

AUB-OSB Conference Features Arab Entrepreneurs, Live Tweets

Friday, May 21, 2010

Business schools today are compelled to graduate leaders who are equipped with a variety of globally transferrable skills. To produce these future leaders, business schools must be at the intersection of entrepreneurship and innovation. The Olayan School of Business (OSB) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) started a two-day conference on Entrepreneurship and Innovation in the Levant and the GCC on May 21, 2010.



The conference was inaugurated on Thursday evening with a gala dinner featuring keynote speaker John Fernandes, President of AACSB International. Fernandes challenged business schools to capitalize on the convergence of entrepreneurship and management, to focus on integrative thinking, and to participate in incubator projects to cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. AUB President Peter Dorman highlighted two of AUB's innovate endeavors to engage the local community, the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service and the Neighborhood Initiative. AUB Provost Ahmad Dallal encouraged the university to promote technology and knowledge transfer across the disciplines. OSB Dean George Najjar reaffirmed OSB's commitment to entrepreneurship and innovation as a leading school of business in the region.

Conference sessions commenced on Friday with Soumitra Dutta who spoke on how to accelerate innovation and entrepreneurship through technology, remarking that "you don't need a Ph.D. to be innovative." Dutta discussed how the Millennial Generation demonstrates what it means to be innovative, commenting that millennials are "confident, connected, and open to change." According to Dutta, it is no longer possible to do things without collaboration, and that progress and connection are what will push innovation forward.

To a packed auditorium, Talal Shair imparted words of wisdom on starting up new companies, and shared the development of Dar Al-Handasah, an Arab consulting firm in engineering and architecture that is expanding globally through the use of strategic branding techniques. Shair fielded questions from conference attendees on his firm's transformational role in the Arab region and on issues of sustainability. Shair discussed how his firm institutionalizes innovation through mentoring and instituting programs to strengthen employee skills. Shair encouraged entrepreneurs, "If you have a dream, go for it!"

Tarek Dajani, CEO of Cleartag, an interactive web and digital consulting agency, challenged conventional ideas of entrepreneurship. According to Dajani, consultants and business plans are good, but curiosity and passion for innovation are the catalysts for entrepreneurship. It is imperative, Dajani remarked, that entrepreneurs understand the ecosystem that they occupy. Dajani closed his presentation remarking that an "entrepreneur always generates momentum; demands little, does a lot."

Anthony Maalouf, CEO of Ant Ventures Holding which runs several food and beverage operations in the Middle East, most notably, Casper & Gambini's, shared his 14-year journey as an entrepreneur. He advised entrepreneurs to be aware of customer wants, particularly in the small details. He also discussed the value of developing a compatible, dedicated team.

Conference attendees are "live tweeting" the conference, a first for AUB. This innovative use of technology testifies to recent shifts in communication and technology among emerging business professionals. Tweeters are not just quoting the speakers and reacting to videos and other media presented, but are also encouraging others to engage in the ideas put forth by the speakers such as creating a business plan competition at OSB. Real-time tweets of the conference are being trended on #AUBEI2010, and can also be followed at <http://alignwithosb.com/live-feed>.

The conference will continue through May 22, 2010, when the success stories of Nissan Gulf Free Zone Company and Injaz will be overviewed.