

OU ACCELERATOR THE IMPACT BEGINS

Six nonprofits, six months to learn, grow, and absorb new tools for success.

In the previous issue of this magazine, we met the six nonprofit organizations chosen to participate as the first cohort of the OU's groundbreaking Impact Accelerator program. This first-of-its-kind accelerator for the *frum* community is designed to help our next generation of social entrepreneurs — namely the most promising nonprofit startups already out in the field addressing Jewish communal problems — jumpstart their paths to business success and maximum impact, by providing them with guidance in the form of seminars and individualized mentorship.

Now, as the Accelerator has gotten underway, we caught up with Jenna Beltser, founding director of the OU Impact Accelerator, to hear how the inaugural program is going. She gave us a glimpse into the set-up and structure of the itinerary, as well as an inside peek

at some of the presentations and workshops that have already been offered.

WHAT MEASURES IMPACT? Every startup in the world is out to make a difference. For some, that might mean providing a faster pizza delivery service. For nonprofits, the impact is felt in more meaningful improvements to people's lives (though someone really desperate for his pizza might argue that point). But whatever the ultimate target, any business that aspires to be successful has to be able to do two things: clearly articulate its goals, and assess whether it is achieving them.

Neither of these is easy.

The Impact Accelerator's first order of business has been to help the organizations define themselves and their goals, and develop appropriate metrics to measure whether and how well they are reaching

THE SIX ACCELERATOR ORGANIZATIONS



NechamaComfort: Supports families who have suffered miscarriage, still-birth, or infant loss. Services include immediate help at the time of the loss and ongoing individual, family, and group support.



GrowTorah: Develops educational Torah garden programs for Jewish schools and communal organizations, incubating *emunah*, environmental stewardship, compassion for creatures, and *tzedakah*.



Yedei Moshe: Places teenagers for whom the traditional school environment does not work in meaningful jobs that teach responsibility and respect, while building their confidence and skills by learning a new trade.



imadi: Provides advocates to families struggling with mental illness, who make sure basic needs including meals, carpools, and childcare are met and help to establish functionality in homes that are suffering.



The Young Talent Initiative (YTI): Channels the creativity of young men ages 16 to 21 through professional music training, teaching them how creativity can enhance all aspects of their lives.



TorahAnytime: Records Torah lectures given around the world, and uploads the footage to its website for anyone in the world to watch or listen to, free of charge.



↑ Hart Levine of the OU (left) and Yosef Gillers of GrowTorah (right) discuss the day's learnings

them. The design of the Accelerator encompasses two parallel components: a standard curriculum, which consists of four three-day training sessions for the entire cohort, and a customized curriculum, involving specialized, one-on-one mentoring sessions. The initial meetings of both of these tracks have been focused on personal goal-setting.

"Every organization has one-on-one sessions with me, where we discuss what their goals are for the next six months and how the Accelerator can help," says Beltser. "Once I hear what they see as their primary challenges, I can connect them with someone who can mentor them in that specific area."

In addition, she collects metrics from each organization, so that they can have measurable outcomes by the end of the program. "How do we show impact?" she asks. "How do we measure success? These are import-

ant questions to consider."

Right now, she says, as most of the organizations are still at the beginning stages of defining their goals, they don't have 100 percent clarity on which metrics are important to take. For example, how many clients serviced per month sounds like an obvious statistic to keep track of. But if your organization's goal is to make long-term life impacts, then longitudinal metrics involving client follow-ups and impact down the line may be more important for you than proving the breadth of your reach.

For now, says Beltser, she's collecting the metrics that the organizations are currently using — such as their budget and number of clients. This way, over the next six months, they'll be able to measure the organization's growth. Along the way, as the organizations gain more clarity and precision in their own goals, they may change and hone the metrics they use.

OF PLAY-DOH AND PERSONALITY The first of the four general sessions took place at the OU offices from November 27–29. The three days were jam-packed with presentations and workshops given by an array of experts, with a focus on setting business goals and defining missions. The classes were a mix of frontal presentations and interactive, group-oriented sessions.

A sampling: The first day of the seminar, which was titled "Personal Growth," featured a talk by Charlie Harary about honing in on your individual greatness; a discussion by Rabbi Ari Rockoff on the PDP Personality Assessment and how to discover the personal strengths that influence our work styles and those of our colleagues; an introduction to fundraising by Arnold Gerson, OU chief development officer; and a presentation by Rabbi Gideon Black on the "Five Languages of Impact" and the different ways that people connect to Jewish communal work (see sidebar).

"The sessions were engaging, interactive, and provided opportunities to learn the nuts and bolts of launching a nonprofit — from crafting a clear and concise mission statement to the art of pitching to donors," relates Yael Wedeck of Yedei Moshe. "Arnold Gerson's take on fundraising was an eye-opener for me, since I've always found that to be daunting. Hearing his anecdotes and experiences as a master fundraiser made me feel that the act of raising money could be a creative challenge and even fun at times. Mr. Gerson emphasized

that trying to understand, connect to, and engage a potential donor could be a growth experience for both parties.”

“After hearing all the presentations, we summed up the theme of the day as ‘Dream Big,’” says Jenna Beltser, who wrote the theme on one of the big poster boards she’d set up in the conference room for participants to record their feedback.

The second day’s focus was “Defining Your Mission.” As Beltser points out, it’s often hard for nonprofits to articulate exactly what it is that they’re trying to accomplish. The morning’s workshops, run by Upstart, were intended to help them come up with that clear idea. Fun, interactive, and multisensory activities such as Play-Doh were used to help them accomplish this.

“The idea behind the Play-Doh is that sometimes using multimodal, hands-on materials can help us express ourselves in a deeper way,” she explains.

Yosef Gillers, founder of GrowTorah, used his Play-Doh to create a set of blue and yellow Luchos with a bright pink heart, carrots, and flowers adorning all sides. “It’s a snapshot of our vision for the future,” he explains. “It’s centered with love, of a multidimensional type. People are showing their love for Torah and expressing it in a vibrant and beautiful way, as well as a complex, nuanced way. It’s centered on health — there are carrots and flowers and beauty, all within the framework of a multidimensional, vibrant, beautiful Torah observance and passion.”



← Rabbi Joshua Joseph, Senior Vice President at Yeshiva University, speaks to the Accelerator participants on staying focused



↓ Joel Strauss, partner at law firm Kaplan Fox & Kilsheimer LLP, mentors Yosef Davis, Rubin Kolyakov, and Moshe Soffer of TorahAnytime

JUST FOCUS Once the missions were articulated, the next step was to learn how to focus on those missions. Daniel Gordon, chief development officer for NY NCSY, led a strategic planning session on how to focus your efforts on realizing your organization’s vision, rather than waste money, time, and resources on activities that don’t fall in line with this mission. For example, it can be tempting to spend a lot of time creating a presence on social media. But if this isn’t the right venue for your organization, then it just becomes a drain of time and resources.

The day closed with an interactive session by Josh Gottesman, HR Manager, about professional communication and, in particular, how to com-

municate your messages effectively by e-mail.

The theme of the day? While Jenna chose “Focus,” participant Shabtai Heller of YTI suggested “Just Awesome.”

“I came in as one person, and I’m walking out as another,” he said.

The third and final day of the seminar focused on how to express the organization’s mission, with an introduction to business marketing and another class on professional communication. There was an emphasis on discovering both your own personal communication style and that of the person you’re speaking with in order to appropriately tailor the style in the way that the message will be best received. The day finished

off with a strategy class on assessing your competitive landscape — now that you know who you are and what you provide, it's important to understand who your competitors are in order to differentiate yourself in the market.

“While the classes were all focused on nonprofits, the idea was to give them the same tools and skills used in a for-profit business,” explains Beltser. She adds that the Accelerator program is based on the assumption that all of the organizations are great at actually providing their services; the goal is to provide them with the business guidance to help them scale their organizations into something bigger and more impactful.

THE PATH FORWARD As a sign of how much the OU believes in this program, the first two days of the seminar were opened by greetings and introductory remarks from the OU's leadership: Moishe Bane, President, and Allen Fagin, Executive Vice President. In addition, the participants were joined by members of the Accelerator board for a dinner, in order to have the opportunity to interact with them and begin exploring mentorship options.

After such an intensive, information-packed three days, the participants went home for a few weeks of implementation, as they prepare for their next session, which will focus on metrics, business plans and strategy, and developing operations and budgets.

The feedback from this first set of sessions only seems to pave the path for more greatness in the future.

“This was outstanding in every way,” said Zeldy Oppen of imadi. “The energy, classes, topics, variety, and networking were incredible.”

“The seminar was jam-packed with information,” added Reva Judas of NechamaComfort. “The presenters shared their expertise on everything from how to develop a business strategy to the latest e-mail conventions. We're really starting to think of ourselves as more than just a group of people doing chesed, but as an actual business that has to run efficiently in order to best serve our clients.” ■

THE FIVE IMPACT LANGUAGES

Rabbi Gideon Black, director of professional recruitment and leadership development for the OU-JLIC (Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus), presented a session at the first Impact Accelerator seminar on the *Five Impact Languages*. Based on Dr. Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*, Rabbi Black's findings, which he developed while working as an on-campus rabbi, seeks to define the various styles of communicating a message that can move an individual to take action.

“While working on campus, I would ask myself, ‘Why is it that two people can be sitting in an audience listening to the same lecture, and one of them will be inspired to change his life while the next will tune me out?’ It's a question that every rabbi or educator asks himself, and I decided to try to come up with a system for assessing how different individuals are impacted by different communication styles.”

Understanding your target listener's unique style can help you present your message in a way that will speak to them. Rabbi Black explained that for a nonprofit startup, it's particularly essential when seeking to recruit active donors to your organization. Ask yourself, will this person be swayed more by statistics or stories? Or maybe it's the personal touch, the gift sent for his family simchah, that will win him over?

Below are Rabbi Black's Five Impact Languages. Which one speaks to you the most?

- 1. CARE:** For some, nothing impacts them more than feeling that you care for them, like calling just to find out how they're doing or sending chicken soup when they're sick. For these people, actions speak louder than words.
- 2. LEADERSHIP:** Are you the type who can galvanize a crowd to action? Take a stand on an issue even if it's unpopular? Start a new initiative and influence others to join? For some, it's the stirring example of a true leader that will move them to action.
- 3. EDUCATION:** Some people are impacted by ideas and information. They need someone who can present information or deep ideas in a way that will stimulate their intellect and thus rouse them to change.
- 4. INSPIRATION:** For people impacted by inspiration, it's not the deep lecture, the proofs, and statistics that speak to them, but rather the inspirational speeches, stories, videos, music, or that one-on-one conversation rousing them to take stock of their goals in life.
- 5. RUACH.** We all know those people whose presence is felt as soon as they walk into a room. There are those who can sit down with their guitar and immediately have a crowd gathered around to soak in the energy and atmosphere. Some people are impacted by an individual's personality, by watching how he lives his life and drawing inspiration from him as a role model.