

A New Podcast Featuring Teen Innovators Explores the Future of the Business World

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Starting with this episode, the Wharton Global Youth Program is excited to launch a new audio podcast, Future of the Business World. Inspired by an online course of the same name that the Global Youth team created for high school students when [summer 2020 went virtual](#), Future of the Business World features teen entrepreneurs from around the world who are embracing innovation and emerging business trends to launch businesses and products, and to build their paths to global leadership. Each month, we will introduce you to a new teen innovator and explore his or her motivations, inspirations and insights about entrepreneurship and business.

First up is Rucha Mehendale, a high school student from California, U.S., who has designed and pitched an app to keep teens motivated and on schedule. Coming in October: Sneakerhead and social entrepreneur Jiro Noor from Jakarta, Indonesia. We hope you enjoy Wharton Global Youth Program's first podcast series!



Wharton Global Youth: Hey, everybody. Welcome to the *Future of the Business World* podcast. I'm Diana Drake with the Wharton Global Youth Program at The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania.

We're exploring the *Future of the Business World* through the eyes of teen innovators who are embracing an entrepreneurial mindset to solve problems and understand emerging trends. Marketing, product design, negotiation, performance indicators — these tools and more are helping high school students make a difference in the world.

We've met some fascinating future business leaders – and we want to introduce them to you.

Rucha Mehendale is 16 and a Senior at Valley Christian High School in San Jose, California. Welcome to *Future of the Business World*, Rucha.

Rucha Mehendale: Thank you so much for having me.

Wharton Global Youth: Let's face it... many of us suffer from a condition that holds us back from doing all that we want to do. It's called procrastination! Especially through the months of the pandemic, we've had to adapt to a new online reality that isn't always conducive to keeping us "on schedule." You and your friend Lillian came up with a solution for this problem that is aptly named Sloth.

You first started working on the idea in 2019. Can you tell us more about your app?

Rucha Mehendale: Sloth is a smart time management and productivity-focused tool that helps users set realistic goals, alleviate procrastination, develop good study habits and be organized and plan ahead. Sloth provides users with special features, including calendar scheduling and task lists. For example, Sloth organizes your tasks and events efficiently by class and due date, but also offers a timer that lets students set periods of time to work productively with the option to block distracting sites and apps, such as social media platforms. Sloth provides weekly metrics for users based on their completed assignments, time spent on their phone and their overall productivity. We know how hard it is for students to stay motivated, which is why Sloth provides various incentives and rewards through partnerships, and we will also offer app customization. Sloth continually updates all users through push notifications and reminders, helping to keep students productive throughout their day even if they have a heavy work load. A few more features are still in the works, so look for more updates about Sloth through our social media pages.

Wharton Global Youth: Did you develop this product in hopes of managing your own time better? What was the inspiration for Sloth?

Rucha: I am definitely one of the inspirations for Sloth. I procrastinate often and have poor time management skills. I'm the persona for Sloth, which we described in our business pitch deck.

"As high school students, we understand that school can quickly evolve into a repetition of sleep, eat and work...If we can alleviate a small percentage of the stress that comes with such a large workload, our work would be worth it." — Rucha Mehendale

Wharton Global Youth: As you progressed more deeply into building Sloth, you and your partner created a business plan, a five-year market strategy, financial projections, and all that went into creating a business. What has it been like to develop your business from the ground up?

Rucha: It's been a crazy, amazing journey. We actually created Sloth through my school's President's Business Challenge, a program in which teams create businesses and compete for the opportunity to pitch their business plans to top Silicon Valley industry leaders and venture capital firms. Our teacher Mrs. Lin was one of our biggest supporters and mentors throughout this entire process. We couldn't have done it without her. In the beginning of the program, my team and I started brainstorming ideas for possible business solutions for problems faced in our daily lives. A problem that really resonated with all of us was time management. We decided to go forward with all of this and now it was up to us to create an effective solution.

We interviewed more than 50 people from middle school students to professional workers for our market research. We found that many other high school students, like us, especially struggle with time management, don't feel as motivated to finish their tasks, and have a hard time steering away from distractions. Upon more research, we found that 87% of

high school students struggle with procrastination and poor time management. As high school students we can very much relate to these situations. We wanted to provide an organized, compelling and useful solution to help students stay accountable for their goals.

After we found our target market, we started diving deep into the financials, marketing plans and the mock-up. Mr. Wong, a private investor, was another great mentor of ours who definitely helped us and guided us, especially for the projected financial statements and ensured that our statements were realistic, which is really important when pitching a business plan. During second semester, when the pitch rounds were getting closer, Lillian and I were always on Zoom calls every other day if not every day discussing how to improve Sloth. We would discuss different ideas we had and take the time to research. I tried to find several ways to monetize Sloth and find various partnerships that would fit with our mission and could be added to our five-year go-to market strategy.

This process was pretty grueling, but I enjoyed every minute of it. Developing Sloth from the ground up taught me the value of teamwork, perseverance, passion and grit. I'm so grateful to have gotten this opportunity to work with incredible people and to develop something that I'm truly passionate about and something that resonates with me.

Wharton Global Youth: It's interesting because the idea came to you in 2019, and 2020 has been a whole new experience for all of us because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It sometimes feels like one day seeps into the next and time has taken on a whole new meaning during quarantine. Do you feel this product has become even more relevant today?

Rucha: 100%. I think since we've started doing more virtual learning and quarantine at home, I've been procrastinating a lot more and time management has been even worse for me. So I think a lot of other students can relate to this and can use our app a lot more and that our app is beneficial to them during this time.

Wharton Global Youth: You actually live in Silicon Valley in California, a global hub for high tech and innovation. I'm fascinated that you've actually pitched Sloth to some top venture capitalists. Tell us more about that experience and what it was like to get up in front of these decisions makers in the finance industry?

Rucha: I remember my business teacher Mrs. Lin announcing that my team would be moving forward to the final pitch with Sloth in front of Radar Partners, which is a venture capital firm in Palo Alto. For those of you who don't know much about venture capitalists, they basically provide financing to start-up companies and small businesses that are believed to have long-term growth potential. And so when my teacher announced this, my team and I were beyond thrilled.

When the day came, I was very excited yet nervous. We had prepared for this moment for months and now it was finally time to present in front of Radar Partners. When we entered the Zoom call, all the judges were so kind, introduced themselves, and then we got started. The pitch went surprisingly well and I couldn't believe we just finished it. Their feedback was definitely helpful. They talked about how they really enjoyed our presentation and were impressed by our mock-up, marketing plan and financials, which is obviously great to hear. It was such a surreal experience and I'm just so grateful to have been part of it. After we presented to Radar Partners, my team and I were announced as the winners of the President's Business Challenge with Sloth. During our school's business and entrepreneurship showcase, they announced this. It was amazing to experience.

Wharton Global Youth: Sounds like your experience was similar to [the TV Show] *Shark Tank*. Did the investors from Radar Partners have any tough questions for you?

Rucha: Not really. I was expecting harder questions. They said we answered all their questions through our pitch, which was great to hear. They asked how far we had developed our prototype, so we talked about that a little bit more. Everything else, they said they liked our slides and parts of our pitch, so that was definitely great to hear.

Wharton Global Youth: It sounds like you were very well prepared. Your prototype is what I want to talk with you about next. Where does Sloth go from here? Are you working on a prototype? What's the plan for the future?

Rucha: Sloth is currently still in the development phase. We're continuing to focus on marketing while designing our app. When Sloth's first app version is finished, we plan to amp up advertising with online promotions and ads and starting our student ambassador program. It's too soon to predict Sloth's future, but we've seen lots of interest in our app mock-up so far, which tells us we have a decent chance at success. We've developed the app's main page and navigation bar and we're working on the other app pages for our special features. Our vision for the app is to make it simple and effective, ensuring that it's easy to use for all students. Our larger overarching vision for Sloth is to help students everywhere improve their study habits and organization skills. Most importantly, we want to make learning fun again. As high school students, we understand that school can quickly evolve into a repetition of sleep, eat and work. A lot of students are most likely extremely busy, juggling a wide variety of extracurricular activities in addition to difficult Honor/AP courses. If we can alleviate just a small percentage of the stress that comes with such a large workload, our work would definitely be worth it.

Wharton Global Youth: Have you taken a look at the competitive landscape? I'm curious if other apps are trying to do what you are planning to do. Is it a crowded market?

Rucha: There are a lot of different competitors, but there is no dominant one. They all have small features or are not very easy to use. That's how we are differentiating our app. We also have some special features that we will work on soon, so we will keep everyone updated on our social media platforms. We've analyzed our competitive landscape to make sure our app stands out from the rest.

Wharton Global Youth: At this juncture in your journey, how have you come to define the entrepreneurial mindset?

Rucha: My entrepreneurship journey started my sophomore year when I took part in another entrepreneurship competition. My team was actually one of the first to get out. Even though I failed, I knew I had it in myself to succeed. I was very adamant about not giving up. When I entered the president's competition my junior year, I put my heart and soul into Sloth and it turned out to be a success. That encapsulates the entrepreneurial mindset to me. Getting back up and persevering, even when you fall.

Wharton Global Youth: One question I like to ask all of the entrepreneurs we interview on *Future of the Business World* is if you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

Rucha: One thing that's really important to me is education. It's heartbreaking for me to know that youth from places all around the world don't have access to a good education. I'm really fortunate to have the opportunities to create startups and learn from great teachers at my school. Youth in other places don't have that because of barriers like their family situation or being brought up in impoverished areas. If I had to change one thing in the world, I would try to make sure that all youth had access to a great education. We're educating the leaders of tomorrow, and through this more people would have the opportunity to solve problems throughout the world.

Wharton Global Youth: We'll wrap up with our lightning round. You've got to answer these questions quickly.

What is your favorite app (other than Sloth)?

Rucha: YouTube

Wharton Global Youth: What is a product you couldn't live without?

Rucha: My iPhone, as cliché as it sounds.

Wharton Global Youth: What is your favorite emerging business trend?

Rucha: Influencer marketing, because you're allowed to spread awareness of your product through word of mouth.

Wharton Global Youth: What business person would you most like to invite to lunch?

Rucha: Probably Lori Grenier because I love her on *Shark Tank* and she's such a powerful female entrepreneur. It would be really interesting to talk to her.

Wharton Global Youth: Rucha, it has been great talking to you today. Thanks so much for joining us on *Future of the Business World*.