Our Conversation with Rob Go

Duke I&E: Tell us about your time at Duke. What did you study and what were you involved in? Did you do anything entrepreneurial while you were here?

RG: I made some of my life’s most important relationships at Duke. I met my wife at Duke as well as one of my founding partners of NextView, so it was very meaningful.

I studied economics and took a bunch of electives in the Public Policy department. I also was very active with the Asian Students Association. At the time, the impact of students of Asian descent was extremely muted for a variety of reasons. As someone who grew up in Asia, I felt compelled to do what I could to expand the visibility and influence of that community in the life of the university.

Duke I&E: You worked at a wide variety of companies, such as The Parthenon Group, eBay, and Fidelity Investments after graduating. Tell us about some of your favorite career experiences.

RG: I almost got fired at Parthenon because of a major prank that I pulled on one of the partners. To be fair, we were encouraged to prank a partner as part of a morale building initiative during the recession of the early 2000’s. I survived because of the grace of the team there and (I think) my solid track record of prior work. Ultimately, the founders and several other partners at Parthenon were some of the first investors in my fund, which was very rewarding.

eBay was a remarkable company at the time I was there because in many ways, we were investing the way internet companies operated and would succeed for generations to come. No one had really done it before, and after the Internet bubble burst, eBay was one of the only companies of scale that was doing really interesting things. eBay was also an incredibly mission driven company founded on the premise of equal opportunity and a level playing field. I remember going to my first eBay Live (eBay’s annual ecosystem conference) and seeing thousands of people from all walks of life pursuing their hobbies or building businesses on the platform in a way that was completely unavailable anywhere else. That was super inspiring.

Duke I&E: You co-founded NextView Ventures. Tell us a bit about the company and the story of how it got started.

RG: NextView is a seed stage venture capital fund founded by three partners. We were each previously operators and entrepreneurs at high growth companies who had transitioned to larger venture capital firms in the past. We all shared a few things in common. First, we loved founders, especially the process of making something out of nothing, and we were frustrated that larger firms were doing less and less of that kind of investing and instead just chasing things that were already working. Second, we all believed in hands-on, high conviction seed investing, as
opposed to investing in dozens and dozens of companies and praying that things worked out. Third, we believed that the ecosystem in the Northeast was both underserved by great investors and also had an excellent, refreshing supply of terrific founders. Finally, my partners and I shared a common ethos about how we wanted to interact with founders and how we wanted to participate in the startup communities we are a part of.

**Duke I&E:** NextView Ventures has been in business for nearly 5 years. Tell us what your business is like these days. What do you spend the majority of your time on?

**RG:** Business is great! We spend time with excellent founders and feel like we are fighting and scraping beside them every day.

We spend about 1/3 of the time working on potential new investments. This means meeting founders, learning about sectors, and doing due diligence on potential investment opportunities. We spend 1/3 on helping our portfolio companies win. This looks like board meetings, working on projects that we’ve given ourselves to help companies with salient issues, and recruiting and business development. We also spend 1/3 of the time broadly on what I’d call firm-building. This includes building out our platform efforts at NextView, fundraising, and thinking through our own strategy and approach with a blank canvas.

**Duke I&E:** Thinking back to when you were a student, were there things you wished you’d done differently to prepare for being an entrepreneur? And what did you do as a student that you are glad you did?

**RG:** I wish I had done a few things differently. First, I wish I had focused more on courses that pushed me to think in different ways. In particular, I wish I had studied more philosophy and more computer science.

Second, I wish that I had taken more risks with my summers and other free time. I ended up doing fairly generic activities, and I could have really expanded my horizons and been more courageous about doing things outside my comfort zones.

What I am glad I did was be pretty broad in my coursework and explored stuff that was interesting to me, even though it didn't have direct relevance to any career aspirations.

The common theme around these is expanding ones experiences and ways of thinking. Entrepreneurs tend to find problems to solve by encountering those problems directly, not through an academic effort or "brainstorming". College is a wonderful time to engage in breadth-first exploration. As Steve Jobs remarked in his famous speech at Stanford (which I was lucky enough to attend in person) "you can only connect the dots looking backwards". My corollary advice then is to use college as a time to create bold and interesting dots in the canvas of your life.
Duke I&E: Tell us what it’s like to live in the Boston area. What’s the vibe like out there for a young alum?

RG: Boston is a wonderful and vibrant city. It’s a city of heroic pioneers, inventors, and students. It’s hard to imagine a place that is more intellectually stimulating. But it’s also incredibly friendly, accessible, and livable. We love it!