She joins The Startup Studio and has been helping pioneer the presence of entrepreneurship education in Danang, Vietnam. She is currently attending the University of Southern California - Marshall School of Business.