Sealing the Deal

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The Changemaker Institute at Tulane hosted Tim Williamson of Idea Village and Stephanie Potter of Youth Venture in a workshop to integrate storytelling skills into the toolboxes of budding New Orleans-based social entrepreneurs. The workshop on the uptown campus was one in a series of lectures meant to be, according to Potter, "a safe space for [students] to get the building blocks to think through a social venture."

Making the case that New Orleans was "the greatest entrepreneurial opportunity of our lifetimes," Williams noted that in the past five years, growth in New Orleans startup businesses has been high above the national average and that New Orleans is host to more Teach for America participants than any other U.S. city. In addition, Williams observed that the Big Easy has been on the cover of *Entrepreneur* magazine twice, featured as a notable model of growth since Hurricane Katrina.

Next, the workshop, which was held on Sept. 30, addressed how to employ structural storytelling elements to spark the interest of financial backers. Potter described an effective message as simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional and couched as a story.

"You've got to be creative," Williamson added.

Toward the end of the session, the speakers created scenarios in which students were expected to elicit the cooperation of potential investors through storytelling skills.

One student, Doug Jacobs, bounded forward to offer his own plan for sustainable aquaponic farming, which combines fish farming and plant cultivation in a symbiotic

relationship. In the scenario, Jacobs managed to explicate his plan to a distracted investor, and succeeded in "sealing the deal."

Tanvi Shah, another participant planning to invest herself in [social entrepreneurship](#), said the workshop showed her the importance of quickly grabbing the audience with a pitch. She plans to continue participating in the workshop [series](#).

"[Social entrepreneurship] is different from volunteering, charity and service learning in that there is self-discovery in the process," she said. "You have to know what your purpose is before you can really help others."

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