

# Boom time in TRIPOLI

KENNETH MORSE, AN ENTREPRENEUR AND RETIRED PROFESSOR FROM THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, WAS IN LEBANON LAST MONTH TO PRESENT A WORKSHOP AS PART OF THE MAURICE FADEL PRIZE. DARIA EL SAMAD REPORTS



[www.mauricefadelprize.com](http://www.mauricefadelprize.com)

**K**en Morse believes that Tripoli has a built-in competitive advantage to Beirut when it comes to entrepreneurship.

"There's a rugged independence in Lebanon's second city. Business people here have a general awareness that to make it happen they will have to do it themselves," he says.

"The biggest indicator of success is passion, and people in Tripoli just have it," says Morse, who has been coming to Lebanon for seven years.

Morse was here to give a workshop on entrepreneurship to the semifinalists of the Maurice Fadel Prize, which is awarded to the best business plan in North Lebanon. Hala Fadel, after whose father-in-law the prize is named, accompanied him, as did other members of the MIT enterprise forum for the pan-arab region.

We meet at Balamand University where the workshop is taking place, and Morse is surrounded by dozens of young entrepreneurs from the northern city who have made it to the semis.

It is designed to prepare the teams for the next step of submitting their business plans, upon which they will be judged for the \$50,000 prize.

The auditorium, full of young students, entrants and other professionals, take detailed notes of what Morse has to say,

anxious not to miss a word.

"You don't want to stay small and broke for the rest of your life. So you've come to the right place," he says.

There are interactive presentations about sales, marketing and networking, and Morse challenged his audience every step of the way.

His advice is to look for demanding customers. "They make you better, they prepare you for customers outside Lebanon," he says.

"You better be available to your customers 24/7, 365 days of the year, or you won't grow. Forget about being comfortable, or don't be an entrepreneur. And have plenty of hustle — you must have hustle."

He is asked by one of the attendees how difficult it is to sell an idea that doesn't exist yet. "It's easier to sell something that doesn't exist. It's bug free. Be passionate about the problems that you have to solve," he replies.

During the workshop, Morse inspired the entrepreneurs by showing them clips and videos explaining that they must live and breathe their businesses every minute of the day.

"You should always be pitching. You have just 55 seconds. The purpose of the pitch is not to sell — it's to set up a meeting."

Morse emphasized that the MIT forum doesn't just work on start-up companies

but also helps launch ambitious firms that are scaleable. "We're here in Tripoli to help companies start up, but we don't want to start a lot of minnows," he says.

"The forum's intention is to help start companies that grow and get bigger. That's the only way to get companies to create jobs. Not a bunch of kids with an incubator somewhere protected from reality. The public sector has reached its limit in terms of employment. So we have to turn to the private sector to create jobs. And that means entrepreneurship."

Morse believes that Lebanon has a huge number of assets because its people have a long history of being entrepreneurial, multicultural, empathetic, educated, and are comfortable with technology too. He adds that they have to be ambitious because they don't have the "oil curse."

"The diaspora is an advantage as the Lebanese are all over the world. It is a ready-made network so use it."

In the break, the young entrepreneurs preferred to take advantage of the time they had with Morse instead of having lunch. They hovered around him, asking for advice about their ventures.

Morse ended his presentation by encouraging entrepreneurs to go out and build successful companies.

"Made in Lebanon," and specifically 'made in Tripoli' — trust me when I say it's the next boom."