

EPISODE 4 - Hamza Khawaja, Product Fellow at Kleiner Perkins

PART 1 - Hamza's Story and 8 Key Takeaways

1. **Put yourself out there** -- when you're just starting and don't have a 'network', a 'mentor', someone to show you the ropes and the path, you have to put yourself out there and build these relationships yourself. Cold email, cold connect and message over LinkedIn, do what you have to do to get your name out there and prove your passion and interest. For a greater deep dive on this topic, check out **Hamza's 5 Networking Tips** below!
2. **The little things add up** -- even if you're an intern - heck, even if you're an 'informal' intern doing small tasks, you can make a name for yourself by always taking the initiative and asking what YOU can do. If you can't do something immediately, learn how to do it as quickly as you can. Offer to help with little things. It may seem tedious at first, but by proving yourself and making a name your direct manager will give you more and more tasks (each one increasing in importance and impact to the organization). Trust is earned through time.
3. **Networking is a snowball effect** -- when you network with one person, you open the possibility of building a strong enough relationship where they would be happy to introduce you to one, two, three, even more people. Then those people can introduce you to more people. And before you know it, just by talking with 3 mentor-like figures and/or new friends, you've built a solid network. Networking is like interest, it compounds (ugh, I couldn't resist the bad pun).
4. **Failure is good, even necessary for success** -- Fail fast, and fail smart. You need to make mistakes in order to improve. Hamza bombed 11 of his interviews and got rejected by hundreds of companies before he landed an internship at Tesla (which then snowballed into Google, Salesforce, and Kleiner Perkins!). By bombing his interviews, he earned an acute understanding of his weaknesses and common mistakes, and he practiced **hard** but also **smartly** by honing in on his weaknesses and eliminating them.

5. **If you have two options, A or B, do both** -- Similar to what Angelica (Episode 3) previously said, if you have the time and energy, you should always do as MUCH as you can. You never know what can land your path!
6. **Being a product manager is like being a mini-CEO** -- for those of you interested in product, Hamza provides a great perspective on what the job is like (and why it may be of interest to you!). Product gives you a bird's eye of viewing of everything that happens in a company, and it's a highly cross-functional role, meaning you're interacting and learning from everyone from sales and marketing to legal, HR, operations, design, engineering, and much, much more.
7. **Do your homework** -- when applying to a job, internship, fellowship, program, etc., do your research. Hamza commanded an insanely impressive, and intimate, understanding of the Salesforce APM program, and leveraged that passion and knowledge to really differentiate himself in the interview process. The recruiters and hiring managers saw Hamza's dedication and passion for the program, and were really impressed. Hamza did the same with Kleiner Perkins - where he understood the history of the program, the unique factors that separated it from other fellowships - and crushed the recruiting process there as well. To attain this knowledge, network (ah, see where networking comes in handy again?).
8. **Startup vs Corporate Culture** -- one isn't necessarily better than the other, it all really boils down to your personal preferences, career goals, and ambitions. Big Tech provides a more structured, comfortable, stable lifestyle, and the name is highly respected (and you know the company's brand is strong, and so you will benefit from having a name like that on your resume). Startups, however, are more energetic and independent, and you will be given more autonomy, freedom, and flexibility to work on high-impact projects. Startups also have much more room for growth, and this carries over to your career trajectory (re: joining a high growth startup that becomes the next Uber/AirBnb/Samsara is a one way ticket to the good life). You will work A LOT more though, and there's inherently more risk (re: startups are more likely to go bankrupt than a blue chip company). There's pro's and con's to each side, it's on your personal risk appetite and preferences to really make a call!

MORE BELOW :)

PART 2 - Hamza's 5 Networking Tips

1. **Networking is not transactional** – Hamza doesn't like the term networking insomuch as it can be more aptly described as 'relationship building'. Networking is about genuinely getting to know people. Okay, well, how does one exactly go about being genuine? Here are some actionable tips + tricks...
2. **Actively listen to people, and spend more time listening than talking** – By listening to people, you make them feel valued. You make them feel wanted. And they're giving you valuable advice! Take notes, ask follow-up questions, and smile and nod and add comments adding on to their thoughts and discussion. You want to make you coffee chatter feel **VALUED**.
3. **Do your homework** – Look at their LinkedIn's, and see current experience, previous experience, and hobbies and interests. Many people write down their high school and college activities even after they graduated – this is a great source of conversation starters, especially if you share an interest or topic in common! Talk about hobbies and passions (like another guest, Carmelia from Episode 2, earlier mentioned). Most students try to cut straight to the chase. Obviously, some coffee chatters would be more than happy to do so. Some may even prefer more 'direct' communication. But chances are, the person you're talking to is, well, a person. And people would generally rather talk about things they're interested in before jumping head first into the professional sauce.
4. **If their LinkedIn is sparse (or if they don't have one or any other discernible way of collecting information, ask them** - One of Hamza's actionable examples is striking up a conversation about work commute and the city. Chat about what they like they do in their free time. Offer some of your own rec's for things to do in a given city/region. Favorite restaurants, free attractions, view points, hiking spots, dessert shops, coffee shops, anything and everything. People will LOVE you, because everybody LOVES a good recommendation.
5. **When it's time to ask more 'professionally' oriented questions, gear your questions towards the individual and individual impact** – Talk about their time as an intern (if relevant), how their work has changed/shifted as a result of COVID-19, how the company/team/product itself has changed as a result of COVID-19. Talk about the impact of the projects they've led/executed (intern-level, entry-level, manager/executive-level if relevant, etc.) and what they were able to accomplish. Talk about the firm's opportunity for mentorship, resources for interns and new-joiners, etc. If you're interested in community service or Diversity & Inclusion initiatives, ask about those and how the firm is championing these causes! **Ask for stories, not corporate talking points.**

PART 3 - Hamza's Quick Tips on Applying to Kleiner Perkins Fellowship Programs

- Candidates have two pipelines into the Kleiner Perkins Product, Design, and/or Engineering Fellow programs.
- First -- Apply to the Kleiner Perkins fellows program [directly](#)
- Second -- Apply to a portfolio company *within* Kleiner Perkins, and once you are accepted you can apply to Kleiner Perkins (and skip one or two rounds of interviews and skip most of the bureaucracy)
- Hamza and I are working on an intensive interview guide for Kleiner Perkins and other similar product fellowships and product management programs/rotations (re: interview questions, take-home cases and case studies, etc.). We're trying to get this out to you ASAP, and when it does you'll find it linked [HERE](#) as well as on our LinkedIn's, blogs, newsletters, and more <3

PART 4 - Hamza's 3 [General] Tips to Acing Your Interview

- Hamza's 4 adjectives for star candidates: creative, humble, structured, and capable of communicating a **view** (re: I think this ABC feature > XYZ feature because of N metric, I think we should do XYZ instead of ABC because 123, etc.). Don't be afraid of taking a view and taking a stand!
- **Hamza's Golden Rule: YOUR INTERVIEWERS ARE YOUR FRIENDS**
 - Your interviewers **WANT** you to succeed. They want to hire the best talent. They want you to blow their mind. Because it saves them time, yes. But because they **NEED** you. Your interviewers are your friend, because they want to support you and see what you've got.
 - When you are 'chill' and more humble and casual, your interviewer can more easily picture you thriving in the firm.
 - When you befriend your interviewer, you will be able to present your best self. **You are at your best when you are happy and passionate, when you thrive off others' energies and they off yours.**
 - To practice being more 'calm, cool, collected, and creative'
- STAR - Situation-Task-Action-Result. Know what this is, and apply structure to your stories whenever you can. For more, read my guide on [Acing Interviews!](#)

PART 5 - Hamza's 3 Top #InternshipTips

- First things first – excel in your main, primary project. Do your main job, excel, and stand out by showing how you're irreplaceable.
- Under-sell, Over-deliver.
 - Say you can get something dead on a certain deadline. Then execute it a week ahead of time. Under-sell (you're an intern, so they'll naturally under-estimate you), then over-deliver and blow their minds.
- Once you prove yourself, you'll be given more projects and more responsibilities.
- Network with your **manager's manager** -- If your manager's manager likes you and wants you back, then your manager absolutely will follow! You want to do small things and take extra work off your manager and manager's manager, but always keep everybody in the loop (so it doesn't seem like you are working behind your manager's back, never assume your intentions are made clear!).
 - What looks better when your manager's manager - who is in charge of your manager's job, pay, promotion, rating, etc. - vouches for you? Nothing.

PART 6 - Hamza on Whether Cereal Is Soup

- **Basically Hamza:** "Without getting too philosophical, I have two criteria for soup. Is it hot? And does it have vegetables? All the soup I've seen fits these two buckets. On that note, cereal is not soup, because it is neither hot nor does it have any vegetables. Case closed -- cereal is not soup.
- **When asked if tea was soup according to his criteria,** Hamza responded with a resounding "yes." I think one funny takeaway here is that - when you need to make fast decisions that are simple and actionable - there's going to be trade-offs. Meanwhile, the more nuance you inject in your analysis and recommendation, the more time it will take to explain (and implement it). This is a common trade-off in the real working world.

Hamza's Final Word to Students and Job Hunters:

"Luck plays an insane role in recruiting. If you had removed the luck factor in my life and I just relied on my hard work, I wouldn't be where I am today. I wouldn't have all the internships and amazing work experiences I've accumulated up until this point. Luck always plays a role. We can reduce our exposure to risk, but we can't bad luck-proof ourselves. All we can do is keep moving, keep grinding, keep learning from others, and most importantly learn from our mistakes and relentlessly grow and improve."