Dean Johnson

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Professor Fine

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Trek Alumni Interview: Jacob Phillips

For my alumni interview, I chatted with Jacob Phillips, a crypto researcher at Polychain Capital. Jacob was part of the first group of students to participate in the Trek. With a major in economics and computer science, Jacob graduated from CWRU in 2019.

From the beginning of his college career, Jacob knew he wanted to pursue a career in finance. To better stick out among a pool of competitive applicants, he started a mock hedge fund (Cicero Capital) in his freshman year. With this experience, Jacob was able to land a summer gig working the bond desk at New Heights Research. The following summer, Jacob worked as an investment banking summer analyst at KeyBanc Capital Markets. Following this experience, Jacob thought it would be wise to apply to the Trek program as he would be surrounded by like-minded individuals. This course would also grant him an opportunity to augment his network of connections. To bolster the connections he made while participating in the Trek, Jacob spent an additional weekend in New York meeting with CWRU alumni.

Following the Trek, he spent his summer working as an analyst in the equity & debt advisory group at Rothschild & Co. While he expressed that his time spent working as a summer analyst served its purpose as an educational experience, he did not particularly enjoy the work. In search of a new path, Jacob decided to branch out into the venture capital arena; this seemed like a logical next step as the majority of his time was already spent researching technology. He then spent a nine-month stint working at Flashstarts, Inc., a startups accelerator. It was in this role that Jacob “got hooked on crypto.” Sensing the winds of change, Jacob dropped everything to research crypto full-time for a year. Over this period, he did a practicum at Flashstarts, an unpaid/remote internship at Limitless Crypto Investments, and then a fall internship with Arianna Simpson (a partner on the a16z crypto investment team). Using his now extensive experience researching crypto, Jacob catapulted himself into a role at Polychain Capital, where he now works full time.

Jacob raved about his current job citing that he has full autonomy in his current position. His role requires him to “find cool things for the fund to invest in” and present those ideas to the team. When asked about the factor most critical to his success, Jacob cited the many connections he had accumulated over the years. Jacob even went as far as to admit that every role he obtained he received because he had someone on the inside advocating on his behalf. Jacob had quite a few pearls of wisdom that he was more than happy to bestow upon me. One, in particular, stuck with me more than any other: the best way to land a position is to “do the job before you get the job.”

My conversation with Jacob was eye-opening in many ways as he provided a surprisingly candid look into the benefits and drawbacks of the industry. Our interests were also aligned, which made the call all the more enjoyable. Jacob wisely added at the end of our discussion that I should take a direct path in pursuing my goals and not adjust my plans based on what others have to say.