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Lafayette Book Store Supports Budding Entrepreneur

By Sophie Braccini



(L-R) Asma Abu-Taleb, Linda Grana, Dave Simpson and Aleks Sedzielarz working in the Lafayette Book Store Photo Sophie Braccini

they ended up giving up on the dream. "They understood that the job was just as glamorous as they had expected, but on the other hand I gave them a reality check, and the complexity scared them off," said Simpson.

Abu-Taleb was not discouraged by Simpson's warnings. The resident of Amman has friends in United States who told her about the program. "I went online and started browsing all the different possibilities they have for a 'Vocation Vacation,'" she remembers, "when I saw the bookstore I immediately contacted them." She took the opportunity of a planned vacation in the United States to meet with Simpson and his team. "I learned so much in a short period of time," said Abu-Taleb at the party, "we worked with Dave on the business plan, the financing and the logistics. Now I'll have to localize it." She now has additional ideas to consider, such as a used book section, an internet store, and the facilitation of book clubs.

The experience has been interesting for Simpson as well. "I had spent hours before, for the mother/daughter team, to establish a curriculum," said Simpson, "I reviewed it for Asma with an international perspective that was different than my business-as-usual practice." Simpson then spent two days focusing on Asma and her business project. She shadowed him around the bookstore and, together with the team, they brainstormed her specific business plan. "In the process, I thought of new international angles for my own business," said Simpson.

For Abu-Taleb the next step was to meet with the Vocation Vacation coach to talk about implementation steps. She seemed pretty confident about her chances to start a business in Jordan. "There is only one major traditional bookstore in Amman," she says, "the way Dave manages his business is different and I think I have an opportunity to seize." She is back there now, armed with Simpson's experience. "I have promised to continue to consult with her pro bono," adds Simpson, "I'd like to see her succeed."

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Dave Simpson enjoys throwing parties for the community. Locals and book lovers come to his Lafayette Book Store, sip wine and browse through the offering of new and used books; there is always something or someone special at these events. On January 7th, the party was for Asma Abu-Taleb, a Jordanian woman who hopes to become a bookseller, and who just concluded a "Vocation Vacation" with Simpson and his team to figure out if owning a bookstore is indeed the right endeavor to pursue.

"Vocation Vacation is a national company that connects people with the job of their dreams," says Susan Critten, a career coach in Lafayette who consults with the company, "For a fee, individuals interested in a career spend two days shadowing a mentor in the profession they are interested in. The vacation is preceded and followed by a coaching session to assess their needs." Right now the company offers more than 175 different 'vacations' with mentors in such professions as cheese maker, green home builder and schooner captain; Simpson is their bookstore mentor.

"When I first heard about Vocation Vacation from Susan I immediately agreed to be their bookstore partner," said Simpson, "teaching and transmitting my passion is one of the things I love to do." Simpson mentored a mother/daughter a few months ago, but