

The Promise of a Pencil Study Guide

The Promise of a Pencil by Adam Braun

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Contents

[The Promise of a Pencil Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Summary.....3](#)

[Chapters 1 - 6.....4](#)

[Chapters 7 - 12.....7](#)

[Chapter 13 - 18.....10](#)

[Chapter 19 - 24.....13](#)

[Chapter 25 - 29.....16](#)

[Important People.....19](#)

[Objects/Places.....24](#)

[Themes.....27](#)

[Styles.....30](#)

[Quotes.....32](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....35](#)

Summary

Adam Braun was born into a life of privilege. His father was a dentist and his mother an orthodontist. He lived in a neighborhood of CEOs, doctors, lawyers and wealthy investment bankers. His father, Ervin, was a coach and disciplinarian and instilled the goals of being successful and hardworking in his children but told them to always be charitable and think of others who were less fortunate.

Adam played basketball in high school. He met two young men from Mozambique, Sam and Cornelio, who earned a scholarship to play high school basketball in the United States. But their accommodations in Philadelphia were deplorable and their high school experience was a disappointment. Adam's parents agreed to become their legal guardians and allow them to live with them while they were in school as long as Adam agreed to tutor them. Adam and the two boys from another world became friends. Knowing them and hearing about the struggles of life in Mozambique opened up Adam's eyes to the rest of the world. He realized that he had been insulated in his upscale existence and began to think about how the rest of the world lived.

After graduating from Brown University, Adam pursued his dream of becoming a hedge fund manager or investment banker. He landed on Wall Street at Bain Capital with a goal of making a real killing and attaining it in just a few years. He signed up for a Semester at Sea (SAS) which allowed him to travel to remote areas in Asia and Africa where he encountered poor kids who had no future. There were virtually no schools and nothing for the kids to look forward to. When asking the kids what they would want more than anything in the world he got responses like "a book" or "to dance." He was blown away. Adam was a goner when a little boy's face lit up when he handed him a pencil.

Adam spent the next few years balancing his time between his challenging job on Wall Street and establishing a nonprofit organization with a mission of building schools in third world countries. He was able to get friends and associates involved on a volunteer basis and funded his pursuit with donations and investments. Over the years as the organization and demands for schools grew, Adam had to make a choice. He decided to listen to his head but follow his heart. He could not get the image of the little boy and the pencil out of his head. Pencils of Promise became Adam's full-time pursuit and at last count, PoP had built 100 schools around the world followed by Adam's announcement of a new goal of 500 schools.



Chapters 1 - 6

Summary

Adam Braun's father was a tough coach and strict father. Other kids got paid for good grades – one kid got \$150 for his good grades. But when Adam asked for compensation for his good academic performance he was told that “Brauns are different.” His father offered only his gratitude for Adam's good grades. Half of their Hanukkah gifts were donations to charities because the Brauns were different. The Brauns read books or played outside instead of playing video games. Adam's father expected his kids to perform at a higher level than other kids. When they went to parties as teenagers their mother, Susan, reminded them to behave as though their father was watching them. They set out to achieve ambitious goals that had to have the values to match.

Adam's parents sponsored two boys from Mozambique named Sam and Cornelio who came to America to play basketball. While his parents gave Sam and Cornelio a chance for a good life they gave Adam a gift as well. It was the first time he realized that there was a big wide world out there that was vastly different than the world he knew. He wondered how his life would have been had he been born in a place like Mozambique. Sam and Cornelio wanted more out of life than their homeland could offer; they took the risk and chose to be different.

The neighborhood that Adam lived in was filled with professionals, investment bankers, CEOs and multimillionaires. Adam became fixated on Wall Street and having a career in finance and becoming a billionaire. He opened an E*TRADE account in middle school and worked for a hedge fund manager during summer breaks in high school. At twelve he had a robust CD business that earned him thousands a year.

Adam chose to study economics at Brown University where he would also play Division 1 basketball. He worked several jobs on campus and was performing well academically. Things changed for him after he watched a movie called Baraka which featured stories about people in remote areas of the world.

Adam realized that one's success cannot be measured by the standards of others. He learned that the great works of artists and musicians were often accomplished during times of strife. He applied for a Semester at Sea (SAS) so that he could travel the world and see how people lived beyond his insular neighborhood. His application was accepted and he began on a venture of self-discovery.

Adam boarded the MV Explorer cruise ship in Vancouver, British Columbia to begin his term with the SAS. In the 100 days that he would be part of the SAS, he would visit four continents. They encountered rough seas on the first leg of their trip which was to Korea. Three storms had converged creating 60-foot waves that smashed into the ship. The icy water short-circuited the power and the ship's engine and navigation system was lost. Everyone was ordered to go to the top floor. The lifeboats weren't accessible –



there was no escape. Adam's thoughts of doom were magically replaced by a confidence that it wasn't his time – he wasn't destined to perish at sea at the age of 21. The ship and its passengers survived the storm.

The Semester at Sea program continued on even though the ship had to be repaired. They began to travel to different locales. Adam decided he had one question he would ask one child in each country they visited: "If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?" He wanted the kids to dream. He was moved when one little girl's answer was, "... to dance." It reminded him that the best things in life are available to everyone at no cost. He was just as wowed when a little girl in China answered that she would want a book. A little boy in Hong Kong wanted magic.

Adam headed for the Ganges River in Varanasi. The river was filthy but was considered to be sacred. When he arrived in India, he fainted in the airport from a high fever. His fever abated by the time his group reached the Ganges. On the way, he couldn't believe the evidence of poverty that was everywhere. The little children begging for money haunted him. He asked one of the little boys what he wanted more than anything. The little boy said he wanted a pencil. Adam handed him a pencil from his backpack. The boy's face lit up like he was given a prize toy. For the boy, the pencil wasn't just a pencil it was the promise of the future. Adam decided that he would give out pens and pencils to all the children he encountered.

Adam's group arrived in Varanasi during Shivratri, a festival honoring the Hindu deity Shiva, "the Transformer." The people burned cadavers in a ritual to gain access to nirvana in the afterlife. The dead of some were floated down the Ganges. As he walked back to the village, he was surrounded by little boys begging for money. Instead, he handed out pencils to them. The change he in saw in them was immediate.

The group traveled next to plains of Africa and townships of South Africa. They visited the slums or favelas of Brazil. It became Adam's practice to meet up with people his age and stay with them. He got much closer to real life in these locales. By the time the SAS was over, Adam had circled the globe. When he returned to America, he had a hard time adjusting to his old comfortable life. He couldn't get the people he had encountered out of his mind. He had grown while he was away. The people at home were stagnant; they hadn't changed at all. He had to get back to the rest of the world.

After earning some money over the summer, Adam and his friend Luke decided to backpack through Europe. They hit the usual tourist spots like Paris and Vienna but they also visited more remote cities where kind people took them into their homes. Adam moved on to Singapore, Thailand and Cambodia with a SAS friend, Dennis.

Although Adam felt he knew himself better than ever before, he had the sense that others didn't understand him. He made plans to establish a non-profit organization after graduation. His professors, parents and friends all tried to talk him out of it. He had a triple major in econ, sociology and public and private sector organization and he would be wasting it all. They convinced him to pursue a business career. However, every time



he looked in his wallet and saw his CCF business card, he just wanted to explore the world further.

Analysis

Adam Braun describes his family and its background which is important for the characteristics and values that Adam inherited and developed. His father was known as the “mean coach” although he really had a kind heart and was a charitable person. He was tough on his kids because he wanted them to work hard, never give up and never forget those less fortunate than they were. The Brauns lived in an upper middle class neighborhood and wanted for nothing. Both of Adam's grandparents had fled Europe during the Holocaust of World War II. He looked up to his ancestors for their strength and ability to survive. The values Adam’s father taught his children and the characteristics of his ancestors all played a role in the turn his life would take.

Adam learned about the struggles in developing nations when he became friends with two boys from Mozambique who came to the U.S. on a basketball scholarship. Adam broke out from his insular existence when he joined the SAS (Semester at Sea) and visits third world countries and saw firsthand the horrific poverty that the people of these regions must endure. He was especially taken with the children who had no schools and no hope for a brighter future. The seed of an idea began to grow within Adam. He wanted to help these children.

Although Adam attended Brown University and dreamed of a career as a Wall Street investor where he would attain success and wealth, he could never get the images of the poor, lost children out of his thoughts.

Vocabulary

fervor, nonconformity, trajectory, Holocaust, piqued, vehement, resonated, lineage, morphed, entrepreneurial, juxtaposed, hypothermia, introspection, unsullied, nirvana, squalor



Chapters 7 - 12

Summary

Adam decided to take one more trip – to Latin America – before he began his corporate career. He couldn't tell his family exactly where he would be going or staying only that he'd be exploring Guatemala City and parts of Central and South America. His parents were upset when Adam told him that his friend, Matt, who planned to go with him wouldn't join him for the whole trip.

Once he arrived in Guatemala City, he made his way to the emerald pools of Semuc Champey and then to the Mayan temples in Tikal. In Rio Dulce he was almost robbed and shot by a man who had claimed to be a taxi driver. He escaped from the man and ran into a hotel where he got a room. Next, he traveled to Lake Atitlan where he decided to stay a month at Las Piramides which was a center for spirituality and meditation. He found his time there to be calming and clarifying. The final week there was a commitment to total silence.

Adam continued handing out pencils throughout his travels in South America. All the people he meant wanted more for their children, a less corrupt government and a better job. These people shared the same dreams as those of Americans.

Adam was offered a great job with Bain & Company, a consulting firm. Adam had interviewed with five investment banks, five consulting firms and a private equity concern before accepting the Bain offer. He turned down an official offer from Lehman Brothers investment division but he knew he'd have to work too hard there. His plan was to work at Bain for a few years and then go with a private equity shop where he could make a real killing. Once he had enough money saved, he would follow his dream to establish a nonprofit organization to help those people who he could never get out of his mind.

The training was intense at Bain and the learning curve was steep. He was gaining new skills and insight that would be the basis for a successful career. In September 2008, the economic collapse began with Lehman Brothers declaring bankruptcy. The party on Wall Street was screeching to a halt. Adam had become completely absorbed in himself and didn't like who he'd become. He grabbed at an opportunity to work with a nonprofit that served the poor in New York City. After beginning this work he felt he was rediscovering himself.

Adam took advantage of Bain's "externship" program that allowed him to take a six-month leave and work on-site at a company of his choice. His choice was to work with Scott Neeson at the Cambodian Children's Fund and have enough spare time to backpack through Southeast Asia during his leave. Adam was ready to start something bigger than himself. He recalled the joy he felt in the simple act of passing out pencils to little children. It made him think of the name, "Pencils of Promise." He was inspired and



his mind was filled with ideas. Adam would use the externship to establish his nonprofit. He would return to Bain and continue running his organization in his off-time. He drew up a mission statement describing the purpose and goals of “Pencils of Promise” and a to-do list to get it off the ground. He discussed his plans with his parents who helped him address the many questions that had to be answered and decisions that had to be made.

Adam did all the legwork necessary to establish his organization as a legal entity including the creation of a website and the opening of a bank account for the organization with a \$25 deposit. Big things start with small steps. He rented a dance hall where he planned to hold a fundraiser. He and his friends invited thousands to the party which was held on Halloween eve. The party raised \$8,000. He also got a lot of people interested in getting involved, many volunteered their services. A leadership emerged from his closest friends and associates.

Laos became Adam’s choice for the building of his first school. Adam and his friends continued to organize fundraisers. Although it was quite a large amount, Adam was advised by his friend Jen to make his fundraising goal \$250K over the first five years. Adam visited Laos and met with the province education ministry. On his last day there, Adam visited Pha Theung which was in dire need of a pre-school to educate three to five-year-olds. Adam found the village where he would build his first Pencils of Promise school.

Adam recognized that he couldn’t attain his goal without the help of his friends. On the work front, Adam was on the verge of getting fired. Companies were in collapse as the economic downturn had a death grip on Wall Street and the rest of the nation. Bain adjusted its externship by extending it to nine months. Although he wouldn’t be paid by Bain, he’d have the freedom and time to set up his school and have a job waiting for him in nine months. He had five months before his externship began. He would have to balance his Bain job and the work he was doing for Pencils of Promise (PoP). It became a problem to keep up both.

Adam was assigned to an important postmerger integration (PMI) proposal at Bain which required long hours. He did a slipshod job, anxious to attend a PoP fundraiser. His manager told said he had done was some of the worst he’d ever seen and would not recommend him for advancement making him ineligible for the externship. He was assigned a new project and new manager and had five weeks to prove himself; if he didn’t he’d be let go. Adam did a good job for his new manager who recommended him for promotion. He would be able to have his externship. Reflecting back he realized that Prescott had done him a favor by being honest about his performance. He learned that more is learned from mistakes and to never rest on one’s laurels.

Adam returned to Luang Prabang and signed the final papers for the school. Adam helped with the actual construction of the school in any way he could. He took time to get to know the kids on an individual basis. In Phayong only children 10-12 years of age went to school because of lack of facilities and resources. Adam began to envision the second Pencils of Promise school.



Adam visited a region in southern Laos called the Four Thousand Islands where he developed the idea to have the parents of prospective students help oversee the construction of schools. He learned that it would be crucial to provide transportation for students along with resources and uniforms. Adam visited the construction site every day to record progress. On his final day, Adam passed out pens and pencils to the village children.

Analysis

Adam, who had visited third world countries in Asia and Africa with SAS, decided to travel to South America and backpack through remote locations there. He found the same conditions in the small villages along his trek. There was abject poverty and there were no schools for the children. The plight of these youngsters was a world-wide epidemic!

Adam graduated from Brown and landed a cushy job on Wall Street at Bain Capital. It was just what he wanted – or was it? Adam began to doubt the plans that he had for so long. It didn't feel like him. But the salary and benefits were great and the trajectory of his career would one day make him a millionaire. Since Adam could not forget the needy children he had encountered, Adam took advantage of Bain's externship which allowed him to take a sabbatical and work for another organization for six months. He worked with the Cambodian Children's fund and he became more convinced than ever that he had to help the poor children that were everywhere he traveled.

When Adam returned he established his nonprofit which he called "Pencils of Promise" because he often handed out pencils to the children he met. He relied on fundraisers and donations and eventually was able to build the first school which was in Laos. He wanted to take another externship leave but he fell short on a Bain project which almost eliminated that opportunity. He was given a second chance to prove himself and was granted a nine-month leave so that he could oversee the building of the second school.

Vocabulary

opulent, dissonance, mesmerizing, karmic, audacious, idyllic, makeshift, hubris, tumultuous, proverbial, camaraderie, moxie, inherent



Chapter 13 - 18

Summary

Back in New York the family held a party for Adam's grandmother's 80th birthday. The family called her Ma. He took her aside and told her about his plans for Pencils of Promise. She had lived under great duress during the European war and couldn't understand why Adam wasn't satisfied to stay home where he had a good, safe life. After he showed her photos of the school being constructed in Laos, Ma was impressed and understood why he wanted to help the children. She was moved to tears when he showed her the photo of the dedication on the front of the school that read, "Lovingly dedicated to Eva Braun." She had inspired him and he wanted to build his first school in her honor. Adam felt a deeper bond with Ma than he ever had before.

While Adam had been gone, PoP had been making great strides stateside in fundraising. Adam encouraged even his young friends who couldn't afford to donate to PoP to volunteer – their time, energy and enthusiasm. Adam focused on making PoP sustainable for the future. He was advised by George Stanton, his mentor, to find five wealthy individuals who would stake him with \$50K each. Small donors alone would not provide what Adam needed to secure the organization's future. To be successful, Adam determined that he had to rely on two hypotheses. If he used social media he believed he would recruit advocates as well as donations. He would also use the power of cause marketing which focused on products that make the world better and which was on the rise.

To effectively use these tools, he needed top branding for his organization. An old school friend, Brad Haugen, was working for a top advertising agency and came to the rescue. Adam recruited a top commercial photographer to fly to Laos and shoot a series of photos. Adam's branding and marketing team was comprised of volunteer professionals who wanted to do some good in the world. Adam was inspired by the skilled volunteers who were flocking to him and the support and enthusiasm that PoP was receiving. He wouldn't be happy with just one school. He wanted to build a movement that transformed the concept of charity.

Adam and four of his best friends flew to Los Angeles and rented an RV so they could travel across the nation and spread the word about PoP. Adam arranged to give a speech at Oklahoma State University before 35,000 students which the guys videotaped. Adam had wanted to capture the cheering crowd on tape but only one person, Chelsea Canada, showed up. Chelsea was inspired by a shortened version of the speech and began to spread the word about PoP on her Facebook page and later launched the first campus club for PoP. Adam and his team focused more attention to training and developing team leaders for home and abroad.

Adam eventually recognized that it didn't matter how many people showed up for their presentation. If they got one person to get involved it was worth it. There were more



scant audiences but at Tulane University they finally had a packed house. Time was running out on Adam's externship so he planned his last two trips to Laos and Nicaragua. Since people were referring to PoP as a Laotian venture, Adam decided to focus on the three major poverty regions of the world – Asia, Latin America and Africa – in order to have a global identity.

Leslie Engle whose friend had been in SAS with Adam was a teacher who was moving to Laos and volunteered to participate in PoP. Leslie joined Adam and Lanoy for the opening ceremony of the second school. With the second school and plans for more in other regions, PoP had progressed faster and far beyond what Adam had ever imagined. Adam was sure that he would easily readjust to his job at Bain when he returned from his externship. But he was wrong.

In the position that Adam had at Bain he was expected to go on to business school and return to Bain or leave the company. He was receiving big offers from hedge funds and top financial concerns who knew he may be leaving Bain. He decided to stay with Bain a few more months and then work full-time at PoP for a year to see where it would take him.

The new staffing manager at Bain met with Adam. He understand Adam's passion for PoP but told him he must improve his performance at Bain. He was offered a project that would require him to spend four days a week in upstate New York. If he didn't take it, he'd have to leave Bain. Adam had the weekend to decide. The owners of the office building where Adam had hoped to rent space for PoP decided to let him have the space free of charge. It was the sign that Adam needed. The decision between Bain and PoP was being made for him. Adam's family and many of his friends thought Adam was crazy to leave Bain.

Adam devoted all of his time and attention to PoP. Until the office space was ready, Adam worked in his small apartment. He began to recruit volunteers from colleges and high schools for the team. He hired Jocelyn Kmet to manage the interns. Adam was invited to attend a conference by the founders of Summit Series an organization that sponsored retreats for young artists, activists and entrepreneurs in Washington D.C. He signed up for workshops where he was able to connect with the nation's leading young entrepreneurs. He met the founders of eighty start-ups including Airbnb which ultimately became worth billions. Adam was impressed with the people he met many of whom had heard of him and PoP. Adam Witty who founded a publishing company offered to raise money from his authors for a new PoP school. Over the coming months and years, members of the Summit Series would fund many more schools.

Adam had held off on a website for PoP because of the expense and time involved. As the organization grew he knew that he had to have a website in order to present a high profile and compete for donations. He allocated \$20,000 to build the site. His friend Alex who worked for Agency Net a huge website company agreed to develop the site but with a \$20,000 things would be tight. Alex's boss, Rich, was interested in entrepreneurial projects and asked to meet with Adam. After he explained the work of PoP, Rich offered to have a \$150,000 website built for Adam in pro bono resources.

Adam couldn't believe it! Rich's company created the website, became a PoP board member and played an integral role in one of the biggest decisions of Adam's life.

Analysis

To honor his grandmother, Adam dedicated the first PoP school to her. She was moved to tears. Adam had amassed a great volunteer staff who were dedicated to fundraising and advancing the profile of PoP. Adam insisted on a heavy use of social media to recruit talented people and to seek donations. He was able to get the help of an old school friend to develop an effective branding and marketing plan.

The more Adam talked about Pencils of Promise, the more interest grew about the organization and its goals. He recognized that by talking to everyone he knew and met, that he would be able to accomplish more in less time and often at less cost. Adam began to spread the word across the nation with initially little return on his efforts. But he never gave up – he learned that from his father. Ultimately, the interest in PoP began to grow but could never keep up with the demand for new schools which never ended.

Adam depended on friends and friends of friends and new contacts to get the resources and skilled experts that he needed to bring PoP to new levels of success. He was able to get a top website company to donate a \$150,000 website for the organization and free office space from a realtor.

Vocabulary

sabbatical, serendipity, democratized, opportune, impetus, philanthropy, conundrum, placeholder, focal, flagship, infrastructure



Chapter 19 - 24

Summary

Adam was contacted by John Nolan, a wealthy friend of his father's, who had a business proposition he wanted to tell him about. He wanted to start an e-commerce business and needed someone like Adam to run it. He would make Adam the co-founder and CEO. John told Adam to run his PoP on the side. He would make a six-figure salary, have equity in the company and full benefits and be driven back and forth to the office by limo every day. Adam sustained a serious injury that required surgery. He had no insurance which made him take John's offer more seriously.

John was pressuring Adam to head the new e-commerce company. PoP was just getting off the ground. Could he develop two companies at once? The offer was too good to turn down. He could make a lot of money in a short time, much of which could go toward PoP projects. Rich told him that he could only be in love with "one girl" at a time. He should choose the "girl" he loved the most. After giving the matter a lot of thought, he finally turned John's offer down. It wasn't him; he couldn't become something he wasn't.

PoP had been run chiefly by volunteers for eighteen months. But the growth demanded that full-time people be hired to run the organization. Dedicated experts were needed to bring PoP to the next level. Adam began recruiting key staff members who had talent and passion. He looked to his friends and to those he'd served with in SAS. He persuaded Emily Gore to do her externship at PoP for six months. Staffing Nicaragua was difficult because of the poor terrain and remote locale. Adam turned to a childhood friend, Noah, to run his Guatemala project. Noah had worked in Ethiopia, the Sudan and Bolivia for an NGO after college.

The office became an issue because some of the space was shared and there was women's apparel hanging on racks and tacked to the wall – not the image Adam wanted to present when meeting with investors. Through a friend who joined PoP, Adam was able to get a large office on the Lower East Side that had a conference room with no ladies' clothing in sight. Ultimately, the staff grew to more than twenty. Adam felt confident of his leadership team and staff in New York and in the regions where schools were being constructed. While Adam was building schools for the poor, his brother Scott was in the music industry and had just signed a scrawny thirteen year-old named Justin Bieber. Justin showed an interest in helping PoP and eventually raised money through social media. When a father of a fan girl asked what he could do to have her meet Justin, he told him to donate \$10K to PoP which the man did. Justin and his mother went on a family vacation with Adam and his family to Africa. Justin was involved in a number of fundraising activities for PoP.

Pencils of Promise was gaining a high profile in social media. Adam did not initially rely on traditional press coverage to spread the word about PoP. But in 2010 media

interview with the Huffington Post led to a cover story on the website after which interest grew rapidly. Interested parties held fundraisers and explored ways to partner with PoP. Corporate sponsors began to circle. Having Justin Bieber on the team helped immensely. Adam was in demand for speaking engagements at established and well-regarded institutions. There was great interest in PoP from audience members attending Adam's presentations.

Over \$1million had been raised for PoP in 2010. Adam and his teams were making plans to escalate the construction of new schools. Archbishop Desmond Tutu who had won the Nobel Peace Prize endorsed PoP. Adam planned to enter a British Airways contest entitled, "Face of Opportunity." Entrants had to describe how they would use a free flight to advance their cause. PoP wound up being the grand prize winner. The prize was ten free business class flights.

During the celebration, Noah contacted Adam to tell him that he and an associate had been robbed at gunpoint. Adam didn't handle it well. He accused them of wanting to be reimbursed for what was stolen which wasn't the case at all. He failed to show the appropriate concern for them. Noah was disappointed in Adam's cold reaction and Appy was considering leaving because of it. Adam had the staff create contingency plans for such incidents and safety guidelines for staff members.

Adam wanted to recruit talented people to join PoP and create specific ways that would inspire them. He learned that the most important thing that will cause a person to commit to an organization was the concept of working for something that was bigger than self. Adam wanted to have an inclusive environment so that everyone was on the same playing field and was always treated special. He instituted a policy that everyone had to write two thank-you notes a month to whoever they thought deserved PoP's gratitude.

Adam was touched when he would return to a school where he had dropped off colored pencils and paper to be given scores of drawings that the children made for him. Adam invited those who had donated to PoP or shown an interest to Lunch & Learns at the PoP offices to speak before the staff and tell their stories.

Adam felt the disapproval of his move to a NGO from the Wall Street types. When talking with a hedge fund manager or investor as soon as he mentioned that he worked for a non-profit full time, he saw a glaze come over their eyes. Adam recognized that the "non" in "non-profit" connoted a negative image that he wanted to dispel. He thought of himself as a business-driven entrepreneur whose goal was the development and advancement of global education. Adam decided to begin calling his organization a "for-purpose" one rather than a "non-profit." The change had an impact on the organization which began to take on business practices such as simplifying their message and goals and making it more accessible and easier to understand.

PoP adapted a total transparency policy so that potential investors and donors knew exactly where the money was going. PoP also adopted a business model that set goals that they held themselves accountable for. They took strident steps in making everyone



involved with PoP feel like a partner. Planning was geared toward reaching the goal of one hundred schools. The changes had a positive impact on the PoP team. They concentrated on larger collaborations and eventually landed partnerships with Google and Microsoft among other global concerns who would often match donations from individuals and smaller companies. These changes and the results they fostered began to impress even the denizens of Wall Street.

Analysis

In this section, Adam is once again tempted by the lure and opulence of Wall Street. A wealthy family friend, John Nolan, who had made a fortune on Wall Street, offered Adam the opportunity of a life time. Nolan wanted to start an e-Commerce business and he decided that Adam was the perfect person to head it. Nolan would make Adam the CEO, part-owner of the company and be given the perks and benefits suited to his position including a chauffeur-driven limo ride back and forth to the office. Adam was tempted to take the position like any young man under thirty would have been. Tempted that is until he recognized that he wasn't the type to be in love with two "girls" at the same time. His first love was Pencils of Promise and he couldn't betray her.

The organization was growing and it was obvious to Adam that his volunteer force though efficient and dedicated had to be augmented with full-time paid employees to advance the organization and do more for the poor kids of the world. His brother, who represented entertainers, introduced him to 13-year-old Justin Bieber who became interested in the organization and as his fame rose stayed involved and did fundraisers on social media with his fans.

Adam knew that NGOs and non-profits were frowned upon by Wall Street bigwigs. He felt there was a negativity about these organizations and developed a campaign to raise their status in the eyes of potential wealthy investors. He took great effort to see that his operation was transparent and that everyone involved felt like a partner.

Vocabulary

proactive, profound, prestigious, bureaucratic, pandemonium, resonated, scenario

Chapter 25 - 29

Summary

Adam accepted an invitation to return to Semester at Sea and be a guest speaker joining the students on a trip to Morocco. For his speech, he focused on what the students probably wanted to hear the most. He told them to be flexible; plans often change unexpectedly. He also gave them advice on staying safe in the remote areas that they would be traveling in. He practiced looking directly into the eyes of those in the audience to underscore to portray greater conviction about his words. He would tell young students to take advantage of your youth and freedom. Adam vowed to only speak from the heart during his speeches.

After leaving the SAS ship, Adam traveled on to Ghana which was the next area targeted for a PoP school. There was a huge need for primary education in the nation. Parents in the villages he visited vowed to provide 100 percent of the labor as long as the education ministry would provide certified teachers. PoP had to raise a lot of money to fund the Ghana schools. A fundraiser that was thrown soon after he returned was sold out three weeks in advance. Shaquille O'Neal and Usher were attending the event. Justin Bieber was contributing \$1 from every U.S. concert ticket. Adam told the crowd if they raised \$1million they could expand into Ghana by the next year. They raised over \$1million that night.

Adam wanted someone to share his life with. He had specific requirements for the girl he would marry. She had to have green eyes, an unusual name and liked to back-pack. When he heard about a girl named Tehillah who was Jewish, down to earth and had green eyes, he had to meet her. She was everything he had dreamed of and more. The next day he told his family that he had met the girl that he would marry. Tehillah had a positive impact on Adam, broadening his view of life. She encouraged him bring his personal life into his conversations with donors to humanize him.

Adam did not like asking for donations. He feared being judged and rejected. He had relied on impersonal fundraisers, social media and the Internet for his fundraising. But he knew that personally asking for donations was one of the highest priorities of someone leading a nonprofit organization. He had avoided it completely. He finally realized that not only were the students in foreign lands depending on him, his growing staff and their families were as well. He had to forget himself and fulfill his responsibilities and stop taking on the easy tasks. He confessed this shortcoming in a board meeting. He needed to start asking for money. It was recommended that he participate in Exponential Fundraising a program that was available at Harvard. Attending these classes and talking with others enrolled in the program he realized he wasn't just fearful about asking, it was his ego making him feel he was asking for money for himself. He had to take himself out of the equation and think of the kids he met around the world – the donations were for them, not him.



Adam asked Paul Foster, a New York investor who was a support of PoP to be the first to join the advisory board which required a three-year commitment and \$100,000 per year. Paul thought about it for several weeks and advised Adam that he and his wife decided to make the commitment and the yearly contribution of \$100,000. Paul gave Adam a few tips when asking supporters for money. He told him not to wear jeans to meet with them and to follow-up quickly on the requests. He had to learn to not put up walls and allow his vulnerabilities to show. The board of directors supported him in his struggles to fulfill all his responsibilities.

Adam needed to appoint someone to run PoP's social media efforts. Carlo was hired first as an administrative assistant and taught himself how to run all the social media accounts. He learned to write code and became the lead designer. Carol doubled their Internet presence in just a few months. A 17-year-old girl in California tweeted that she was biking across America to raise money for PoP. She wanted to raise \$10,000 to build a new classroom. The website sparked the launching of numerous fundraising. Adam created a campaign called the Impossible Ones which celebrated the many efforts being made to support PoP which had the "impossible goal" of building the 100th school. Adam's brother Scott raised \$30,000 on his 30th birthday. There were countless other efforts made on behalf of PoP originating from its increased presence on the Internet. Adam was more inspired than ever with each person's unique contribution. Adam stayed focused on the 57 million children around the globe who needed an education.

To understand the real impact the schools were having on the students, the PoP team did an in-depth study and found that 85 percent of the teachers saw huge gains in literacy and math. Adam came to understand that evaluating student performance was a complex proposition including a safe environment, parent interest and good teachers. Adam decided that PoP should begin to include teacher training and student scholarships. The organization has too large for Adam to run; he depended on thousands to make the process work.

By early 2013, PoP was nearing the 100th school mark which was being built in Ghana. Adam traveled to Ghana for the opening ceremony. Adam's next concern would be to find ways to keep everyone involved and inspired. He knew that growth was linear and that trend lines were not straight lines moving upward – they were more like roller coasters. The new mission was to build 500 schools and provide 10,000 students with scholarships by 2015. While in Ghana, Adam staked out locales for the next phase and met with village officials to discuss these future plans. Adam recognized the benefit of meeting with locals to understand their concerns and have their input.

Adam had a lot of memories about his life and PoP but it was time to move on and think about the future and the schools that were to be built for the thousands of students who would be given the opportunity for a brighter future. As long as children continued to reach out for a pencil, the mission of PoP remained unfinished.



Analysis

Adam improved his speaking ability and learned to speak from the heart when he made a presentation about Pencils of Promise before a group. The organization's fundraising techniques and abilities were improving. A fundraiser to raise money for schools in Ghana raised \$1million in a single night.

Adam had been so busy after college with his job at Bain and then his venture with Pencils of Promise that he hardly had time for a personal life. His organization was gaining fame and success; he wanted someone to share that with. He met Tehillah who met all his requirements. He told his parents that he had met the girl he wanted to marry. Tehillah was good for Adam. She opened his eyes to have a wider perspective of the world and to bring his personal life into his discussions with donors so they could make a connection with him.

Adam recognized that his biggest flaw was that he hated to ask for a donation on an individual basis. He knew this was holding PoP back from getting some hefty donations because of the people he knew and met with. He overcame this issue by reminding himself who the money was for. He kept the image of the kids in mind, forget himself and ask for donations.

Adam had achieved far more than he ever imagined. He couldn't believe it when he had built 100schools. The next goal was set at 500 schools. He recognized that he'd never be done because there would always be poor children who needed schools.

Vocabulary

nostalgia, mantra, invigorating, juxtaposed, adage, zeitgeist, replicate, trajectory, reciprocate, exponential, daunting



Important People

Adam Braun

Adam Braun was born into a world of privilege. He was born and raised in Greenwich, Connecticut, in an upscale neighborhood that was insulated from the reality of those in developing nations who lived in poverty and squalor. He was taught by his father and mother, a dentist and orthodontist respectively, to work hard, be successful and to always focus on those who were less fortunate.

Adam attended Brown University with plans of becoming an investment banker or hedge fund manager like many wealthy neighbors in his community. During his first year at Brown, he joined the Semester at Sea program that allowed him to travel to Asia and Africa where he encountered conditions that he never imagined. Adam was jolted into the real world when he met the people who lived in the poor villages he visited. He was especially moved by the poor children in these villages who had no future. Adam and his family were huge advocates of education; he knew that these kids didn't have a prayer unless they had an education.

Adam realized his goal and landed on Wall Street at Bain Capital. He had a bright future and the promise of lucrative success but he couldn't get the faces of the young children he met overseas out of his mind. He eventually founded the nonprofit Pencils of Promise with a goal of building schools in third world nations. When he came to a crossroads and had to choose between a Wall Street career and running the nonprofit Pencils of Promise, he went with his heart. He left Wall Street behind and gave his all to his NGO which ultimately built 100 schools after which Adam announced a new goal of 500 schools.

Ervin Braun

Adam Braun's father had a huge influence on Adam's life and the choices he made. He was known as the intimidating dad of his hometown, Greenwich, Connecticut. Ervin Braun coached and played every sport with great intensity – basketball, baseball and football. He wanted the kids to work hard at their sport and earn his respect. He was a disciplinarian who was loved and feared. His own kids became aware of code words and phrases that warned them not to step over the line. He pushed his own kids and the kids he coached to do their letter best.

Adam's father got his strength from the strife that his parents endured as European Jews during World War II. They were both Holocaust survivors and were introduced after the war. They fell in love and married and soon had twins a girl and a boy – the boy was Adam's father, Ervin. When the Hungarian Revolution broke out, they fled the war-torn county and eventually made it to New York City. They both worked hard for little pay but kept the family together.



Ervin learned to speak English with an American accent by watching TV shows like *The Long Ranger* and *The Little Rascals*. He was a top student who was doubled-promoted in elementary school and earned a spot at the Bronx High School of Science. He attended the University of Pennsylvania dental school where he met Susan, his future wife, whose father's family had fled Europe before the Holocaust. Ervin became a dentist and Susan an orthodontist. They chose Greenwich as the perfect place to raise children.

Susan Braun

Susan Braun is Adam's mother. Her parents had left Europe before the war broke out. She met Erwin when they were studying in dental school. She became an orthodontist and was always an advocate of her children's pursuits. Before Adam left on a trip to a remote place in Guatemala, he had his mother witness the signing of his will. She had been reluctant but he assured her it was just a precaution. On the plane ride down, he recalled the fear in her eyes when she signed it with a trembling hand.

Scott Braun

Adam's older brother, Scott Braun, had attended Emory University in Atlanta and had become the owner of the most successful nightclub in Atlanta. He went on to work in the music industry and then became a successful entertainment manager. He discovered a young boy who was only 13-years-old but had a great voice and a charisma that Scott thought would elevate him to stardom. His name was Justin Bieber.

Grandmother Eva

Adam's grandmother Eva, who he called Ma, was a Holocaust survivor. She lived with her large family in Hungary when they were placed in a Jewish ghetto. They were transferred via cattle cars to the notorious Auschwitz where most of her family were exterminated in gas chambers. She was young and able-bodied and had been separated from her family and made to labor for the Nazis. She was eventually liberated at the end of the war, so weak she could barely feed herself. Ma was an inspiration to Adam who dedicated the first school he built to her.

Sam and Cornelio

Adam became friends with and was inspired by Sam and Cornelio who were from Mozambique. They came to America to play basketball and attend school. But the conditions they were living under in Philadelphia were horrid and their school was a big disappointment. The boys readily accepted the invitation to stay with the Brauns. Ervin and Susan agreed to become their legal guardians so they could attend Greenwich High School but they expected Adam to help them assimilate and tutor them. Sam and



Cornelio opened Adam's eyes that there was a huge world out there and that life was very different for many compared to the privileged life that Adam led.

Captain Buzz

Captain Buzz was the commander of the SAS (Semester at Sea) ship that Adam was aboard during his internship with the organization. The ship encountered a horrific storm during their travel to Asia. Captain Buzz was steadfast and assured the students that they'd power through. The students believed him. He would update the travelers on weather conditions and on the ship's coordinates. Captain Buzz's cool demeanor and calm voice on the intercom soothed a lot of worries during the rough seas that the ship was traversing.

Joel Puac

Joel Puac, a small man who said he was a teacher, approached Adam and invited him to stay with his family if Adam would agree to teach the man's children English. He lived in the small village of Palestina. Adam weighed Joel's offer. He knew that if he stayed it would change his children and even his grandchildren's lives. Adam knew he was blessed in life and felt he owed something to the people who were born into poverty and suffering. His grandfather Apu had suffered through the Holocaust. Adam felt he would be honoring him by helping Joel and his family. Adam decided to accept Joel's offer.

Joel showed Adam around his small house. He grabbed an English Bible, a Spanish-English dictionary and a cassette recorder. He told Joel about Guatemala and the dangers facing the nation. Joel would listen to Adam's recorded words as he read from the Bible and try to emulate them. Adam spent hours recording his words; Joel spent hours listening to them and working on his pronunciation. Joel learned that charity did not mean handing out free things to people. It only creates a dependency. Adam's act of charity was giving Joel and his family hope for a better future.

Scott Neeson

Scott Neeson had moved to Cambodia and given up a promising career in Hollywood. Like Adam, he couldn't get the poor kids he'd encountered out of his mind. He had to return to help them. Scott created the Cambodian Children's Fund (CCF) to help the poor kids. Adam sponsored several fundraisers for the CFF. Scott had two-sided business cards made up for him. One side identified him in English; the flip side was translated into Khmer. That business card was a reminder to Adam about the needy kids of the world who he had encountered.



Tehillah

Adam had been so busy with his Wall Street career and then Pencils of Promise that he hardly had time for a personal life. As time went on, he began to want someone special in his life. He knew exactly what he wanted in a girlfriend. She had to have an unusual name, be adept at backpacking and have green eyes. When a friend told him about Tehillah, the first thing he asked was what the color of her eyes were. When he was told they were green and that she was Jewish like him, he was sure that she was the girl for him. When they met there was an immediate attraction and the couple became inseparable.

Hope Taitz

Adam met with Hope Taitz who had run an educational NGO some years before. Adam confided in her that he wanted to leave Bain Capital early. He needed to raise \$100,000 to do so. He asked if she could raise half. Hope believed she could but she was more interested in developing PoP into a world-class organization. Adam knew that he could learn a lot from her. Hope was one of the many experts who took an interest in Adam and PoP and made it grow in size and stature.

Justin Bieber

Adam's brother, Scott, introduced Adam to a young talent he had discovered and was representing named Justin Bieber. Justin, of course, became a sensation. He was very interested in the work that Adam was doing and worked his social media to promote Pencils of Promise. During one American tour, he donated \$1 for every ticket sold for his concerts.

John Nolan

Family friend John Nolan, a wealthy denizen of Wall Street, offered Adam the opportunity of a life time. He wanted to start an e-Commerce business and would make Adam the CEO. He would have a six-figure salary, own part of the company and have all the perks that his position would garner. But Adam could not abandon Pencils of Promise and turned down an offer that would have made him a millionaire before he was thirty.

Kevin Roberts

Kevin Roberts the CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, the largest ad agency in the world, was the first to believe that PoP would ultimately build a hundred schools. Adam was shocked when he read Kevin's blog post about PoP. Kevin was the CEO of a huge ad agency yet had focused on PoP! Adam had never considered the possibility of 100



schools but began to set his sights on that goal. He was inspired by Kevin's confidence and began to think it was a realistic goal.

Ray Chambers

Adam met his idol, Ray Chambers, a well-known financier and philanthropist who had founded non-profits such as America's Promise and Points of Life. He had been appointed by the UN as the Special Envoy for Malaria and was in charge of holding the leaders of the world accountable to global health-related goals. Adam told Ray about the work of PoP. Ray talked about achieving bliss by fulfilling one's purpose. Ray Chambers ultimately agreed to join PoP's board of directors which changed the trajectory of the organization. His biggest contribution was his ability to bring people together to solve problems. He had connections with influential people around the world.

Objects/Places

Greenwich

Adam Braun was born and raised in an upscale neighborhood in Greenwich, Connecticut. The public schools in Greenwich were among the best in the nation. The town was also famous for its culture of volunteerism and diversity that both were great motivators in Adam's later life.

Brown University

Adam chose to major in economics at Brown University. He wanted to emulate the success of many of his neighbors who were wealthy investment bankers on Wall Street. Adam was also a star basketball player in high school and Brown would fulfill his dream of playing Division 1 basketball. After graduating from Brown, he was hired by Bain Capital, a Wall Street investment concern.

Varanasi, India

The Ganges River, in Varanasi, India, is a very dirty river but is revered as holy by the locals. It is one of the most spiritually devout sites in the world for Hindi. Adam Braun first became aware of the river when he watched the movie, *Baraka*. The episode on Varanasi depicted human cadavers being burned in ritual. The episode in the movie was one of the drivers that made Adam want to reach out into the world beyond his insular existence.

When he ultimately visited the region, Adam decided he wanted to bathe in the river. He was warned that he would not be allowed back on the bus he had arrived on if he went into the filthy water. But Adam was insistent so Vanay, one of the group's escorts, showed Adam steps that led down into the water. Adam submerged himself and open his mouth to allow the holy water to fill him. Adam didn't want to discard any chance for spiritual help and felt his action would build trust with the local people.

Pencils of Promise

Pencils of Promise is the nonprofit organization that Adam Braun founded after he had been exposed to the poor children in the third world nations that he visited. Although he had a brilliant future on Wall Street Adam was unable to get the images of the poor children he met during his journey out of his thoughts. Adam knew the importance of education and recognized that these children wouldn't have a chance to rise above their horrific conditions without being educated. He was compelled to found PoP with a goal of building schools for children of developing nations.



Cambodian Children's Fund

Steung Meanchey was a notorious garbage dump in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. Thousands of the area's poorest children lived near the dump in abject squalor. Visiting the site was what compelled Scott Neeson, a friend who inspired Adam Braun, to leave his promising career in Hollywood, sell his house and his Porsche and move to Cambodia where he ultimately established the Cambodian Children's Fund.

AgencyNet

After Pencils of Promise came to prominence, Adam recognized that PoP needed a sophisticated website that could provide information to interested parties and also be a help in fundraising. He had budgeted \$20,000 for a website but then was told he'd need \$100,000 for the kind of site he wanted. AgencyNet was one of the premiere website companies in the nation. When the CEO heard about PoP and their need for an improved website, he donated his resources to produce a \$150,000 website with no cost at all to Pencils of Promise.

Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang was the site in Laos of the first school built by Pencils of Promise. It is a charming town that is located along two rivers, the Mekong and the Nam Khan. It had been colonized by the French in the last part of the nineteenth century. When Adam visited he saw the beauty of the area but also saw the poor children who were without a school.

Baci

Baci ceremonies are held in Laos for special occasions. There is a belief that 32 guardian spirits protect each individual. It is believed that sometimes these spirits wander off. In order to make sure the spirits stay with the people, white threads are tied around their wrists to bind their guardians to them. The spirits are believed to bring them peace, harmony and good luck. Not wanting to eliminate any chance for success, Adam's wrists were covered in white threads by the time he left the nation.

Nonprofit Organization

Pencils of Promise is a nonprofit organization also known as an NGO or non-governmental organization which is set up by private individuals who rely on donations and grants for its operation. Most NGO's have a tax-exempt status which allows them to expend all their donations and investments on their mission and goals and not be required to pay taxes on their charitable donations and other resources.

Chase Community Giving Program

An opportunity came up for PoP to compete for a \$1 million donation from Chase as part of its Community Giving program. Adam headed a full court-press gathering his friends and supporters to vote for PoP which made it to the final round. They weren't able to grab the big prize but did win \$25,000 which was enough to build one school.

Themes

Tenacity

Adam Braun learned his toughness from his father and gained his tenacity from the stories of his grandparents who had survived the Holocaust and fled to America. Adam relied on these characteristics when he struggled to hold down a well-paying job on Wall Street that promised him a bright future while pursuing his dream of helping poor children in developing countries who had little hope for the future.

Adam could not initially turn his back on his job at Bain Capital on Wall Street. He was paid well and needed the funds to help establish a fledgling nonprofit that he was developing to one day build schools in remote areas of the world where children were virtually without schools and would remain uneducated without outside intervention. He was aware that he wasn't making the best impression on his Bain managers when he took an externship to travel in remote regions of the world scouting out locales for schools.

After he returned to Bain from his sabbatical, he worked on complicated projects at Bain while he continued to develop his nonprofit which he named Pencils of Promise during his off hours. Although the schedule was more than challenging, Adam hung on to both pursuits because he needed the money and connections from Bain to help him establish his NGO. Without the strength of character, dedication and tenacious nature, Adam would not have been able to balance and transition between the two challenging positions, one that he had to hold onto until the other got off the ground.

Follow Your Heart

Adam Braun was a young entrepreneur who decided to leave a lucrative future on Wall Street behind him and help the poor children of the world. Ervin Braun, Adam's father, was a strict disciplinarian and a tough kids' coach. He applied the same principles to his own kids and insisted that they strive for success, work hard and always remember those in need. Ervin's family had survived the Holocaust and the stories he heard about their struggles informed him on the strife and pain of life. He taught his kids to hold out a helping hand to those in need just like those who had reached out to his parents long before.

Adam had dreamed of being a wealthy investment banker. There were so many examples for him to live up to in his upscale neighborhood that was filled with wealthy investors and hedge fund managers. But his neighborhood was isolated from the part of the world where the only goals were to make it to the next day.

After Adam was exposed to the horrific conditions in developing countries, he could not get the image of the poor, especially the kids, he had encountered. He was stunned when a little boy lit up when Adam gave him a pencil. Kids in America lit up like that for



bikes and video games! When Adam landed a job on Wall Street the images of the poor children - most of whom would go uneducated - haunted him.

Adam founded Pencils of Promise with a goal of building schools in developing countries. He handled both the job he landed on Wall Street and the establishing of his nonprofit for a while. But when the demands of both pursuits clashed, he had to choose between becoming a wealthy investor or helping to education the poor kids of the world. He took the advice of a friend who said to think with his head but follow his heart. He chose to take the risk of taking the reins of a nonprofit organization that could easily go belly-up over a promising and lucrative career on Wall Street.

Education

There is a strong focus on the importance of education in Pencils of Promise. Adam's parents were highly educated. His father was a dentist and his mother an orthodontist. Adam lived in an upscale neighborhood which was inhabited by CEOs, investment bankers, doctors and lawyers and other professionals – all highly educated individuals. Aspiring to a successful career after attending an elite college had always been in the works for Adam. He decided on Brown University, an Ivy League school, for his education.

Adam's existence in Greenwich, Connecticut, and then at Brown University was an elite one and one in which he was insulated to the world at large that presented quite a different life for young people. Along with the importance of college and being successful, there was always an emphasis on being charitable and thinking of those who weren't as blessed as Adam was in the Braun family. When Adam was accepted into the Semester at Sea program and visited developing nations in Asia and Africa, he was able to see firsthand the struggles and difficult life that children in those poor regions were subjected to.

Adam made it a habit to ask the poor village children that he encountered what they wanted more than anything in the world; many of them said "a book." The reaction of the children touched him and after returning to the U.S. and landing on Wall Street in a lucrative career, he couldn't get the poor kids he met out of his mind. The thing that had been so important to him and his family – education – was a missing element in the lives of those children. He knew that had no chance for a better future unless they were literate and could express themselves in the arts or hone a natural skill in math.

Adam's education had led him to these children. Their lack of education led him to found a nonprofit organization, Pencils of Promise, to fill that need.

Humility Over Hubris

While Adam's heart was in the right place when he opted to focus on Pencils of Promise over Bain Capital, he ultimately realized that Bain was important in his career and that he had used them and not lived up to their expectations. He had gladly accepted their



benefits and generous salary and taken advantage of their largess that allowed him to go on sabbatical under their externship program. Adam's goal was to participate in the externship so that he could work on developing Pencils of Promise without having to resign from Bain.

It all came to a head when he was assigned a project at Bain that if successful would elevate him to senior analyst qualifying him for the externship that he had counted on. At the same time, Pencils of Promise was growing along with the time that he needed to devote to it. He was exhausted from the late nights he kept working on PoP matters and didn't have much fuel left for the Bain project. He knew that he had done a slipshod job on the important project. His manager told him how disappointed he was and that he could not recommend him for advancement which would disqualify him for an externship. Adam was devastated. Luckily, he was assigned to another manager and did a much better job that qualified him for the special leave.

Adam took a look in the mirror and knew that just because he believed that Pencils of Promise was more important than Bain, he was being paid by Bain to do a good job for them. He realized the errors of his ways and in the future he vowed to fulfill all his responsibilities not just the ones he favored.

Selflessness

Initially, Adam Braun would do almost anything to promote Pencils of Promise and advance its goals of building schools in the poverty stricken villages of developing nations. He aggressively recruited people who had the skills and talents that he believed would further his organization's goals. He sponsored fundraisers and got the advice from experts who had been successful in business or in nonprofit organizations. Adam learned to create spectacular presentations and give great speeches about Pencils of Promise. He knew how to get people to donate their time and resources.

As the organization grew and more was demanded of everyone on the PoP team, Adam came face-to-face with his biggest flaw and a real drawback in being the head of the organization: he found it impossible to ask an individual, on a one-on-one basis, for a monetary contribution. He decided he had to change. He was honest with his board of directors and told them about this debilitating stumbling block. He recognized that this weakness kept him from getting sizable donations from people because he had connections with so many high-powered and wealthy individuals.

Adam finally realized that it wasn't an innate fear of rejection that kept him from asking for money. What was stopping him was that from his perspective he felt he was asking for money for himself. After talking things out with associates and friends, he was able to refocus and drive it home that he was asking for money for the little children in remote villages across the globe many of whom he had met in person. Once he put his own ego aside, he was able to ask individuals for donations in a direct manner because he kept the image of the little children who needed the money embedded in his mind.

Styles

Structure

The Promise of a Pencil is a memoir of author Adam Braun, a young entrepreneur who established the nonprofit that he named, “Pencils of Promise.” The book is structured in a chronological manner with the main focus on the establishment of his nonprofit organization.

Adam first tells of his childhood in Greenwich, Connecticut. He credits his parents for the characteristics he developed that would enable him to become successful, work hard and focus on those who were not as fortunate as he was. His father was a strict disciplinarian with a kind streak and was one of Adam’s heroes. Adam also attributes his strength of character to his grandparents who were able to survive the Holocaust and flee to America. He recognizes that he would have never enjoyed a privileged life without their bravery. He dedicated the first school he built to his grandmother who he called Ma.

Adam describes the choices he made as he matured. He decided to attend Brown University and follow in the footsteps of many of the neighbors in his upscale community who were wealthy investment bankers. But during college he opted to sign up for a Semester at Sea (SAS) which allowed him to travel with other students to developing nations. He was haunted by the people who lived in poverty stricken villages. He was especially moved by the children who had no schools and no future.

Adam felt a calling to Wall Street and landed there shortly after graduating from school. He had great potential for a lucrative career but he couldn’t forget the poor kids he met which compelled him to begin to think of ways that he could help them. Adam then founded Pencils of Promise, a nonprofit with a goal of building schools in developing nations. He devoted his after-hours time to this organization. He ultimately came to a crossroads when he had to choose between a Wall Street career or running his growing nonprofit.

The final portion of the story includes the ups and downs that Adam encountered after he left Wall Street behind and concentrated only on his organization. He describes the many donations, investments and expert people who helped make Pencils of Promise a huge success. After reaching its first goal of building 100 schools, Adam announced that PoP’s new goal was 500 schools.

Perspective

Adam Braun tells his own story in The Promise of a Pencil which is told in the first person perspective. He describes the struggle that he had in deciding which pathway his life and career would take. He was a privileged young man who had the advantage of a caring family and a great education at Brown University. It was a natural trajectory



for him to go directly from college to Wall Street. He had imagined that someday he would become an investment banker or hedge fund manager and make a real killing on Wall Street but he became interested in the developing countries he visited and the poor children who had no schools to attend.

Adam made it a habit to ask kids in those countries what they wanted more than anything. He was shocked when they would say a book or a pencil instead of a toy or video game like kids in America would respond. When he saw a little boy's face light up when he handed him a pencil, Adam was a goner. He could not get the images of the children out of his mind. The prospect of these children having no school and no future haunted him.

Adam tells the story of Pencils of Promise, or PoP, which he founded while still at Bain Capital on Wall Street. For several years he balanced the two, even taking an externship that allowed him to concentrate on his nonprofit for six months. But as PoP grew through donations and fundraisers, the demand for more schools increased as did the need for Adam to dedicate more and more time to it. In the end, Adam made the best and only decision he could. He left Wall Street behind him and made his goal to keep building schools until every child in the world had the chance of a good education.

Tone

Adam Braun tells the story of his life and the founding of his nonprofit organization, Pencils of Promise, with candor and in great detail. It is a story wrought with emotion because of the struggles he had to get PoP off the ground. His angst over the choice he had to make between having a lucrative career on Wall Street or devoting himself to his nonprofit organization is told in a language that is touching and believable.

Adam provides the background that led him to his charitable entrepreneurship. The families of both his parents were survivors of the Holocaust. He describes their stories which he heard through the years in a poignant manner. His grandmother Eva, who he called Ma, was an inspiration to him. When he showed her a photo of the first school he built with a dedication to her, she was moved to tears.

The story is told with candor and honesty against the uplifting backdrop of the inspiring work that Adam and his global team at Pencils of Promise dedicated themselves to. Adam was first moved by the children he encountered in the poor villages he visited around the globe. When he asked a girl what she wanted more than anything and she responded with "to dance" he was blown away. He decided to establish his NGO when he gave a little boy in one of the villages a pencil and the little boy's face lit up like he was getting the best gift in the world. Adam never forgot those children which made his decision to leave Wall Street and a lucrative career behind him all the easier.



Quotes

Even back then, we knew his crazy temper and strict discipline were just forms of tough love. He wanted to get the best from each of us – and he got it.”

-- Author (chapter 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: The author speaks about his father who was known as the “scary dad” among the youngsters of his hometown. His father pushed his own kids and those he coached to do their own personal best.

When you come from a lineage of Holocaust survivors, you grow up with an understanding that everything was once taken away from your family. The only things that enabled them to survive and then radically change their lot in life were the strength of their willpower, the help of others, and a commitment to education.”

-- Author (chapter 1 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote points to the root strength of the Braun family. Although Ervin and Susan didn’t go through the Holocaust themselves, their parents did. They were taught by people who had survived the nearly impossible through strength of character and tenacity. Ervin tried his best to pass that legacy onto his children.

I began to see that success in life isn’t about conforming to the expectations of others, but about achieving personal fulfillment.”

-- Author (chapter 2 paragraph 13)

Importance: While a young college student, Adam began to think beyond his upper-middle class life and realize that there were millions of people around the globe who led lives that were nothing like he experienced. These early revelations about life was a coming of age time for Adam.

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”

-- Marcel Proust (chapter 5 paragraph 2)

Importance: Adam learned the truth of twentieth century French novelist Marcel Proust during his SAS term during which time he circled the globe and met impoverished and needy people in dire conditions who he never knew existed. The experience changed the trajectory of his life.

For years I had struggled with intense feelings of guilt. I was born into the lottery of life with a winning ticket – a loving family, great education, good health. But what had I done to deserve any of it? Why was I born into those blessings when so many others were born into suffering?”

-- Author (chapter 5 paragraph 36)

Importance: This quote captures the guilt that drove Adam to reach out to help the



suffering of the world. The images of the poor and suffering haunted him and compelled him to reach out to them and help to improve their lives however he could.

In moments of uncertainty, when you must choose between two paths, allowing yourself to be overcome by either the fear of failure or the dimly lit light of possibility, immerse yourself in the life you would be most proud to live.”

-- Author (chapter 11 paragraph 102)

Importance: Adam Braun struggled with what path to travel in life. He had an Ivy League education and was heading for a lucrative career on Wall Street, yet he was called by the poor children of the world to reach out and help them.

Reid Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn, has said that an entrepreneur is someone who will ‘jump off a cliff and assemble an airplane on the way down.’”

-- Author/Reid Hoffman (chapter 16 paragraph 21)

Importance: When Adam was considering leaving his paying job to devote himself full-time to his non-profit, he recalled what Reid Hoffman had said about being an entrepreneur.

In certain situations you ask to see a sign to guide you in the right direction. Sometimes these calls to a higher power are answered, and sometimes we are left to seek counsel from within. But if you look for them, the signs will usually present themselves to those with open eyes.”

-- Author (chapter 16 paragraph 43)

Importance: Adam was going through a stressful time when he had to decide between his safe job at Bain that presented a brilliant and lucrative future for him or working full time with Pencils of Promise that had no guarantee of success.

Leaders from every red-hot start-up were in attendance, and whether people were on-stage or in the audience, they clearly all shared the same general path. Most had been told no, but they refused to give up. They were confident and unflappable, but they weren’t afraid to ask for help. And they had all failed at times. But they learned more from their mistakes than from their successes.”

-- Author (chapter 17 paragraph 17)

Importance: Adam met hundreds of young entrepreneurs like himself at an event in Washington, D.C. He was heartened to discuss his work with them because they had gone through the same ups and downs that he had.

The most powerful thing in the world is an idea whose time has come.”

-- Author (chapter 22 paragraph 2)

Importance: In 2010 PoP had come into its own. Adam felt that the hard work and dedication that he and his staff had expended for the organization had finally paid off and it was powerful.



Here's my best advice: make the little decisions with your head and the big ones with your heart."

-- Kevin Roberts (chapter 23 paragraph 27)

Importance: Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, the largest ad agency in the world, gave this advice to Adam when he was somewhat overwhelmed with the rapid success of PoP.

We all spend so much time putting up walls so that others can't see our vulnerabilities, but those same walls often close us within our own insecurities."

-- Author (chapter 27 paragraph 43)

Importance: Adam struggled with asking people directly for donations. He relied on fundraisers, the website and social media for donations. He had to learn to take himself out of the equation and concentrate on the kids he had met around the world who needed schools.



Topics for Discussion

1

How did Ervin and Susan Braun set a good example for Adam when they decided to sponsor Sam and Cornelio? What impact did his friendship with these two boys have on Adam's future?

2

What is an externship? How does it differ from an internship and how do the involved companies and the employee benefit from it?

3

How did Adam's participation in the SAS (Semester at Sea) program influence the choices he made? What question did he ask the children who he encountered in this program and how did he react to their responses?

4

What two methods of seeking recruits and donations to secure the future of the Pencils of Promise NGO did Adam rely on? Explain how each method could help him.

5

What are the elements of "branding" and how did Adam use branding to help build interest in Pencils of Promise?

6

What were the eight rules that Adam wrote when PoP moved into new offices on the Lower East Side?

7

Why did Adam believe that music was important to PoP's success? How did that belief manifest in his management of the staff?



8

What involvement did Justin Bieber have in PoP? How did he come to know Adam?

9

What was Adam's reaction to Noah's call informing him that he and another associate had been robbed? Discuss why he responded how he did and whether or not it was appropriate.

10

What were the five key elements that Adam wanted to instill in his organization that would draw and retain skilled people and that would inspire them?