

“And the award for the Best Presentation goes to Mr. Vivek Kulkarni”

Vivek, a young boy, all of 15, was standing on the stage taking in the adulation. As I saw him, I reminisced about my association with him over the past few months.

Vivek was an orphan who I met when I started volunteering at Care for India orphanage in my village to teach kids. He used to lovingly call me “didi” (sister) and cajoled me into teaching him public speaking and presentation skills. As his mentor, I taught him the basics of Microsoft PowerPoint, coached him on how to give an English presentation and booked a slot at the Annual Day Function for him to give a speech. As the D-Day approached, I was more nervous than him but I was confident of my mentee and the preparation we had done. Vivek gave a stunning presentation, brimming with confidence, and as the winner announcement with applause engulfed us, I saw his teary eyes meet mine and I knew I had contributed to something magical.

I did not want my association with Vivek to end at the Annual function as I went back to my city. I wanted to help and teach 100+ underprivileged kids like him. And that’s when it struck me – with my knowledge in the technological space I can impart education even 1000s of miles away from my village. This was the genesis of my first entrepreneurship idea “Avatar Teaching”. Avatar Teaching – a hologram-based teaching application would enable the less-fortunate kids to learn from all around the country. Teachers from anywhere in the country will be able to sign up to provide lectures. The USP of the application would be a holographic display that would enable the teachers and students to “meet” in a virtual world. 70% of kids especially in the rural parts of India miss out on the opportunity to learn due to limited resources – laptop screens, teaching faculty, etc. My application would mitigate that unavailability of resources as the only thing you need to learn would be a mobile phone (not even a smart one!). Everyone deserves a chance to learn and the learning experience should be free of any barriers. My venture will make sure that even the underprivileged get that chance.

I am certain that I have it in me to make this dream a reality, due to various academic and professional experiences I have gathered so far. Not only has it made me technologically oriented but has pushed me close to my goal. During my undergraduate journey in Electronics and Telecommunication, I gained plethora of knowledge in the VR, AR and holograph domain with courses like “Image Processing” and “Digital Signal Processing”. The feather in the cap was my “Robotic Pothole Analyzer” project which detected potholes on roadways and communicated the details (location, width, severity) to the concerned government authorities. My joy knew no bounds when I won the “Best Project for Social Good” award at the Paper presentation competition. I realized that if within a span of three months I can utilize technology to create solutions for the day-to-day problems, I CAN definitely put my technical skills to educate kids all around the country.

While thinking about a new holographic venture requires technical acumen, it also demands an entrepreneurship mindset. The ability to present, plan end-to-end and execute. In my 3rd year of Engineering, I was associated with a local NGO ‘Shed’: working for the betterment of underprivileged children in my city and was also a front-runner as the Chairperson in the IEEE committee at my college. I wanted to contribute equally to both of them and with that goal in mind, I decided to conduct an educational workshop – with fellow members from IEEE imparting knowledge to the kids from orphanage on technology savvy topics such as ‘Computers’, ‘How to get started with Technology’, ‘Robots’ etc. I planned this workshop end- to-end, right from convincing members of the committee to planning logistics and engaging the kids. This event was a huge success with 50 members hosting teaching sessions and 200 teenage kids engaged in the sessions.

Little did I know that these experiences in college would help me to pursue my career in the corporate industry. I was one amongst a handful of students to land an internship (in my second year of engineering) as a ‘Project Associate Intern’ at Bharat Insulation Company (BIC). As a Project Associate, I gained maximum exposure to management and business fundamentals – an essential tool to set up my own venture. My work there was exclusively focused on process optimization and enhancing equipment performance. I realized that gaining this exposure was an essential part along with academics which inspired me to pursue two more internships – as a ‘Process Architect’ at SAVIC technologies and as a ‘Supply Chain Intern’ at Art Internationals. These experiences taught me to manage logistics cost reduction process, utilize data to make informed decisions and day-to-day functioning of a startup.

Post-graduation, I was recruited by Persistent Systems where I currently work as a Software Engineer and am involved in building Tibco based middleware for a large bank in India. My work revolves around designing and implementing application. I also work on providing optimum solutions to customer issues. One incident wherein I stepped up and took charge was when my team was tasked with resolving issues in the software for an international client. My manager was involved in another high-priority project and the responsibility of resolving this issue was on my shoulders. I coordinated the team, deep dived into the issue and was in constant communication with the client – informing them about the status and resolution steps. It required 2 days of sleepless nights and endless cups of coffee. In the end, my team and I were able to successfully identify the root cause and resolve the issue. The client was ecstatic about the work I had done and informed my manager about the same. I realized that I have an innate knack for the intricacies of management, leadership skill and organization ability which will hold me in good stead when I start my own venture.

Along with working in my office, I am also actively involved in Corporate Social activities and have organized various fundraising initiatives. Being involved in various social programs, I am aware of the problems in the society. My experiences so far have equipped me with the knowledge and experience to create solutions to those problems. To implement what I have achieved so far on a larger scale – such as establishing my startup to teach underprivileged kids far and wide, I need to further hone my skills. And what better platform than the Northeastern University’s Masters in Information Systems course - a perfect mix of technical and management curriculum to scale my learnings to the next level?

The Information Systems program at Northeastern University is the perfect forum to garner the skills and transform myself into an entrepreneur - someone who will synergize the technology with management and operations skills required to build and run an application. I am a self-driven individual, a distinction evinced in the fact that I am a certified National Stock Exchange Financial Professional – a diversification would allow me to flourish in a subject like Financial Management. I’m confident that I would be a great fit at your program and an education at your university will allow me to EDUCATE INDIA and make true Nelson Mandela’s wise words:

“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world”