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How to Do Well in the Do Good Challenge

The Do Good Challenge at the University of Maryland is a unique opportunity that sheds light on some of the most noble and promising causes led by UMD students. Teams present in the form of a pitch which judges then review and decide who gets the first-place prize of $5,000, second place prize of $2,500, and third place prize of $1,000. Although pitches are normally given in person, this year was different, as members filmed themselves giving the five-minute speech covering an assortment of topics regarding their project or venture. These five minutes are crucial, as they give a look into what the organization has done, what it hopes to accomplish, and how it plans to get there. Additionally, these are so substantial because they influence how the judges view them as well as the audience who vote for who receives a share of $4,500. Just because one team may show more long-term promise over another doesn’t mean they’ll be awarded first place; Instead, the team that has the most persuasive pitch will receive this honor, and be granted money that can greatly influence the long term prospect of their project or venture. In this paper I will be recounting what the 1st place venture did to make their pitch stand out, describe what the 3rd place project did to underwhelm, and detail the major differences in pitch style which played a role in the judge's decision.

The venture that won first place was “Chat Health” who delivered a truly textbook speech to win over their audience. Chat Health opened with a personal anecdote describing one of the team members’, Jesse, friend who had HIV but couldn’t find applicable information for him about resources or help available. She then broadened this problem, discussing how college students often don’t know where to find health information online. Jesse then introduces their venture, Chat Health, and describes its utility. She continues into depicting their local reach, quantifying it as 4,000 users in March of 2020 with growth leading to 40,000 users by fall of 2020 at the University of Maryland alone. She then describes how the product works with basic information about the chat bot feature. Following this she lays out their immediate plans for expansion to other local universities in Maryland as well as expanding along the east coast, notably to Rutgers. A chart is then shown showing the growth plans for the next three years, depicting exponential growth in user base with nearly one million users by 2023. Transitioning, Veeraj takes over and immediately describes how they plan to make revenue through a university payment plan and continues into detailing how this revenue would be used to reinvest in staff, technology, and growth. He outlines what the realistic market can be, making sure to be very specific in identifying 500 universities across America with 10,000 students or more, making their total “annual serviceable obtainable market” at one million dollars. After highlighting all of this, Veeraj describes what winning the challenge and the prize of 5k would enable them to do, breaking it down into $3,500 for mobile app development and beta testing and $1,500 in funding for the initial launch in five chapters. Coupling with this breakdown is a timeline defining when and how the budget would be spent. Nearing the end of their five minutes, Veeraj further establishes legitimacy by describing their team and listing accomplishments, and gracefully ends bringing it back to Jesse’s friend with HIV who would personally benefit with this technology at their disposal. Altogether, this speech does a fantastic job of having a speech with a great flow and message. There was an abundance of useful information throughout the speech, leaving the audience with little to wonder about what they do and what they hope to accomplish. They were rightfully awarded first place by the judges and show a lot of promise for their future endeavors in expansion.

Unfortunately, not all speeches were as thorough and comprehensive as Chat Health’s, with Public Health Beyond Borders paling in comparison. Manasvinee opens by asking the audience three questions: What invaluable lesson did someone teach you, how did you grow, and have you shared these lessons? These questions are given with long pauses in between and took nearly one fifth of the time allotted to them to get through. She then continues into a personal anecdote of her friend Darya who met a boy named Aldo when teaching abroad. At the 2 minute 30 second mark (halfway through), she finally begins describing Public Health Beyond Borders, talking about their reach in the US and three other countries. In a very broad sentiment, she then presents what their organization does, listing activities such as handwashing workshops, raising money for the Black Lives Matter movement, and malaria prevention initiatives. An example of the broadness in her statements was the sentence, “We have all learned hard lessons over the past year. Our job here… is to bring these lessons to everyone.” At this point in the pitch, she describes their reach being 13 trips impacting 3,500 children and 1,000 students and reports their growth being 190%. Transitioning to another group member, Sara takes over for the final minute to describe what their immediate goals are. These goals are as broad as their initiatives, with the only specific goal being to spread their cause to Temple university. She then outlines their infrastructure being a board with graduates ready to work, having a one-year projected budget. Somewhat abruptly, Sara closes saying they have everything they need to expand and get to work. Although a worthy cause, this pitch is both very broad yet also very unclear leaving the audience with an abundance of follow-up questions. The presenter’s delivery was good, and they had quality graphics to assist in their presentation, but the overall speech is lacking in valuable substance.

Given both teams had five minutes to work with it is abundantly clear which team better utilized every second. There are several differences that made one pitch successful and the other lacking. First, Chat Health has an inspiring opening prompting empathy from the crowd whereas PHBB spends far too much time making hypothetical questions that provide no substance to their pitch. As an audience member I found myself waiting for their pitch to start, with the three questions being somewhat of a standard middle school opening inappropriate for the five-minute time frame. Additionally, it is clear that Chat Health hit the ground running and never stopped, covering their opening, problem, introduction of their venture, utility, and local reach within the first 2 minutes and 30 seconds, whereas PHBB had only done their three-question opening and personal anecdote. Additionally, the biggest strength of Chat Health as compared to PHBB was Chat Health described exactly what they would do with the 5k if they got first place with a detailed breakdown and timeline, whereas PHBB does not lay out any plans for what they would do with the funding. In a competition where judges are awarding substantial capital, identifying what this capital would do to move the needle is imperative and by not mentioning it at all PHBB practically took themselves out of the running for top prize. With both nonprofits wanting to expand throughout America, it is clear that Chat Health has a far more comprehensive plan, including said plan in their presentation whereas Public Health Beyond Borders was asked by the judges about their expansion plan and responded with more information than they included in their presentation which shouldn’t be the case as it should have been laid out in their pitch! In summary, Chat Health did an exceptional job influencing the judges and rightfully earned the 5k If Public Health Beyond Borders had done a pitch in a similar style with specific information throughout, they too may have been able to influence the judges to award them the top spot but fell short in doing so this year.