Shreen Ghaleb PIT-KN: Elevating the Stories and Knowledge from Underrepresented Lived Experiences

PIT In Practice Profiles

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Shreen Ghaleb, Founder of Collabful
Summer 2017 was a time when I was unknowingly given the opportunity to change my life. I spent day and night studying and researching, and on the quest of discovery at the world-renowned University of California San Francisco Cardiovascular Research Institute. As the summer ended, I continued my research at the institute while attending San Francisco State University, where I was completing my degree in cell and molecular biology.

On this journey, I saw many classmates struggle. I wanted to do something to help them, even though my time was limited. I decided to organize a few peer-led study groups. This was when I was on the path of another discovery: educational inequity and the struggles of students with multiple identities. I learned that many of my classmates weren’t just students, but also an employee, a caregiver, a commuter, a partner, a family member, and more. For classmates whose families couldn’t completely provide for them, having to juggle multiple identities — being a student as just one of those identities — wasn’t easy.

PIVOTING TO PIT

The Vision

After the end of my global journey, I flew back to San Francisco and met with some friends. I expressed my concerns about the inequities, and lack of accessibility, of digital educational tools for underprivileged college students. We immediately went to the whiteboard. We began to toss around ideas and found shared interest in a simple concept: virtual study groups.
The Realization

We discussed the idea with our families and raised our first investment of $10,000. That gave us the chance to build out the product, which we called Collabful, and pilot it in the summer of 2019 with over 1,000 students at four California colleges. We followed a process recommended to us by an adviser: the lean startup. He vowed to follow our path and stay up to date. He wanted to watch us traverse the uncharted waters of entrepreneurship. I guess we did OK, because after a few months he decided to invest a first round of $50,000, and we were off to the races. Today, Collabful has over 3,000 users.

WHAT I LEARNED
Understanding people and their problems and creating community with something as imperative as education, which could result in socioeconomic mobility, opportunity, mentorship, and knowledge, excites me. Another thing I have learned is that the path of entrepreneurship is typically a lonely one. Your job as an entrepreneur isn’t one thing, but many things, and you make difficult decisions on your own every day. No one ever tells you that you have to constantly raise money, make connections, and know the right people when trying to solve other people’s problems with technology.

It’s important that we be aware of the path of accessibility into entrepreneurship and how other minority entrepreneurs can be supported, because exposure is unique for every dreamer. Some are more privileged than others, and creating a change in its accessibility through entrepreneurship can change the world. That is why I was intrigued when presented with the opportunity to discover the Public Interest Technology University Network (PIT-UN). I knew that it could be an opportunity to create that knowledge-sharing collaborative network and meet other entrepreneurs, whether with more or fewer resources, who can help push ideas and initiatives forward.

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