



Photography by Afribun

A PERSONAL MBA

REAWAKENING A GLOBAL MINDSET



A comfortable path was laid out for **Eddy Vaisberg '08**; the roadmap was clear. But Vaisberg didn't want comfort, and the type of clarity he sought could only be found by forging his own unique path.

BY MICHELLE CHOATE





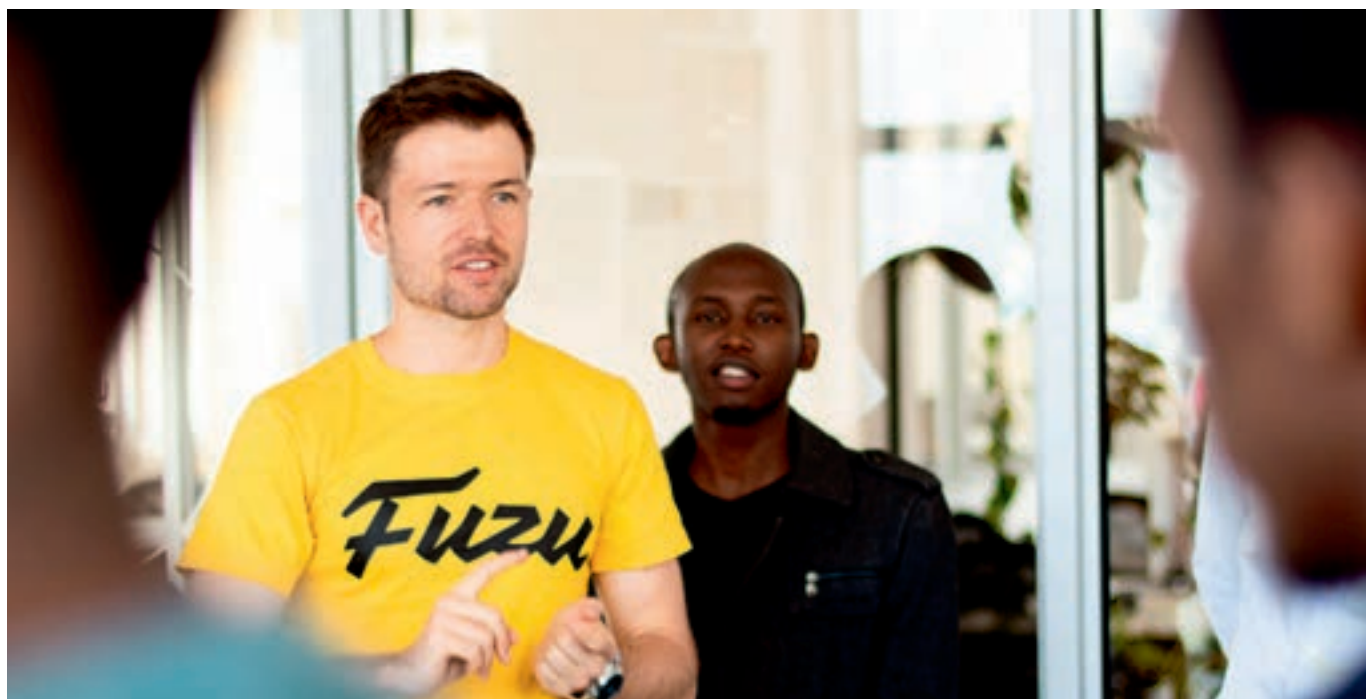
VAISBERG GRADUATED FROM DARTMOUTH COLLEGE IN 2012 and accepted an attractive position at the renowned Boston Consulting Group (BCG). In the eyes of many, he was in an enviable position. Vaisberg spent his first five years with BCG working on projects up and down the West Coast, as well as in Australia and Europe, engaged in challenging work that enhanced his skill set. His future was virtually guaranteed: attend an MBA program financed by BCG, graduate with a nice job waiting for him back at the firm, and continue the professional trajectory that had been followed by so many.

Instead, Vaisberg opted for a more uncertain and unpredictable journey—and that has made all the difference. He now finds himself working for a seed-stage startup in Kenya and Uganda, making great progress on his more personal goals and reawakening the global mindset he had forgotten meant so much to him.

GETTING FROM THERE TO HERE

Vaisberg currently serves as the COO of Fuzu, Ltd., the fastest-growing online career platform in Africa, with more than five million users. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, Fuzu (a Swahili verb meaning to qualify, progress, graduate, succeed) is a website that guides individuals to achieve their career ambitions. The platform has two sides: the job seeker side provides free access to more than 250 online courses and personalized guidance to help prospective employees gain the skills and professional awareness to become marketable to employers. On the employer side, Fuzu has created a way for companies to better identify potential employees through personality profiles and competency assessments.

Given the population demographics and education models in East Africa, Fuzu is providing a critical service. The greatest percentage of the population in East Africa is very young. In






Uganda, for example, the average age is 16 years old, and the population there and in other African nations is growing at a tremendous pace. Over the next 20 years, 500 million people are expected to join the workforce, most of them with a college degree. In Uganda, there are 400,000 higher-education graduates per year, but only about 100,000 jobs created each year, contributing to an unemployment rate for recent graduates of 65 percent.

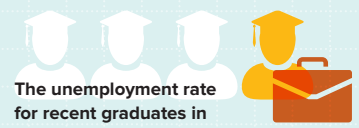
However, the lack of suitable jobs is only part of the problem. “According to the World Economic Forum, 70 percent of graduates are not employable at the point of graduation because most of them need to learn basics, like how to write a CV, how to prepare for a job interview, and how to act in a professional environment,” Vaisberg explains. “This harsh reality is the result of the educational system in countries like Kenya and Uganda being very focused on rote memorization. Graduates have very little experience with applied knowledge and creative thinking. The education provides limited career development and neither mentorship nor guidance programs to support that transition from graduation to employment.”

Essentially, Fuzu’s mission is to support hundreds of millions of junior and senior professionals who suffer from the same challenges by creating a vehicle for them to advance their careers in the face of such a skew between education and experience, supply and demand.

Where does Vaisberg fit into all this? “As COO, I am leading all Africa operations across marketing, business development, customer service and content creation,” says Vaisberg. “I am in charge of market expansion efforts and creating the detailed strategy and implementation plan to ensure the organization is well-positioned for our Series A funding round.”



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REAWAKENING A GLOBAL MINDSET

Vaisberg didn't just leave BCG one day to fly to Africa and join Fuzu the next. Like most personal journeys, his was influenced by experiences and personal goals, which grew and changed as he did.

"I've always loved learning new things and discovering new perspectives. And when I was at LJCDS, the community service projects taught me that the world is bigger than me and the people I interact with on a daily basis," says Vaisberg. "In some ways, it probably paved the path to where I am now, spending so much time in the emerging world." But Vaisberg admits that his desire for a more global perspective was lost in the background noise during his time in college and at BCG.

A yearlong stint in Australia with BCG's Ambassador Program started to awaken that old curiosity and the desire for new perspectives. "That's where the journey started for me in terms of having a broader global mindset," says Vaisberg. "The friends I made in Australia—and while backpacking through Southeast Asia on my way back to the U.S.—were from diverse backgrounds with different life objectives and ways of thinking about life. They all had traveled quite a bit, but not just for travel's sake; they were combining travel with more meaningful experiences that enriched them in different ways."

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UNDERGOING A “PERSONAL MBA”

Vaisberg returned to the U.S. with a plan to forgo a traditional MBA program and leave BCG for a year to travel through Africa, Southeast Asia, India and Latin America. “I love BCG. I feel it was a phenomenal launching pad for me,” says Vaisberg. “But growing up in the BCG world, you surround yourself with amazing, like-minded people. I’m sure MBA programs are filled with phenomenal people like at Dartmouth and BCG, but they’re all going to offer—for the most part—perspectives that are very similar to what I’m used to. Going out and traveling on my own and having this experience that I made for myself would introduce me to entirely different perspectives.”

He envisioned his new journey, which he referred to as his “personal MBA,” as largely consisting of travel, but also wanting to accomplish three important goals: “First, I wanted to work for a bit at a startup, because with BCG I had only been exposed to the corporate side of business. Second, I wanted to get work experience in an emerging market, because all of my prior experience was in the developed or Western world. And third, but equally significant to me, I wanted to do some spiritual development throughout that year.”

On Vaisberg’s last consulting project for BCG, he met the CEO of Fuzu. Upon leaving for Africa, Vaisberg reached out to the CEO and arranged to stop by the startup and volunteer for a while. He ended up staying with Fuzu for four months, then headed to India for four months, where he checked off some of his spiritual goals. “I did a 10-day Vipassana meditation course, which completely changed my outlook and encouraged me to open my mind as much as possible to whatever comes,” explains Vaisberg. “The experience was quite intense: 10 days of meditation, no talking, no eye contact with other people, no access to phones or books—just 10 days of you and your thoughts, 12–14 hours of meditating per day. It was absolutely transformational.”

TO SUCCEED

When he left India, Vaisberg stopped at Fuzu for what he expected to be a short stay before heading out to his next destination, Argentina. But Vaisberg never made it to Argentina. He became Fuzu’s COO almost immediately and has been there for close to two years.

“Ultimately there were a few key things that ended up selling me on staying,” says Vaisberg. “I viewed Fuzu as a learning lab. I get to be the number two for the company, which is the perfect place for me. I’m involved with every major decision but don’t have the full weight of the company and all the stakeholders on my shoulders. By the time I joined, Fuzu was almost two years old, so I get to play a very critical role in a startup that I didn’t have to build from scratch. I also saw it as an opportunity to learn and try new things, new management and coaching tactics. I could succeed, or even fail, without all of the pressure of Fuzu being my own company.”



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Fuzu’s CEO also knew how to excite his adventurous young COO, offering Vaisberg the opportunity to launch the platform in Uganda on his own. “Without knowing anyone in Uganda, and without knowing how the market there worked, I got to dig in and figure it out—and experience the professional adventure I was craving,” Vaisberg says.

Vaisberg also saw Fuzu’s potential to impact millions of lives and wanted to play a role in making a positive difference. While supporting the company’s broader mission, Vaisberg felt a great responsibility to ensure the company’s future success. “Had I not stayed, the chances of the company pulling through would have been less,” Vaisberg says. “I feel a great deal of pressure to make sure the company is in a place to continue and succeed, and make the impact it has the potential to make for so many young people in Africa.”

TO PROGRESS

Vaisberg currently works 80–90 hours a week, and he is the first to admit this is not a pace he can sustain long-term. As is his way, he is keeping his options open for the future, for his next opportunity for adventure and personal growth—but not before he accomplishes a few key things for Fuzu. “I have always seen my primary role as bringing the company from seed stage to Series A,” explains Vaisberg. “Once that is achieved, I plan to keep my options open—whether that is staying at Fuzu to help drive the next phase of growth and expansion into West Africa or finding a completely new path.”

While he’s not sure where his “personal MBA” will take him next, he is heading forward with an open mind in typical Vaisberg fashion. Whatever he ends up doing, his choices will not be influenced by what is most comfortable or traditional. “I’m looking for something exciting, something that I’ll be passionate about and where I can make a big impact,” says Vaisberg. “Of course, I would like to come closer to home at some point, but if I don’t find what I’m hoping for, I’m not married to that idea. I’ll go wherever the opportunity takes me.” ■