

When I came to NYC for college in the fall of 2021, I didn't really know anything about anything except that I liked thinking about technology and startups. Over the last three years, I've asked for and received a ton of advice, but I realized all advice is generic without context. So for every few lessons below, I'll provide an anecdote or observation from my experience (in somewhat chronological order) that taught me the lesson instead of just explaining it.

- 1. "There's no problem you can't solve if you study your business from a to z"**
- 2. Proof by contradiction: only stop thinking about something when you find a reason for why it's stupid to keep thinking about it**

When I first got to college, I was dead set on getting a PhD and inventing something, then building a deep tech startup around it. So I thought I should probably talk to everyone affiliated with PhDs and startups. My first impression after talking to fifty-something grad students, PIs, and tech transfer officers was that I seemed to be pretty different from most of the people sitting across from me. That's interesting - maybe I should talk to some people who've built startups. So I did, and they were a little closer to how I perceived myself than the academics, and they kept telling me about something called "venture capital". So I found some VCs with PhDs and talked to them too. "Don't do it, just start something" was the common feedback on my grad school aspirations. Interesting. Why do they say that? Then someone told me about the VCs' bosses - "LPs" - some of whom turned out to be universities! So I talked to a bunch of these people, and they said the same thing about my PhD aspirations as the VCs. Hm. Let me look at more deep tech startup folks and their backgrounds - in this case "more" meant 650+ deep tech startup founders. Yea, looks like very few were PhDs, especially not the successful ones. At this point I was two semesters in, and the Math in my Math major was getting me on my toes and in office hours every week. I don't seem to be that good at academics, and everyone who would have an educated opinion is against it, so maybe I shouldn't do it.

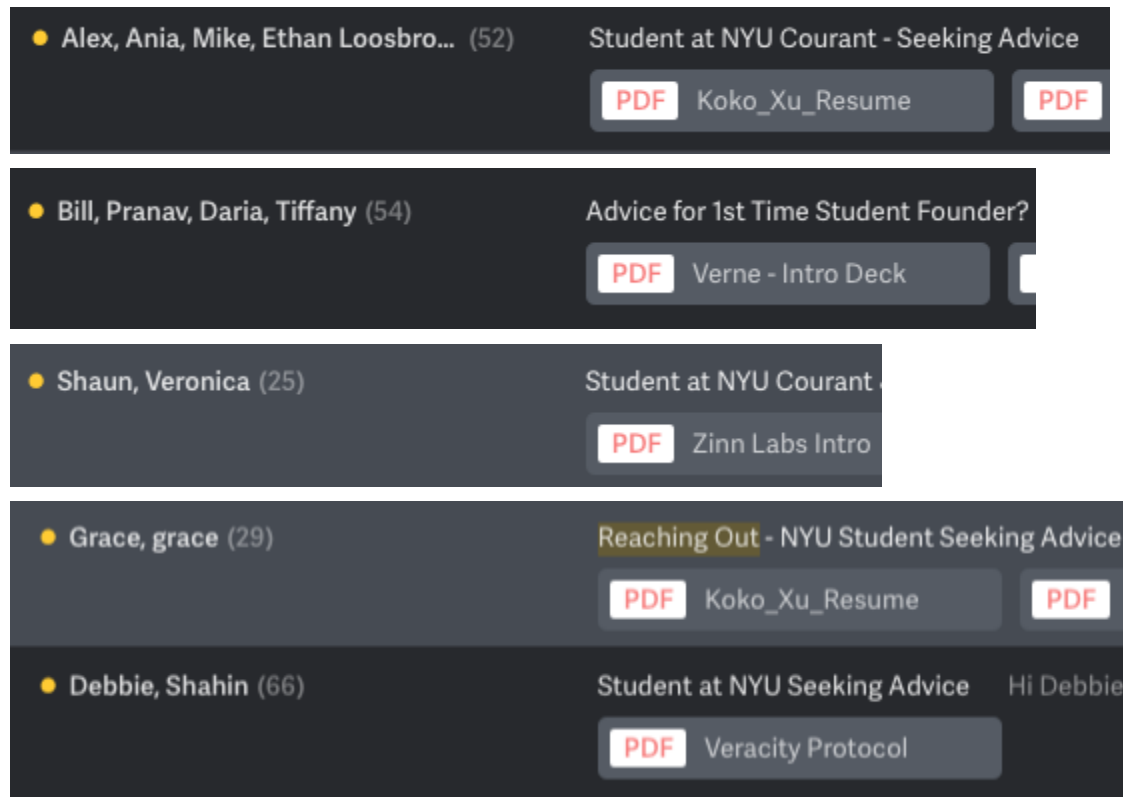
- 3. Go wide, then go deep**
- 4. Keep doing things**
- 5. Carve out a niche and build a brand around it**

Okay, so maybe I should look beyond a PhD. What can I do to start a deep tech company without being technical then? I figured the best way to figure that out was just to try everything. My first week of college I had walked into the Entrepreneurship center at NYU and asked for a job - any job. They gave me one writing blogs about alumni founders for \$20 an hour. That was fun, but I didn't think I was especially good at it. I also joined all both of the startup clubs on campus, and made a name for myself by pitching an aerospace company in the applications (keep in mind that this was fall of 2021, when the tech world was all about NFT monkey jpegs). The next semester I started working three internships at once, each in very different disciplines: Product Management, Venture Capital, and Operations. PM was fun, VC felt like a lot of bitch work, Ops just didn't click for me. Let's keep trying things. So freshman summer I applied for a grant at NYU that gave me \$1k to do independent research. I chose to research deep tech startups while studying abroad in Florence, and actually really liked learning about the 210 deep tech startups I collected. It was like daydreaming about the future but getting paid for it. When I got back to NYC that summer I tried dry and wet lab research, but hated it. Interesting. I was also helping some friends start their company, but I kind of sucked at coding. So I tried to start

my own company with two professors, but they were painstakingly academic. Then come the spring of 2023 and I worked at another deep tech VC firm I really liked, and that's when it clicked - the research I was doing was more VC than PhD. So I spent the rest of 2023 learning everything I could about VC.

## 6. Send cold emails

How did I talk to all these people, one might ask? Well in my first semester of college I sent ~800 cold emails. I upped those rookie numbers to ~1500 the second semester, and from there things got easier because I got better at writing cold emails and had a sense for what would prompt people to reply. To this day, I still set aside a few hours once a month and just send cold emails - the recipients have ranged from founders to investors to scientists to executive searchers to lawyers.



## 7. Don't network until you have something to say

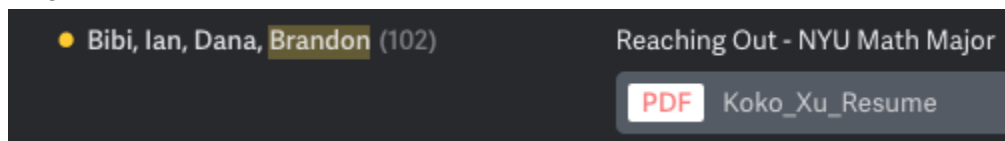
## 8. Use your insecurities to your benefit

So all in all my college cold email scoreboard was probably in the ~2600 range, but in that first semester, I really only converted two lasting relationships from the dozens of hours of work. That's when I realized what I was doing wrong - I was just stupid, and smart people don't want to talk to stupid people. As I got more working experience I realized my cold email conversion rates were going up, then after I did my independent research over the summer suddenly the conversion rate shot up. The reason, I realized, was just that I literally had novel data that no one else had - my little research project was the largest repository of deep tech startup data in recent history. When people learned something from talking to me, they'd respond to my emails

next time. This was a groundbreaking insight for me - an introvert - because it turned networking from greasy salesmanship to focused learning. My strategy pivoted from trying to be friends with more people to try to be interesting enough so that people wanted to be friends with me. I also had such scar tissue from hundreds of bad first meetings that now, ironically, a lot of my best ideas come out in first conversations. I realized that this is because I have really bad FOSS - Fear of Sounding Stupid. It's like darwinism for networking.

### 9. Find great mentors

Luckily, one of the two VCs who responded to my first batch of crude cold emails turned out to be my closest mentor to this day. From November 2021 to March 2023, I had sent this guy an email every week with some startup I found interesting, or some research I did, or an article I liked, totaling over 80 one way emails. Even today, I text the guy almost every day, and he's taught me most of what I know.



### 10. Always follow up

### 11. Leave room for serendipity

After my failed startup with the two professors, I had joined a great fellowship program and met some very interesting people. Two of them were going to school at Harvard and MIT, and since I grew up in Massachusetts, one weekend I went up to see them. One of them had stood me up three times, but I finally met the kid the fourth time. Another was better - I was only stood up once with a prior heads up. Despite the logistics mishaps, I became great friends with both of them, and they were my first two angel checks. A few months later, I was stopping by in Boston to attend dinner at the 3-times-guy's (3TG) apartment before flying to SF on a red eye. I had originally booked the flight for 9pm takeoff, but I thought better safe than sorry and changed it to 5am takeoff the next morning. Turns out, that night I met one of 3TG's friends who was thinking about starting an aerospace company. We stayed up until 3am talking about the business model, his prospective cofounders, fundraising, etc. Today 3TG and his buddy are two of my closest friends.

### 12. Deferred gratification leads to focus

I eat one meal a day at night right before I go to sleep and it's the most satisfying experience every day. It also literally focuses my energy during the day since overnight digestion plus no food intake plus lots of caffeine means fast metabolism during the day, and blood is only going to my brain, not my gut.

### Bonus: $1.001^{18262} = 85B$

Becoming 0.1% better everyday for 50 years results in an 85 billion x improvement. Conversely, every day that I waste not improving is literally costing me thousands of hours of work down the line. So let's get after it!