

Future of the Business World: Building an App for the Scoliosis Community

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In the past year, Christine Sinn, our guest on this month's Future of the Business World podcast, took to heart some recent advice about thinking like an entrepreneur in times of crisis. In an [article on that topic](#), Wharton professor Lori Rosenkopf told us: "Being confined during the pandemic is a great time to practice empathy. How are others feeling? If you can put yourself in their shoes, understand how they are feeling and think about their needs, then it's only a short step to figuring out how you can help them."

Christine has done just that, using her months at home to learn coding and create a new app for scoliosis patients. In this podcast episode, Christine discusses her deepening connection to technology and to the health care-related community she hopes to empower and serve when her app launches in January 2021.

Wharton Global Youth Program: Hey, everybody! Welcome to Future of the Business World. Where we get to spend time with exceptional high school entrepreneurs from around the world.

I'm Diana Drake with the Wharton Global Youth Program at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. At Wharton Global Youth... we design programs, competitions and content that introduce students to all areas of business education while they're in high school.

For me, business starts with people. Whether you're exploring data analytics or investment banking, people are the unifying thread – the personalities and skills of the leaders that drive profits and change.

Our Wharton Global Youth team has met some interesting and innovative teen entrepreneurs...and we want to introduce them to you.

Today's guest, Christine Sinn, is a high school sophomore from Virginia in the U.S. Christine is about to launch her first app, ScolioBend, to help maximize the treatment process of young scoliosis patients.

Christine, Thanks for joining us on Future of the Business World.

Christine Sinn: Thanks so much for having me.

Wharton Global Youth: I'm very interested to learn more about the community you're building, but first...what is scoliosis and can you talk about your personal connection to this condition?

Sinn: Scoliosis is an idiopathic curvature of the spine. This means that doctors don't know why people have scoliosis. The most common types of curvatures are S curves or C curves, where your back is shaped to look like an S or a C. In

6th grade I was going to my pediatrician for my usual annual checkup and my doctor noticed that one side of my back was higher than the other. So, I got an x-ray and was diagnosed with S curve high-to-moderate scoliosis. It was certainly unexpected and it resulted in a lot of large changes in my life. I was playing tennis pre-professionally and I wanted to be a professional tennis player. With scoliosis, I wasn't able to play tennis anymore. Little did I know that having scoliosis actually set me on a very different path for my future. It set me on a path to entrepreneurship and to where I am today.

Wharton Global Youth: Wow, you were actually going to be a professional tennis player?

Sinn: Yes, I was training a lot; two or three times a week with a retired tennis coach. I had big plans, but now I have even bigger plans.

Wharton Global Youth: Was it disappointing to have to change course?

Sinn: It was very disappointing at first because I invested a lot of my time and energy into tennis. But also I think having scoliosis opened my perspective to everything beyond tennis. I was really focused on tennis only, but now I'm able to explore all my interests beyond tennis, so I think that having scoliosis is a blessing.

Wharton Global Youth: You began to think about starting a business this past summer when you enrolled in our [Future of the Business World online course](#). What was the spark for you? What inspired you to start something new?

Sinn: I wanted to reach out and connect to other teenagers who are like me. Most teenagers have a phone, so I was thinking about making a phone app. In this pandemic, lots of people are picking up new skills and I was one of them. I started to teach myself how to code. I would watch free Youtube videos and I bought a \$15 course that was on sale. I was thinking of coding the first version of my app but I didn't know where I wanted to take it. When I went to Future of the Business World, I loved it, because I realized my idea and my vision for this casual phone app could be taken into a business and form a really large scoliosis community. I realized this vision of where I wanted to take my phone app and that started my larger project of ScolioBend.

Wharton Global Youth: What exactly is ScolioBend and how does the app work?

Sinn: ScolioBend is a company that offers resources for scoliosis patients as they go through the treatment process for scoliosis. We're going to start off with a phone app, but I'm also hoping to include some guides and resources for everyday life with scoliosis. Actually, I'm almost done with the app, so the first version will come out in late January, which is really exciting. I hope through ScolioBend that I empower and connect teenagers with scoliosis so they can reach their full potential. I was really disappointed when I found out I had scoliosis because I had to stop my dream of being a tennis player, but I didn't realize that would start the whole new journey down where I'm living right now. I want people to know that when they have scoliosis it's not a dead end, but only the start of their potential.

The app is totally free. We recouped the cost through partnerships with scoliosis centers and hospitals. We actually are already featured by the National Scoliosis Center. We're looking into other scoliosis centers, as well as The John Hopkins Hospital because they have a really good Orthopedic department. They made innovations in scoliosis surgery to make it less invasive. I'm hoping to pitch to them soon as well.

“The wonderful thing about tech skills is that you can learn them anywhere and anytime. If you want to get started and you're passionate to help people through technology, then it really begins with one click.” — Christine Sinn, ScolioBend Developer

Wharton Global Youth: What has it required of you to take this idea from ideation to implementation? Did you have to

create a tagline? What has been the business development process for you?

Sinn: A lot of times when I mention to people that I made a phone app, people think about the self-taught coding. There's a lot of strategy and planning that goes into it beforehand. One key part of my business is that I wanted to have a mission. Our mission is Bent to Be Strong to essentially empower and connect other teenagers with scoliosis. I did a lot of strategy and planning even before I started to code. I thought about the competitive landscape, how I wanted to release resources and when, and I also did a mockup of my app to see how I wanted to include certain features and where I wanted to put them. That really made the coding process a lot easier because I entered this process not knowing how to code a single IOS phone application.

Wharton Global Youth: Do you have a story that illustrates when you began to feel like an entrepreneur? Do you feel like an entrepreneur?

Sinn: There wasn't one really big story that made me feel like one, but there were a lot of small stories that made me realize I am one. I would be talking with my friends or sitting in class and I'd be struck with this great idea for ScolioBend and I'd write it down. Or I went to the stationery store one day and bought a drawing notebook, but I ended up using it as my idea and strategy notebook instead of drawing in it. I also started to be more of a problem-solver for small and large problems alike. One of my friends calls me Sherlock, which is a nickname I've grown to enjoy. So, I think day by day as I grow my passion to learn and then use what I learn to help my community, I'm starting to become an entrepreneur. The real entrepreneurial life is that you learn something new every day, and I couldn't be happier.

Wharton Global Youth: I think it's fascinating that while you're building this community you're also part of the community. It gives you a certain sort of empathy and connection to the people you're trying to help. What do you hope to learn from the users of your app and what do you plan to do with that information?

Sinn: There are a lot of different degrees of scoliosis, so every scoliosis patient has a different journey. Some people naturally grow out of their scoliosis and others require minimally invasive scoliosis surgery. I was kind of in the middle. I had a scoliosis back brace but didn't need surgery. I'm hoping to listen to the different perspectives that my users bring and offer different avenues for feedback and connection, so I can improve my app and support as many scoliosis patients as possible.

Wharton Global Youth: How do you see that playing out?

Sinn: We're also thinking of having community-building events and exercises. In-person connection – or Zoom connection because of the pandemic – is really important. Before the pandemic started when we were in-person, I met with this girl in my school in 5th grade. She was recently diagnosed with scoliosis and she's a dancer. So she was kind of concerned about her future dance career as well. I really related to her because that's how I felt a few years ago. Talking with her for that 30 minutes to an hour made me realize that this app could be a reality. Her story was an inspiration for a lot of the features I want to have on my app now and in the future. Having user perspectives and making sure that my app is valuable to my consumers will be really important.

Wharton Global Youth: How will you measure the success of your app once it launches?

Sinn: Apple has a great resource for us IOS app developers called Apple Analytics. It measures the popularity of your app quantitatively and includes features like how often people open the app, log in or download per day. It's a great resource for quantitative success. As for qualitative impact, I think that's another major reason why I wanted to take this beyond a phone app. I wanted to be able to connect with scoliosis patients and help each person, so I'm going to offer a lot of avenues for feedback and for comments, as well as some community-building events for qualitative impact.

Wharton Global Youth: Do you feel your app is truly innovative?

Sinn: There are scoliosis support groups but there isn't a single app that supports scoliosis patients emotionally and physically. When I realized that, it was one of my key self-motivators to keep going through the hard nips and bugs in my code. I realized my idea could actually make the world a better place and change the world.

Wharton Global Youth: What were some of the points where you had to get over those hurdles so that you saw this to fruition and were able to build the app?

Sinn: I think a key part is partially my lack of experience. The tech space is definitely welcoming, but I think there are so many resources that it's hard to choose just one. Another key point that I wanted to ensure was security, so when I log in my users and have a database for their information for now and in the future, I wanted to make sure that was secure. I had to learn a lot of little ways and solutions to fix that. Honestly, with the tech life you're learning every day as well. When I have major bugs I write them in my idea notebook and then research a solution individually and write it down. There are a lot of coding courses out there, but I think about half my coding experience was just researching individual problems and thinking about new ways to add it in. It's a really big improv business, and it's really nice.

Wharton Global Youth: I want to go back a minute to your self-taught coding. One of the most interesting things about tech skills is that you can pretty much learn them anywhere these days. You can go online and problem-solve, as you said, and do things individually without being in a classroom. Do you feel like you've become a technologist? How do you feel as a member of the technology community, which is still male-dominated. Has the technology space truly been welcoming?

Sinn: For my self-learning journey, it was a really welcoming space. If anything, there are too many resources. It's good if you take advantage of it and make the most of it. When I decided I wanted to make this phone app a reality, I taught myself the basics of IOS app development with free Youtube videos and Stack Exchange. Stack Exchange is a free forum where you can post your questions and people help you by using their expertise to offer solutions. So, I do think it's been a welcoming space. There are less women in STEM and technology than men, for sure. The wonderful thing about tech skills is that you can learn them anywhere and anytime. If you want to get started and you're passionate to help people through technology, then it really begins with one click.

Wharton Global Youth: How were you able to self-motivate and have the perseverance to stick with this?

Sinn: With COVID-19 and everyone staying home, especially with coding it's a very individual journey. Sometimes you can feel like you're in a vacuum and stuck in this space alone. For me, getting out and listening to the stories of other people is really helpful. Other people's perspectives and experiences bring me back to the big picture and make me realize my ideas can help people. It keeps the spark going. It adds fuel to the flame; this idea that people will be impacted by my ideas is really inspiring for someone who is starting out with tech skills and as an entrepreneur.

Wharton Global Youth: What are your future plans for ScolioBend?

Sinn: The app and the website will be released in January 2021. That's very exciting, please stay tuned. We're also hoping to make future partnerships and release guides and resources for everyday life with scoliosis and begin our community-building events. It's a bright future and it's just the beginning. Honestly, ScolioBend will be a living, breathing project. That's what I love about it. I can't wait to see how both ScolioBend and I grow over the next few years.

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?

Sinn: It's hard to choose just one thing. I think I would continue to empower other teenagers to reach their full potential. I would also bring to awareness issues that people all around our world might be facing. It's something that crowd-funding and credible news channels are beginning to do, but there are many issues of diversity, representation and financial and social well-being that go unspoken. Listening to other people was such an important part of my journey as an entrepreneur, so I would definitely change the lack of attention that certain issues get in the media. I would also encourage everyone to listen to the perspectives of others, because listening is the first step to change.

Wharton Global Youth: Let's wrap up with our lightning round. Answer these questions as quickly as you can:

Something about you that would surprise us?

Sinn: I love to bake. It's a hobby I've recently picked up during COVID-19. Making food is a way for me to connect with other people.

Wharton Global Youth: Do you have a favorite food to bake?

Sinn: I started baking because I love chocolate chip cookies and I couldn't go to the grocery store and get some, so I'm going to go with chocolate chip cookies.

Wharton Global Youth: Cool tech innovation that you can't wait to get your hands on?

Sinn: There's a group of tech innovations that's focused on brain-computer interface. You wear a headband and it will track your brain signals to play music when you want to or direct drones where you want them to go. Kind of sounds out of a sci-fi film, but it also has real medical applications for prosthetics, so I'm excited to see where that goes and I'd love to try one.

Wharton Global Youth: What company would you love to invest in?

Sinn: I would say Disney. Beyond the fact that I used to be a Disney model, they have a great multi-generational connection in diversity. Even with the pandemic when they had to pivot their business strategy, they found a way to bring people joy through digital entertainment, so definitely Disney.

Wharton Global Youth: Wait a minute, I'm messing up the lightning round again. What did you just say about yourself?

Sinn: When I was younger I used to be a Disney model. They had a show to encourage young parents with their babies called "Go, Baby!" and I was the female lead for that.

Wharton Global Youth: Wow! You truly are a celebrity! Okay, a product or service you consider a guilty pleasure?

Sinn: Tasty, a free recipe app for cooking and baking recipes. That's where I started with my improv baking and I go on it every day.

Wharton Global Youth: The business person you would most like to take to lunch, and why?

Sinn: I would love to have lunch with Dr. Lisa Su, CEO of Advanced Micro Devices, and her focus on semiconductors helps PCs and data centers perform high-performance computing. What I love about her is that she makes good calculated risks, she sticks to those bets and she inspires others to join her on a journey. She really turned around AMD from being a declining company to being one of the leading semiconductor companies in the world. As a fellow Asian-

Wharton Global Youth: Christine, I wish you luck with ScolioBend, especially since it's launching in January, and thank you for joining us on Future of the Business World.

Sinn: Thank you so much