

Ivey Entrepreneur

www.ivey.uwo.ca/entrepreneurship

Gil Silberstein, HBA '05

Providing a blueprint for millions of young Canadians

Heading into university, Gil Silberstein, HBA '05, had a simple plan.



Get to business school, find a business partner, and start a new venture.

From the moment the new class of HBA 1 students were seated in alphabetical order, things started falling into place. Seated right next to Silberstein, was Eric Silber, HBA '05, who also had an interest in entrepreneurship.

Few business partners meet in such serendipitous circumstances.

Later this year, Silberstein and Silber, will be celebrating 15-years at myBlueprint, the

research project turned startup the pair bootstrapped after graduating from the Ivey Business School.

"So my highschool goal somehow materialized, and we got to start a company together; right out of Ivey, in my parent's basement," said Silberstein.

Empowering Students

myBlueprint is an online platform that helps students chart their future academic, and career options. Today, over a million

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InstituteBuzz



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By **Eric A. Morse**

Ron and Nancy Clark Chair in Entrepreneurship
Special Advisor to the President and Director of Entrepreneurship
Executive Director, Pierre L. Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship

Following three years of build-up, 2020 looks to be a big year for entrepreneurship at Ivey and Western University.

Starting the year, we had a number of key updates with our newly combined Western Entrepreneurship Advisory Board, which will now be lead by chair Paul Sabourin, MBA '80, and vice chair Erik Mikkelsen, HBA '06. We are excited to have Paul and Erik's enthusiasm and strategic mindset as we head into an important season.

Additionally, we've gathered an excellent team of committee chairs, including Connie Clerici, QS'08 (Governance), Andrew Barnicke, HBA '83 (External Collaboration and Relationships), and Alexa Nick, MBA '95, (Internal Programming and relationships). Together with the Board, we will take a hard look at other entrepreneurship ecosystems, such as Toronto, Western Canada and South Western Ontario. In September, we are looking to present our strategic plan for the next three years.

January and February were also months full of spotlighting entrepreneurship at the university. We hosted the 22nd and 4th editions of the Ivey MBA and HBA Business Plan Competitions, which brought together 18 teams from seven universities across Canada and the United States. I was also encouraged to see strong participation from across Ivey and Western, many of whom were students impacted by our programs and outreach initiatives. Our competition weekend is a celebration, bringing together young entrepreneurs, and experienced alums, to share insights, and life experiences.

Speaking of celebrations, we gathered at Toronto's National Club to recognize our donors, and our exemplary students, who were awarded more than \$170,000 in entrepreneurship scholarships. It was a wonderful evening, which provided students the opportunity to personally thank their donors.

Continuing on the theme of celebrations, faculty member Dave Simpson hosted Paul Desmarais III for a gathering of regional business families. It was a fascinating discussion, touching on the Desmarais legacy, family dynamics, and his philosophy on investing.

Lastly, we are continuing to grow our podcast series, with a variety of themes that touch on different parts of the entrepreneur's journey. If you have not had a chance to listen or subscribe, visit our page at go.ivey.ca/entrepodcast.

BLUEPRINT CONTINUED FROM P.1

students use the platform across Canada, in more than 6,500 schools.

Since originally targeting high-school students, the platform is now accessible to students across the K-12 spectrum.

Tracing back Silberstein's journey with myBlueprint, takes us back to the Ivey New Venture Project, which at the time was a year-long course, that brings student teams together to research, and build a new business idea.

Silberstein and Silber's team got on the education track after they came across some students undergoing academic transitions; trying to figure out which programs best matched their career aspirations.

That germ of an idea soon evolved to encompass a larger target market, students navigating post-secondary options. For many high school students, trying to decide on a career, degree, and university program, can be a stressful process. In fact, many university students across North America spend much of their academic life as 'undecided.'

"We had no idea what the product was on day one," said Silberstein, but as they continued to ask questions, and conduct research, with teachers, school administrators, students, and guidance counsellors, the picture became clearer.



Gil Silberstein, HBA '05

"The NVP joke is, you don't open an Italian restaurant, where nobody likes Italian food... If we didn't take that time to understand the market, and identify



needs, and pain points, we would have just come out with another app that nobody was prepared to buy or invest in," said Silberstein.

As their time at Ivey ended, Silberstein was enthusiastic in pursuing their New Venture Project. "I turned down a job offer, and decided to run with it after our last exam," recalls Silberstein.

After getting some seed funding from the group often cited as the 3 Fs "friends, families and fools," they were well on their way. Fifteen years on, Silberstein is proud of the way they were able to bootstrap myBlueprint.

Silberstein is encouraged by the trends in education that are moving towards a more holistic way of assessing student growth, and progress, and myBlueprint is already positioning itself to support the transition.

Available across every province, they are hoping to see 1.3 million active users on the platform for 2020. With all they have learned from building the product for the Canadian market, Silberstein believes myBlueprint is ready to pursue a global growth strategy.

Lessons in resilience

"One of the things that all entrepreneurs know is that it's not a straight line," said Silberstein.

And it certainly was the case for myBlueprint. Having enthusiastically started up the company, they soon realized that some of their early ideas, and assumptions didn't hold in the real world.

"Everything we put in the NVP got tossed out the window within the first year... We thought we were going to hire retired teachers as a sales team, and we quickly

realized that wasn't the best route... we had to live off barely anything for the first year or two, to make it work and to prove things out."

It was an important testing ground for Silberstein to discover the other, less tangible ingredients that make an entrepreneur.

"You gotta keep trucking forward. You have to have the patience and resilience, without those things, we wouldn't have made it this far."

Silberstein advises young entrepreneurs to prepare themselves for all the naysayers they will meet on their journey. It's a difficult balancing act, of listening to feedback and opinions, but also having the determination to see through the ideas you truly believe in.

"If we had listened to some of the teachers that said, 'it doesn't make sense, no one would pay for those, there are no budgets in schools, etc., it would have stopped us right in our track," said Silberstein.

Control, flexibility, and being your own boss

One of Silberstein's earliest memories of entrepreneurship was in grade 3, buying and selling sour keys during recess. That enterprise was short-lived when the school authorities shut him down.

"I had my very early taste of success but clearly didn't get the regulatory approval for the sale of the product," said Silberstein.

During a Toronto-wide garbage strike, Silberstein saw an opportunity to address a significant pain point in his community. Together with a group of friends, they rented U-Haul trucks, and created routes

to pick-up and drop off people's garbage at the open sites that were not being picketed.

Perhaps his biggest influence was his father, who himself had left the corporate world to start his own practice. Silberstein remembers how his father described the entrepreneur's journey.

"That's where you'll have the most control, and most flexibility. And you get to be your own boss," Silberstein recalled from his father's encouragement..

It made quite the impression, and heading to university, Silberstein was on a mission to find a business partner to launch a new venture; and he knew there was no better place than the Ivey Business School.

Lessons from the classroom and from the field

One of the biggest lessons Silberstein learnt at Ivey was the importance of collaboration.

Much of the HBA program is highlighted by group projects, like the many 48-hour reports, and the Ivey Field Project, in both its client and new venture forms.

"Ivey did a good job of pushing us to work closely with our peers, to collaborate, to leverage each other's strengths and weaknesses, and communicate effectively with one another."

Leading a team comes with its own challenges, and Silberstein talks about how important it is for entrepreneurs to be able to delegate, build trust and onboard the people who can support their journey.

Looking back to the early days of the company, Silberstein wishes they had brought in key individuals to fill certain roles in the company earlier than they did.

"There are people who can do those things as well or better than you. The sooner you can find those people, and trust them to do it, and not micromanage them; you will be able to grow, expand, and focus, on the most value-add tasks that you should be working on."

Throughout myBlueprint's journey, Silberstein has felt extremely fortunate to have Silber as a partner, and co-founder.

"We are very different people. We have very different skills and strengths. The one element that's similar is our beliefs and value system," said Silberstein.

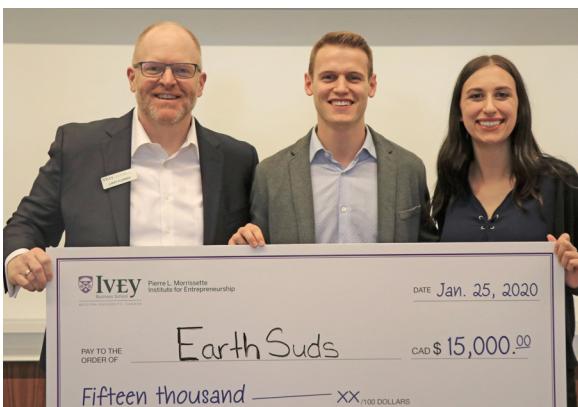
It's this system of shared values and beliefs that have helped Silberstein and Silber keep-in step with each other, building up myBlueprint from a classroom research project, to an education platform changing millions of lives across Canada.

2020 IVEY BUSINESS PLAN COMPETITIONS

TEAMS FROM WESTERN UNIVERSITY, AND WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY, TOOK HOME TOP PRIZES AT THE 2020 IVEY BUSINESS PLAN COMPETITION ON JANUARY 25, 2020.



Hairstrong from Western University took first place in the MBA Competition. Founder Nicole Baranowski, MSc '21 candidate, has created the world's first customizable hair band that specifically targets women in athletics. The product was developed through Western's Propel Entrepreneurship incubator.



EarthSuds from Wilfrid Laurier University, took first place at the Ivey HBA Business Plan Competition. Represented at the competition by Daniel Moll and Marissa Vettoretti, EarthSuds is a sustainable shower products company offering alternatives to the plastic toiletry containers used in hotels.



The Pembroke Asset Management Prize in Social Enterprise was won by Team Urban Roots London, featuring Richie Bloomfield, HBA '14, MBA '20 candidate, and Mariam Waliji. Urban Roots is a non-profit that revitalizes underused land for agriculture by producing high-quality, organic vegetables and distributing the produce locally.

Eighteen teams from across Canada, and the United States gathered at the Ivey Business School for the 22nd MBA, and 4th HBA editions of the Ivey Business Plan Competition on January 24-25, 2020. The two competitions had a combined prize pool of \$45,000.

READ MORE ABOUT THE COMPETITION AT: go.ivey.ca/iveybpc2020

2020 SCHOLARSHIPS

HBA SCHOLARSHIP

2019 RECIPIENT

DIANE BISCOF MEMORIAL HBA SCHOLARSHIP

Angela Zhang, HBA'20

J. ARMAND BOMBARDIER ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARD

Samantha Lanooy, HBA '20 Candidate | Chloe Beaudoin, HBA '20 Candidate

JOHN R. CURRIE HBA AWARD IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Landon Tulk, HBA'20 Candidate | Graham Bohm, HBA'21 Candidate

DON LANG HBA SCHOLARSHIP IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Natalie Diezyn, HBA '21 Candidate | Kayla Shepard, HBA'20 Candidate

RON AND NANCY CLARK HBA AWARD IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Sanjot Boyal, HBA'21 Candidate | Christianne Morrison, HBA'20 Candidate
Dorothy Lin, HBA'20 Candidate

JACKSON FAMILY HBA ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARD

Dan Nejman, HBA'21 Candidate | Jesse Zender, HBA'21 Candidate

PIERRE L. MORRISSETTE HBA AWARD IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Nick Elder, HBA'20 Candidate

QUANTUMSHIFT FELLOW HBA ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARD

Carol Zhai, HBA'21 Candidate

TEVYA ROSENBERG AWARD IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Simone Godbout, HBA'20 Candidate

PAUL SABOURIN HBA SCHOLARSHIP IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Adam Silverman, HBA'20 Candidate

ENACTUS CANADA AWARD IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Arseny Tyulenev, HBA'21 Candidate

MBA SCHOLARSHIP

2020 RECIPIENT

NELSON M. DAVIS SCHOLARSHIP

Amrita Singh, MBA'20 Candidate | Richie Bloomfield, MBA'20 Candidate

SCHULICH AWARD FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Emily Royer MBA'20 Candidate



2020 ENTREPRENEURSHIP SCHOLARSHIPS: The Institute hosted donors and recipients of the Ivey Entrepreneurship Scholarship Awards at Toronto's National Club on January 23, 2020. Meet our HBA and MBA recipients.



IVEY ENTREPRENEURSHIP BOOTCAMP:
February 2020 Edition

IVEY ENTREPRENEUR PODCAST

Visit go.ivey.ca/entrepodcast

Michael Katchen of Wealthsimple sat down with long-time friend, Eric Janssen, to talk about his journey; from leaving management consulting to working in the start-up world and building a disruptive company in an industry he had never worked in.

Eric Morse speaks to QuantumShift alums Andrew Oland, CEO of Moosehead Breweries, and Jon Stanfield, CEO of Stanfield's Ltd, on how the long history of their businesses impact how they view, and handle the current disruptive landscape.

