

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/a-courageous-risk/>

Shiza Shahid, co-founder and co-CEO of Our Place, tells the story of how she became co-founder of the Malala Fund when she was only 22 years old. She explains how her decision to leave her job and take a risk to help girls around the world illustrates a core principle of entrepreneurship.



Transcript

- I read about a little girl in the north of Pakistan 00:00:08,460 in a town called the Swat Valley.. She was 11 years old at the time.. Her town had been taken over in an armed resistance by the Taliban, they had started to blow up girls' schools, and she was writing about her experience.. And I read her diary, and I was in my dorm room at Stanford, and I said, "I have to help this girl." So I started calling everyone I knew, I found her father's phone number, and I said, "I'm a student at Stanford.. I'm young, but I'm here.. I know people.. I think I can help." And that summer, I went back to Pakistan and I created a summer camp.. And that summer camp that I created was for that little girl who was, in fact, Malala.. She was writing under the pen name Gul Makai at the time.. And I brought her and her friends to the summer camp to help them share their stories and bring change in their communities..

So that was actually three years before I had graduated, taken my job at McKinsey.. - I just wanna underscore how important it is 00:01:16,980 that the catalyzing moment might have been relatively short in terms of time, and we can jump to that, then the 22.. But there's all this preconditioning that happened in advance to create that opportunity of co-founding the Malala Fund.. And so at 22, then, something happens.. Can you walk us through? And what I want the students to understand is what does it take to actually have conviction to jump into something where you're going off the beaten path? So, go for it.. - So, I create this summer camp, 00:01:58,200 and I go back to Stanford, I graduate.. I take my first job out of college at McKinsey.. I'd never heard of consulting growing up, but I kept getting emails from something called Bain, and they kept asking to go to lunch.. And I would go to the career fairs and go to all the nonprofits and hand out my CVs.. And, they'd say, "Well, I'll get your PhD and come back, and we'll put you....

Maybe we'll have a job for you." And I realized this huge discrepancy between how the private sector values talent and the nonprofit sector values talent.. And I had tried to chart a path back to my home country, but was met with a lot of challenges.. There's a lot of sexual harassment.. And I said, "All right, what's the path forward?" I was given a job at McKinsey, asked them to move me out to Dubai so I could be closer to home.. And at the time, they were running this massive education transformation project in Pakistan out of Dubai.. So I was like, "All right, this is it, this is my plan.. I'm gonna do this three-year McKinsey business program.. It's great, it's safe, it's competitive, it's fun.. Then, they'll pay for me to go to business school, and then maybe one day I'll build my own thing." But just a year into my time at McKinsey, I had just landed in Egypt

for a project, when I got a text message that Malala had been shot.. Malala had been on her way home from school when two masked gunmen boarded her school bus, asked who is Malala, and then shot her in the head for her advocacy, for her bravery..

I was devastated.. I flew to Birmingham in the UK where she had been airlifted for treatment.. I was with her the next few weeks.. Thankfully, miraculously, she recovered.. And as she started to come back, her story started to hit breaking news.. And all around the world, people were outraged that in the 21st century, a girl could be shot in the head simply for wanting to go to school.. And I realized in that moment that what Malala had been through could be far more than a day in the news cycle.. That, in fact, her story could be the catalyst for real change for girls around the world.. But Malala was 15 years old in the hospital, and our goal was to get her back to school and give her somewhat of a normal life.. Her father asked if I would stay and help build a vision for what this could be..

And immediately I said, "No." I said, "I'm too young, I don't know what I'm doing.. I'll find you someone, I got you, don't worry." And it was a few days later that I realized that I had to take the leap.. I quit my job, I never looked back.. And I just believe that in our lives, there are certain moments where we have to decide who we are, and that's what entrepreneurship is.. I have not engineered any of the things I've done in my life, which maybe is not the best thing to be telling students taking a class on entrepreneurship.. But what I have done is seen when there is an opportunity to make a difference and found the courage within me to take that leap.. I was 22 years old, I had no savings, I was a year out of college.. I didn't even have a visa to be in the United States, but I knew that I had to take that leap, and somehow I found a way...