



Each year speakers at the Walter E. Heller College of Business Signature Luncheon look at business leadership from a different perspective. This May the event featured Adam Braun, the CEO of a growing philanthropic organization called Pencils of Promise that builds schools, trains teachers and funds scholarships in impoverished cities and villages in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

In 2005 at the age of 21 Braun was on a ship that hit a 60-foot wave and nearly capsized. At that moment the Brown University graduate became obsessed with his legacy. “I knew it wasn’t my time, but I started to wonder what is my purpose in life?” he told the nearly 200 people at the luncheon held at the Palmer House Hilton Hotel.

Shortly later, while traveling abroad he met a young boy begging on the streets of India. When Braun asked the boy what he wanted most in the world, he simply answered, “a pencil.” After meeting that child, Braun decided to commit his life to helping children in third world countries achieve an education. “If your dreams don’t scare you, they aren’t big enough,” he said, explaining his decision to make a life-altering change.

Braun quit his job at Bain & Company, the global management consulting firm, and asked his friends to help support his new venture call Pencils of Promise. He initially netted \$22,000 from 650 people and began what he calls a “for purpose organization.”

“Evaluating companies only as “non-profit” or “for-profit” does an injustice to the emerging landscape of business,” he said. “It’s too limited. We need to add a second axis, where companies are also equally evaluated as ‘for-purpose’ or ‘non-purpose’ to reflect the social benefit they provide to society.”

Since its founding, Pencils of Promise has built 217 schools, served 22,536 students and delivered 15,000 hours of education. And according to Entrepreneur.com, “Pencils of Promise is turning growth numbers that would please even the most competitive venture capitalist.”