

November 19, 2009

FLiP Has It Covered: "From dot.com to dot.org" Event at NYU

Ed. Note: FLiP contributor Jordan Walker brings you coverage from the event we posted about on Tuesday. Read on for all the details!

By Jordan Walker

Yesterday FLiP attended "From dot-com to dot-org: Three activists speak out," a Lunchtime Conversation presented by the NYU Heyman Center for Philanthropy & Fundraising. The event was moderated by Michael Evers, Adjunct Professor in Fundraising; and panelists included Laurie Lock, VH1 Save the Music Foundation; Phil Suarez, NYC Medics; and Obaid Kadwani, eyeBLINK.org.

In sharing their personal paths to their current endeavors, the panelists made one thing clear: there is not just one way to forge a career in the nonprofit world. See below for some key insights from the panelists, which can apply in a variety of ways no matter what your goals and direction.

"You can't avoid what you're meant to do." – Laurie Lock

Trained as a violinist and developing a career on Broadway at the time, Laurie Lock made the life-changing decision to pursue a career with VH1 Save the Music Foundation when she fortuitously saw the Foundation's first PSA while at the gym. Lock characterizes her involvement in the nonprofit world as one that was inevitable, explaining that both of her parents were involved in nonprofit work and she had felt a social obligation since age ten, when she first created a recycling program for her neighborhood. Ten years into her career at Save the Music, with an Executive MBA to her name, Lock has translated her love of musical performance to a passion for bringing music education back into public schools.

"When it comes to gut versus head, go with your gut...but don't forget your head." – Michael Evers

When asked how his role in the NGO he founded, NYC Medics, mirrors his profession as a paramedic, Phil Suarez summed it up neatly: "When you receive a 911 call, you get the call, and you drive there." Suarez created NYC Medics in response to the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. The organization fills a gap by supplying paramedics in the immediate aftermath of a disaster before larger NGOs can step in. At the time of the organization's founding, however, Suarez acted on impulse, making phone calls, mobilizing friends, and gathering supplies wherever available. NYC Medics works because it fills a specific need and doesn't overlap with the offerings of more established NGOs. More importantly, it enables Suarez and fellow volunteer paramedics to utilize their unique skills in a meaningful way, and this personal motivator is the driving force behind the NGO's success.

“It’s less about the ‘path not taken’ and more about adding additional paths.” – Michael Evers

Obaid Kadwani has his hands full, and with the success of “Pizza for the Hungry,” he has become even busier. Kadwani has an active entertainment career, hosting Namaste America and Doc-Day on the Sundance Channel, as well as running eyeBLINK, a nonprofit organization dedicated to challenging social and cultural stereotypes in the arts. When Kadwani read about a pizza party thrown in a homeless shelter, he immediately sought to replicate the idea through eyeBLINK, adding live music as an artistic component. This concept, which partners musicians with local homeless shelters, provides benefits at the individual and community levels, and as such has grown exponentially over the last three years. In 2009, Pizza for the Hungry operated out of 25 states and remained entirely volunteer-driven. Like Lock and Suarez, Kadwani drew upon his own personal skills and interests as well as passion for a cause to make a significant difference.

Change the world; change yourself.

All the panelists agreed that their impact was evident on so many levels, touching the volunteers who helped the organization, the actual recipients of services, and the communities and other nonprofits involved in the cause. Additionally, all panelists discussed the personal growth and challenges their activism has produced in their own lives. In dedicating so much of themselves to these passions, each cause has become an even more integral part of each panelist’s identity. The panelists urged participants to draw on their own skills and strengths (and add to these through continuing education and volunteerism!) to make a difference in the world. It’s up to each of us in our own lives to figure out what we want to achieve and how to make it happen for ourselves.

For more information about the NYU Heyman Center and the nonprofit organizations mentioned in this post, check out the following websites:

[NYU Heyman Center](#)

[VH1 Save the Music Foundation](#)

[NYC Medics](#)

[eyeBLINK.org](#)

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