Technically Working: Annie DeStefano (SVB)

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Annie is a VP at Silicon Valley Bank, where she works with founders and CEOs of venture-backed fintech companies and leads partnerships for the SVB platform. Annie has some experience on the engineering side working on Goldman Sachs's web platform, but most of her career has been in business and finance roles where her technical literacy has helped her excel.

Don't worry, this interview happened at a safe social distance.

How "technical" are you?

I'm probably more curious than I am the textbook version of technical. Going back to my high school days, I became obsessed with building blogs and random websites, so I started teaching myself HTML in my free time. My intent was to never formally study anything computer science or technology related – I always wanted to go into business or business journalism – but I found myself enrolling as a student at Stevens Institute of Technology for college. As the name implies, all coursework had a technical spine, so my college degree ended

up being a split between core finance and technical courses. I was required to take computer science and risk modeling courses where we were programming in R as well as core finance, which has been an invaluable blend for my career so far.

What's your work background, and what do you do currently?

My career has primarily been in the finance and technology industries, but I have found myself in a variety of different roles. My very first internship and eventual full time job out of school was with Goldman Sachs. I joined the web technology team that supported the firm's digital presence which included all external digital assets. Some of my first projects were hands to keyboard technical work and coding for the company's internal and external webstack.

The last team I was on at GS was the Marcus by Goldman Sachs team, which really was my deep dive into the world of Fintech. There I worked in the product management organization helping launch the Marcus consumer banking experience. It was a role that truly required a unique understanding of digital experience and engineering approach as I was quarterbacking specific feature buildout and technical integrations. There was no day I didn't spend talking directly with the engineering team.

After an amazing six years at the firm, I decided to join Foursquare in an operations management role supporting the engineering organization. It was paramount in this role that I was able to connect with the company's engineers. I needed to understand the highly sophisticated location intelligence technology stack to be able to drive strategic projects and initiatives on behalf of the SVP of Engineering and broader executive team.

Currently, I work at Silicon Valley Bank on our national Fintech banking team. SVB's Fintech practice partners with venture-backed companies in a variety of ways whether its core banking, ecosystem connectivity or financing. We work with companies on tailored lending solutions, as well as corporate banking or in many cases, powering our client's payments through our financial infrastructure. In particular, my role focuses on the relationship side by building

partnerships with CEOs/Founders and management teams as well as evangelizing the message of what product offerings SVB has for startups.

How has being "technically literate" helped you get better at your job? Any specific examples?

I think being technically literate has helped me **quickly connect with my clients and internal partners** in a variety of ways. If I'm talking to a founder about her company, in order for me to best advise on how SVB can help, I need to understand how the technology is solving a customer pain point in finance. I think (at least I hope so!) being able to go a little deeper on the product/tech side helps me in building credibility as well and display my understanding of the sector.

In other ways, being technically literate has just made me resourceful in my day to day work. If there is something I need to better understand about a product or company, I've had instances where I've checked out their GitHub page or used the Chrome inspect tool to dig into some of the technical side of the product experience and architecture. This helps me ask better questions and better represent the company to my internal stakeholders beyond what financial analysis may show.
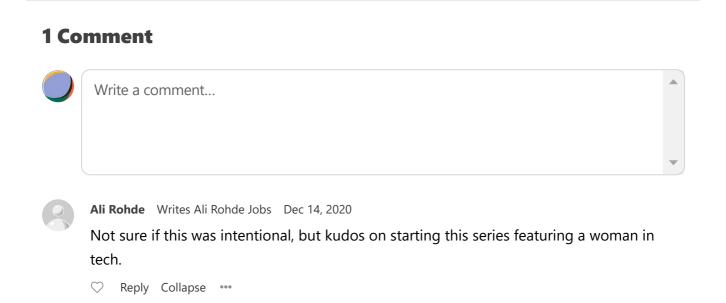
Have you ever tried learning how to code? How did it go?

As I mentioned, I started teaching myself HTML way back in the day, which if you look at some of my very early websites -- it probably didn't go so well. :-)

I would be interested in picking back up some more formal training, in particular focusing on data science principles - which is a core backbone to many Fintechs and enables much of the innovation we see in the space.

What's your go-to (aside from Technically, of course) for leveling up your technical knowledge?

Twitter! There are so many technical leaders I follow that are actively blogging and writing about various topics and sharing this information through Twitter. It's a great way to quickly stay informed and discover new topics I want to go deeper on.

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Not sure if this was intentional, but kudos on starting this series featuring a woman in tech.

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