

HAVE YOU EVER JUMPED OFF A CLIFF?

...Because that feeling of being disconnected is the only way I can think of to describe how it feels to join a team whose members crisscross the globe. Two weeks ago we were bundled together and thrown off a cliff - and we've experienced some thrilling sensations since, never really forgetting that our time to hit the ground has been rapidly approaching all the while.

On the way down I learned a lot - not only about collaborating across time zones, and not only about how impatient I can get waiting for another name to pop up on the "currently signed in" box (that I'm all but convinced was placed there exclusively for the purpose of driving me out of my mind). Not only these things, but also, and perhaps most importantly, how the team isn't created through physical presence alone. Our team was tied together by our common purpose, by our willingness and intention to be members of a world community - and I hope that after this competition is over I'll be able to find other ways to participate in a world that extends further than my city and my neighborhood.

This competition, for me, has come down to enjoying the fall while it lasts - even though there's been a part of me wondering, the whole time, what I will do after I finally reach the bottom?

My involvement with the Global Enterprise Experience started off somewhat by accident. I think I was surfing the web, looking for ways to interact with people overseas... I must have stumbled on to some link, because before I knew it I ended up on the GEE website. This was sometime back in January and I thought to myself, 'Sure, why not?' - so I signed up, with an impression that most people find their way to the competition through schools or business courses. Of course, after that I promptly forgot all about it.

A long while later, I receive an email: "Please submit a bio and we'll get this thing underway!"

Well, I'm not going to lie: actually forcing myself to sit down and write a bio took some energy. It doesn't seem like the sort of thing one would bother procrastinating about, but I guess in retrospect I was having commitment issues. I think this competition comes down to being in it, or... well, not.

It took me awhile to see that, but after I did, I realized how worthwhile this competition really is - and I decided that instead of treating it like something easy I was doing for fun, I would treat it as a priority. As something that I wanted (hint: still want) to *win*.

It took awhile for our project to get off the ground; I think a slow startup phase must be pretty common to this sort of thing, like building up steam. We started by submitting information about the indigenous cultures in our respective regions to try and hone in on which culture we could focus on. It felt great to share some information about the Australian Indigenous people (although I'm certainly no expert). One thing led to another and our team ended up focusing on Australia (you can't see it, but I'm waving our flag right now).

Our team worked really well together. I remember the first time that we actually felt like a team, too - our captain organized a meeting time with everybody and, yeah, I was a half hour late, but I made up for it with zeal. I never realized before how important that feeling of meeting really is - so much better than email, being able to collaborate in real time. I'm starting to understand why a person will fly around the world for a business meeting instead of simply picking up the telephone. Unfortunately I don't have the luxury of international flights, but meeting online was almost as good. As we were talking about ideas I started imagining voices and faces for my team mates; their words took on a life of their own. If I met them face to face I think I'd have some kind of embarrassing reaction, along the lines of 'Wow, you've really changed your face since we spoke last!'.

We eventually agreed on a product: Kangaroo meat. I thought it was nice

that it relates so directly to the indigenous people; it's essentially capitalizing on traditional skills and turning them into a profitable business. I really think consumers would go for it, too; I mean, who could prepare a kangaroo better than an actual Aboriginal person?

Yeah: so it's at this point that I started to feel nervous about subjugating an entire class of people. I'm used to writing about things I don't know much about, but this was fairly personal; I just hope nobody ever looks at our report and thinks, 'they think their superior', etc.

That feeling was fairly challenging for me.

We're in the final stages of editing right now; I'm so excited to submit the final product. I was put in charge of the presentation of the report, as well as getting to write a large section describing our merchandise, which makes me feel like I've really contributed.

At the same time, I don't really want to finish the challenge... it's only been a couple of weeks, barely enough time to really examine what we're doing and how we can interact.

When our team worked together, it really worked - our final product is evidence of that. When we were uncommunicative, it drove me crazy; I couldn't focus, I felt unsupported - but, as a result of working as an independent agent, an autonomous member of a larger group, I gained confidence. If changes needed to be made, I needed to make them. If I wanted something done, I had to do it *myself* - not because no one else could, but because it would take longer to explain to them what the task was and ask them to do it, than simply to see it through on my own.

I learned that an international team like ours needs decisive leadership and vision, and we had that in abundance; I learned that each of us possess skills and ideas necessary to our project. Most importantly, I learned that a healthy team is built from people who are dedicated and willing to jump up whenever they have an idea that might help, and I was lucky because I doubt every team was as dedicated and willing as mine. ●