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*Where did you begin?*

I was in a unique position because at the time, I was pursuing a science degree. And I came from a four year college, so I had the mindset of “here’s the formula for getting the goal, and it was a very cookie-cutter approach to getting a degree.” And so I started taking more science classes, but then I realized that oh, I don’t have to just stick to this cookie cutter formula. I can take classes for fun and that interest me, and that just opened up a lot of possibilities for me.

I think that is important for students to realize that there is not one way of succeeding and there is not one path to success, and if you are in a situation where you… if you don’t know what you want to do, you have to ask yourself “what is the best situation for me to be in where I can succeed?” So, if it is a four-year college, you know exactly what you want to do and finances are not an issue, that’s fine, that’s great, and there are a lot of benefits to that. But City College is equally, if not more empowering because it’s giving the student the ability to really discover what they’re interested in, engage with the community and what works in the real world. It’s not just an academic isolated bubble. You’re actually involved in the real world, and I think you come out of City College with a very different mindset that is very applicable to the real world and to succeeding.

*What happened after Lick-Wilmerding High School?*

I went to UC Santa Cruz right after Lick-Wilmerding. I really liked biology and I also loved music, and I didn’t know what the heck I wanted to do --- but I thought science was really good and intriguing to me, and I’m good at it and excited about it, and I did AP bio class, and my first job, at 15, I worked at the Exploratorium as an explainer – cow eyeballs and all that stuff – and so after immediately, I went straight to UC Santa Cruz – I wanted to stay local. It may be a cultural thing. Hispanic families --- were all up in each other’s business, so it’s a cultural thing too. I wasn’t that far and I’d come home every weekend, bring my laundry and hang out with my family. It’s what you do. I wasn’t into the fraternity thing – that just wasn’t my thing. But yeah, it was far enough that I felt like I was on my own, but family is right there. You know, when you’re 18, you’re still a kid – you’re still a baby. At least I was. I wasn’t… I didn’t. It is crazy to me kids that can go off. That’s good that they can do that, but I knew it was going to be too much for me. It was the right balance, and I knew immediately like I applied to the college I was associated with – Merrill College, and it was a chemistry honors group, and you know, that place is huge so I found my little niche and was okay, that’s where I am going to be and this is who I am going to hang out with – this little nerdy community and I was right at home. But I did feel a little bit lost. I think there were times when I wasn’t sure if this was the right fit for me and it was costing me a fortune and I think if I knew now what I knew then, I would have done it a little bit differently. Its different – like my brother, who you have met has been struggling. He has had a different experience because academics have always been a struggle for him, but in a way, City College has been the perfect fit for him because it is taking him more time to figure it out – so why put all this pressure on yourself to go to a four year school and get a four year degree when you’re still really confused about what you want to do. So, you know, tomorrow is the beginning of the next semester, and he said, “I don’t know. I’m kind of interested in this.” So, I told him that this is your opportunity. Don’t get stuck in some little mentality that “I need to take this in order to transfer here,” unless you really want to transfer to pursue something. If you feel lost, this is the time. He is a sweetheart, but he struggles and math is a big one for him.

*What did you do after UC Santa Cruz?*

After Santa Cruz, I went to Notre Dame Demur, and I was like, ok, I don’t have, because my degree was in anthropology and I missing some of the harder math classes, and I thought, I’m not going to spend all this money on this. I can go to City College and take the same classes there. I can be closer to my family and the teachers are more approachable and it made sense. Notre Dame did serve its purpose and I did connect with a few key important professors there, but ultimately going from there to City College is where I really formed who I want to be and what I want to do. But, yeah. After that… I came to City College in 2009.

*How did you find community at City College?*

I didn’t do clubs or extracurricular activities. I was just focused on academics and I spent a lot of time in the learning assistance center – which is where I did my math tutoring stuff. I went for tutoring and then I did tutoring with a company called TutorCorp. And then I did a little bit at City College for a nutrition class.

*How did the experience differ from Santa Cruz?*

At Santa Cruz, there’s the orientation process and the family is involved. You’re paying so much money so it’s almost like this customer mentality of you know what I mean. You want to be wined and dined. At City College, it was a confusing process, but now it seems like it is easier to find things – even the website. Like before, I didn’t even know where to start – like where do I go for this? Where do I go for that? Where is this building? It was just kind of a confusing and chaotic process.

I do remember having to show up to do the placement test, and that’s it. There was no orientation. Even here – we’ve had issues with onboarding and what is going to be the process. How are you new hires and what is going to be their experience. A huge part of retention in general is creating that sense of community, and a lot of companies will say, “hey welcome to our company. Here’s a bag and a pen and a t-shirt or whatever, you know. It would be cool if City College kind of adopts that same mentality.

I think it would be great if City College could adopt the same kind of practices that certain companies do – especially successful tech companies – you know in San Francisco, we are now the new Silicon Valley. We are in the hub of it, so I think City College is in a unique opportunity to break that mold and welcome new students in the same way that companies welcome new hires. Here’s a guide to help you navigate through your journey here to help you succeed and here’s your support system. If we set something like that up at City College, the community, the retention rate would probably be improved greatly, and letting students know that there is a support system I think is a huge benefit.

*Coursework*

I started with sciences and math. I took physics with Trudy who was Indian. Shruti something.

Then I took the small business class, introduction to business, accounting class and another professor who also went to USF – personal finance. I had a degree and my aha moment was when I was taking the MCAT for medical school – it’s now three hours long and in my time, it was 8 hours long, and I remember sitting there being surrounded by people who felt as if this was their life and this is what they wanted to do. They wanted to be a doctor, and I felt like… this isn’t for me, and I could not dedicate the next 10 years of my life to this. That’s when I thought, I need to put the brakes, reexamine my life and my priorities and what’s important to me, and I think the stress of being in a situation where you’re paying hundreds of thousands of dollars and being in that situation – I couldn’t even put myself in that situation.

You were a huge influence because I think you were the first teacher that really explained things how the world works to me in a way that I felt like “I get it.” It makes sense and this is something that I can apply to my everyday life. With a lot of the liberal arts colleges, it’s about your feelings and this, and I just wanted to know how to understand what a mortgage is, whether I am getting ripped off my bank or the terms of a contract. It had always been so daunting to me and I thought it was so complicated. But then I realized that if I could understand how the human body works, I can understand how finance works. I can understand that. It’s just the same process of breaking it down and understanding it piece by piece. So then when I found out that business makes sense – what’s the next step? What can I do? MBA. What can I do with an MBA. And then having a science background with an MBA it was a limitless source of opportunities And between you and the other teachers who did personal finance and the statistics teacher who also taught at SF State, I realized there was a correlation between me and the professors who taught business – and realized that this is what I’ve got to do. It just made sense, and then I realized do I want to go to SF State or USF? USF was a great program and the networking alone was well worth it.

I started as an intern in Silicon Valley and it was through my networking and my music – one of the girls who was in the video was a dancer and she also did marketing, so I asked her and told her I was looking for a job and that I had just graduated and wanted to get my feet wet and just see what it’s like. She had an intern job and I started there, and it was a company that wasn’t doing too great. A few months after I started, the marketing team just left. A contractor was left assuming the role of marketing, and I was automatically promoted and learned how to do everything -- webinars, advertising, website, how to work with vendors and how to talk with third-party vendors and events and all these things I had never been exposed to.

Once I discovered that I could get into a tech company, which I always thought would be a daunting thing, that was it – you know. And how I ended up here was again through my network of friends. I ran into the recruiter at a mutual friend’s wedding. I was actually poached by a startup and it was such a risky thing – but then I thought to myself that I don’t have any kids to feed or anything and that if I am going to take a risk, I am going to try it now. And I did, and it wasn’t what I had signed up for, but at least I could say I tried it and it wasn’t what that world was like, and so I was looking for another job and I ran into the recruiter at a wedding and she said she was looking for a sales job and I thought that I could do sales. I sold paint jobs door-to-door in San Francisco (free estimate). I started at Switchfly in sales and our VP Marketing had a baby and decided she wanted to do freelance work and have her own schedule and spend more time at home. I was asked to join the marketing team – I will be brought on permanently with a promotion to follow at a good, solid company.

Switchfly is an ecommerce SAAS travel platform for travel enterprises – our clients are major airlines, hotel chains and financial service. Any company with a loyalty program offering travel as a redemption option we power the booking and the inventory – we connect everything in the background. It’s white label, so you don’t even see that it’s Switchfly. Like United or American Express. We have a global headcount of 250 and in SF, probably about 100.

*Where do you see yourself in the future?*

I think I’m in a – sort of going through a growth spurt, and I’ve learned a lot and I see that if I were to go another company – or if I leave Switchfly, what do I want to take with me – there is, in marketing, metrics are everything and it’s not just about “I can do this. I can do that” and waving your hands. It’s more about “here is a very concrete roadmap that I’ve developed and I can measure my success, the company’s success, I can show wherever I go, what are you starting with and where do you want to go? I can then facilitate getting from A to B. So, I’ve learned all these pieces and now I am figuring out how to put them together, so if I am managing other people, there is that framework that I can build on. I am sort of trying to put myself in a position where one day I can manage others or can someday mentor somebody or run a team. So, that’s my goal. It’s not like… oh, I plan to be VP Marketing, but hey, one day maybe I will be VP of marketing.

I am still very active in the music community and now that I have more of this marketing background, I am trying to help people in a different way using those metrics instead of like just looking at descriptive characteristics – looking at quantities vs. qualitative, especially with artists – everything is about feelings and emotions – so it’s nice to see how many tweaks did you do and how much engagement did you have? OK, so maybe what you’re talking about on your social media site isn’t appealing to your audience. Who is your audience? Then changing the way artists – it’s the part of music that artists don’t like to deal with – but it’s the reality like everything else. I know too much about what happens at companies like LiveNation, and I can’t and wouldn’t be able to do the good that I would want to do if I worked there. having the freedom to partner with whom I want to – for example, demystifying the process of releasing your own album, and monetizing your own work and music and why playing for free is bad for the whole music industry – for the venue, and for the band and these pay-to-play scams that are constantly coming out where they reach out to bands and say “we will do all the promoting for you. All you have to do is show up.” My goal is just trying to keep the music scene here from turning into L.A. It’s become very predatory – the music scene. And if people just had a little bit more common sense and knowledge about what things are, I think that would alleviate a lot of these horror stories that I hear.

*What advice would you offer others returning to City College with four-year degrees?*

I would examine what your goals are, what your priorities are and if you feel unsure about what you want to have a career in or what your life goals are – even that’s okay. I think City College is the place to figure that out, and I think it’s important that you just make the most out of what’s available at City College and give yourself permission to explore. Because whatever your four year degree is, it’s not going to be the end-all be-all – it can be complimentary to what you want to pursue, and that’s ok. The degree isn’t what makes you – it’s what you decide is important to you that really shapes who you are.

*What are the three best things about City College?*

The three best things about City College are the freedom to choose your classes, the variety of classes that are offered, and there is virtually any kind of community available to you at City College. You can share the things are important to you.