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Entrepreneur Lecture Series: Davis Smith, Founder of Cotopaxi

A Company with Heart

By Ashley Brasseaux

After graduating with his bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University, Davis Smith and his wife decided to take an unpaid internship in Peru. While in Cusco, they met many locals who played barefoot in the city center. One in particular named Edgar, insisted on shining Davis's tennis shoes with his shoe shining kit to earn money. Davis, intrigued by little Edgar's persistence, allowed the little boy to shine his shoes. The day before Davis and his wife left Cusco, they found Edgar crying in despair. When asked, Edgar explained that his shoe shining kit had been stolen the night before. Davis gave Edgar the little money he had in his pocket, and the next morning as Davis and his wife were leaving, he saw that Edgar had bought a big bag of candy that he was now selling individually to the other children in the street. Davis felt compassion towards the rough circumstances these children faced and knew he would be back one day to help them.

Davis's first business was pooltables.com, a business he started by selling pool tables from his aunt's basement. As the business grew he eventually opened a store and grew the business, but after six years he sold the company and decided to go back to school.

Davis earned his MBA at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and soon after, started his second venture, baby.com.br, a baby company in Brazil. The business was a huge success, becoming a \$100 million company within the first 18 months. However, despite his success, Davis knew he needed to do something more.

Davis returned to Cusco in hopes of finding out what had happened to Edgar. Miraculously Edgar was found and even remembered Davis as the one who had given him money to buy his candy. It was a happy reunion, but Davis soon realized that Edgar's life had not improved in his absence. Edgar's parents had both died or abandoned him and his two younger siblings, and Edgar had constructed the makeshift mud home they now lived in. Touched by the lengths that Edgar had gone to take care of his family, Davis knew that his new business venture, [Cotopaxi](#), could help other street children like Edgar from having to grow up in such circumstances.

Davis moved his family back to the states from Brazil in November 2013 and launched Cotopaxi in April 2014. Cotopaxi's slogan, Gear for Good, encompasses the company's values and mission. Each backpack, jacket, water bottle, or product that is sold, gives back to a humanitarian cause. For example, every Cusco backpack that is purchased helps educate a child in Peru for one week. Cotopaxi's unique business model of selling their products online without a brick and mortar location, allows Cotopaxi to cut retailer costs and donate the additional revenue to their humanitarian causes.

Based out of Salt Lake City, Cotopaxi is now a thriving businesses that encourages people to give back and be adventurous. The Questival events that are held in different cities across the U.S. encourage communities to get involved in community service while doing fun adventures such as sleeping under the stars to earn points for Cotopaxi gear. Cotopaxi has a mission to give back to humanity through their social causes while inspiring others that their efforts can make a difference.

[Watch Davis Smith's presentation here.](#)