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Jessie Becker inspects
her products at Specialty
Silicone Fabricators in
Paso Robles, Calif., InPress'
manufacturing partner for
its life-saving devices.



A LIFE-SAVING STARTUP

How Jessie Becker built the skills to help
save new mothers around the world.

Jessie Becker was in her second year at Cal Poly when she walked into BUS 310: Introduction to Entrepreneurship, the first in a revitalized entrepreneurship program in the Orfalea College of Business. As she sat down, she contemplated switching majors, knowing the other business disciplines hadn't inspired her as she had hoped.

At the lectern was Jonathan York, an entrepreneur and venture capitalist who left the industry to join Professor Lou Tornatzky's effort to build a formidable entrepreneurship program at Cal Poly.

"It's amazing to remember Jessie as a sophomore sitting in my class and to see how she's grown into the CEO of a medical device company that's going to change the world," said York.

That would turn out to be the first of many projects the two would tackle together, confirming Becker's passion for all things entrepreneurial and York's hopes that the Cal Poly community would embrace the idea for a Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE) that could impact the careers — and lives — of students.

After her first class, Becker dove headfirst into the entrepreneurship concentration, invigorated by the business acumen she was sharpening

with each hands-on project. "Cal Poly's Learn by Doing philosophy is really something that is completely expressed in that curriculum," she said.

But as she looked around, she felt a disconnect between the blossoming ambitions of her fellow students and the resources available to transform them into reality. So in true Becker fashion, she took up the cause and helped pioneer some of the CIE's core student programs.

First on her list was revitalizing the student club, Cal Poly Entrepreneurs, into a thriving community that linked students and industry veterans together. Next, Becker became the first student employee of the CIE's newly minted SLO HotHouse. The original location on Tank

"Just having a community of people as equally motivated and crazy as you are is great," said Becker. "We're all coming up against some of the same challenges, and having a community of peers around to help with that is absolutely vital to getting through those things."

As a permanent fixture of the HotHouse community, Becker designed, coordinated and led the CIE's first lineup of student programs, including the Ray Scherr Pitch Competition and the on-campus Hatchery. With Becker's guidance, the CIE's programs began to form a continuum of opportunities that students of all ages and all backgrounds could explore whether or not they had a concept for a product or business of their own. "The entrepreneur is the one who takes

"IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP, THERE IS NO RIGHT ANSWER, BUT SOME ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS. IT WAS REALLY INVIGORATING TO ME."

— Jessie Becker

Farm Road offered little more than some desk space, conference rooms, and a mailing address for seedling startups, but Becker fell in love with the environment and the people who gravitated toward it.

the idea and enables it to become a reality," said York. "Jessie's solution was to find something she was passionate about, jump on board, and make it happen. That's exactly what she did."



Left, the InPress team gathers in its HotHouse office space. Right, InPress' team trains health care workers in Indonesia, Becker speaks at a San Luis Obispo Chamber event, and Becker inspects the device on the manufacturing room floor. *Clockwise from top.*



While Becker was serving as an entrepreneur in residence for the 2011 Innovation Quest competition at Cal Poly, she met Alex Norred and Davis Carlin. The two Cal Poly biomedical engineers took second place in the competition for their prototype device that could stop a potentially fatal postpartum hemorrhage (PPH) with vacuum pressure that activates the body's natural response.

Becker was immediately inspired, seeing the need for a fast and cost-effective treatment for PPH, the leading cause of death for new mothers in developing nations. Norred and Carlin named their idea InPress Technologies and entered the inaugural HotHouse Accelerator, a three-month summer program that fosters student businesses by providing workspace, mentorship and seed funding. Becker, who ran the accelerator program, found herself naturally gravitating toward InPress.

At the conclusion of the summer, InPress was admitted into the HotHouse Incubator, a new program offering two years of low-cost workspace and access to the CIE's growing network of resources in San Luis Obispo and beyond. It was then that Becker began moonlighting as an official member of the InPress team, using her business skillset to explore the viability of producing and marketing the product commercially.

"I decided to join because I cared about the mission, and I believed that I could help

InPress make an impact on the world," she said. "The impact is what drives me."

In a stroke of luck, or fate, the InPress team met entrepreneur Nathan Bair as he was consulting with local businesses as part of the CIE's Small Business Development Center. Bair had just moved to San Luis Obispo after 10 years launching startups and working in medical device engineering in the Midwest.

Even as inventors Carlin and Norred transitioned away from InPress to pursue other opportunities, Becker

"If you look at the makeup of any of the CIE companies, none of them have the same team members they started with," he notes. "But the others stay. The resources in the CIE help these entrepreneurs weather that transition."

May of 2013 was a turning point for InPress. The team learned it had been accepted into the Fogarty Institute for Innovation, a nonprofit organization that helps medically innovative startups. Bair and Becker hired Cal Poly biomedical engineer Amy Degenkolb and began working on InPress full time

"I'M SO GLAD I CAME TO CAL POLY AND BUILT THE MINDSET THAT GOES ALONG WITH IT."

— Jessie Becker

and Bair held the company together with a staunch belief in its mission. York says this kind of change is common for any new venture, but it doesn't have to be detrimental.

from its second office in El Camino Hospital in Mountain View, Calif.

"The wonderful thing that has allowed us to be as ambitious as we are is having



the support of the HotHouse and CIE and Fogarty Institute at the right times,” said Becker. During its tenure in the Fogarty Institute, InPress has made significant progress, building a patent portfolio, gathering investors, and producing a commercial-ready product.

InPress’ perennial challenge is to navigate tough regulations with the Food and Drug Administration in the U.S. and CE Mark in Europe. Becker admits the learning curve is steep and the stakes are high, knowing a misstep means it could take longer for the product to reach the market.

“I’d be lying if I said there haven’t been times it’s been so difficult that I didn’t wonder what life would be like with an easier job, but I never honestly considered quitting — ever. There have been times when I’ve questioned, ‘Am I up to the task?’ But now I know that I am.”

Through it all, the InPress team has built significant momentum by treating 10 women in a successful human trial in Jakarta, Indonesia, and raising \$1.7 million in seed funding in

preparation for a Series A goal of \$4 million. And in January, Becker was thrust into the national spotlight when she was named one of Forbes’ 30 Under 30 for healthcare.

“My parents called me one morning, and I remember my mom just yells out, ‘You’re in Forbes!’” she said with a laugh. While she is grateful for the honor, the ever-humble CEO says it’s more of a reflection on her team than herself.

Becker visits InPress’ office in the bustling SLO HotHouse regularly to check in with her growing team, visit investors, and catch up with her favorite entrepreneurs, like Professor York. The CIE and InPress have watched one another grow over several years, but neither is quick to claim victory just yet.

“I’m proud of myself, but I have so much farther to go,” said Becker. “I have so much more to learn.”



STARTUP SNAPSHOT

InPress isn’t the only startup making waves in CIE’s SLO HotHouse. Orfalea College of Business alumni lead new ventures in technology, retail products and professional services.

NAME

Josh Hirahara

(B.S., Industrial Technology, 2014)

COMPANY

Boost Acquisition Inc., an enterprise software company that builds a cloud-based platform to increase profits for car dealerships through effective sourcing of used vehicles from consumers.

What has it been like to innovate a product that didn’t exist before?

It’s been exciting to see our vision take form and begin to provide real value for businesses. There are always different obstacles to overcome, but that’s what makes it worth doing.

What does it mean to you to be an entrepreneur?

Being an entrepreneur is being foolish enough to believe that you can create something better than what already exists, but remaining grounded and focused enough to not stop until you’ve found a way to make it happen.