



WINNERS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETITION DO BUSINESS WITH TREE LEAVES

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Two engineering students from Tampere University of Technology got a business idea to import biodegradable plates from India to Finland. A few months after their idea got the first place in a social entrepreneurship competition Be A Change. Within half a year they founded their own company Kaveri Good Products Oy. Sathya Prakash Balasubramaniam, the CEO, and Juhani Janhunen, the Chairman, told their story, how ordinary students can become social entrepreneurs.

Plates growing in trees

Janhunen and Prakash were spending their summer holidays in India in 2009, when they came across the idea of importing plates to Finland. They visited a factory, which produced plates from the leaves of a special tree called areca.

When the areca trees drop their leaves on the ground, it looks like the ground is full of huge plates. They only need to be washed and heated into a shape. No chemicals are needed in the production. The friends thought, why not sell the plates also in Finland. They could offer an environmentally friendly option for big events like weddings, conferences or festivals, which now use bleached paper plates.

Be A Change – from idea to action

When the two friends returned to Finland after the summer, they soon took their idea to a competition called Be A Change, where they competed to win the title of the best business idea based on social entrepreneurship. In the competition Janhunen and Prakash developed their idea of trading plates further with three other participants. Business and social entrepreneurship professionals gave feedback during the process.

– They said, that our idea was good, but we didn't have any social point of view in it, Janhunen explains.

The main idea of the competition is to be a jump start for new social enterprises that can help to solve social and environmental problems through profitable business. Janhunen and Prakash' team started thinking, how social change could be achieved with the eco friendly plates.

Children drawing their message to the world

Janhunen had visited Hampi Children's trust during his travels in India. The Children's Trust was a place for children to spend time after school in the village of Hampi. Before the poor children were begging in the streets and they couldn't afford needed equipment for school.

– Founding the Children's Trust changed the whole atmosphere of the village, Janhunen says. Although there are limited places for children, the same alphabet games and attitude towards learning have spread around the whole village.

Janhunen and Prakash' team wanted to support the Trust and decided to make it their business partner. The children of the Trust get to draw designs for the plates and the royalties of the designs go to the Trust. –It's a channel for the children to tell their story to the world, Janhunen says.

be a change



Winners, friends and social entrepreneurs

The plates of the two young business men, called Arcagoodplates, won the competition due to the social and environmental aspects. As a prize the men got a membership to Hub Tampere, where entrepreneurs and change makers can network. They can also get a trainee for free to work for their company for a year. The company's name Kaveri Good Products stands for two things. It's a company of two friends, since *kaveri* means a friend in Finnish. Kaveri is also a river in India. The areca plates are grown as leaves on the banks of the river Kaveri.

Experience and courage from a student organization

Janhunen and Prakash have gotten business experience in the international leadership development organization AIESEC. As members of the local board of AIESEC Tampere they have learnt everything from legal issues, strategic planning and marketing to team leading. Most importantly the international organization provided them a network of people all around the world.

–The organization gave us the courage to become entrepreneurs, Prakash says.

–And Be A Change, organized by AIESEC, was a good kick start, Janhunen adds.

The young business colleagues see social entrepreneurship as a way of the future.

–Everything changes, also the way business is done. What we can do, is to make a change for good. That is social entrepreneurship, Prakash summarizes.

Applications to Be A Change 2010 competition 19th Oct 2010 onwards: www.beachange.org

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Winners of last year's competition

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