

Leadership-in-Action Report

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## Acknowledgement

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## Introduction

In Week 2 of my Leadership-in-Action, I was given an outline of what kind of work I would be conducting during my stay in Medellin, Colombia. Through a fun search activity I learned with my randomly chosen teammates—Jani and Rachel—that we would be working with the NGO, Todos Podemos. The goal of our project was to develop a strategy that the organization could use to better engage with the foreign expat community, and sign up 25 sponsors in the Medellin area to finance and mentor social entrepreneurs. Within the first day of getting our goal, we drafted a strategy to create engagement and find 25 sponsors. We also divided the project into three sections that each of us would lead. Jani would head the digital marketing division; Rachel would lead advertising and in-person reach; and, I would lead channels of engagement with expats.

## Project Summary

With my task now defined, I began strategizing how I could connect the local community with expats in Medellin. In my first two weeks I learned that much of the work and lifestyle culture in Colombia centered around in-person events. Whilst the US and Canadian work culture had adapted to frequent webinars and telecommunications, Colombia preferred and almost solely

operated on in-person communications. Rachel had also advised me that many people she had met were weary of digital events and paid attendance. Another challenge in devising a strategy was that Todos Podemos did not have the brand recognition of other major NGOs. If I was to sign up 25 sponsors or to create channels of engagement, it was necessary that people trusted and recognized the organization. I also had limited Spanish skills and did not have my team of volunteers established, which would make it increasingly difficult to connect with the local community. To address these interdisciplinary challenges, our team thought that free social events would both increase trust in Todos Podemos and build a network of expats we could contact and connect with.

We planned to have two events where the Todos Podemos organization could come speak about their mission and where we could network with expat and local business entrepreneurs. After defining our approach, we set up a meeting with the Todos Podemos executive team to pitch our idea and introduce ourselves. This first meeting would be a crucial point of the project and would also introduce us to the work culture and team of Todos Podemos. Unfortunately, in the two days leading up to the meeting I became sick with the flu. I gave my notes to Rachel and Jani to present and waited for the meeting results. Rachel and Jani set up a zoom call to discuss their first impressions and the meeting notes. We discussed how CEO Alex Alvarez and his team had developed their own strategy with an in-person based campaign to promote sponsors and a fundraising event. Alex and his team had also developed marketing material which Jani would publish rather than design on his own. Though we were hesitant on this strategy, we believed that it would work efficiently and have a successful outcome. After recovering from the flu, I started

to draft my plan for two events that could be held to promote Todos Podemos and act as a fundraiser.

Rachel started her in-person outreach by going to cafes and restaurants that were popular among the expat community. I attended one of these trips to Cafe Naturalia, an all vegan cafe catering to the international community in Medellin. Rachel met with the owner Ginger and I talked with many of the visiting expats to gain insight into their working life and their networks. I learned a lot from one expat, Joshua, who had moved from the US and was working in digital marketing in Medellin. He had stayed in Medellin much earlier in his life and had returned back to the city that he once loved. It was very enlightening to see an expat who was so motivated to make a positive impact amongst the community he was visiting. He also advised me on facebook groups and other locations where I could connect with more expats. Rachel's meeting with Ginger was also very insightful into our strategy for the project. She advised that many expats and local businesses would not be trusting of a fundraising campaign from an organization that was not well known. She advised us to create free events that would increase awareness of Todos Podemos before starting a pay-to-enter event. With this knowledge, we went back to Alex to propose having both of our events free, as we had originally thought. Though, Alex was weary of having free events and believed that many people would not be focused on having a positive social impact. We agreed and started to think of ways we could address both these concerns simultaneously. After doing some online research, we found that focused marketing campaigns were successful in reaching a targeted consumer base. Using similar methodologies, we proposed a targeted marketing campaign that would focus on individuals who were more keen on making

an impact in the community. Jani started designing and creating content and we had also got some team volunteers that would help us immensely.

Our volunteers in the project were one of the most integral components for the success that we had. Although our volunteers were a late addition to the team, their guidance, expertise, and knowledge were instrumental in progressing towards our goal. Each section of our project was assigned two to three volunteers. The volunteers assigned to Rachel spoke fluent Spanish and communicated with many more people on the-person outreach campaign than before. Jani's team had many graphic design graduates and they produced high-quality material that would reach our target markets. My team consisted of Isai and Sharoom, both of whom had great social and communication skills. These assets proved to be instrumental in gaining access to booking spaces and starting dialogue between the expats and local community. Without our amazing team of volunteers, the project would have surely not had the same level of success.

In our final week we hosted both the Cafe Naturalia event, free of cost, and the Pizza Zorba fundraising event. The Cafe Naturalia event was free of cost and had a great attendance from both local business entrepreneurs and expats. Alex and his team presented what their vision was for the organization and their experiences working in Medellin. Many expats shared stories of why they came and fell in love with the city. Local entrepreneurs also discussed the positive and negative effects that expats brought, and how they could be a more positive influence to the community. The event was overall a success and Todos Podemos was able to obtain some new volunteers and contacts for their newsletter. We concluded our project with the Pizza Zorba event, which had a high attendance, though not in comparison to Cafe Naturalia. We were also

able to fundraise an estimated 2500 dollars<sup>1</sup> for the organization through digital and in-person outreach. Although we had some successes, we also had many challenges and failures within the project. We never reached our target goal of 25 sponsors and did not have enough time to build a long-standing awareness of Todos Podemos.

### Conclusion

Reflecting back on the project, it was my first time experiencing managing client expectations and relationships. I had never worked directly with a client and learned how complex and challenging it can be. I realized that being a leader and working with people is not always straightforward at times. Dealing with people comes with complexities, but it also comes with increased creativity and ingenuity. It was very interesting to see how people with different backgrounds, personalities, and opinions came together for a goal in mind. This project inspired me to see that great work can be accomplished. Even though we did not complete our full deliverable, I had a great time learning and working with Jani, Rachel, Todos Podemos, and our amazing volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> Figure at the time of writing