



Season 3, Episode 9, “Learning to Balance,” April 4, 2023

Abhinav Gabbeta: Being that we are all consultants working full-time jobs while also doing Oystar puts us in a really interesting position because we get to be both the understudy and the elder statesman in different aspects of our life. And so there's a lot of learnings that I will get from the day job that I'll then pass along to my Oystar role. Things that I've learned from great leaders and things that I wish were done differently.

Kurt Greenbaum: From Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis, I'm Kurt Greenbaum and this is On Principle. You've made it to our ninth and final episode of season three. And for today's episode, we're switching things up a bit. As regular listeners know, we typically interview one person about an "oh, shoot" moment that they've confronted in their business. We try to understand what gave rise to the moment and how they confronted it—and what we can learn. Today, we have four founders on the line, young entrepreneurs who are holding down day jobs as consultants while they balance their work on a startup called Oystar.

Today's episode isn't about a single thunderclap moment. It's more about the smaller "oh, shoot" and "oh, wow" moments our guests navigate on a daily basis as they pivot between corporate and startup life. What have they learned? What's transferable from one realm of their lives to another? And how are they crafting a corporate culture for their own business? With so many voices in today's episode, I thought we'd shake up the format of On Principle just a little and go without comments from one of my WashU Olin faculty colleagues. We'll learn more about what Oystar does in a moment. But let's start by meeting its founders.

Tim Brandt: My name's Tim Brandt. I currently work for Cognizant, which is a large technology professional services and consulting firm.

Lungile Tshuma: My name is Lungile Tshuma or Lungie. I'm a management and tech consultant for a technology services provider based in St. Louis, World Wide Technology.

Kevin Ko: My name is Kevin Ko and I'm based out in Mountain View up in the Bay. I currently also work for Cognizant.

Abhinav Gabbeta: Hi, everyone. I'm Abhinav Gabbeta—I just go by Abhi. Much like everyone else here, I am also a consultant. I am a senior consultant for a company called Guidehouse.

Kurt Greenbaum: So those are the characters in today's conversation. Tim, Lungie, Abhi and Kevin. And as they all said, they're all consultants working at different firms and across the continent from one another. Tim is a manager for Cognizant's American Strategies and Innovation Team. Lungie works for World Wide Technology for management and tech clients. The other two focus on healthcare—Abhi for Gatehouse and Kevin for Cognizant. They all met as MBA students at WashU Olin Business School and within their two years were drawn together by Lungie's idea for a startup that would help connect international students with US universities. But none of them envisioned creating a new business when they decided to enter business school.

Abhinav Gabbeta: I joined the MBA as a career switcher. I had a clinical background before this and I came into my MBA in order to have a different view on healthcare. I was interested in the business of healthcare and I wanted to see how it could impact the space from a higher level and have a wider impact while doing so. And so that's why I came into the MBA program. And WashU has an excellent MBA program as well as an excellent focus in healthcare.

Kurt Greenbaum: Great, thanks. Kevin?

Kevin Ko: I was very clinically oriented. I worked at a hospital doing clinical research and I wanted to pivot to more towards the business of healthcare. I ended up in consulting because I wanted to get a broader understanding and a broader experience before finding a more strategic role, whether in a hospital setting or in a health startup.

Kurt Greenbaum: And how about you, Lungie?

Lungile Tshuma: If you want to know anything about me, it's that I'm very passionate about the African continent. My personal mission is to empower Africa so it can reach its potential. And I used to use sport to do that, and then I decided to pivot to use business to achieve the same mission. So WashU was a catalyst for me to increase my business acumen and be around some incredible people that are going to have impactful careers in their lives. So that's the decision for my MBA.

Kurt Greenbaum: Got it. How about you, Tim?

Tim Brandt: I came from a pretty life sciences niche-focused background. So for me, you know, coming to the MBA was a time of exploration of broader business pathways. You know, I had a career pursuit in mind but wanted to explore, have, you know, two years of personal growth of the mind and meeting other people who are on the same journey to eventually find out what the right pathway is for me to pursue on the other side.

Kurt Greenbaum: So you all started your MBA programs in the summer of 2019. And of course, as we all know, it was not long after that that the world shifted on its

axis. I wonder if one of you—I'll just ... this'll be a jump ball—wonder if one of you can talk a little bit about the experience of kind of going through the first semester of business school and then having that incredible shift from the pandemic. Who wants to take that one?

Lungile Tshuma: I can start with that one. We definitely started at an interesting time and we didn't we didn't know it was going to be interesting when we started our MBA, of course. A big draw for the MBA was the global immersion, and that's how it kicked off our MBA.

Kurt Greenbaum: Now let me set the stage a little bit. Lungie mentioned the global immersion. At the time, WashU Olin's full-time MBA program began with a six-week excursion across three continents. Lungie, Tim, Abhi, Kevin and nearly 90 classmates all traveled together from St. Louis to Washington, DC, and the Brookings Institution, then to Barcelona, then to Beijing and Shanghai, and finally back to St. Louis. The experience blended classwork with on-the-ground projects in different global cultures. Students who had never met bonded over the travel, the work, the laundry, the food and their experience adapting to new business settings.

Lungile Tshuma: For me, it was incredible. I really enjoyed it. I was definitely thriving and that set the tone for the MBA and it was like, this is the beginning. It's going to be amazing. And then COVID hit. It kind of added like a huge downer at first. You know, like we weren't going to travel, weren't going to see each other as much. And, obviously, it shaped the remote work that we all do right now. So it was an anti-climax sort of thing that happened during our MBA from this explosive beginning.

Kurt Greenbaum: You said something there that I want to pick up on and maybe somebody else, another jump ball here. You said it shaped the work that you do now. Can one of you talk about that? In what way?

Abhinav Gabbeta: I think, for me, being in the global immersion, that was my first real experience traveling abroad to multiple cities at one go. That, too, with a cohort of peers. So it was like a really definitely a core memory for me and a seminal moment in my life because it showed us the power of community, of just putting together a group of strangers and picking up our bags and traveling across the world. And those connections have lasted.

We created a company from those original beginnings, and it also taught me, like, how interconnected the global community is. We were interacting with students from across the world, collaborating with universities across the world, and that was something that really stuck with me. And on the flip side, it was really interesting to go from a global immersion where we were going everywhere to then suddenly, right after spring break, being stuck in our homes, it could not have been more polar opposites of experiences, and yet we had to find a way to still create community, still make connections, still thrive in our works in different circumstances. And I think it

taught us how to nurture a community and also how to be agile in our thinking and agile in our capabilities. So that we're still able to have the same level of impact, same level of connections, whether we're facing each other in person or whether we're messaging each other online. That was something that really stuck with me.

Tim Brandt: The global immersion was an outside-the-box experience, right? It exposes you rather forcefully to times of growth. It makes you a bit uncomfortable in what you're experiencing. But what comes from that on the other side is this great appreciation for venturing further. I think for pushing the boundaries in things you pursue. And I think for us it's something that, you know, all four of us here align on and carry with us forward.

Kurt Greenbaum: You've all talked about going on this formative experience of the global immersion, and that's where you met each other and that's where you really came together and bonded. But now you've also been through this experience of finishing your MBA through the pandemic, learning what it's like to sort of nurture and foster a community and a way of working that is remote. And here you are, all four founders of a company, and Tim is in St. Louis, Lungie's in Texas, Abhi is in New Jersey, I believe you said?

Abhinav Gabbeta: DC right now.

Kurt Greenbaum: DC right now. And ... and Kevin's in California. Can you can you pick up on that, Kevin?

Kevin Ko: Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, in the global immersion we worked with a lot of different teams with students from local schools and then with COVID, we swapped everything to virtual and then eventually back to hybrid. So I think we've become very accustomed to be very nimble, be very comfortable with, you know, working in uncertainty. Right? We run Oystar asynchronously. The four of us are able to adapt to kind of whether if each of us have a real-life or like a real-job meeting that we have to go to. We're very comfortable switching our meetings around or our work schedules to ensure that we are completing our side, work our jobs, but also pushing Oystar and moving it further along in the startup process.

Kurt Greenbaum: So let's talk about Oystar briefly here. Who can give me sort of the elevator pitch? What is Oystar? What is it about? What are you all trying to do?

Lungile Tshuma: I think Tim should give the elevator pitch because every time he's done that, we get money. So ...

Tim Brandt: Yeah, Kurt, my success rate is pretty high right now because we've only gone to one pitch comp. So, yeah.

Abhinav Gabbeta: I remember \$5 bill or anything.

Kurt Greenbaum: Yeah, Yeah. Every single time. Yeah, well, go for it, Tim.

Tim Brandt: I feel like we're jinxing something right now. OK. Oystar is a platform for facilitating international recruitment of students to the United States for higher ed. For us, we like to think of it really as the LinkedIn for higher ed. It is a platform or a marketplace where, you know, on the one side you have universities that are seeking out the right global students. And then on the other side, as well, you have aspiring students that come from all various parts of the world, sometimes harder to access markets as well, that are seeking out those new opportunities in life to pursue education. And so we view Oystar as this middle ground. It is a platform that brings transparency to the process and facilitates more meaningful relationships between these two parties of universities and aspiring students.

Kurt Greenbaum: So it's a way for recruiters to help identify potential students that would thrive in their programs. And meanwhile, for students to be able to identify programs in the US that might be interesting to them or might benefit them or give them opportunities that they might not have in their home countries. Is that a fair characterization?

Lungile Tshuma: You know, that's the initial phase, right? We want to help universities gain access to this talent from different parts of the world. And we want to help students communicate or connect with the ideal university in the United States. But it's also educational for students that have no idea how to navigate these waters and helping them understand what the US university landscape is like. And it's also helping universities to, you know, to understand where this talent is and to build new pipelines so that they can have a more diverse student population themselves.

Kurt Greenbaum: So if you search for information about Oystar, just remember it's spelled O-Y-S-T-A-R. And as Lungile explained it, the name is a play on words. The idea was to remind students who would use their service that, "Oy! You're a star!" And then they layered on that familiar old saying about how the world is your oyster. So how did the four of you converge on this particular idea?

Lungile Tshuma: The seed came from my journey coming to the United States. I knew I wanted to come to the United States for higher ed. I just didn't know where to start. So the only thing that I used was I was an athlete. I played rugby, so I looked for a university that played rugby and I ended up in St. Charles, Missouri. Because you ...

Kurt Greenbaum: Who did you play for?

Lungile Tshuma: Lindenwood University.

Kurt Greenbaum: No, before you came to Lindenwood.

Lungile Tshuma: I was playing for Zimbabwe. I was playing for my country. Yeah, it was. It was great I was ...

Kurt Greenbaum: Let me just say that we're getting fist pumps from everybody else on the ... on the call here. All right. Yeah, go for it.

Lungile Tshuma: And I didn't. I didn't pay Kurt to ask me that question for a flex, by the way, so. Yeah. And I ended up I ended up in the United States playing at Lindenwood University and had no idea WashU was down the road. So I was like, OK, there's something wrong in the system or in the process. So, you know, I also realized that universities were looking for students. So I knew that the platform in the middle had to be birthed. So that's where the seed came from, and then took the idea through some entrepreneurial classes. And one of the classes, Kev ... Kev was on my team. He basically started driving a lot of the work and was super into it. And Kev is like a silent work ... like he just gets going. So I was like, OK, I think he I think he likes this idea.

Kurt Greenbaum: All right. Kevin.

Kevin Ko: Yeah.

Kurt Greenbaum: Let's not let's not be silent. Tell us. Tell us more. What drew you to this?

Kevin Ko: First and foremost, shout out to Doug, our entrepreneurship professor.

Kurt Greenbaum: Doug Villhard.

Kevin Ko: But I was drawn to Lungie's idea because I applied to undergraduate as an international student growing up in Taiwan. And so Lungie was explaining his idea. I felt and understood a lot of his pain points and frustrations that he had experienced. You know, the problem that he was trying to solve was close to my heart.

Kurt Greenbaum: Can you talk about that? What were the pain points that you saw in your experience, Kevin?

Kevin Ko: Well, yeah, as an international student, you know, oftentimes you don't really understand the nuances of college application. You need certain counselors or maybe certain consultants to let you know, hey, like you need to take your SATs or ACTs at a certain point in time to make sure the scores are ready. You know, how good of an AP score or how does IB scores translate to universities? Or, like, how do scholarship work? You know, what's the difference between early action and early decision? Unless you have the right resources, you know, these questions can be very convoluted and very confusing because, you know, there's so many different university systems, right? There's the common app, there's the UC system, there's

private schools, public schools. I think the list continues on, and I'm sure a lot of our listeners will also have experienced the same thing.

Abhinav Gabbeta: I joined the team later on after Lungie and Kevin had formulated it through Doug's class. And I really loved the idea when Lungie first told me about it. As a child of immigrants, education has always been at the forefront of priorities for our family and for our entire culture, honestly. And I've also been involved with a lot of educational nonprofits. One in particular that I'm pretty close with is Asha for Education, which helps children find educational opportunities in India. When I was in college, I was part of Big Brothers Big Sisters, trying to help some of the local kids find educational opportunities and aspire for higher education. So it's always been a cause that's been really important to me.

Tim Brandt: Lungie and I met actually on one of the last nights in Shanghai, and this is still a memory that I will never forget. But we were coming back from a karaoke session with the whole class and there was a walk, about a 30-minute walk in the rain all the way back to our hotel. This is not actually where Oystar came up, but what this instance led to was in the fall semester, Lungie and I having weekly meetings on the second floor in Bauer Hall, and these weekly meetings were us just bouncing career pursuits off of each other. And it was in these conversations that he started to bring up the concept of Oystar. He continued to talk to me about this concept that he was taking through the classes.

And for me, you know, I found this to be extremely interesting, which is a bit ironic because I'm, you know, I'm a domestic student that actually grew up 10 minutes from WashU. My gravitation to Oystar is from maybe a bit of a different angle. But it does align on several things. For me, it's about the global impact potential of Oystar. It was a broad idea that had the potential to cover and impact a lot of different people. And this is something that I was seeking out coming into the MBA program. The second thing was, you know, it was focused on higher ed. For me. I became very self-aware by even just the first semester in Olin of how important higher ed, how important grad school was to my growth, and working on a business problem that could bring that to other people was very important for me. And ... and that actually leads me to the third point was it was an interesting business challenge. Immersing yourself in business school, you do get this natural desire to solve business problems. And this was one that was sitting right in front of me that a close friend of mine was discussing.

Kurt Greenbaum: The four guys converged on this startup idea. And let's be clear, the company is very much still in its early development stages. We recorded our conversation back in September. Today, six months after we talked, the guys told me Oystar is in the validation phase where they're testing and refining the business model and the solution they've developed. But back when we recorded this episode, they were in their discovery phase. They were conducting interviews, surveys and conversations with stakeholders to better understand the problem they wanted to solve and the market they could serve. Throughout the process, they've been

creating Oystar's culture and hiring interns to help with the work, all while maintaining what they called their day jobs. This reminds me of the conversation we all had earlier about this episode before we sat down for a recorded interview. You all talked a little bit about sort of what you've gained from your day jobs that is transferable to your startup and vice versa. And I wonder which one of you could sort of launch us into that part of the conversation. Like, where did that realization come to pass? Where did you see opportunities to do things better?

Abhinav Gabbeta: Being that we're all consultants working full-time jobs while also doing Oystar puts us in a really interesting position because we get to be both the understudy and the elder statesman in different aspects of our life. And so there's a lot of learnings that I will get from the day job that I then pass along to my Oystar role, things that I've learned from great leaders and things that I wish were done differently. I think one of the biggest things Kevin touched on is entrusting and building out a good team of people, giving them the autonomy to do the work that they want to do. Empowering them to have creativity, to challenge our thoughts, I think is really important, and I think a lot of it is also based on just trust and also levity. The best teams that I've been a part of, it's not just work.

I don't think any of us here ever want Oystar to feel like just work for any of us. And I think we're really intentional about building a strong culture within our team, with our teammates, making sure that we are ... this Oystar came out of friendships between them, all of us. And so we're trying to carry that through with every new teammate that we bring on. We get to know each other outside of Oystar, learn about each other's interests, learn about different life stories. Favorite foods, favorite songs. I know one thing I do throughout my marketing teams. We'll spend a good portion of the meeting just talking about what are we excited about this week? What was something that was exciting that happened this week or something that we're excited about for this coming week, and then also making sure that we call out celebrations.

Kurt Greenbaum: I love that example of the marketing conversation, you know, and that comes out of a positive experience that you had working in your day job that you could transfer to the culture at Oystar. Are there other examples like that that any of you can think of?

Lungile Tshuma: We have a unique opportunity. I'll say that first because we literally live in different worlds and can test different things in different worlds on a daily basis. I think one positive thing that has come out for me, as I said it earlier, is learning. Learning how to eat an elephant one bite at a time is something that has come out. And by that, I mean, you know, starting with something small to get to the bigger solution. In the startup world, it's called .. it's an MVP. It's a minimal viable product where we've had to create not only the platform itself, create an MVP, but for everything that we're doing in the workstreams. You know, it's starting small, something workable, and then you continue to build on that. You know, that's helped me in my day job in consulting. And there, it's simply called a use case. And it's iterating on a use case. It's bringing something to a client early so that they ... they

give feedback and they pretty much tell you if you're on the right track or what needs to change. And then you iterate on that.

Kevin Ko: In the beginning. The four of us didn't really have a plan or kind of like a method in how we were working. We would just kind of decide on a workstream and on Miro, on Google Docs, we would kind of build out our plan and kind of like create a checklist on things that we were doing. But we really quickly realized that like when we started having interns helping us, that wasn't the best method moving forward because it would just cause confusion and it wasn't really streamlined in how we should be held accountable. And then at Cognizant, some of my work is run through Jira, through the Agile methodology. And so I quickly realized that this was something that we should, you know, try out and implement throughout our summer. That was something that I saw from my real job or like real-world job that I brought into Oystar that turned out, I believe, quite well.

Kurt Greenbaum: How about you, Tim? You have an example.

Tim Brandt: I was trying to think of ... were you looking for something bad we've experienced that we've mitigated against?

Kurt Greenbaum: Well, I think you've always talked about the idea of leaders who, or managers, perhaps, not leaders who have perhaps not been as generous about sharing credit. So I'm looking for some examples like that. Is there some or maybe I'm making this up, maybe it's somebody else. Another group of four guys that I was thinking of talking to.

Abhinav Gabbeta: You're probably thinking about One Direction.

Kurt Greenbaum: Oh, wait, you guys aren't One Direction? Wait a minute.

Kevin Ko: We're Four Direction, actually.

Tim Brandt: I have seen firsthand leaders step in who are supposedly on your side in whether a meeting or a presentation and openly turn around and yeah, either snatch the credit or, you know, retarget a question or a comment that is almost breaking down your work or your ... your platform that you are on. On the flip side, I personally had had a team leader that was almost rather exceptional at this concept of inclusiveness to the team. A specific example of this was, you know, we were building a presentation for the president of our whole North America market. You know, naturally you would probably think that to Abhi's comment, this component of hierarchy would probably quickly trickle in and begin to take over. But in reality, he, you know, this ... this leader was able to allow each person on the team, no matter seniority, to bring their original thought and content to the table and only steer through subtle guidance, not actually overpower. This was a personal experience that I had that I you know, I walked away from ... from that presentation and that ... that project rather amazed at the level of trust, the level of empowerment that was

given to people who were even not even a year into the company or a year into their careers and building that level of ... of a deliverable. Into Abhi's point, this is something that we try to bring back into Oystar.

Abhinav Gabbeta: I can add to that. I think that's a really good example, Tim, and something that I've actively been trying to do throughout this past summer with our marketing team. So to give a little background, this past summer is the first time we really put a concerted effort on building out our marketing structure. So we've dabbled in it in the spring semester, but this summer semester we had a rather ambitious project of wanting to create and produce a fully formed commercial for Oystar, and none of us are directors or ... or animators. And it was a really bold idea, but we really felt strongly that we could put this together based on just like our ideation as well as picking up the right teammates. And so over this past summer, three of our marketing interns were Emily, Sheri and Ryan. Through her, we were able to recruit Ryan. We were able to trust that Ryan would be a good addition to the team because we knew that if we got along really well with Emily and Sheri and we were able to bring in a recruitment through them, after meeting with them, we were able to know that the culture fits.

Not only does the culture fit, but the work ethic and determination also fits. And so very quickly we were up and running in terms of how our team functioned. Another thing is, we all had really different skill sets, which is and I think that's one of our high points for our Oystar leadership team as well. Within the marketing team, I would function as the guardrails for the team. I would give direction, I would help create ideas, communicate some of our leadership thoughts to the marketing team. Emily and Sheri would function a lot as our right-hand woman in that aspect, helping come up with the script. We worked on that together where we were able to write it out together, scratch it out together, create it together to challenge each other. And then one of them was better at making sure everything is documented and structured out. One of them is a bit better at more creative thoughts.

And then Ryan, we fully empowered a brand new intern to the team to do all the animation for us singlehandedly, and that came through several initial weeks of working together where we developed a style, a working style as well as a rapport in terms of him trusting that we were not going to give him more than he can handle, but that we're going to challenge him to do more than he may be initially comfortable with. And then us trusting that he is going to deliver on that and do so in a timely fashion and in frankly, like, a brilliant fashion. And we came out with at the end of the summer, we have a one-minute commercial that I would put up next to any animated commercial I've ever seen. And we did that based off of three interns, one who was brand new and two who are just one semester in. And that comes from taking our lessons in leadership. Trusting our teammates to do the work.

Kurt Greenbaum: In the questions that I shared with you guys earlier, one of them, I'll just say it, we talked about both "oh, shoot" moments in your post-graduate experience and "oh, wow" moments. Can you share examples?

Abhinav Gabbeta: Adding teammates was a pivotal moment for us because it went from just us four working as friends on a cool idea in our own little bubble to "Oh wow. We're now leaders responsible for helping bring on others within our team to show them our vision, to make sure that we're all working towards something together." That was a pivotal moment for us in terms of taking it from just going outside of our little bubble as an idea to now being a full-on company, working towards a business goal and putting ourselves in positions as leaders to deliver on that promise.

Lungile Tshuma: We consider Oystar having its own its ... its own personality, its ... its own thing. We're creating an environment and a climate around it. It's a living thing that has a culture. That is because three other brilliant people came on board and validated this idea and all imparted, you know, what they believe to be of value onto Oystar. So now its ... its own. It's got its own breath.

Abhinav Gabbeta: We actually did a personality test for Oystar as one of our marketing exercises. So literally it has a personality.

Kurt Greenbaum: Oh, tell me about that. What's the personality of Oystar?

Abhinav Gabbeta: So Oystar is a protagonist. E N F J is the acronym for that. And protagonists feel called to serve a greater purpose in life. Thoughtful and idealistic, these personality types strive to have a positive impact on other people and the world around them. They rarely shy away from an opportunity to do the right thing, even when doing so is far from easy. And that is exactly what we strive to be. When we had previous discussions about being intentional about a culture, this is one of the exercises we chose because we wanted to make sure that any user, any customer that interacts with the Oystar knows who we are and what we're about. As part of our like visioning boards, we've pulled together some statements, some phrases that are important to us: Inspire others not just in their careers, but in every arena of their lives. Pulling together people of experiences and ideas who differ wildly from each other. Want to see the impact they're having. Rarely lose sight of their core mission. Guide others to learn, grow and become more independent. And so, yeah, I think this is exactly who we strive to be. And so it's a pretty useful exercise.

Kurt Greenbaum: And that grew out of the idea that you guys needed to have a foundation on which to build the company, to build a culture around the company.

Abhinav Gabbeta: Mm hmm. Very early ideas for the for what our marketing would be. We wanted to make sure that people understood us and that we're consistent in our messaging. And we were coming up with a commercial even that came down to, like, our visual style. We chose animation because we wanted to make sure that we were approachable and not have a very cold corporate feel. Our color scheme is reflective of that as well. The language that we use is reflective of that as well. Our

character designs are meant to be representative of diverse backgrounds. Everything we do is very intentional to make sure that we're communicating this personality of being the protagonist who is here to help guide others to their full potential.

Tim Brandt: The "oh, shoot" moment that I saw for Oystar, I think it connects back to this theme that has been discussed on our chat today, which is around the culture that we are building within the company. We had an experience of going through quite a bit of our hiring of interns into our business for a short stint of time. And, you know, this was earlier on in our journey and we did look at personalities and culture in the fit. But I don't think it was of a serious priority for us. You know, we were very scoped in our vision that skill set was by far and away what we needed—tactical skillset, engineering, coding or marketing, whatever it may be. But what ended up coming from this was a total disconnect between some of our teammates. They did not mesh together. It did not work well. And what ended up happening is not only one person leaving the team, but multiple people who are leaving our team because of this un-match of personalities and in working styles, really.

There was through you know, this ... this moment afterwards that we did realize that moving forward you know you have to prioritize the culture fit almost just as much or if not more than the skill fit. You know, you have an outsized impact of a meshing of ... of personalities then a meshing of skill sets sometimes. And so being able to prioritize that, I think, has allowed us to find the right people that we work with and that work with us and that are aligned to the mission. Our "oh, wow" moment was when in our first pitch comp, the learning from this was about momentum. One of the, by far and away, the biggest impacts to our team from winning that pitch comp was the momentum. It was during a time when, you know, we were floating out in kind of our ocean of building and building and building, and we all of a sudden got this huge wave of validation that you all as a team are on to something and you're progressing toward something that could have a pretty serious impact. And so coming off of that pitch comp, you know, we had a new wave of energy that really brought the team forth into new workstreams. And for us, we take that into very strong consideration. When you're in that down flow of re-strategizing, you need to keep a momentum high and run back into those next projects. So for us, that was definitely an "oh, wow" moment for me, I think when I think about that.

Kurt Greenbaum: I wonder if somebody could kind of characterize for me where Oystar is at ... at this point.

Lungile Tshuma: It's a complicated platform because it is two-sided and it will have different groups of people that will be on the platform to connect. Our customer is the universities. We're helping them find students, talented, diverse students in different parts of the world, many harder to access markets, for instance, like Latin America or the African continent. So what we're doing right now is we are building the student side of the platform and continue to keep validating that until it is sustainable on its own. We're going through customer discovery on the university side to understand

exactly what the university wants to see and how they want to use the product. And then we are going to connect the two sides through some sort of pilot program or another MVP. We started ... this was an idea back in an entrepreneurial class and now have good friends that are working on it. We've come this far, like looking ahead and like talking with each other in our meetings, talking about the possibilities. Yeah, it is definitely exciting to have the opportunity to create something out of nothing, out of thin air, which I think is incredible. Definitely excited.

Kurt Greenbaum: That's it for this episode of On Principle. And that's a wrap on season three. Thank you for joining us. And a huge thank you to Lungie, Tim, Abhi and Kevin. It was a lot of fun to try a different approach to On Principle for this episode, and I really appreciate a different perspective on what an "oh, shoot" or an "oh, wow" moment might look like. Tim explained that Oystar is set this spring to move from its validation phase to its launch phase where the team expects to start seeking funding to build the product and start entering the market. If you're interested in knowing more, check out the show notes for today's episode, where we'll include more information about the guys and Oystar. Look for those links along with past episodes of this podcast at onprinciplepodcast.com. As always, I encourage you to subscribe to On Principle in your favorite podcasting app so you'll automatically get new episodes. We'll drop bonus mini episodes in May, June and July while we continue working on season four, which launches in August. Do you have episode ideas or feedback about this podcast? Please send your comments by email to Olin podcast at W-U-S-T-L dot E-D-U. That's olinpodcast@wustl.edu.

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