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Backpacked through Europe for 10 weeks

Before my junior year in college my grandmother surprised me by offering to pay for a summer trip to Europe. To make it even better, she agreed to cover the airline ticket and Eurail train pass cost of a friend so I wouldn't have to travel alone.   I had been around the United States and to Mexico on trips with my parents but had never traveled without my family or been to Europe.

My friend and I outlined our plans for the trip. We wanted to have a real adventure and decided to create a general plan, with an understanding of the key places we wanted to visit but allow ourselves to make it up along the way. We both started studying up on Western Europe to learn about the sites, cities, and events we wanted to see and came up with a long list of possibilities, with a few we both agreed we had to do. After speaking with some folks who were familiar with Europe at that time of the year we decided to start in London and then jump over France and work our way down the coast side and then swing back up the other side of Western Europe. We were traveling using backpacks, and using advice we filled them and then hiked around the block at home to decide if we were bringing too much. We ended up leaving a third of our stuff behind when we realized how heavy it all was. Sometime during the first week of the trip we ended up shipping home almost half of the remaining items, realizing how little we really needed, and how much easier it was to travel lightly.

Besides getting our passports, airline tickets and 2-month Eurail passes, we chose to only book our first nights hotel, so we would have something near the airport when we arrived in London but decided to take our chances for the rest of the 70-day journey. I had a friend who lived in Amsterdam and so we set a rough estimate of when we would be there near the end of the trip but otherwise we were free to improvise along the way.

Staying at a hostel in London to start the trip was a great beginning as we quickly met other travelers our own age and found it pretty easy to explore a foreign country, especially when you spoke the language. After a few fun days in and around London we decided to head over to France. We discovered how easy it is to meet other Americans, Canadians and Australian travelers enjoying each other's company and finding out about can't miss places to go. As time went on, we discovered it wasn't so hard to meet Europeans and share stories about our cultures. Along the way we saw a number of fellow American travelers who seemed rude and arrogant, often demanding that things be done in the same way as back home. While we were proud of America, we tried to blend in and just enjoy the different experiences and ways of life for the local areas, and I remember laughing triumphantly when we were mistaken for Scandinavians at one point.

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We met so many great people and had a lot of fun adventures, many that we never could have expected if we had planned the trip more tightly. Now of course we didn't just randomly go places but kept our list of desired places and events handy along with out general path and whenever we felt we had seen and done enough in one place we decided where our next stop would be. Almost every place we went has some lasting memory of the people or places we saw, and we made sure we saw all of the key sites, visited many of the great museums and tasted the local cuisine.

It was a long and exciting trip, filled with fun and adventures and uncertainty about what each day would bring. While we didn't make it to every place or event on the lists we created before the trip, we did experience many things we never could have imagined. At the end we were both happy to come home and enjoy some of our normal comforts and routines, but the experience changed both of us in so many ways.

Insights:
I enjoy planning but am also comfortable free styling if it aligns with my objective. I am comfortable dealing with uncertainty and adjusting to a situation. I really enjoyed meeting all of the people and experiencing the different cultures and learning new ways of doing things.   I would push for us to make a decision on our immediate plans and then take action to make them happen, so as carefree as I try to be, I still like having some structure and idea of what's next.

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eBay Speaker Series

When I was the marketing manager of the eBay Developer Program I produced the eBay Developer Conference for four years. One of the aspects of running the conference that I enjoyed was hosting great sessions for people to learn new ways of doing things. I recognized that eBay was a leader in its space but that as a company we were a little isolated from outside ideas, with few employees attending conferences or hearing from speakers. I wanted to bring some of the latest thinking and different ideas to help eBay employees get a different perspective.

One year I asked the Developer Conference keynote speaker, John Battelle, if he would be willing to give a presentation at eBay for the employees, to which he agreed. I made the arrangement with John, booked a room and created a flier to advertise the event. A friend and I then went to every building on both local campuses posting the fliers inviting people to attend. I was able to secure some budget and bought a bunch of his books to give out to attendees and even created a survey for attendees. This session played to a packed room. I introduced the speaker and he then lead a great session.

Flush on the heels of that success, I tried getting approval from the leadership team for some budget and the approval to create a regular speaker series. I wasn't able to get any traction on the idea for a few months and was getting frustrated waiting for approval. My boss gave me great advice and told me that I should just go for it and get permission later, if it was important to me. I realized that if I made it have low budget impact with high value to the employees, and didn't require additional resources to pull it off, and then nobody would want to stop it.

I thought about how to create a program that was valuable for eBay, the employees and the speakers. For eBay I identified some topic areas that were important or emerging for the company and tried to find speakers around those areas. For the employees I tried to make sure the topics were interesting and varied, with some technical and some business sessions across the topics. I also offered them free books, including having the authors sign the books and meet them. For the speakers we gave them a chance to claim they spoke at eBay, a quick sale of 50-100 books, and for some, introductions to appropriate teams at eBay for future consulting work. I even shared the post-session survey results with most of the speakers so they could see what the employees liked and didn't like about their session, and how it compared overall to other speakers we had, which many of them appreciated.

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I liked owning this but I wanted to get more people involved, besides just attending. I had an employee create a logo for the eBay Speaker Series and worked with another on creating a website. , Worked with facilities on having them distribute the fliers and set the conference room up in a specific configuration, created a flier template that was easily changed per speaker and automated the survey, including asking for speaker suggestions. Someone volunteered to start video recording the sessions and we opened a conference call for remote employees to listen live. I even met with the HR team to identify key topic areas that would match up with employee's goals so they could participate and get credit for employee development activities. I made sure to publicly acknowledge all of the people that helped with the sessions, including the employee who recommended or made initial contact with a speaker. While I always led off the sessions, occasionally I had another employee introduce the speaker. This resulted in our president and some VP's making introductions, and they always brought along a crowd, for their session, many who would then come again to future sessions.

I had worked at eBay for over three years before I created the speaker series and knew a fair number of people but suddenly I met a much broader cross section of the employees, who would email me or stop me on the campus to discuss a speaker or a session idea. Meg Whitman sent me an email, copying the leadership team and asked John Donahue to be the executive sponsor, so I met with him a few times to share my plans and get his feedback.

I loved getting the chance to meet and talk with the speakers, receiving signed copies of their books and the attention from and opportunity to meet so many fellow employees. The visibility I gained in this role helped me land my next position leading the eBay Education team.

Insights: I really enjoyed creating a new program and building it from scratch. I liked figuring out how to make an efficient, low cost system so would take minimal time, effort and budget but would be valuable to all involved. I loved being the focal point of the series but also enjoyed sharing the spotlight with others who helped out, which made more people want to support the cause. Helping to bring the outside new ideas was very fulfilling as I felt I was doing something to help others and the organization.

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eBay Developers conference for 4 years

As the new Marketing Manager for the eBay Developers program I had 13 weeks to put on a developer event to coincide with eBay's second annual user conference, eBay Live. They had actually done a one-day event the previous year, attracting about 50 developers, but wanted this to be a real, organized conference. I had sold the interview team on my ability to pull this off, so in the midst of learning about eBay and the developers program I dug in to put this event together.

I quickly worked with the eBay Live team to get some logistical support and for them to provide us with space at the Orlando conference center. Our VP was very budget conscious and felt that the event was really just about the speakers so I had to be really tight with the funds for the event. I created a core team from across our program to focus on the different aspects of the event, including the sessions and social aspects and the marketing to get developers to attend. I set some basic objectives for the conference and made sure we met them. The first year was quite an improvement over the previous year, but it wasn't a very polished, professional event worthy of eBay. Besides compiling my own notes, I surveyed all of the attendees, speakers and staff after the event and learned what they liked and what they wanted changed for the next event. I then created a presentation summarizing the event and the feedback and made recommendations for the following years event.

With one event behind me I was able to really plan how to create a great conference the following year. With the attention paid by the senior leadership our VP agreed to spend a little more money this time and have a more professional event. I hired an event production company help me develop and manage the event, which freed my up to do more planning and organizing and less doing tasks.

We grew the event from 200 attendees to 750 over the four-year period. Every year we included innovative changes to help encourage networking, allow the best developers a chance to speak and to get more involvement from eBay's leadership team including the founder, Pierre Omidyar and both Meg Whitman and John Donahoe.

I treated our event production company as a true partner, which extended to the other vendors helping us stage the event. In addition I formed a core team of employees, including those from PayPal and Skype who played a prominent role in the event. Everyone involved benefited from there involvement in the event. Whether it was from learning new things, gaining new skills, or being recognized for their great efforts.

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The last year's event was held in Las Vegas and was a great way to go out on top. We had a stunningly dramatic opening, great keynote and session speakers, fun lunch activities and social events, and even a special event in the private Foundation Room atop the Mandalay Bay with our top developers and senior eBay leaders.   After the developer conference officially ended, we extended it to the eBay Live show floor where we had a private booth for developer conference attendees with food, drinks, video games and special guests.   The ratings from all of the attendees, staff, vendors, and sponsors were unbelievably high and I ended up receiving special recognition at an eBay quarterly meeting for creating such a great event.

Insights:

I really enjoyed looking at what we did previously including the stakeholder's opinions and creating plans on how to build off what worked and change what didn't. It was fun to come up with new ideas to bring some different experiences and surprise people at the event. I liked mentoring some of the core team as they took on new roles as well as the familiarity of working again with people I trusted from delivering previously. I really like seeing all of the plans come to life. I enjoy the commotion and activity around the event as you solve unforeseen issues that suddenly appeared.

Resolved SJLC financial crisis

I am the president of the board of directors for the San Jose Leadership council. This no-profit organization manages the alumni network and oversees and adult and youth leadership program. These programs have 9 month long classes, which help people gain a deeper understanding of the San Jose community organizations and the infrastructure that runs our city. Our organization has one part-time employee and the majority of the $50K budget goes to running our programs.

The organization is twenty years old and fundraises to keep afloat. Prior to the recession we had been able to stockpile some additional funds and while we tried to be careful with our expenses, we didn't closely monitor the budget. As the economy turned down we struggled to raise the funding we had always been able to achieve before. During my first year as president I noticed that our financial reporting wasn't very accurate and we really just reviewed a balance sheet. At the third meeting of the year, and our income level below expectations, the financial report suddenly was very clear that we were running out of funds to keep operating,

I quickly put together a small team to address the issues. We developed a cash flow statement and projected our revenues and expenses for the remainder of the year. We took a fresh look at our budget and tightened it up, getting rid of any unnecessary expenses. We developed a fundraising plan and tracking mechanism and started pushing to get more funds in as soon as possible. The Executive Director had the main responsibility for fundraising and for creating the financials, both of which led us to this problem. We agreed to withhold 25% of his salary until the end of the year, which he would only receive if we broke even or made a profit after paying him. He didn't like that action but it allowed us to save enough to not go broke during the year. As our whole board knew the ED's financial stake in the outcome, we were all motivated to bring in extra funding to allow our organization and the ED to recover.

By the end of the year we had generated a profit, even after paying the ED his full salary. We also created new processes around our fundraising and financial management to help us get early signals of any pending problems. While it was a very difficult time, or organization came out of it stronger than when we started.

Insights:
Once the issue became apparent I quickly mobilized a team to address it. I allowed everyone interested to participate in a meaningful way and have there voices heard. With the team I was then able to determine what needed to be done, assign responsibilities on each of the pieces and drive the deliverables to make sure we all kept on track. I kept the rest of the board informed of the plans and progress but allowed each of the team members to report on their actions. I like collaborating on an action plan, driving it and sharing the spotlight with those who make it happen.