

ADVENTURES IN AFRICA

Mackenzie Bailey gains unique experience working abroad with small business owners

by Natalie Bruckner-Menchelli

Mackenzie Bailey, BCom '15, understands that investing in people is key to building a successful business; so much so that when she was invited by a young female entrepreneur she was mentoring to drive eight hours on a packed bus, hike another three to a remote home in Dodoma, Tanzania, and subsequently slaughter a goat for dinner, she approached each task with the same amount of enthusiasm she approaches everything in her life.

“Looking back, it was a crazy experience. I was declared missing for two days! But I strongly believe in immersing myself into any situation. You need to take the successes, challenges and unexpected experiences for everything they offer,” says Bailey, who specialized in entrepreneurship at Gustavson and has spent time working in microfinance, human rights advocacy and at the home-grown African social enterprise The Great African Food Company.

The young entrepreneur in question was a lady named Banou. “She was born to a father who didn’t believe girls were worth educating. When I met Banou, she and her daughter were eating one meal a day, usually consisting of bread or a piece of fruit. Although Banou was illiterate, she was hungry to make a better life for her daughter. Together we created a business plan, raised the financing and hired the construction team to build her new store.



Bailey with small business owner Esther Angavu.



“Despite Banou not speaking a word of English, and me speaking only basic Swahili, we ended up forming an amazing friendship. The business changed everything for Banou and her daughter—I just was honoured to be a part of that transformation.”

When reflecting on the experience, Bailey notes, “My time in Africa was an interesting chapter for me. It underscored the value that comes from taking time to actively gain a deep understanding of the needs of the particular context that you’re in, and the people you serve. Solutions come from insights, and insights only happen when you analyze the context, think creatively, and have the humility to step outside yourself. Working in Africa definitely made me more confident; it allowed me to be versatile in my skill set, and creative in my problem solving.”

With a year in Africa behind her, and a desire to do a master’s degree in marketing overseas at a Global Top 40 business school, Bailey decided to enrol in the MSc in Marketing Strategy and Innovation at Cass Business School in London, England.

“I wanted to carve out an area of expertise and deep knowledge, and Cass Business School was a perfect choice. It offers a specialized program, and is linked into the business community in London and across Europe. We are exposed to the latest academic thinking, and fantastic insight from industry experts who are brought into the program as guest speakers.”

With a set of skills from her foundation at Gustavson, a unique global set of experiences from working and living abroad, and now studying in one of the world’s leading business hubs, Bailey is looking to the next exciting challenge.

When asked what the future holds, she says, “At the end of the day I do want to launch my own business. But I also recognize the benefits of learning from others. I think that there is value in building your relevant skill set and network, as this lets you control some of the risks that come with launching a business. Risk is central to entrepreneurship, but I think successful entrepreneurship is about taking smart risks, while controlling what factors you can.” ■