Informational Interview Notes

**Josh Tatum – Notes**

Startups are unmatched in exposure and quality of work  
He worked for Spothero (startup) before Apple  
Week 1 he was working on a pres for the CEO  
Doing meaningful work from Day 1  
Tough part is that they might not be hiring right now for the roles you might be interested  
Often looking for someone with more experience  
Not looking to hire folks straight out of college  
Look for more later-stage company  
Pure startups are often looking for senior people (sub 30-person company)  
Try to go find  
Cast a net ~20 companies I’m interested in that fit these qualities  
60+ size  
Series B+ size  
Grow your career as the company grows  
Best opp. is to choose a series B company and see them through an IPO  
Spend 5 years at a company so it’s now well-known  
Then puts you in a good position  
What you see is people build their careers first and then go startup  
Maybe it’s not what you want to do forever, but go learn the ropes at the bigger company and then put you in a good position to be successful at an earlier stage company  
Optimize for a job where you are working under someone you really want to learn from – who will invest in you  
Your first manager is vital  
Who’s going to be managing and mentoring me  
To find this manager  
Project out what you want to be doing in 5 years  
Find someone already in that position  
Be interested in their job  
Some of this gets fleshed out in the interview process  
Do they have the time? Do they have a history of managing?  
Leverage the networks you have (Claremont, Chicago)  
Pick 3–4 roles and positions you’re interested in  
See if someone from Claremont and UChicago has that role and is willing to talk  
People get hired through relationships  
Time is better spent building relationships

**Jennifer Liang – Notes**

Customer engineer and then strategic cloud engineer  
Customer engineer = technical sales person  
Whenever someone wants to join GCP you walk them through how to use it  
Architecture  
Fit cloud into their existing architecture  
Strategic cloud engineer is like consulting for big companies like Walmart  
CTR cohort makeup depends on business needs  
Process usually opens in August or September – keep a close eye on it  
Prepping for interview: Professional Cloud Architect Certificate  
You have to do this during the CTR program; also a great foundation for all Google Cloud products across the board  
Work towards this in the first 3 months of the program  
Her background: mainly data analytics and data science  
For CTR: background is often CS or ML; a strong background in 1 or 2 areas (for her, ML and data viz)  
For interview process: mainly asking questions about your subject area of expertise  
They have you choose 5 areas of expertise from which to draw questions  
Don’t actually do the whiteboard demo and take-home  
From what she’s heard, nothing compares to Google  
Hasn’t come across any toxicity  
Very little – definitely more of an outlier  
Google culture: data analytics early career program, apprenticeships, cloud certificate, basic IT role (customer facing)  
You can work on building demos  
Customer engineer is more of a cloud architect consultant  
Lots of opportunities to present within Google too

**Ilana Zimmerman – Notes**

Works in operations  
She is near data analytics/focused  
She got her start from a referral to Meta  
Still works in operations  
Program management – trust and safety  
Risk management  
Southwest is a bit of an older company, less up to date with that  
Going through a lot of new, unprecedented challenges  
Whole Foods customer care  
Customer experience background  
Flexibility is the right mindset for product  
When the RPM opens, let her know  
Her understanding is business engineering is more of a sales role

**Daniel Landa – Notes**

Not a ton of different roles – you flex  
He knows Caroline  
He started in Public Health  
They have the same boss – great  
He was late to CS – not a true SWE  
Did it at Duke which led him to the Marlins  
Loves sports, especially basketball  
Loves building and tech  
Had a good friend at Palantir  
Made the move to Palantir  
Finds the work very motivating  
Cares a lot about what he does  
Very interesting problems (e.g., human trafficking)  
Very flexible role  
Felt like a small, late-stage startup vibe  
Lots of autonomy  
Every team  
FDE job is to implement the software for the customer  
Operate as a startup within the customer’s team  
Go to the CDC to learn what’s hard about their job and what the data is like  
Figure out what they need, not just what they’re telling you they need  
Creative problem solvers  
Build full stack apps on top of Foundry and Gotham  
Not coding the problem from scratch  
Go on-site, talk to people, scope solution, build solution, demo, iterate  
To become a tech lead, you lead one of those teams and do more delegating  
Do more like sales – deployment strategist, more consulting, requirement gathering, lots of demos  
Chose to apply because it was unorthodox and exciting  
Started in health because he needed clearance  
Commercial is also a big thing now  
Now supports war fighting AI applications  
Chose Palantir over consulting because he likes to build stuff  
Likes owning the building process  
Palantir culture is weirder – throws you into the deep end  
Best parts: mission (people care a lot), culture (ages 22–35, super young, super quick to move up)  
Very informal – show up when you want, eat lunch with whoever you want  
Very smart, cool, nerdy people  
Common thread: most people are intense and passionate about their work, very entrepreneurial, very competent  
They look for decent candidates beyond technical skills  
People who can showcase genuine interest in their work  
Lots of self-starters  
Apply for what you like best  
Speak to projects in baseball  
If you can reach the coding bar, apply to FDE  
Deployment strategist  
Interview process would be more consulting-like  
Bonus if technical in a deployment strategist role  
Interview process: phone screen, super day, Leetcode-style problem (~medium level), case study (e.g., scheduling classes with tech), debugging functions, another coding problem, some behavioral questions  
People who don’t like Palantir: those who like lots of structure and frameworks  
FDE is more of a semi-SWE role  
Once you’re a very good FDE, you can choose your projects or do more capture efforts  
Caroline is part of the AIP review board  
Write down characteristics of your dream job  
Just go for it – gather info then apply  
Don’t overthink  
Spend more time getting to know the company and what you’re looking for  
Happy to refer me

**Cindy Lay – Notes**

She’s working on SharePoint embedded  
Basically like an API so that companies that need really high levels of security can share and store files and build apps on top of it instead of building super secure file storage from scratch  
Says it’s easier than school and she’s missing some of that intellectual stimulation  
Originally was recruiting for CS, but the hiring manager moved her to PM because they didn’t have any SWE roles open  
Seems like it’s off-cycle recruiting time for university grad jobs  
She will ask around to see if people know what hiring is looking like right now  
She will also introduce me to Hillary Lundberg (recruiter)  
Need to remind her of these things

**Caroline Evans – Notes**

Deployment strategist  
Palantir as a whole  
Product team building out software  
Then the other side is using that software and continuing to build it out – this is where deltas and echos come in  
Usually half and half on each team  
Think of it as a range from 0–100 (0 is SWE and 100 is program manager; FDE is 25, DS is 75)  
More customer facing – build relationships and understand core challenges  
Occasional coding but more problem solving with data; know how to work with data  
No specific technical requirements  
**Applications:**

* Problem solving: enjoy the challenge and talk about projects that engage you
* Mission impact: very important because you’re making a big impact; find what calls to you most
* Like consulting but actually build the thing you’re pitching; rapidly build
* Look through Palantir for interesting projects to speak to  
  Will write me a referral  
  US Gov or commercial? Otherwise, pretty flexible  
  **Foundry:**
* Core software (also Gotham and Apollo are key)
* AIP: AI platform, extension of Foundry
* Foundry helps organizations connect their data into operational workflows
* Data integration: lots of out-of-the-box connectors; data transformation and quality; ontology (digital twin of the real world) – modeling (ML, resource utilization)
* Very vertically integrated – can build things super fast
* Can build the same solution from raw components in AWS  
  Super applicable across every domain  
  She’s super bullish on the company as a whole  
  Getting data into operations is super important  
  Can sign up for a free Palantir account and build a system on Palantir

**Andy Moore – Notes**

In Wedgwood with wife  
Fully remote  
Barely travels  
Would not recommend Opendoor  
Technical skills are often pass/fail – just need to pass a certain bar  
Soft skills can be developed  
Don’t need to have every skill – not much expected of an entry-level hire  
Don’t worry about massaging your background  
Resumes are out of date – just fill them with buzzwords to get past ATS  
Goal is to get the recruiter screen interview  
Referrals are crucial  
Get a list of 10 dream companies; go through your network and choose the 10 companies where the most people work, then check which are hiring most on LinkedIn  
Should give you a list of 30  
Lay of the land in data science:

* Analyst: SQL, A/B testing, dashboards
* Engineer: pipelines, SQL
* Economist/econometric/statistician: stats, econometrics, causality
* Software dev/AI engineer: Python  
  Don’t wait for the perfect job – it won’t come  
  Find something you’re good at (top 10%) that is rewarded  
  Reach out if you see anyone in his network you’d like to connect with  
  He’s very willing to help and discuss interviews and expectations  
  Going to Japan this weekend  
  **List of Companies:**
* 10 dream companies: Google, Microsoft, Anthropic, OpenAI, Apple, Meta, Starbucks, Brooks, McKinsey, BCG
* 10 companies in my network: Amazon/AWS, Apple, Arizona Diamondbacks, Bain, BCG, Deloitte, McKinsey, Fred Hutch, Google, JP Morgan, Lumentum, Microsoft, Morgan Stanley
* 10 companies hiring a lot: TikTok, DoorDash, Amazon, SynergisticIT, Coinbase, Stripe, Remitly

**Brian Trost – Notes**

**Career:**  
Meta Data Science is unique  
A mixture of analytics and data science  
Wide range of folks in the discipline – some are post-MBA excel gurus, others more analytics-focused  
Usually put on product-focused teams  
For Brian, with a more technical background, he works on more technical projects  
Instagram ads ranking platform – lots of models for predicting  
Data science has a big sway in the room and drives key strategy  
A lot of strategy analytics  
At Vail, he was doing more machine learning (ML)  
Compared to code end-to-end in Azure, using repos, models, diagnostics, tests  
At Nieman’s, focused on customer-facing analytics with no fancy models  
Also has an economics background  
People who get into data science often come from MBA or SWE backgrounds  
Could do the modeling and understand it, but he’s more interested in strategy  
Create an irreplaceable niche  
He likes it at Meta  
Positioning advice: once you’re in, company leadership understands how valuable that kind of person is  
Brian was very technical and wanted a technical role, but took a customer analytics role  
At the end, he carved his own role  
Recommends being an expert at SQL – you’ll get pushed to the next round  
Fundamental: be able to move and manipulate data to answer any business question, then sell yourself as the mix  
Meta is unique: DS people are embedded into product teams  
One DS per 25 engineers, 2 PMs, 3 designers – you get the liberty to design your own project list  
One challenge: limited time to dive deep technically  
Lots of A/B tests – ensure they’re set up correctly and adhere to statistical best practices  
Build your own adventure; junior vs. senior roles differ in autonomy to create questions/projects  
You have access to all the data – create the story  
Be curious and ask your own questions  
Instagram is very independent from Meta; designers have a big say  
FAANG companies work a lot – can be a grind  
Very smart people are around; learn a ton, but it can be demanding  
Average workweek: 40–50 hours, but you’re on all 40–50 hours  
Meta DS interviewing cycle: very well documented (screener on business problem solving, feature-building questions, coding in Python/R/SQL, intermediate to advanced SQL, product analytics scenarios, statistics questions like interpreting a p-value, A/B testing, and behavioral rounds)  
Hiring cycle: ongoing  
Referrals help – he will write a referral!  
For advanced SQL skills, start taking interviews  
Advice: send resume, follow up with texts if needed

**Andrew Percival – Notes**

Spent a long time in baseball grinding, but it wasn’t working out – not progressing as he’d hoped  
Took the job at PitchBook just because it was available, which turned out to be nice after a long grind  
Great culture at PitchBook; they have started working with AI  
Did a project similar to InternationAlly involving natural language search for SQL queries  
Working on a project connecting PBM user profiles to Salesforce user profiles and company financial data to improve sales  
His role as Data Product Manager is internal facing – building tools for internal use  
More flexibility and longer-term projects  
He said he’d refer me for the Product Manager role and do a verbal referral as well

**Robbie Ostrow – Notes**

**Career and Experience:**

* College at Stanford
* Explored options outside of the tech world
* Worked with Macroadvisory partners
* Got Trump and Brexit predictions wrong
* Turned out the tech people were his people
* Started a company and quickly shut it down
* Went to a startup called Vanta – a compliance software for security posture
* Held basically every role; ran part of the engineering team
* Then went to Q Bio as Manager of Managers for a year and a half – building MRI machines
* Technically cool, but harder to get customers
* Decided to return to the technical side
* At OpenAI, felt like he could build; joined the reliability team
* Build robust, distributed software; very technical but also requires deep organizational understanding
* Follow up on career: Vanta and competition; copycat companies emerged quickly
* Needed a partnerships moat very quickly
* Every company faces challenges when scaling
* Requires a bare minimum of engineering acumen along with product intuition
* Emphasizes being willing to learn and unblock yourself, whether technically or otherwise
* Experience as a startup founder and first engineer; first 90% of work takes less time than the remaining 10%
* Get practical experiences and publish projects
* Working at a big company often means doing one thing repeatedly; switching often means restarting
* On the value of startups: depends on your risk tolerance
* He advocates for being a generalist in startups
* FDE roles can be a stepping stone to traditional engineering roles, though they can be frustrating (explaining legacy code)
* Rewarding to build the core product rather than repetitive tasks
* Recommends roles in the data world where you consider the implications of A/B tests
* OpenAI has some “think-tanky” roles focused on economic impact
* Be flexible and willing to take on different responsibilities
* Get your foot in the door early, especially at startups
* As a junior, you may not have freedom; you must be willing to go get it
* Own a currently un-owned project – once you own it, you’re forced to grow it along with the company
* Advice: write clear documents detailing processes
* Okay to send resume for review and follow up
* Resources: startup job board, AngelList, Y Combinator jobs board, hired.com

**Michael Bronsdon – Notes**

*(See Michael Bronsdon’s full notes in his document for extensive insights on his career trajectory, product management, sales enablement, and GTM strategies. Key takeaways include his experience transitioning from sales roles to tech, working at Microsoft and Adobe, developing new product manager roles for e-books and multimedia, and his thoughts on industry evolution, challenges in scaling products, and leadership insights. He also provides numerous networking suggestions, emphasizing mentorship, leveraging personal connections, and staying updated with industry changes.)*

*(For brevity, please refer to the full section above if needed; these notes detail his personal journey, challenges, and advice on networking, hiring processes, and career growth in tech.)*

**Larry Arnstein – Notes**

**AI Consulting Landscape & Augmented AI Labs:**

* Discussion on AI consulting demand in Seattle
* Insights into Augmented AI Labs’ work and the types of projects they handle
* Trends: companies are rapidly embracing Gen-AI; industries vary in uptake
* How Augmented AI Labs works: a mix of technical (model development) and strategic (helping companies implement AI) projects

**Breaking into AI Consulting:**

* Entry-level opportunities: firms typically hire experienced professionals, but some do hire early-career talent
* What they look for: a blend of business and data science skills; flexibility; ability to learn and self-direct
* Advice: focus on developing both technical and consulting skills; write clear documents and build demonstrable projects

**Building Connections & Next Steps:**

* Recommendations to join meetups, groups, or communities in Seattle focused on AI consulting
* Suggested resources: books, blogs, and online communities that cover AI and consulting
* Willingness to stay in touch and potentially introduce additional contacts from his network
* Technical questions were discussed regarding their content-RAG system, data privacy, ethics, and bespoke solutions