

Where My Journey Began (age 24). Click [here](#).

Fast forward...

2022: My Year of Kintsugi

- Jan 2022 began my sabbatical from Arizona State
- Prioritized my “confidence gaps” and mental health through nature, creative expression, therapy
- Incorporated ZENertainment April 2022 in Phoenix, AZ
- Researched trends in education and my own professional interest to explore in my next chapter (global and interdisciplinary approaches, mental health, the arts, tech, practical skills and personalized learning)
- Reached out to global thinkers in various countries/industries to learn what they were prioritizing, share high level vision for ZENertainment

2023: Baby Steps Are Still Steps. Just Start.

- **2023 Action Plan:**
  1. Complete a business plan by March 2023
  2. Complete 36mo It Still Takes A Village project plan by Jan 2023 w/launch initiatives by Dec 2023
  3. Secure funding from at least two multi-year sponsors by Dec 2023
  4. Build New Avenues proof of concept app and ZEN website by Dec 2023
  5. Hire new teammates by Dec 2023
- **Jan 2023 Source Tech Options:** I used Bumble Bizz, LinkedIn, and other platforms to locate universities/programs/professors seeking project-based learning business partners. Found RIIPEN which connects businesses to universities for work-integrated learning experiences for students. Free to businesses, but hefty price tag for schools. Not lots of niche course options, which limited the student’s skills/ experiences needed for our projects. Limited geographical range, primarily Canadian schools with some presence in the US. End of semester surveys aren’t customizable for the business partner or campus; they’re prepopulated. Badges to show Project-Based Learning (PBL) status as a business partner isn’t very beneficial, I’d prefer some other promotional option that can be shared across other networks to highlight my advocacy for PBL and membership to an ecosystem that champions this model. Professors seem to be hands-off/not the most invested in the business partner projects; feels like they have a “break” from teaching and can spend time doing other things while still getting paid to “teach” their course.
- **University/Project 1:** Software engineering capstone course. Never met professor. Didn’t understand student outcomes/scope of work in their class/program, so I had no way to identify how to structure the semester to benefit their learning while also ensuring execution of my needs as the business partner. I met with the learning team each week from Feb-April for 60-90min each session. Terrible communication from the leadership team. Did not fulfill their contract obligations/never delivered the wireframe for the app and I didn’t have legal counsel to enforce the contract. No feedback provided by students or professor.
- **University/Project 2:** Talent Acquisition Consultancy course. Students didn’t seem to understand the connection between their classroom instruction and the business project. I didn’t seem to have clear expectations/understanding of final deliverables although I met with and emailed the professor of the business goals several times prior to the start of the semester. I didn’t have weekly check-ins with learning teams to understand their progress as

most were nontraditional students who worked full-time while attending school in an asynchronous format. I was unable to record the introductory meetings. Students were instructed not to facilitate a debrief session or complete the final insights form I prepared to understand their learning journey. The final deliverables were scripted and not tailored to the specific roles that my company was planning to hire for, so somewhat defeated the purpose of walking away with a talent acquisition plan for each role.

- [University/Project 3](#): Business management capstone course. Students on the business plan/pitch deck team were significantly underdeveloped to take on the responsibility of the deliverables and I was under the impression that they were experienced business students. I was not equipped to be leading the group on the elements of a business plan, my understanding is that the students would be consulting/advising me. The level of communication and initiative was quite minimal for most members of the group.
- [University/Project 4](#): This team seemed to have more life and professional experience, more thorough in their deliverables and took more initiative to research and find their answers, despite not having many directly related skills, understanding or experience with respect to the assigned projects. Had a hands-off professor who had more of an open-door policy and was prompt in responding to communication, but I was not provided with clear understanding of student's final deliverables or what has/was being taught during the in-class portion of the collaborative project.
- [University/Project 5](#): These learning teams were underdeveloped, and the level of communication and initiative was quite. The professor was hands-off until initial deliverables were approaching deadlines and took over communicating on behalf of the learning teams. The quality of work that was submitted was subpar for the university level, but to keep a positive attitude I shared encouragement as often as possible.
- Other Findings/Resource Challenges:
  1. **Operations**: There should be a better system to source talent for learning teams, partner universities, and for the future, there should be Project-Based Learning Guides who oversee these projects not Marisha.
  2. **Multimedia/Tech**: No systematic method to document meetings/student learning or ability to record for future L&D needs.
  3. **Global Thinkers**: no database to house contacts or system for outreach (email campaigns for social participation, partnerships, etc.). Limited time/resources to communicate benefits of aligning or offerings to make aligning more valuable.
  4. **Funding & HR**: No funding outside of family help to cover costs of incubating these project-based learning concepts. Marisha was the project team lead, the experience designer, and all other hats on the ZENertainment end. Not sustainable for high quality, high impact projects; funding will be essential to cover operations and scaling plans.
- Project-Based Learning Solutions:
  1. Don't tie projects to courses, instead they should be offerings from campus partner resources, i.e. campus internship/career centers; alternatively PBLCs activations designed by learning teams, etc.
  2. Learners must be selected from an application and interview process that requires letters of recommendation and portfolio
  3. Implement pre-project evaluation to assess knowledge/skills prior to approval □ New Avenues app

4. Student stipends and project budget needed; hourly? Base rate per project? Still undecided
  5. Student/Talent insights form should be updated to ensure we're tracking and reporting on essential metrics from the student lens as well as partner organizations where learners/PBLGs are sourced
  6. Hire learning team guides based on expertise needed for each future project; stipends provided
  7. ID project-based learning platform to document learner's journey
  8. Secure PBLCs (funding and pipeline development for talent and learning teams)
- **2023 Year End Summary:** To date, ZENertainment has managed over 75 modern learners who have collaborated with peers from different countries on joint projects bridging education and industry. These collaborations highlight the power of project-based learning, intergenerational and cross-cultural competence, content-driven experiences and entertainment programming, as well as social enterprises. Our agency champions these solutions as new avenues for socially conscious brands seeking fresh approaches to amplify their stories while simultaneously serving as innovative pathways for modern learners to gain knowledge, skills, and relationships with leaders in essential industries of the future. We leveraged these solutions for our own startup social enterprise needs and intend to use media and entertainment to spotlight our findings. Over the course of the year, Marisha completed 6 projects with teams made up of 3-6 learners, each committing an average of 10-20 hours weekly. There were several unforeseen challenges in partnering with each university/professor, but invaluable lessons were illuminated on how to modify programming for future learning teams.

Of the five priorities we intended to execute by the end of 2023, we have only completed half of them to an exemplary/satisfactory level, which include the 48-month It Still Takes A Village capacity campaign project plan (updated from a 36-month project plan), although none of the initial launch projects were started, they were modified once the Fall '23 teams were selected. We also completed the proof of concept for the New Avenues app and ZEN website, although we only have the code and not the front-end development, so nothing to show for that PBL collaboration except for the video from each project meeting and demo day. No business plan was sufficiently completed by the learning team that was assigned that project. No funding was secured nor were there attempts to do so. Lastly, no new hires were made, however the talent acquisition plans were developed by learner project teams. The relationships that were built and the content that was developed by the Strategic Engagement teams positioned us to have a better approach to execute our previous and future goals. The plan was to stay behind the scenes and create a proof of concept to determine how ZENertainment would operate. We will use the months of December 2023 and January 2024 to recalibrate (personal wellbeing) and reorganize (professionally) to move forward more efficiently and sustainably.

2024: Keep The Momentum But Be Smart.

- **2024 Action Plan:**
  1. Secure funding from at least two multi-year sponsors by Dec 2024
  2. Soft launch New Avenues digital enrichment center by Oct 2024 (World Mental Health Day)
  3. Secure at least 2 advisors and 3 of the 10 executive team member by Aug 2024
  4. Incorporate a mid-year review not just end of year review to pivot where/however necessary
  5. Continue research but ensure it is funded and in partnership with value-aligned institution(s)

- Dec-Feb: Used the time to reassess organizational priorities, the strategy and how to tactically approach/ execute those priority goals.
- March-April: Began organizing [The Ubuntu Project](#) by reaching out to a project team of college students and recent college graduates, connecting with mental health professionals and creatives from 10 US markets, and determining how this project could be used to drive priority business goals (i.e. building community around core values, funding/revenue generation, talent engagement/recruitment). Also connected with the former Head of Partnerships at Twitch for mentoring on how to create a partnership/sponsor deck and general advice on navigating major, multi-year partnerships as well as mindset for pursuing entrepreneurship.
- May: Hosted the month-long mental health awareness virtual activations. Trying to manage all the moving pieces prior to getting a team in place made it challenging to fully bring the mental health month initiative to life according to the vision. It was a positive initiative with very insightful feedback that we were able to get from collaborators [here](#). Marisha also began committing time to researching potential advisors who are value-aligned, global thinkers, well connected/resourced, and committed to social impact for historically underestimated talent. The candidates would serve to significantly move the needle forward on future organizational priorities, now that there were several projects under the ZENertainment umbrella completed to show a proof of concept, gaps in both the industry and in expertise/skill within the agency, as well as opportunities for growth/impact.
- June: Marisha shared mid-year review prompts with the team to complete by June 26<sup>th</sup> for 1:1 calls and hosted a team debrief call in early June to check in on everyone personally and to assess their time with ZENertainment during the Ubuntu project (they used [this insights form](#) to help facilitate the team debrief call). Two of the six Ubuntu Project teammates were unable to continue collaboration with ZENertainment due to new work assignments, but the remaining four stayed on to help however they could based on their availability and needed skills. In the last two weeks, three of those four teammates got new FT jobs as stability became a huge priority, so their availability has been significantly reduced at this point, leaving only one who is available to help with ZENertainment full time, although nobody has been compensated which is a huge priority to keep good people on board. Two organizations that worked with our agency during The Ubuntu Project ([Grey Box Collective](#) as well as [Bring Change to Mind](#)) became “mock clients” for us to support them with their strategy planning to improve their reach/visibility and drive new customers/talent and programming offerings to their organizations. This was also a way for ZEN to immerse the team in the learning of how we think about developing personalized, strategies and experiential offerings for prospective clients, but also to show how we can integrate service-learning for these organizations to help meet their goals while considering how to create separate and distinct offerings that are equally valuable to their end users/stakeholders. Had at least one discovery call with four prospective advisors; two are really aligned. Still solidifying details/next steps on this priority goal.
- July: complete [mid-year reviews](#) and firm up strategic plan for the remainder of 2024-2025. The mid-year reviews and strategic plan will help us to determine how to roll out the project initiatives, the “empowering future leaders through interdisciplinary service-learning” program, funding and HR goals, etc.