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Problem/Empathy & Interview Report

Endless problems exist in the world, and each day they increase in complexity. Solving problems becomes a necessity to entrepreneurs, but narrowing down which to tackle is a chore. When so many pervasive and time-sensitive issues exist, identifying problems is easy, but finding passion in said problems can make or break an idea. I considered racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, food insecurity, body image issues, financial instability, homelessness, and the fight against anti-homeless architecture. A simple product or service cannot solve these issues, but I can help reduce some prevalent problems. To narrow down my search, I examined the issues that affect those closest to me. I found one overarching problem each student I spoke with has had their respective journey, and none have yet to find a completely effective solution; stress management and mental health resources.

Stress and anxiety are prevalent among both high school and college students. While the general public is aware that stress levels within the student and young adult population are growing at an alarming rate (Bethune), no one has cracked the code on why we can't manage our stress. During my interviews, I discovered that students do not know how to manage their time, and the American school system has not taught them effective time-management methods (Aeon). Given that I am in two exclusive Honors and Entrepreneurship based cohorts, standard Honors, I hold five positions in Kappa Delta, I serve on two committees in the Business Honors Academy, I have an internship, and I participate in countless other involvements, I understand the struggle that accompanies college life. Even with these commitments, it was still impossible for me to get involved with all the extracurriculars I wanted. The expectations to be involved are high with the daunting pressure to fill an impressive enough resume to get noticed in the workforce. The second semester of my college career was the worst couple of months of my life. Yes, we were (and currently are) amidst a pandemic in which we are anxiously living each day with the hope that there will be another, but with that came a compacted semester with more content than regular semesters (for the academy) and no breaks. In addition to my preexisting mental health issues, I struggled through the semester to the point where I was unsure I would survive. I was exhausted, burnt out, in classes for which I had no passion, and I performed worse in my classes than ever in my life. The only things that got me through were the relationships I was fortunate enough to form first semester and my North Dakota therapist I could speak with, given the U.S. waived the licensing laws due to Covid-19. My story may seem like an extreme example, but every person I know has been afflicted with stress or anxiety. We all would benefit significantly from a resource in which we learned adequate time and stress-management techniques, could find mental health resources, created a calendar, and had a network capable of supporting our individual needs.

There is no singular solution to stress and anxiety, especially since there are endless stressors and anxiety-inducing situations. With this in mind, I envision an app that can process and understand the needs of its users and provide a Hub for time and stress management tools, tips, techniques, and resources available to help students. Though this idea is clearer in drawings and a prototype I have yet to complete, the basic principle of the app goes as follows:

After the app download, users input the information they wish the app team to know; this includes preferred name, gender identity and pronouns, sexual orientation, and problems or challenges they currently face. This information must be optional to ensure the app caters to the users' needs. However, the more information the users submit, the better understanding the app team can gather to match them with the content and resources they need. After the initial information is submitted, the user can check boxes from a comprehensive list regarding their afflictions and whether or not they desire content and resources for that topic. Content users can select includes but is not limited to: calendars with suggested schedules in which users can input their desired amount of time to dedicate toward each thing, a resource center for all the user's concerns, daily tips and tricks that can help with the user's afflictions, mood and anxiety journals, reminders- intended for reminders to eat for those with poor relationships with food,- sleep logs, exercise logs, and anonymous text submissions in the app to which certified professionals respond. A few things to note about the app's design; the users' profiles are anonymous, and they control their content via a selection process in Settings. The professionals that respond to submissions have verified profiles the app team has vetted and approved, and their profiles are visible to the users to whom they respond. Should the user decide the professional is not a good match, they can submit a review and request a change. There are no networking capabilities with other users because I intend this app to create a safe support system for students, and anonymous users bully or berate people more intensely than if their profiles were visible.

Stress in students today is amplified by multiple factors that are simply not going anywhere. Social media and smartphones are here to stay, but there must be an effective way to leverage the existing technology to create a solution that helps create and build healthy habits and encourage mental health to present itself at the forefront of students' minds. One in ten students states they have never intentionally allowed time for stress management. This colossal thirteen percent of students who have reported they do not allow time for stress management is a small fraction of the complexity surrounding stress and anxiety (Bethune). For example, family pressure and standards often enforce the idea that mental health issues are not legitimate and do not warrant action. Students raised in households such as this are not aware of how to process their emotions and manage stress because they were never encouraged or allowed to do so. While I cannot change each family's views on mental health, I understand from experience how parents' denying validation and privacy can lead to severe anxiety that can ultimately affect physical health, performance, and overall well-being.

Society would benefit enormously from improved mental health both economically and socially. One of the reasons people do not seek mental health resources and professional help is the process of seeking out a good match. Therapy is an excellent solution, but finding a therapist with your desired area of specialization and is a good match is a daunting challenge to most people. Even as a therapy veteran, I despise the prospect of needing to seek out another person who I would have to start over again with my life story, trauma, and anxiety troubles. When I moved to Nebraska, I needed a new therapist after the U.S. lifted the Covid-19 licensing law waivers. Though I knew I needed a new therapist, it took me an entire year before I was mentally ill enough to make the challenges of the therapist search worth my effort. Some students do not have that long to find adequate help. Additionally, according to Science Daily, an increase in one poor mental health day per month can lead to a decrease in income growth

potential per capita of 1.84 percent. Though schools and universities may be averse to investing in a product they believe provide the same services as their mental health resources, they would greatly benefit from avoiding the \$53 billion loss in total income by investing in their students with an accessible and effective app.

I interviewed three students to get their feedback on the general state of their lives and stresses. I interviewed two of my Business Honors Academy classmates, Colby and Drake, Actuarial Science and Economics/Finance majors respectively, and my friend Sarah, an International Relations and Liberal Arts Economics major at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I generated questions based on what I needed as a baseline to determine their stress levels. I also asked questions that would help me gauge interest in the app and the features that would appeal to its target market the most. I asked the following questions:

1. Would you use a stress management app?
2. What would get you to use a stress management app?
3. Do you currently have a stress management app?
4. Would you pay for a stress management app?
5. What are your current stress management techniques?
6. Would you say that you are reactive or ahead of your stress?
7. What do you enjoy?
8. How is your eating?
9. How is your sleeping?

Though I asked these questions to all three students, I dove into specifics depending on the person and direction of the conversation. I learned that no students are willing to pay for a stress management app, though all would find great benefit from one that works effectively. Many students have apps intended to help them manage stress, but none are satisfied with the apps' performance. Capabilities that would draw their interests to the app are:

- Scheduling capabilities
 - Scheduling breaks, prioritizing due dates, needs, and wants, efficient use of time
- Resources for time management
- Mental health resources in one place
 - Creating a Hub in which students do not have to search outside the app to find resources they need
- Accessibility to all students
- Better/more efficient studying
 - Help students pay attention and increase awareness

The interviewees did not have stress management techniques, but all students responded they stress-eat or forget to eat due to stress. The three students all responded their strategies are reactive rather than proactive, and all students desire and would benefit from proactive stress management. Stresses students face include school, homework, work, finances, time pressures, social anxiety, work/life/social balance, and mental health concerns. Stress management techniques the interviewees have tried are working out, sleeping, eating, therapy, and meditating. Two of the three students reported that their sleeping and eating schedules and quality were irregular and not satisfying, though all three reported they find these essential to their overall wellbeing. Though I performed outside research on mental health in students and teenagers, I relied more heavily on input from my peers. Society is aware mental health is

declining; the statistics exist to support this idea. I, however, wanted to focus on the app before I dive into the entirety of the market.

Citations

Aeon, Brad. "Students Struggle with Time Management. Schools Can Help (Opinion)." *Education Week*, Education Week, 3 May 2021, www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-students-struggle-with-time-management-schools-can-help/2020/02.

"American Psychological Association Survey SHOWS Teen Stress Rivals That of Adults." *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/02/teen-stress.

"Poor Mental Health Days May Cost the Economy Billions of Dollars." *ScienceDaily*, ScienceDaily, 30 July 2018, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/07/180730120359.htm#:~:text=07%2F180730120359.htm-,Poor%20mental%20health%20may%20cost%20businesses%20nearly%20as%20much%20as,less%20total%20income%20each%20year.

Appendix

Brad Aeon. "The Philosophy of Time Management." TEDxConcordia. Dec. 19, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXBA4eWskrc>

Questions and Responses:

1. Would you use a stress management app?
 - Yes
 - Yes
 - Yes
2. What would get you to use a stress management app?
 - Being able to schedule stuff (commitments, keep work, classes, personal, and other separate)
 - Being able to schedule breaks
 - Prioritizing what is necessary and due
 - Importance
 - Due
 - Wants versus needs
 - Resources for mental health
 - Resources for time management

- Resources and help to study better and use time more effectively
 - Help with increasing attention and focus in classes
3. Do you currently have a stress management app?
- Yes
 - meditation /sleep app
 - No
 - No
4. Would you pay for a stress management app?
- No
 - No
 - No
5. What are your current stress management techniques?
- Prioritize things
 - Netflix
 - Talking to my mom
 - Stress eating
 - Sleeping
 - Working out
 - Don't have one; I just hope I don't end up with an ulcer again
6. Would you say that you are reactive or ahead of your stress?
- Reactive
 - Reactive
 - Reactive
7. What do you enjoy?
- Hanging out with dog
 - Hanging out with parents or calming people
 - Watching TV
 - Post-workout feeling
8. How is your eating?
- When available
 - Not content with it
 - Not balanced
9. How is your sleeping?
- 6-7 hours
 - 2-3 less than she wants
 - There is not any sort of a schedule
 - 7-8 hours

- would you be willing to pay for it? → not unless it was valued

- what do you know and insurance? → negative
→ essentially counteracting to reduce risk

