

## From entrepreneur in Slovakia to distinguished professor at the Tec



Far from his homeland, Ján Rehák challenged himself to be his students' best professor, which led to him leading a group of them to first place in the world in social entrepreneurship.

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Courtesy from Ján Rehák

*"When I got to the **classroom**, my **first words** were: 'Look guys, **I'm going to be the best professor you've ever had in your life.**'"*

This is how **Ján Rehák** introduced himself to the **first group** he taught **entrepreneurship** to in **Mexico** at **Tec de Monterrey's** Querétaro campus in his search to **be happy through teaching young people**.

**Today, Rehák** is a **distinguished professor** at **Tec de Monterrey** and **national director** of the **Entrepreneurship program**, achieving national recognition from the institution as an **Inspiring Professor**.

Born **35 years ago** in **Bratislava, in the former Czechoslovakia**, he discovered at a young age that he had a talent for **entrepreneurship**, without imagining that a **chance** would bring him to **Mexico** to share his **passion** in a **classroom**.

This **passion** was demonstrated when he led a group from the Querétaro campus to a **first-place win** at a global **social entrepreneurship competition** in **Brussels, Belgium**.



## **Arriving at the Tec and becoming a professor**

Rehák arrived in **2015** at Tec de Monterrey's Querétaro campus thanks to a coincidence: **being in the right place at the right time**, he says.

Before ending his teaching relationship with the **Comenius University** in Bratislava, he was asked as his last assignment to **represent** the educational institution at a **conference in Mexico**.

*“By **chance** and a **lot of luck**, the **conference** was held at **Tec de Monterrey**, and on the last day, I met **Rafaella Diegoli**, currently the academic vice-rector, who offered me the chance to come as a **visiting foreign professor** for a year.*

*“I **stayed (up to)** a **third year** as a **visitor**, and in the end, I was offered a **position** at the **Tec**: in **2018** I became a **research professor**,” he says.*

***“My decision was to become the professor I would’ve wanted to have.”***



**“To become the professor I would’ve wanted to have”**

As a **Tec professor**, **Rehák** shares his **mantra** with a smile.

*"My decision was **to become** the **professor I would've wanted to have**," Ján says.*

The **words** he shared with his first students at the Tec, to become the best professor of their lives, resonated with **René Cosío**, a **young man** sitting **in front of him** on that occasion.

*"I'm still in **touch** with **some of** those students from that **first class**, and a semester ago, **René became a Tec professor**."*

*"He said, 'Ján, I was **inspired** by what you said in that first class, and I want to **give something back to the community**.' He's a **high-impact entrepreneur**, he's finished his master's degree, and now he **teaches entrepreneurship** at the Tec", says Rehák.*

## **"I became the happiest person at the Tec."**

Rehák was a business owner and full-time professor in Bratislava in 2014, but his pace of life was **unsustainable**, so he decided to embark on a **journey to find himself** on a temporary stay in Asia.

*"I'd become **addicted to work** and my **company** had **grown**, but it **gave me no fulfillment**. I was **working 18 hours a day**, and I said, 'I'm going to sell the company, and I'm going to travel around the world,'" Rehák says.*

*"(Diegoli) told me I could go to **travel through Mexico**, get to know it, and then go to Asia. She told me that there are 330 days of sunshine a year in Querétaro, but it rained all month when I arrived in August," Ján says laughing, since his **idea** was to be in **Mexico only temporarily**.*

However, after a process of **adaptation**, he gradually began to feel better when he saw **how he could transform his students**.

*"I suffered from **impostor syndrome** for the first few years. When are they going to realize that I don't know anything? I had to do **three times the work**."*

*"I had all the material possessions you can imagine in **2014**, but **I was unhappy**. I **became the happiest person when I joined the Tec in 2015**, doing something I*

*was passionate about and seeing the impact on students and collaborators.”*

***“I became the happiest person when I joined the Tec in 2015, doing something I was passionate about and seeing the impact on students and collaborators.”***



## **The challenge of leading a Mexican group to first place in the world**

One of Ján's greatest achievements was **leading a team of students in 3 months** to a **win** in a global **social entrepreneurship competition** using **Artificial Intelligence** and **Machine Learning** to solve water and ocean problems.

Ján was coordinating an entrepreneurship activity at the Querétaro campus in **2019** when he accepted an invitation to the [DigiEduack Global program](#).

*"(They told me) the **project** was in **3 months**, in October. If you think you can do it, go for it," were the **words Ján heard**. Their main challenge, the lack of time.*

*"(I accepted) and asked for **support** from **entrepreneurship professors, mentors**, and amazing people. The **kids were working all night**, 24 hours. They even had sleeping bags, but they didn't even use them in the end," Ján says with a laugh.*

All that effort was rewarded when they **traveled to Belgium and came in first place**.

*"Suddenly, we were there in Brussels talking about what we were doing at the **Tec**. I gave a lecture there on our **Tec21 Model**, and they were like 'wow.'"*

*"We were there with the European Commission, and it launched a **chain of successes**, of fantastic things for the department, for the Business School, and for the Tec," Ján says with a smile.*

"Quiero dedicar este premio a mi familia, a mi novia, a mis amigos, que siempre me ayudaron a desarrollarme y a ser la persona que soy", Jan Rehak [#ProfesorInspirador](#) del Tec Campus Querétaro.

La nota completa en [@ConectaTECmx](#): <https://t.co/jlNpTrnba7pic.twitter.com/S2GqGg5Mgt>

— TEC Campus Querétaro (@TECcampusQRO) [July 17, 2020](#)

# His greatest recognition beyond an award

The professor says that coming in **first place** at the **DigiEduHack** led to him getting the national **Inspiring Professor** award, the **greatest recognition** that a **professor** receives from **Tec de Monterrey**.

This award is given to professors who have **taught** their students with **excellence** in the **areas of Teaching, Intellectual Vitality, Service, and Leadership** during the year.

Another of Ján's achievements was designing a **Master's Degree in Executive Entrepreneurship**.

*"It's one of the **greatest achievements of my life**. I never imagined it. I obviously wanted to achieve it when I arrived at the Tec.*

*"I didn't know if there was an award, but I saw that students had been given a statue of a golden ram and that there were photos of professors in the library. **I wanted to be there**," Ján recalls.*

***"I'm a person whose purpose in life is to help the people I'm in contact with and those around me grow."***

## Following his mother's entrepreneurial example

Ján was born and raised in present-day **Slovakia** in a family of **4 siblings**, an **artistic father**, and a **mathematical mother** who decided that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 90s was an ideal time to **start** a business.

The fall of the **Berlin Wall**, on November 9, 1989, with the **fall of communism**, symbolized the end of the **Cold War**.

*"My mom has a **PhD in mathematics**, and in the 90s, after the fall of the (Berlin) Wall, **she was able to start a business**."*

***“There was no private property in the country before that, so although she came from a family of landowners, at one point she was left with nothing,”*** Ján recalls.

Taking advantage of commercial opening in the decade, his mother started her **accounting company**, where Ján and his 2 brothers and sister occasionally helped out.

***“It helped us understand a lot of things, and my brother and I actually studied administration because it was one of our inspirations,”*** Rehák says.



Ján finished his **degree** at **Comenius University** in **Bratislava** while starting a **business** with one of his colleagues, where he was in charge of creating a **financial model** that would later become his **own company**.

By that time, Ján was becoming more **interested** in **teaching**, so he participated as a **volunteer** in some **non-governmental organizations** and as a **judge** and academic **debate coach** at **Tilgnerova High School** in **Bratislava**.

*“The **first time** I came to **Mexico** was in **2007** with an **NGO** program where I worked as a **volunteer** collaborating with **children** in **leadership development**, and I lived in **Mérida for a year**,” Ján recalls of the place where he **first learned Spanish**.*

*“I remember a **conversation** I had with my **teammates**. I was always **inspired to teach**, but I didn’t yet see it as a career,” says Ján.*



## **New challenges in his academic life**

After **years** teaching on **campus**, conducting **research**, giving **advice**, and even planning **activities** in the areas of **business and entrepreneurship**, Ján was given the opportunity to become **national director of Entrepreneurship**.

*At the end of the day, I’m growing in a **position** with **its own challenges**, and it’s **fantastic** and **fulfilling**, but it’s also a lot **more difficult**.*

*“**Designing** the **programs** and trying to make it the **coolest program of all the Tec business school programs** is very **challenging**, but I’m surrounded by **very talented people**, and we’re doing **amazing things**,”* he adds.

Ján was also one of the **professors** who participated in the **development** of the **Tec21 educational model**, which includes **challenge-based learning**, **memorable university experiences**, **inspiring professors**, and **flexibility** in how and when students learn.

*“**At the end of the day**, I’m growing in a position with its own challenges, and it’s fantastic and fulfilling, but it’s also a lot more difficult.”*

Ján levanta la mirada y toma una bocanada de aire antes de contestar lo que para él sería el **sueño** que, menciona, ha **encontrado** tras **6 años en México**, a miles de kilómetros de Bratislava.

*“Me he puesto a pensar **quién soy**. ¿Quién es esa persona que si le quitas los roles queda al final? He llegado a la respuesta que no sé si es perfecta, pero me parece interesante.*

*“Soy una **persona** cuyo **propósito** es **hacer crecer a las personas** con las que estoy en contacto y con quienes me rodean. Ese es el **legado** que **quisiera dejar**, una persona que haya ayudado a otros a crecer”,* finaliza.

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