

Tangent, because your social class shouldn't determine your success

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Gary Izunwa, Co-Founder of Tangent, about employee referral, social mobility and finding hidden gems.

What was the catalyst for launching Tangent?

When working for LinkedIn, I quickly learned that employee referrals were the best hiring channel. You're 9x more likely to get hired through a referral and 82% of employers rank them as their best recruitment source. This is all great *if* you have a professional network. However, if you come from a low socioeconomic background like I do (I grew up low-income and in a single-parent family), chances are you don't have this type of network and are locked out of referrals, which subsequently affects your career. Tangent exists to change this.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work

with, how you reach customers and so on?

Tangent is an employee referral platform that makes referrals accessible to everyone and *not* just the privileged few with the best networks. In practice, this means that we connect aspiring Business/Sales Development Representatives (B/SDR) in London with Tech Sales employees for a referral opportunity. Jobseekers on Tangent submit video pitches (60-90s) where they pitch themselves for a B/SDR role. These video pitches can be viewed by Tech Sales reps who connect with the ones who they think have profiles that could be a match for their company. They'll usually have one call and if it goes well, the rep can refer them for an open role or pipeline them for any future opportunities that open in their company.

We have big ambitions at Tangent, this is just our first step in creating a world where the social contexts we are born into *do not* determine our career outcomes.

Some of our early customers include unicorn companies such as GoCardless and Multiverse; who both made hires through Tangent in just three weeks.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

At the beginning we were very cash strapped so we had to be creative! We launched our first MVP in October 2022 which was hacked together using tools such Google Drive, MailChimp and TypeForm – it was *far* from perfect, but it allowed for us to validate our riskiest assumptions (e.g. will people post video pitches, will sales employees watch them, will customers hire through Tangent – all scary things that had to be answered before we built more product). Since then, we have answered these questions and successfully raised our first round of funding which has allowed us to grow the team and develop our own technology. We'll soon be launching the first version of Tangent in code which will allow for a much more bespoke and custom member experience.

Tell us about the working culture at Tangent

We're a very mission driven business so naturally everyone who joins Tangent is enthused and passionate about advancing social mobility. Being such a

mission and impact-driven company has proven to be an incredible asset for building culture as it helps everyone in the team move in the same direction.

Core tenets of our culture are: vulnerability, trust, accountability, high-agency and transparency. All this mixed together promotes a culture where everyone is empowered to speak openly without fear of retaliation, is expected to drive their work forward to a high standard whilst holding others to account and has clear visibility over the core business objectives so that they know that their work is meaningful and contributes to our highest priorities.

How are you funded?

We are backed primarily by private investors (angels and VCs) but have also won non-dilutive capital from Google's Black Founders Fund and the Stephen Lloyd Awards.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Fundraising in 2023 as a first time founder from a low socioeconomic background was definitely a challenge. I quickly learned that fundraising, like most things in life, is a game of "who you know and not what you know". There is so much capital out there but it's often hidden behind doors that most don't have access to. Somehow during the raise I managed to break into networks of influence and privilege and from that point everything changed.

How does Tangent answer an unmet need?

The tech industry has all the ingredients to be a paragon for social mobility but like most industries it favours schools over skills, credentials over competencies, privilege over potential. Sixty seven percent of tech employees come from the highest social groups with twenty one percent attending independent or fee-paying schools. This compares to sixty three percent of the total population coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. There are so many hidden gems that don't get noticed in the labour market due to lack of professional networks and knowledge. It's our firm belief that unlocking this talent for companies will be both good for business and the economy.

What's in store for the future?

Growth, growth, growth! Growth of our tech platform. Growth of our members. And although it's not a core focus right now, eventually growth of our customers. We're building something that so uniquely blends both purpose and profit and so we are extremely excited for the impact and commercial potential of Tangent.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Always talk to your members and users! If you're not regularly talking to the people who you're building your product/service for then you're making fake progress. Read "The Mom Test" and set a concurrent cadence for meeting with your target audience. It's not glamorous work but helps ensure that you're building the right things, in the right way and for the right people.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I usually wake up between 5am and 6am to go to the gym. I have to get it done early – by the end of the working day I'm so tired that I couldn't bear the thought of having to workout; I've no idea how people do it!

My only rules are to work hard, be kind to myself and enjoy the rollercoaster of a journey that is entrepreneurship.

Gary Izunwa is the Co-Founder of *Tangent*.