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BUAD 302: 10 AM

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9/5/2020

**Networking Report Memo**

I consider myself a gambler. Not in the traditional sense, but rather a gambler with my career. Regular coveted things like stability, stable income, and comfort are not for me. This is because I am fascinated with start-ups. I’m drawn to the idea of risking not only a lot of money, but also my career, for even greater rewards. Unlike other jobs such as consulting or accounting, there is no one set playbook for building a start-up. Many have tried to teach, and there are even popular “accelerators” that assist in the start-up process, but even those programs don’t have the magic keys. No amount of preparedness can make you ready for a start-up. You have to make the leap and go for it. Many have tried and many have failed countless times, but there are some that have found success on the first go-around. The individual that I interviewed, Drake Austin Rehfeld, was someone that not only had a successful first attempt, but found success in every venture that he pursued. He was someone that I had to talk to.

I first saw Drake on LinkedIn, and was drawn to his profile. He had it all. Serial entrepreneur turned influencer turned venture capitalist. However, these impressive accolades were not the reason why I was drawn to him. He and I share many mutual interests, including start-ups and investing. But, there was an even stronger tie pulling us together. Drake and I were apart of the same fraternity, and although he was already graduated, he and I have had many similar experiences. Not only does he have the model career path, but he also was a fellow brother of mine. This was a clear talking point for me, and helped me engage in conversation with him. So when I sent him the classic, “Nice to meet you… Trojan Family…” I also had to mention that we were apart of the same fraternity. This worked as Drake not only accepted my connection request, but also accepted my request for a phone call, right away. I had gotten over the cold emailing part, and now his call was on the books.

The stage was set. A Thursday afternoon. Our call was scheduled for 12 p.m. I was stationed in my battle station, better known as my bedroom. Eagerly, I checked my phone at 12, waiting for his call. A couple minutes passed by and I got the text, “Running late.” A classic. However, at 12:15, my phone lit-up, and the interview started.

I decided to jump right into it. Once we made it past the formalities, I was upfront with Drake and told him that I was very interested in start-ups and investing. I initially planned to talk about Drake’s company that was listed on his LinkedIn. When I mentioned the company, he revealed to me a secret that no one had known yet. Drake had actually switched positions from a CEO of a company, to becoming a principal investor at Day One Ventures. He had made the exact career jump that I wanted to follow as well. At that moment, I knew that reaching out to him was the right decision.

Drake and I talked about many things. We shared common experiences that we had in the fraternity house. I told him about my start-up that I was trying to launch, and he promptly told me to email him my pitch-deck. We talked about his experiences in Y-Combinator, the premiere start-up accelerator. He mentioned that he had to wear a lot of “hats” at his businesses, a experience that I was starting to become familiar with. When you are operating at a start-up, you sometimes can find yourself as the CEO, CTO, and CFO all wrapped up into one. He then stressed how important it is to get the right team around you, and how he would not have found any success if he had just done it by himself. This really inspired me to make sure that in any future endeavors I pursue, I make sure that I have the “right” team, or most likely I will stumble and fail.

Our call lasted around 30 minutes. At the wrap-up portion, Drake shared me a link that included a list of all the companies that his firm had invested in. He encouraged me to do research into what their methodology was for picking these companies, and how I can model my own companies in the future to be similar. I came into the call expecting a quick 10 minute chat, and instead I got a profound life lesson, something I couldn’t have even dreamed for.

The points that were driven home to me were: never stop trying, surround yourself with talented individuals, and always make it fun. Even if you fail, always get up and keep trying, or you’ll never make it. Find your team and run with them, through the ups and downs of running a start-up. And finally, make sure that you can look back at the long hours as a time of innovation and fun instead of failure and disappointment.

My talk with Drake only further inspired my desire to continue my gambling habit. Seeing not only the success that he had, but also the apparent fun, it reaffirmed to me that start-ups were for me. I don’t think I’m built for the typical corporate job, and with the right mentors, it’s possible to take that big career gamble and come out successful on the other side. With people like Drake in my corner, I feel confident that when I stumble, I will be able to learn from not only those experiences, but from the past experiences of others around me, ensuring that when I get back on my feet, I’m running at full force. While I might never be as successful as Drake is, I’m going to do my best to try and get there.

Hopefully sometime in the future, another fraternity brother of mine will cold connect with me on LinkedIn, asking for career advice. By that point, I will be ready to share some of the “secrets” that I’ve learned. Before I can do that however, I need to go out and find out what those “secrets” are.