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Alumni: Brian Johnson. Senior Software Engineer @ Yelp

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Brian Johnson

For my alumni interview, I chose Brian Johnson, who attended Wall Street Trek in the Fall of 2016 and graduated in 2019 with a BA in Computer Science and MA in Applied Mathematics. He currently works as a Senior Software Engineer at Yelp on a Search team.

I was interested in interviewing Brian since he just like he is a Computer Science major and has similar career goals to mine. He at first decided to attend Wall Street Trek because he wanted to go into the fintech position of quantitative analyst. But after seeing the work environment at the financial companies, he decided to switch careers and aim for Big Tech firms. We event discussed the recent report about the onerous working hours for the junior bankers at Goldman Sachs. He did not network too much because big tech companies do not give too much consideration to references unless you know someone high up. Still, he got his position in Yelp through contact with a Case Alumni who was a VP at that point. He said that networking might be quite useful at smaller firms.

He gave me some advice to get involved in more activities connected with Computer Science on campus and get to know more people in the field. He also advised against going into fintech because it is very demanding and requires a lot of knowledge in mathematics and especially statistics in addition to computer science, which means there is little chance of getting those positions without a Ph.D. He also said that to get promoted in Machine Learning, the other field I am interested in is very hard without getting a Ph.D. in math or computer science. If I decide to go into the path of systems engineer or software development, he advised me to concentrate on a lot of projects in the last two years of college because they would teach me things that are expected from the developer but are not taught at school.

He also said that one definitely has to work a lot harder to compete with people from Stanford, MIT, Harvard, to get into one of the big tech companies. Most of his coworkers are actually from big-name schools. However, besides big tech, there are a lot of smaller companies and even startups, who do not look too much on the school name because they are “hungry” for talent. He advised me a couple of services where I can find a startup I would like to work for.

He is quite satisfied with his career, but he said he would also create a startup one day because it can be quite intriguing. He also said that if he did not have to work for a living he would still engage in the tech field through probably creating or supporting interesting startups.