Business School Admission Essay

My parents -- whom I value immeasurably -- are leaving a great legacy in the world. Despite harsh childhoods and economic difficulties, they focused their priorities on their children's education while always caring for and helping our family and community, conveying the importance of "what seeds you're leaving in the world." Thanks to their efforts, I was able to accomplish things at the professional level that were completely unimaginable just a few years ago. Now, I am thinking more seriously about my own legacy and its impact on human society.

Our legacy begins with family, friends, and local community, and I like to think that our impact begins in a very subtle but powerful way -- by simply raising the bar and setting the precedent that it's possible to achieve your dreams, despite numerous failures and obstacles. By being a good example to be followed, I was able to demonstrate to my family and social circle, as well as professors and colleagues, that we can achieve extraordinary things through hard work and persistence, regardless of our circumstances or location.

For example, it's considered unachievable for the best engineers from my Brazilian college to get a job at a top Silicon Valley firm, despite the fact that their skills are (in my experience) easily comparable to those of computer scientists graduating from the top schools in the U.S. Setting the precedent and empowering exceptional people to at least try to achieve bigger dreams was very satisfying. Ivan was the best student in my class, yet despite exceptional potential he was content with "only" pursuing a masters degree at another college in Brazil. Seeing my achievements abroad, he reached out for advice, and we worked together on the steps for a placement in a top CS PhD program in California. Hugo, a gifted coder, was wasting his potential in a job where he was underutilized. We worked together on his résumé, and I recommended him to a few companies. He's now a software engineer at an international company and traveling abroad. These people had skills better than mine, but their potential was only unleashed with my small "push."

One of my most joyful and proudest moments was when I found out that one of my "failures" -- the start-up that I had to dissolve after taking my current full-time position at Palantir -- actually yielded unexpected and amazing outcomes. The startup was composed of people from several countries who didn't know one another, except the Duke students; a few of those remote employees were exceptional Brazilians, great developers who didn't have the best opportunities. I do not consider my failure to be having to dissolve the start-up because it lacked the expected user growth, but instead letting down my team, especially members from abroad, whom I had told that this was an opportunity to grow and have a better life together. Not being able to keep that promise frustrated me -- until I recently received really good news.

My CTO went on to launch a successful startup within the same segment and brought one of the Brazilian developers with him; another Brazilian developer got a job in Switzerland working with our lead developer, who was previously located in Siberia. Partners in the US and employees from around the world reminded me how my example inspired them. Even though they went on to pursue their dreams in a meritocratic way through their hard work and skills, I felt responsible for introducing them to one another, making them work collaboratively even in a remote environment, and allowing them to grow. All that was needed was the "spark."

Giving people that one opportunity, even if it's a recommendation, makes all the difference. I have mentors who, after seeing my work ethic and perseverance, changed my life in unique ways. Even my current job at Palantir was only possible because a professor at Duke for whom I worked as a TA recommended me during one of my most fragile periods, when the CEO of the investment bank I was going to work at after graduation was arrested on corruption charges.

Giving people new opportunities and allowing them to see better things by setting a precedent results in people dreaming bigger; as a consequence, human potential on an individual basis is maximized. This concept, together with the desire to leave a more direct legacy, led me to my most recent endeavor, Instituto Elevar ("Elevate Institute"). Our goal is to empower people through education, not only by helping them finance their studies but also by enlarging their networks through connecting them with successful sponsors from around the world who will guide them through the initial years of their professional lives. Instituto Elevar will change the global outlook of exceptional people in my hometown, allowing them to accomplish even greater, previously unimagined things. In the longer term, I expect that there will be an exponential effect on the network, resulting in the advancement of the human race.

Moving forward, I want to keep setting an example, provide the right connections, and enrich people through their skills and opportunities. There's no doubt that my big and crazy dream of creating a Brazilian Silicon Valley will intersect directly with those goals by putting exceptional Brazilians on par with their counterparts on a global scale. Access to the right resources and connections to maximize their skills could make Brazil a tech powerhouse. The potential is clearly there — all that is needed, as I have seen so many times, is empowering those people to see that the big dream is not as out of reach as it seems.

My two years at Harvard will be an important step towards creating my legacy and helping others cultivate theirs. HBS will empower me to better empower others. Being able to contribute, even a little bit, to human advancement towards a more meaningful and impactful life gives me pure joy, and that's what I want to focus on over the years to come.