Interview with Featured Mentors: DOUBLE FEATURE

Dan Paikowsky, mentor for the SCAP Bio/healthcare cohort & Ann Sweeney, mentor for GAH

Dan Paikowsky
Principal Consultant at New Market Advisors
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1. Dan, please tell me a bit about yourself, who you are and what you do.

I grew up in the Boston area, went to high school in Cambridge, went to University of Massachusetts, so I'm a Boston native through-and-through. In 2016, after I had graduated college, I moved to Tel Aviv to work for Monitor Deloitte. Initially, I worked with the larger strategy group doing work with defense companies, larger industrial companies, manufacturing companies. I did a lot of your typical competitive analysis, "where to play, how to win" kind of stuff. After some time doing that, I authored a report on industrial innovation within Tel Aviv and this ended up being a big report that was globally published by Deloitte. There was a lot of focus on key startups, industry evolution and advanced manufacturing technology.

After that, I joined a new team within Monitor Deloitte that focused on delivering strategy work to startups. It was industry agnostic, so we worked with startups in any industry, focusing on go-to-market strategies, pitch deck creation, growth, product, etc. Really anything you can imagine we tried to help them with, keeping things short and impactful so they could drive their businesses forward.

I made my way back to Boston afterwards and left Deloitte. I didn't want to go back to drier corporate strategy work and I didn't see the opportunity to work on the same kind of problems that I had in Tel Aviv if I decided to stay with them here. I joined New Market Advisors in 2019 and they're a boutique consulting firm that's a spin-out of Innosight. One of the senior partners of Innosight, Steve Wunker, left and became the Managing Director for New Market. He wanted the focus of New Market to be "Jobs to be done", which is a method of practice that deals with customer centric problem solving. A lot of the work that we do is looking into new areas and products that don't exist yet, assisting with newer tech and overlooked needs. Most of the work I do is working for Fortune 500

companies, oftentimes mirroring my work in Tel Aviv, but with larger corporations. I've also been mentoring startups since working in Israel, something I've continued for 5 years now. That brings me where I am today.

2. **You said that your work in Tel Aviv was mainly "industry agnostic." Would you say you've kept your mentorship just as open when it comes to the types of startups that you work with?**

Boston is a famous Biotech hub, so I do see a lot of them, so that's just more so by circumstance than design. I'm also based in Puerto Rico as well and there I work with a lot of Fintech companies as there's a large Web-3 and Crypto industry based on the island.

3. **When you mentor startups, what is something that is initially impactful to you as something the startups struggle with?**

Very frequently, founders are thinking "I need to get my pitch together and I need to make money", so that's usually my entry point to mentorship with these startups. They want assistance with their pitch and they want to know what to say to shareholders. 100 out of 100 times, after getting into the pitch materials a little bit, it becomes clear that their thinking isn't fully developed around one parameter or another.

There's a few main components to putting together a good pitch and usually it's one or more of those things that are not clearly defined. That's where most of my impact tends to come from. The first one is the definition of the problem, what's the problem and who are you solving it for. and the second part is the solution itself and being able to clearly and succinctly describe it to those that are experiencing the problem. Those are the two most crucial parts of having a business, what the issue you're resolving is and how you're going to resolve it.

I think that the most frequent issue for startups is either they don't have a clear view about what one of those two parts are or they haven't developed the proper language to describe it. Often their descriptions get tangled up in scientific jargon and become unintelligible to someone without their knowledge level in the field.

4. **What has your experience working with startups through GAH? Has anything been particularly impactful on you?**

Overall, the experience has been wonderful. The founders have been very passionate and serious about their work, driven as well. I don't want to stereotype, but I really hope that other Japanese startups are as organized and well put together as the ones that I've been working with. Earlier I mentioned those two pieces and how startups usually struggle on at least one to start with, though from what I've seen from the companies that I've worked, they've done a great job of defining what they're doing and who they're doing it for. Where I've been able to help the most is in clarifying and putting together their ideas into more succinct messaging that they can then use.

It's been great to work with folks that are from so far away and to get some exposure to their different ideas. Another program that I'm involved with called "Our Generation Speaks" brings Israelis and Palestinians together to start companies as a form of driving forward peace. I'm a big proponent of building bridges between different societies through economic collaboration and entrepreneurship.

5. **From your perspective as a local, what makes Boston a good city to be an entrepreneur in?**

Boston's primary resource is its human capital. You have some of the most interesting and smartest people in the world that have all moved to this city for one reason or another. You can walk into a party and can talk to someone who's pursuing a PhD in classical music, or someone who's studying mathematics. There's a lot of people from across the intellectual spectrum that come together across the city which leads to a cross pollination of ideas and fertile growth for thinking outside the box. I think that's my favorite thing about the city, you get a lot of folks who are experts in their field in one place.

6. **Do you think Boston's entrepreneurship community is receptive to Japanese companies entering it**

I think Boston's a receptive place. Boston itself is home to all sorts of people from around the world that have moved there to primarily pursue education. That's how my parents ended up meeting even. It's fairly multicultural and a fine place to be.

7. **If you had some advice to a Japanese startup that's eyeing Boston, how would you convince them to come here?**

I would say if you're looking for talent and human capital, Boston is an excellent place. Boston is also the center of Venture Capitals, second only to New York or Silicon Valley, so it's a great place for fundraising as well. The cost of doing business is also lesser than those two other locations, so it may end up being a cheaper option as well. If you're talking specifically about biotech, it's the world capital for that industry, like how Silicon Valley used to be for tech. I think we're coming into a wave where biotech is going to continue to grow over the next 10 years and Boston's looking to be the epicenter for a lot of it.

Ann Sweeney
Global HR Leader | DEIB and Talent Evangelist | Board Member | CHIEF Member
Vice President, People and Culture at Mount Auburn Cemetery
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1. **Hi Ann, please give us a short introduction about who you are and what you do.**

   I'm a mission-driven, innovative leader with a passion for helping businesses grow through dynamic talent engagement. With trust, transparency, and empowerment as a cultural foundation, good people become stellar teams that drive corporate growth with facility. Alignment of vision, a trust-based culture, and excellent communication are musts to deliver success. When we engage collaborative partnering to support business-focused best practices and regular feedback/continual improvement creates a growth mindset model to support successful scaling and organizational growth

   Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) is a particular passion. I see building truly diverse and inclusive teams as foundational musts for any organization, and wince when organizations do "special" DEIB training. DEIB is intrinsic and should be baked into every aspect of every initiative we undertake. Making it "in addition" to other training and development creates the impression that it is a "plus one" instead of the main event. As leaders, we have a responsibility to change that, and to ensure that DEIB awareness and initiatives are knitted into everything we do.

2. **Could you tell me more about your missions at work and some observable outcomes?**

   Some of the most impactful outcomes have been some of the issues that I've undertaken with our teams to advance accessibility and access and to improve outcomes in the DEIB space. Because of the partnerships that I've had with some of our team members, we were able to create change on a global level in an 80,000 person company where we started really thinking about accessibility and design and what that means in the most comprehensive level. So not just thinking about closed captioning, but also really thinking about who might potentially be using these products and how we could create thoughtful design functionality. I think a lot of times when one talks about accessibility there's like the low-hanging fruit like, "is there literally a barrier to entry for those with

mobility issues?". A lot of times we forget about the interconnectedness, so while we can fix the mobility barrier, we also need to address the thought process behind it.

One of the things I'm proud of is I work with incredible Human Factors engineers. We did a deep dive on what it means to be accessible and the conversations were really incandescent and the more we met the more the conversations expanded. It was really extraordinary to see how the conversation evolved to really tackle necessary accessibility needs.

3. **Can you explain to me what you work on when you consult different companies and startups?**

My engagements with companies vary widely as it depends on what they're trying to do and where they're at. At a holistic level, I help companies get to the next level, whatever that next level is. My engagement is always contingent on what the company needs. When you're talking about SMEs, there's a lot of variety in there; from setting up a talent strategy, helping create a comprehensive DEIB initiative, or something more fundamental like putting really good best business practices in place. I've worked with companies to do some due diligence for an acquisition, helping them prepare to go public, and more.

Working in a variety of different industries really allows me to look through a number of different lenses and truly choose the best practices to bring to the table.

4. **What would you consider to be your top achievements within your career so far?**

That's a tough one, because I've had a very rich and varied career. I can certainly point to a couple of things that were interesting and fun. One of the things that I was really proud of a couple of years ago was solving a really gnarly issue where a US entity had given a UK-based founder stock options in a US-based company. There were significant and concerning tax consequences for the employee, so it was an intellectual challenge to come to a solution. We had to tag a number of people from PWC from around the world, but I'm really proud that I was able to figure that out in a way that kept the founder protected and found a way to include them successfully. Having the ability to include some experts in international tax law and being able to find a creative way to get to our goal was intellectually satisfying.

Some other things that have been great are the DEIB initiatives that I've been engaged in, particularly the recent story that I shared about being able to move the needle in an 80,000 person company. That is an achievement that I can walk away feeling proud of. Knowing that I was able to initiate change that is going to have a global impact and change the way employees experience their time at a company to something more positive is incredibly meaningful.

5. **What is your experience working with any Japanese startups though GAH?**

The only company I've worked with so far is Optimays and we've been working with each other for several months now and it's been an incredible experience. It's made me think holistically about how we interview, harkening back to the DEIB conversations that we have. It's been very fulfilling to help an emerging company look at how you create a good business model, how to create referenceable customers, how you get that rolling thunder and take an amazing idea and an emerging product and how to take it to the next level.

This is my first time working with a Japanese startup, but I'd love to continue to work with more of them in the future. I actually worked with JETRO on a project a while back and they were incredibly helpful in navigating talent issues back then. We had some Japanese nationals that we were trying to bring over to the US and JETRO were incredible facilitators in helping us find a lane into the country.

Though back to working with Optimays, I absolutely love working with them. They're wonderfully ambitious and our conversations have been challenging, refreshing, and really very stimulating. We've really worked well together, and it's been wonderful to be thinking about things in a very both strategic and granular way.

6. **Working globally can be tough for these companies as standards that we have in the US don't necessarily exist abroad. Have you seen any challenges with DEIB in this regard?**

One of the things that I find so enriching about working globally is, we have so much to learn from one another. In the early conversations that I had with one of my clients, there was some discussion about some of the rubrics that they had used in their AI algorithm. It was interesting to see some of the algorithms that were built in and why, but then looking at it from a DEIB perspective, and specifically from an affirmative action perspective, there were some components of the product design that could be seen as discriminatory from a US law perspective. The choices were well intentioned, but could hinder adoption or even cause roadblocks in the US market. It was a good opportunity for some in-depth dialog and understanding how it was like that and then how to best craft a response and fix those issues.

With the AI, we can sort of cheat out where some of these things arose. One of the things that was interesting in some of the AI creations is trying to figure out how certain things got baked in, and then trying to back it out so that we could have an engagement that was more neutral. We tried to arrive at a solution where potential bias against somebody who, for example, might have a physical challenge, would be alleaved.

7. **Is there any general advice that you could give an international company looking to work in the US?**

Always give the benefit of the doubt and never hesitate to ask in order to clear something up. As an example, I was once working with a man in the UK of whom I had an exceptional working relationship with. During a meeting he asked if we could table the

next agenda item and I agreed, so I moved past that item and continued on with the next items on the list. Over the course of the next half hour I could see that this gentleman was getting increasingly agitated and tense, which was unusual in my time working with him. I paused and asked him directly if something was causing discomfort and I was unclear if I wasn't picking up on something correctly. He then explained to me that he wanted to table the next agenda item and that I had ignored him and moved on to the next agenda item. As it turns out, tabling something in UK English means to put something at high priority, the opposite of what it means in the US. Separated so far by a common language.

I apologized profusely and mentioned that there's some vulnerability in speaking the same language, but this experience really cemented the idea to me of challenging assumptions. Even if we think something is a certain way, the more that we can ask and revalidate, the more successful we're going to be. I would suggest asking for clarification if anything ever seems off to you in a given situation. The more that you communicate and challenge your preconceived notions, the more likely you are to avoid a future conflict.