



# Going Global From Vancouver

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EIR Corner

## EIR Corner: Lessons learned in Silicon Valley

I recently sat down with four Centre4Growth clients who had each graduated from three-month programs in Silicon Valley. I wanted them to share the lessons they learned from that experience and how they brought those lessons home with them to Vancouver.

The CEOs and the programs they took part in are:

**Pavel Bains**, CEO, StoryPanda – 500 Startups

**Alexandra T. Greenhill**, CEO, myBestHelper.com - RocketSpace

**Katryn Harris**, CEO, VitalityLink - Plug and Play Tech Centre

**Jenny Yang**, CEO, MetaFor Software - Plug and Play Tech Centre

In speaking with Jenny, Katryn, Alexandra and Pavel, they were fairly consistent in how they benefited from the experience, what they learned, and what they're instilling into their own corporate cultures.

### 1. It's all about attitude: can do mindset + speed + go after it

All four CEOs named the "energy" in SV as one of the best parts of their experience. They consistently talked about Founders who had a vision for changing the world, not just making a widget. When we drilled down into the "what" made the energy so unique it came down to three things wrapped up in an attitude package. The three factors were mindset, speed & a go after it behaviour. **The mindset was one of 'can do'**; anything is possible, and if you think it you can do it. For example, Alexandra cited a presentation by the AirBnB Founders who said they wanted to make travel possible for anyone (=vision). It wasn't about letting people rent out their space (=widget to realize vision).

*"The energy and positive attitude in the Bay area is contagious. You can't help but feel like you can change the world when you're down there."*

*- Jenny Yang, CEO, Metafor Software*

**The speed was at full throttle.** Regardless of what you were doing, from thinking about something, to talking about it, to trying it, to testing it and making it better, it all happened FAST. Things didn't need to be perfect, you didn't wait and your lens was one of "how can we go faster".

**The 'go after it' factor tied nicely into mindset and speed.** Once you think of the impossible, you start to move FAST to achieve it. To achieve the so-called impossible then you needed to believe in it, i.e. it's not impossible but possible. The next step was to get others to believe in it and not let anything stand in your way of achieving it.

*"It was an amazing opportunity to connect with angels, VCs, other entrepreneurs and many, many people who are looking to change the world and build companies with a worldwide impact."*

*- Katryn Harris, CEO, VitalityLink*

## 2. Long-term Relationships: flat, generous, multi-sector

The way relationships are built is with a long-term horizon versus instant gratification. Pavel cited one connection who reiterated the importance of the first contact. You need to realize you could be building a mutually beneficial 20-year relationship, approach it as such.

The long view is implicit with the SV "flat" approach. It's not about connecting with someone who has a similar title (eg CEO to CEO, VP to VP) it's about connecting with like-minded individuals. Likewise, Katryn, Alexandra, Jenny and Pavel all experienced generosity. They found the SV community very open in sharing their networks and learnings.

*"My experience with 500 Startups in the SV allowed me to form valuable relationships that I would probably have never developed."*

*- Pavel Bains, CEO, StoryPanda*

And lastly, the open approach to meeting new people didn't extend to just the tech sector. The relationships and introductions were cross-sector. Someone with a psychology background might connect with someone on the product side where the expertise was helpful.

It seems how relationships are built 1:1 flows over into interactions between companies and the community. For example, Alexandra joined a tour open to the general public where you could stop at the most innovative companies and hear from their Founders. 80 companies hosted over 2,000 community members.

## 3. Do the Work: be prepared, ask, don't expect everything hand-delivered

The programs are the way to build a local base and have some doors opened but the work is up to you, the CEO.

In keeping with the 'speed' factor from 1) above you need to be able to hit the ground running by the time you land. That means well in advance of being in SV you need to determine who you want to meet, reach out to them (directly or via contacts) and schedule the meetings for when you arrive.

*"San Francisco has attracted the best and brightest can-do tech people from around the world - the exposure to their thinking and doing is #musthave for anyone seriously interested in building a global stellar tech business."*

*- Alexandra T Greenhill, CEO, myBestHelper.com*

It's also important to have a game-plan prior to arriving in SV. What is your ask? It might be pure learning, it might be advice on a particular challenge or it might be to start a relationship with long-term benefits over the next 20 years. The ask might vary based on who you're meeting with and what you've learned by the time you meet them. Just make sure to factor this into your planning.

From a logistical aspect, have everything set-up from accommodations to travel to other administrative details (eg insurance, local phone numbers, etc.). These are all items that take some time and you want to be

able to spend your time on the ground building value for your company.

Jenny, Katryn, Pavel and Alexandra all have brought back what they've learned from their time in Silicon Valley to their own corporate cultures. They've also continued to foster long-term relationships and building a local and global network. They know that although Vancouver is home base, the market of opportunities they can go after is global and it's big.

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### EIR Corner by Sandra Wear

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