

210 interns. 115,000 applicants. Here’s what Citadel Securities’ 0.18% actually have in common

By Alex DiLeonardo

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AI is transforming how work gets done, automating or accelerating many of the tasks that have long defined the early years of a professional’s career. That shift is playing out across even the most technologically advanced industries, including ours.

It raises questions every employer should be asking: what will we expect from early-career talent, and what will they expect from us?

At Citadel Securities, our answer starts with how we already work. From day one, we ask new colleagues to own hard problems, form a view, and drive it – not to shadow, not to wait their turn. AI amplifies that model. It clears away the mechanical parts of the job and puts more of the interesting work – judgment, ownership, building – into the hands of the people just starting out.

That’s why what increasingly separates the 0.18% who get an offer from everyone else isn’t coding ability, or GPA, or which quant competitions they’ve won. It’s something AI can’t replicate, but something AI can accelerate – building.

Builders are people who identify problems no one assigned them to solve, organize people and ideas around solutions, and take responsibility for making things happen. Those qualities have always mattered – and in the age of AI, they’re becoming even more important, particularly for new graduates.

Of course, technical excellence still matters. Our work depends on outstanding engineers, quantitative researchers, and traders. But as AI becomes increasingly capable, technical expertise alone is no longer enough to stand out. Employers are now evaluating early-career candidates the way they have long evaluated leaders: based on



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curiosity, problem-solving ability, communication skills, and the initiative to build.

So how should students prepare for this new environment?

Build something.

The specific pursuit matters less than the fact that you chose it yourself. Build a business. Create an app. Launch a campus organization. Organize a community initiative. Pursue original research. Turn a hobby into something bigger. The common thread is self-direction.

Projects like these teach lessons that classroom assignments rarely can – they require you to navigate ambiguity and persist without someone else defining every step. Those experiences build judgment, resilience, and confidence.

Pursue mastery.

The strongest candidates aren't the ones with the longest list of activities. They're the ones with genuine passion who go deep because they cared enough to keep improving.

Employers notice people who have challenged themselves, overcome setbacks, and demonstrated the discipline to keep learning and improving over time.

Use the tools.

Use AI tools every day – just as much in your extracurricular pursuits as your core classroom work. The goal is not simply proficiency with AI. The goal is to use it to create, experiment, and solve problems on a scale that simply wasn't possible before.

In doing so, you will develop the judgment to know when to rely on AI tools, when they will fall short, and how to combine these capabilities with your own thinking to produce better outcomes – qualities employers will increas-

ingly look for as they recruit new talent.

That's why I believe we are entering the golden age of builders.

As AI takes on more routine work, talented people will have more leverage than ever before. They'll be able to test ideas faster, solve larger problems earlier in their careers, and create meaningful impact with fewer barriers to getting started. That means more interesting work from the outset, a shorter path from idea to implementation, and earlier opportunities to lead.

That's what makes this moment so exciting. Every industrial revolution has reshaped the workforce while also creating entirely new opportunities for those willing to adapt. The professionals who succeed in this environment will be the builders – and their advantage will only grow.

Builders have always stood out. Today, AI is giving more people, earlier in their careers, the opportunity to become one.