



ACCEPTANCE ROADMAP



 Danny Ruderman

Welcome

Thank you so much for picking up this roadmap!



For the last 18 years, I have been blessed to help many, many of families just like yours find, apply, and get into top universities. Yet with admissions numbers continuing to drop and anxiety about the process continuing to rise, many families ask, "Is it really possible?"

Yes, it is. And I will show you how to help your child have the best opportunity to get accepted into America's top colleges by being authentic.

My approach has been considered revolutionary because it runs counter to commonly-held beliefs about how college admissions works and why students get accepted. I feel blessed that families from all over the world have placed their trust in me to help their children navigate the admission process. I am also proud to say that, year after year, my students have gone on to great colleges that truly match who they are as people.

Given that I'm the first in my family to attend college and the third to get accepted to Stanford from my urban, public high school, I want to fulfill my mission of helping as many families as possible realize the same dream.

Danny

Step 1

Be Authentically Interesting



This is Claire.

When Claire was a senior, she was a good student but wasn't the top of her class.

She had mostly As (weighted GPA of 4.1) and a 32 ACT score (Superscore 33).

She was the only student from her private high school to get into Stanford that year, despite having students in her class who had higher GPAs and test scores.

Wait, what?! Why? How?

Well, we need to dig a bit deeper.

One day Claire came into my office, and I asked her, "So, anything interesting happen this week?"

"Well, my bowhead whale rap went over well in class," she replied.

"Uh, your bowhead whale rap?" I asked?

"You want to hear it?"

"Um, yeah right away."

And it was hilarious and very, very Claire.

You see, it's not that writing a three minute rap about whales is overly impressive, but it does give you a quick snapshot of Claire's personality, which is why I had her send a link to it in her Stanford application. Keep this mind as you learn what else she was into...

So what else was Claire into?

She was a singer/songwriter who had been writing songs since 1st grade and regularly released her music on Soundcloud.

She was a guitar & ukulele player.

She worked as an intern at OPAL Music Labs where she helped with the creation of an algorithm that used key words/groupings to find unsigned musicians on SoundCloud.

She became a certified emergency medical technician (EMT) before 12th grade.

She was an artist who worked with acrylic paint, watercolors, and graphite.

Now you might be thinking, this Claire girl seems interesting. And you'd be right.

Oh and once she got to Stanford, she was the first intern at Jone Ive's design company (he was the chief designer for Apple).

Great Danny, What's Your Point?

I'm so glad you asked.

To best show you why and how so many of my students have gotten accepted into the Ivies (and Stanford, Duke, Northwestern, & U Chicago), you should understand that while there are many factors that contribute to a college acceptance, including grades, test scores (if applicable), quality of classes, activities, recommendations, and essays, there are 3 little-understood strategies that not only produce the best acceptance results, they also produce the most interesting and authentic students.

3 Key Strategies



#1 It's not about doing more, it's about being **INTERESTING**.

The key is to help your child discover a genuine interest and then come up with ways of pursuing that interest in, well, interesting ways. So if a boy likes cars, maybe he creates a photo blog where he takes pictures of exotic vehicles. Maybe a girl contacts robotics professors at a local university to ask about working in their labs in the summer. Or maybe two friends write a musical. The bottom line is that colleges like to see **commitment & authenticity**.



#2 To become interesting, students need to maximize **TIME**.

What about all the time taken up by sports, theater, and saving the whales, you ask? Believe me, I get it. However, it's still possible to maximize time so a student can spend 3-10 hrs/week on another genuine interest. To do this, I advise what is considered blasphemous: **take fewer hard classes and drop anything that a student doesn't love or isn't necessary**. I'm not saying kids shouldn't challenge themselves. But if that one AP US History class is taking up four hours/night, be strategic. If anyone could join that club, then it doesn't really stand out, right?



#3 It's all about finding the best **MATCH**.

The guy in the picture is named Evan Spiegel. He is also an ex-student of mine. Oh yeah, he also started Snapchat. Evan didn't think he could get into Stanford because, while he was a good student, he was not at the top of his class. What he didn't realize, however, was that his 4-year's worth of graphic design work **demonstrated his ability** to succeed in Stanford's Design program. Thus, one of the reasons he got in was because his interests matched to what Stanford offered. Make sense?

Step 2

Go Big

This is Blake.

When he was a junior, I asked him what he would do for a job if he had one billion dollars.

"A music producer," he said quickly.

Yet, when I started talking about summer opportunities, he said he would probably just go into his dad's business.

I asked him, "Look, if you could intern with anyone in the world, who would it be?"

He mentioned 2 music producers...



We started asking everyone we knew and emailing the producer's assistants. After weeks, they agreed to have him move furniture for one day.

Blake came back and said, "I didn't meet the producer. I guess nothing will happen."

"Oh we're not done Blake, I replied. Now you have your foot in the door."

We then sent a thank you email, stating that he was available to do any activity, any time, after school or in the summer.

They invited him back to help set up a studio, and soon Blake met the producer who, unbeknownst to us, had been mentored himself when he was 19.

Cut to today, and Blake was recently nominated for a Grammy after having worked as an intern for the producer for 3 years. He was then signed to the label and now produces some of the biggest acts in the world.

So What's This About A Superpower?

I have a time-tested theory:

Teenagers have a superpower.

Adults WANT to help them succeed. They want to feel like they are helping the next generation. They are more than happy to provide opportunities, mentorships, internships, and the like that they won't do for an adult.

All a student has to do is ask in the right way
and learn how to develop a relationship.

3 Key Strategies

#1 Take off the restrictions, let go of the self-doubt and **GO BIG.**



Most students don't believe me when I tell them they, too, can do what Blake did and find opportunities most people would deem extraordinary. However, before anything else, a student has to **believe it's possible & decide they are willing to work** their butt off if given an opportunity.

#2 Identify the people who would be the most helpful in making a **GOAL A REALITY.**



As a parent, you can help your child figure out who would be a great mentor. It might be a CEO, a professor, a doctor, lawyer or other professional. It might be a writer, singer, artist, or movie star. Then, **you can help them find a contact email** (I like using RocketReach online) or reach out to other people who might know who are you looking for.

#3 Ask, ask, ask, ask **ASK.**



Send a specifically-worded email, in which your child introduces themselves as a high school student, demonstrates their knowledge of the person's work, and asks if they would be willing to answer three simple questions (put at the bottom of the email) about how to succeed in the field. **It works.**

Step 3

Develop Grit By Finding A “Big Why”



This woman's name is Shree.

When Shree was in high school, her grandfather died of cancer and she decided she wanted to work in a lab to conduct cancer research.

At the time, she said she wasn't the science genius in the house—that would be her brother. In fact, Shree often found her science classes difficult and had to work really hard.

Nonetheless, she began emailing three professors a day and was either ignored or turned down 101 times. Yet, she kept going until one researcher said yes. She then ended up making a discovery in the lab that caused a certain type of cancer be killed by chemotherapy.

She submitted her results to the inaugural Google Science Fair. She won first place and \$50,000.

She then went on Harvard.

Oh and she's now getting a PhD/MD at Duke.

Why Grit Is THE Most Important Thing And The Hardest To Develop

In her book, Grit, Professor Angela Duckworth writes that it is “a combination of passion and perseverance for a singularly important goal that is the hallmark of high achievers.” She also find scientific evidence that grit can grow...

The real question comes down to this:

Does a student have a big enough reason, a big enough WHY that will propel them around, over, and through any obstacle?

3 Key Strategies



#1 Ask the right **QUESTIONS.**

Every person has their own “big why” as to why they take action and why they follow through when most others won’t. To help your child figure out their big why, **you can ask questions** for them to think about—questions such as, “If you had a billion dollars, (so money wasn’t an issue) and you could have any job, what would it be? “What are three favorite memories you have from your life so far?” & “What is time when you experienced true joy? What gave you that feeling?”



#2 Set a goal and list every step, including any possible challenges & how to **OVERCOME THEM.**

Most students have no idea how to write down a goal, break it down into concrete steps, estimate how much time each will *actually* take, and then create time blocks in their schedule to accomplish it. You can help your child do this by **starting with something small** and building from there. The key is to also have them think through how they will push past a delay or challenge before they ever get there to help them believe they are capable at the outset.



#3 It’s all about setting up **ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS.**

We’ve all been there...we decide to do something and then let life get in the way. While some students would love someone to keep them on track and hold them accountable, almost none want their parents to do it. Yet, you can help your child set up strategies to hold themselves accountable, including working with a friend and creating a reward/punishment system that they choose in order to provide some external motivation for them to follow through.

Step 4

Write Essays That Stand Out



This is Griffin.

This is his personal statement:

They called me the bug man.

When I was 7, I lifted up a rock where I found the most daunting of all creatures: the *Latrodectus mactans*, or “black widow” spider.

Being the bug connoisseur I was, I decided it would be wise to use one of my bug jars to capture the arachnid, along with its white egg sac.

Although I desperately wanted to share my greatest catch with everyone, I knew my parents would freak out if I were to show it to them, so I kept my new friend to myself and stored the container in a secret spot in my closet.

For days, I would marvel at my capture and study every aspect of its fascinating anatomy. One day I noticed something different about the egg sac. It seemed deflated. When I looked closer, I noticed hundreds of minuscule black widows crawling in and out of the mesh attached to the top of the plastic container. They were on the floor, the walls, and seemingly everywhere in the closet. I knew this was too big of a job for me to handle, so I ran to my mom. My parents were none too happy to discover I had unleashed an army of poisonous spiders into our household, but they called the exterminator and the problem was eventually eradicated. My mom and dad were similarly perturbed the time that I “accidentally” let dozens of crickets, (which I used to feed my pet bearded dragon), into our living room the night before we were going to have an open house, nor were they overly thrilled when I hatched my collection of butterflies in the downstairs bathroom. Nevertheless, they continued to encourage my ever-expanding curiosity. My fascination with bugs soon turned into other passions.

Without ever knowing the term “autodidact,” I suppose I became one. One day, when I was at home sick in the 2nd grade, I found a book on how to play the piano and spent the next seven hours teaching myself how to read sheet music. When my parents came home, they couldn’t figure out how their son suddenly knew how to play “Ode to Joy.” I would read everything I could get my hands on. I read a book about quantum computing while flying to Spain and read about Entrepreneurial Finance on the flight back.

(Continued on next page.)

I studied soldering techniques in a book I found in a library so I could go home and add another button to my Xbox controller that would help me shoot faster. I learned lock picking techniques. I recently re-wired the light system in my house. I have also spent months studying how to trade stocks so I could both day trade and invest for the long run.

While some kids in my elementary school thought my interests were "weird," my parents had the foresight to send me to cotillion where I learned to balance my intellectual abilities with the skills to actually talk to girls. I guess the point is that if I am supposed to write something so meaningful that my application would not be complete without it, then I have to say that I simply love being curious. I like knowledge; I like having intelligent conversations, especially with people who are smarter than I am; and I believe that in order to improve society, we must build off of what has been found before. However, in order to do this, we must also truly understand what has already been discovered. This is why no matter what I major in or what profession I choose, I will always be learning new things and trying to improve upon them. For now, I just want to make a container that will prevent baby black widows from escaping.

Wait, Is My Child Supposed To Write Like That?

No.

Most students don't write like Griffin or have his personality
(and most don't know the word "autodidact").

The reason why I am using this example is because while the essay is certainly
unique, it does do three things that all standout essays should do:

3 Key Strategies

#1 Great admissions essays should **REVEAL PERSONAL QUALITIES.**



Many students think they should use the essays to show more about what they've done. Instead, students should use each essay to show a side of them that **may not be evident** in the rest of the application. In other words, admissions officers want to get a sense of the traits that a student feels are important to understanding them. Are they hard working, honest, compassionate, quirky, creative? And do the essays have a voice, a personality?

#2 Standout essays should **TELL STORIES.**



Most people have heard the phrase "show don't tell." When it comes to essay writing, this means focusing on a **moment** story. If a student wants to show compassion, they can write about when they visited a friend in the hospital and stayed up all night. If they want to show hard work, they can write about running up 157 stairs with a 30 lb weight vest on. And it doesn't just have to be one story. Students can also string together anecdotes related to a theme, each one showing a different quality.

#3 Essays that get remembered use **CONCRETE DETAILS.**



Griffin is particularly good at this. Notice how you get a sense of who he is by his use of specific examples throughout the essay. Not only do they paint a picture in a reader's mind, but they all seem genuine because they're all true. Now, not every student is going to be as curious as he is, but when admissions officers are only spending 12 minutes on an entire application, they aren't reading for details, they are reading for **feeling**.

Well, that's it...for now!

I hope this Roadmap has been helpful, and I look forward to continuing to provide support however I can.

And if you'd like an affordable way to get my personal guidance—

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