

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Business

Anna Chif: 'Be intellectually rigorous and never settle for anything less than excellence'; Dialogue co-founder reflects on the value of education, starting a company and working with millennials

Karl Moore and Dan Schechner

775 words

17 March 2019

The Globe and Mail (Breaking News)

GMBN

English

©2019 The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Anna Chif, 30, is the co-founder and COO of Dialogue. Her company offers health-care services to companies' employees via online chat, audio and video calls.

My parents are both entrepreneurs – they started a community newspaper [Meeting Place – Montreal] and they've run it for about 25 years now. Everything about them is entrepreneurial – the way they think, the way they came to Canada from Uzbekistan. They had a vision of a better life and they went after it.

I learned much more outside of school than I learned in school. For example, travelling for a year between CEGEP and university was valuable and eye-opening. However, school is good for going deep on complex topics.

Working at McKinsey taught me how to be a professional. It helped me go from being a student who had no idea how the business world works, to one who was able to engage with people at different levels, without making me look junior. It also taught me to be intellectually rigorous and never settle for anything less than excellence.

My first attempt at solving the rising issues in wellness and health was through food. I built a startup that helped people eat better, and that's where I acquired a lot of my entrepreneurial instincts. That's where I hired my first employees, fired my first employees, set up vision, got investors, raised debt ... name it.

At the beginning [of Dialogue], we were a bunch of passionate individuals who wanted to find a way to give better access to care. I had personally seen a family member, my grandmother, go through an experience where access to care was difficult. In her last months of life, we were still asked to go to the emergency room for a doctor to see her, even when she could not walk any more. There had to be a better way.

Today, I wake up every day knowing that hundreds of people, who wouldn't otherwise have access to care quickly, can get their issues resolved from the comfort of their homes.

Our vision is to increase humanity's level of well-being by lowering barriers to excellent care. What that means is being a large, impactful company that allows the masses to access better care, and setting the standard for what better care is.

There is glamour around entrepreneurship, but it is anything but glamorous, and I think it's not for everybody. Some people are great entrepreneurs because they thrive on uncertainty, an ever-changing environment and on complex decision-making. Others are great intrapreneurs – they don't thrive on starting a company from scratch, but they enjoy coming into a company and be entrepreneurial within it, by helping it scale and professionalize. And then some people perform [better] by working in well-established environments, tackling complex intellectual challenges without uncertainty.

Creativity is often associated with art, but I think there's a lot of creativity that goes into any industry. My work is highly creative to me personally, because every day we face challenges that we've never faced before and we need to find interesting, smart and clever ways to solve them.

Health care is moving from a very reactive state, where doctors treat patients after a health-care issue arises, to being much more proactive – where, based on signs that as a human you may not even be aware of, you get a recommendation of what you should be doing. There is so much data we share through various devices, the more this data will be consolidated, the better predictions will be made.

Millennials join a company because of their purpose, and work hard if they receive recognition, have clear expectations and maintain good relationships with their managers. I think a lot of sensationalist media talks about how millennials are lazy. I disagree with that, and think millennials work very hard when they are in the right environment.

I lead with context. I think providing people as much transparency and context helps me lead effectively.

Stay ahead in your career. We have a weekly Careers newsletter to give you guidance and tips on career management, leadership, business education and more. [Sign up today.](#)

Follow this link to view this story on globeandmail.com: [Anna Chif: 'Be intellectually rigorous and never settle for anything less than excellence'](#) The viewing of this article is only available to Globe Unlimited subscribers.

The Globe and Mail

Document GMBN000020190317ef3h000gp