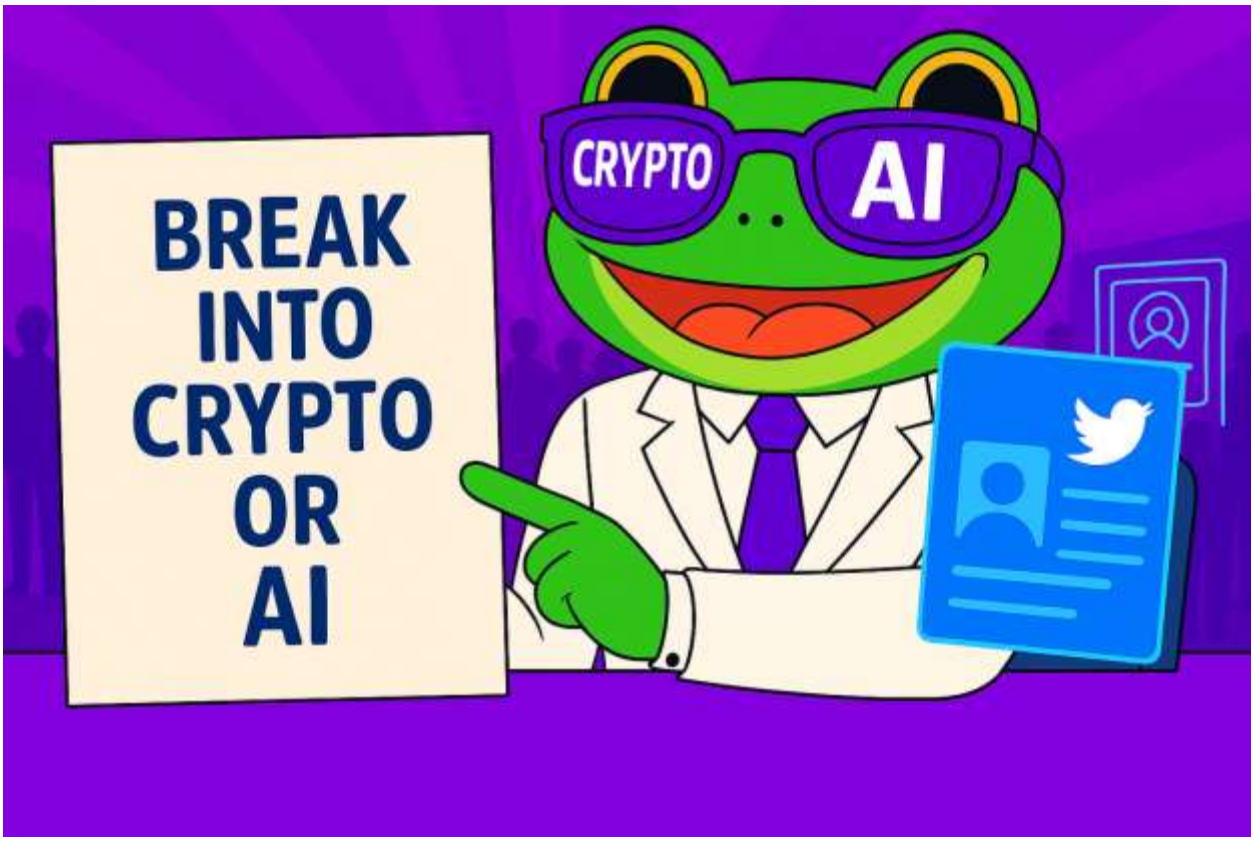

MODULE 1 — Understanding the Landscape

In both crypto and AI, hiring operates according to a logic that is fundamentally different from traditional technology sectors, and understanding this difference is essential for anyone hoping to navigate these industries with intention rather than confusion.

Instead of relying on job boards or formalized talent pipelines, these ecosystems function as living, evolving networks where opportunities emerge from the interplay of funding cycles, product milestones, narrative momentum, and the relationships that bind builders, founders, and contributors together.

Crypto, for example, is not a monolithic industry but a sprawling constellation of Layer 1 and Layer 2 protocols, DeFi platforms, infrastructure providers, wallets, exchanges, security firms, gaming studios, DAOs, and research organizations, each with its own rhythms, priorities, and hiring triggers.

AI mirrors this complexity through its own ecosystem of foundation model labs, applied AI startups, infrastructure companies focused on data and MLOps, established products

integrating AI features, and agencies or consultancies helping enterprises adopt automation.

In both domains, hiring rarely follows a predictable headcount plan; instead, it is shaped by the immediate pressures and opportunities facing a team. Roles often emerge from a problem-first dynamic, where a company encounters a bottleneck—whether in growth, infrastructure, compliance, or community—and responds by creating a position tailored to that specific pain point.

At other times, hiring is person-first, driven by the appearance of a candidate whose clarity of value, depth of context, or demonstrated proof of work compels a founder to create or reshape a role around them. And in moments of new funding, product expansion, or market entry, hiring becomes budget-first, with teams rapidly assembling pods across go-to-market, infrastructure, or ecosystem functions to capitalize on momentum.

Crucially, the people who make these decisions are not distant HR departments but founders, CTOs, Heads of Product, engineering leads, and small circles of trusted advisors who prioritize speed, trust, and contextual understanding over polished processes or ATS-driven workflows.

Warm introductions, investor recommendations, former colleagues, and visible community contributors carry far more weight than cold applications, and hiring decisions are often made long before a job description is ever drafted or posted.

This is why traditional job-search playbooks consistently underperform in crypto and AI: ATS-heavy strategies fail because many roles are never posted or are posted only after a preferred candidate is already in motion; generic resumes fall flat because teams expect evidence that a candidate understands their stack, their users, and their constraints; and slow, formal outreach loses to fast, specific, founder-aware communication that demonstrates genuine insight and initiative.

To succeed in these industries, candidates must adopt an ecosystem mindset—one that recognizes that opportunities arise from participation, visibility, and proof of work rather than passive applications. They must learn to track funding announcements, product launches, and narrative shifts, because these events reliably signal where hiring will accelerate. They must position themselves not as job seekers but as contributors who understand the problems a team faces and can articulate how they will solve them. And above all, they must recognize that in crypto and AI, hiring is not a transactional process but a dynamic, relationship-driven exchange where clarity, speed, and contextual intelligence consistently outperform traditional credentials. Mastering this reality is the

foundation for building a resilient, high-leverage career in the frontier industries shaping the next decade of technology.

Lessons:

- How crypto & AI hiring really works
- Where real jobs come from (not job boards)
- Hype roles vs. durable roles
- How to read the market like an insider

1.1 How crypto and AI hiring actually works

- **The ecosystem view, not the job board view:**
  - **Crypto:** L1s/L2s, DeFi, infra, wallets, exchanges, tooling, security, gaming, DAOs, research orgs.
  - **AI:** Foundation model labs, applied AI startups, infra (MLOps, data platforms), AI features inside existing products, agencies/consultancies.
  - **Implication:** Hiring is often driven by funding cycles, product milestones, and narrative shifts—not just headcount plans.
- **How roles actually get created:**
  - **Problem-first:** Team hits a bottleneck (growth, infra, compliance, community) → creates a role around that pain.
  - **Person-first:** A strong candidate shows up with a clear value proposition → role is created or tailored.
  - **Budget-first:** New funding, new product line, or new market → hiring "pods" (e.g., GTM pod, infra pod, ecosystem pod).
- **Where hiring decisions are really made:**
  - **Founders & early leaders:** In early-stage crypto/AI, founders, CTOs, and Heads of Product/Engineering make the call.
  - **Small, trusted circles:** Warm intros, investor recommendations, ex-colleagues, and community contributors are prioritized.

        - **Signals over process:** They optimize for speed and signal, not for perfect process or polished ATS workflows.
    - **Why traditional job search playbooks underperform:**
        - **ATS-heavy strategies fail:** Many roles are never posted, or postings are "backfilled" after a candidate is already in play.
        - **Generic resumes get ignored:** Teams want evidence of context: you understand their stack, their users, and their constraints.
        - **Slow, formal outreach loses:** Fast, specific, founder-aware outreach beats "Dear Hiring Manager" every time.

Exercise: Map your last 3 jobs to the "problem-first / person-first / budget-first" hiring model.

Assignment: Write a 5–7 sentence breakdown of how *you* would get hired by a founder, not an ATS.

1.2 Where the real jobs are (not just job boards)

- **Primary hiring channels in crypto & AI:**
    - **Direct company channels:** Careers pages, Discord/Telegram/Slack, GitHub repos, project forums, Notion job boards.
    - **Ecosystem hubs:**
        - Crypto: L1/L2 ecosystem job boards, hackathon partners, grants pages, ecosystem newsletters.
        - AI: Open-source communities, model provider ecosystems, AI dev platforms, research labs' "opportunities" pages.
    - **Investor networks:** Portfolio job boards, VC talent networks, scout programs, founder communities.
    - **Communities & events:** Conferences, hackathons, demo days, Twitter/X spaces, local meetups, online cohorts.
- **Hidden roles and "quiet hiring":**
    - **Unposted roles:** Teams test demand, bandwidth, and budget before posting anything publicly.

        - **Backchannel hiring:** “We’re not hiring” publicly, but they’ll hire for the right person with the right fit.
        - **Project-based entry:** Freelance, grants, bounties, part-time contributions that convert into full-time roles.
    - **How to systematically surface real roles:**
        - **Company shortlists:** Build a 50–100 company target list across crypto and AI (by stage, domain, geography, stack).
        - **Signal feeds:** Follow funding announcements, product launches, partnership news, and hiring surges.
        - **Community scanning:** Join 5–10 high-signal communities and check them daily for:
            - **New roles** posted informally.
            - **“We need help with…”** messages.
            - **Founder pain points** mentioned in passing.

Exercise: Join 3–5 high-signal Discords/communities and screenshot the job channels.

Assignment: Build a 50-company target list using the provided Notion template.

1.3 What companies look for in 2026

- **Core hiring themes in 2026:**
    - **Execution over theory:** Can you ship, iterate, and own outcomes in ambiguous environments?
    - **Context awareness:** Do you understand crypto/AI-specific constraints (regulation, latency, safety, UX, security)?
    - **Adaptability:** Can you learn new tools, frameworks, and narratives quickly as the space evolves?
- **Role-specific expectations:**
    - **Technical roles (engineers, data, ML, infra):**
        - Strong fundamentals in CS, data structures, distributed systems, or ML.

        - Ability to work with modern stacks (e.g., smart contracts, L2s, vector DBs, LLM frameworks, MLOps).
        - Evidence of real-world projects: repos, demos, benchmarks, contributions.
    - **Product & design roles:**
        - User-centric thinking in complex, technical domains.
        - Ability to translate between engineers, users, and business stakeholders.
        - Portfolios showing flows, experiments, and measurable outcomes.
    - **GTM, ops, and ecosystem roles:**
        - Ability to grow users, partners, or communities from zero or from small bases.
        - Comfort with experimentation: content, partnerships, BD, community programs.
        - Strong communication and narrative skills.
- **Cross-cutting traits companies screen for:**
    - **Proof of curiosity:** You follow the space, understand key players, and can speak to recent developments.
    - **Bias to action:** You've shipped something—content, code, experiments, events—without waiting for permission.
    - **Ownership mindset:** You think in terms of outcomes, not tasks.

Exercise: Rewrite your last job achievement using crypto/AI-specific language.

Assignment: Record a 60-second Loom explaining a recent project using the "context → approach → outcome" format.

1.4 The difference between hype roles vs. durable roles

- **Hype roles:**
    - **Characteristics:**

        - Tied to short-lived narratives (e.g., “X-to-earn,” “metaverse hype,” “AI influencer manager” with no product).
        - Vague responsibilities, unclear reporting lines, no clear success metrics.
        - Compensation heavily skewed to illiquid tokens with no clear path to value.
    - **Risks:**
        - High churn, frequent pivots, and resume “noise.”
        - Limited skill compounding—what you learn may not transfer well.
- **Durable roles:**
    - **Characteristics:**
        - Aligned with long-term infrastructure, core product, or mission-critical functions.
        - Clear responsibilities, measurable outcomes, and defined stakeholders.
        - Skills that compound: infra, security, data, product, growth, ecosystem development.
    - **Signals of durability:**
        - Role tied to revenue, retention, or core infra.
        - Company has a clear roadmap and real users, not just hype.
        - Leadership with prior track record of building and shipping.
- **How to evaluate a role’s durability:**
    - **Ask:** “If this narrative cooled off, would this role still matter?”
    - **Check:** Is this role close to the product, users, or infra—or is it purely narrative-driven?
    - **Decide:** Does this role build skills you can reuse across companies, sectors, and cycles?

Exercise: Evaluate 3 job postings and label each as hype or durable.

Assignment: Write a 1-page “Durability Scorecard” for your ideal role.

MODULE 2 — Positioning Yourself

Positioning yourself for a role in crypto or AI requires a fundamentally different approach from traditional career development, because these industries reward clarity, context, and demonstrated alignment far more than they reward generic credentials or polished but interchangeable professional branding. In frontier sectors, where teams move quickly, roles evolve rapidly, and hiring decisions are made by founders and early operators rather than HR departments, the way you present yourself—your narrative, your proof of work, your understanding of the ecosystem, and your ability to articulate value—becomes the single most important determinant of whether you are taken seriously as a candidate. Unlike conventional job markets, where resumes are filtered through ATS systems and evaluated against standardized job descriptions, crypto and AI hiring is driven by a founder's instinctive assessment of whether a candidate "gets it," whether they understand the product, the users, the constraints, the technical stack, and the broader narrative forces shaping the industry. This means that positioning is not simply about describing what you have done; it is about demonstrating that you understand where the industry is going and showing how your skills, experiences, and worldview fit into that trajectory.

In these industries, the strongest candidates craft a professional identity that is both specific and contextual, one that signals a clear lane rather than a vague collection of skills. They understand that founders and early-stage teams are not looking for generalists who can "do anything," but for individuals who can solve the particular problems the team is facing at that moment—whether those problems involve scaling infrastructure, accelerating growth, improving community engagement, tightening security, refining product-market fit, or building new AI-powered workflows. Positioning yourself effectively therefore requires you to articulate not only what you can do, but why it matters in the context of the team you want to join. It requires you to translate your background into the language of the ecosystem, to show that you understand the difference between working on an L2 versus a DeFi protocol, or between contributing to a foundation model lab versus an applied AI startup, or between building for a consumer wallet versus an enterprise security product. The more precisely you can map your skills to the specific challenges and opportunities within a given vertical, the more credible you become.

At the same time, positioning in crypto and AI is inseparable from proof of work. These industries value demonstrated capability over theoretical potential, and they reward candidates who show their thinking publicly, who contribute to open-source projects, who write about the problems they are interested in, who build small prototypes, who analyze protocols or models, who participate in hackathons, and who engage meaningfully in community spaces. A candidate who can point to a GitHub repo, a technical teardown, a

governance proposal, a research summary, a product critique, or a working demo immediately stands out, because they have already crossed the threshold from observer to contributor. Proof of work signals seriousness, curiosity, and initiative—qualities that founders prize far more than polished resumes or formal credentials. It also demonstrates that you understand the culture of these industries, where learning is continuous, experimentation is expected, and value is created through action rather than presentation.

Effective positioning also requires you to craft a narrative that ties your past experiences to the future you want to build. This narrative should not be a chronological recounting of your career, but a coherent explanation of how your skills, interests, and motivations align with the problems you want to solve in crypto or AI. It should show that you understand the industry's pace, its ambiguity, its technical depth, and its cultural norms. It should convey that you are not simply looking for a job, but for a place where you can contribute meaningfully to a mission, a protocol, a product, or a research direction. In these industries, where teams are small and stakes are high, founders want to hire people who are aligned with the work, not people who are merely available for it.

Finally, positioning yourself effectively means learning to communicate with founders and early-stage teams in a way that reflects the realities of how hiring actually happens. This means writing outreach messages that are specific, contextual, and grounded in insight rather than generic enthusiasm. It means showing that you have taken the time to understand the product, the roadmap, the technical architecture, the competitive landscape, and the user base. It means proposing ideas, offering critiques, identifying opportunities, or highlighting risks in a way that demonstrates both initiative and respect for the team's work. In crypto and AI, the candidates who win are those who approach founders as collaborators rather than supplicants, who frame themselves as problem-solvers rather than applicants, and who communicate with the speed, clarity, and precision that these industries demand.

Lessons:

- Translating your background into "crypto/AI language"
- Building a portfolio from scratch
- The 3-sentence positioning framework
- How to signal credibility fast

2.1 How to translate your background into "crypto/AI language"

- **Step 1: Inventory your existing experience:**
    - **Domains:** Industries you've worked in (fintech, SaaS, gaming, consulting, etc.).
    - **Functions:** Product, engineering, ops, marketing, sales, design, data, support.
    - **Outcomes:** Revenue grown, costs reduced, systems built, users acquired, processes improved.
- **Step 2: Map your experience to crypto/AI contexts:**
    - **From generic to specific:**
        - "Improved onboarding funnel" → "Improved onboarding funnel for a complex, high-friction product with trust and education challenges."
        - "Managed stakeholders" → "Aligned technical and non-technical stakeholders in a fast-moving, ambiguous environment."
    - **Crypto translation examples:**
        - Compliance, risk, or fintech → on-chain risk, KYC/AML, custody, security.
        - Gaming or consumer apps → wallets, UX for non-technical users, incentives, retention.
    - **AI translation examples:**
        - Data or analytics → data pipelines, model evaluation, experimentation.
        - Ops or support → AI-assisted workflows, automation, process optimization.
- **Step 3: Use domain-native language:**
    - **Crypto terms:** on-chain, L1/L2, rollups, bridges, custody, governance, tokenomics, MEV, DeFi, wallets.
    - **AI terms:** LLMs, fine-tuning, RAG, inference, latency, safety, evals, embeddings, MLOps.
    - **Rule:** Use terms you actually understand—depth beats buzzwords.

Exercise: Translate 5 of your resume bullets into crypto/AI-specific phrasing.

Assignment: Draft your new positioning statement using the 3-part framework.

2.2 Building a portfolio even if you're new

- **Principle:** You don't need prior employment in crypto/AI—you need proof of work that's relevant.
- **Portfolio types by function:**
    - **Engineering / technical:**
        - Small dApps, bots, scripts, integrations, open-source contributions, infra experiments.
        - AI demos: RAG apps, agents, internal tools, fine-tuning experiments, eval dashboards.
    - **Product / design:**
        - Case studies: "How I'd redesign onboarding for X protocol" or "Improving prompt UX for Y AI tool."
        - Wireframes, flows, and product specs tailored to real projects.
    - **GTM / community / ops:**
        - Growth experiments, content series, community playbooks, launch plans, ecosystem mapping.
        - "Shadow work": writing a GTM plan for a real project, even if unsolicited.
- **Minimum viable portfolio (MVP):**
    - **3–5 focused pieces** that show:
        - You understand the space.
        - You can execute.
        - You can communicate clearly.
    - Each piece should include:
        - **Context:** What problem you tackled.

        - **Approach:** How you thought about it.
        - **Output:** What you produced (code, design, doc, plan).
        - **Reflection:** What you'd do next or differently.

Exercise: Choose one portfolio project and outline the "context → approach → output → reflection."

Assignment: Ship your first portfolio artifact (repo, Loom, Notion doc, Figma file).

2.3 How to signal credibility fast

- **Fast credibility levers:**
    - **Context-rich online presence:**
        - A concise LinkedIn/Twitter/X bio that clearly states your target lane in crypto/AI.
        - Pinned posts linking to your portfolio, case studies, or repos.
    - **Visible participation:**
        - Thoughtful comments on founder posts, protocol updates, or research threads.
        - Contributions to discussions in high-signal communities.
    - **Proof of work:**
        - Public artifacts: GitHub, Notion docs, Figma files, blog posts, Loom walkthroughs.
- **Borrowed credibility (without faking it):**
    - **Communities:** Being active in respected DAOs, research groups, or AI/crypto collectives.
    - **Collaborations:** Co-authoring content, tools, or experiments with people already in the space.
    - **References:** Past managers or colleagues who can speak to your execution and character.
- **Avoiding credibility killers:**

- **Overclaiming:** Claiming expertise you don't have—experts will notice quickly.
- **Low-effort outreach:** Generic DMs, copy-paste messages, or irrelevant asks.
- **Inconsistency:** Saying you're "all-in" on crypto/AI but having no visible engagement or work.

Exercise: Rewrite your LinkedIn/Twitter bio using the credibility checklist.

Assignment: Publish one public artifact (post, thread, Loom, repo) this week.

2.4 The 3-part positioning framework used by top candidates

Framework: Who you are → What you do → Where you're going

- **Part 1: Who you are (identity & context)**
  - **Goal:** Anchor your background in a way that feels relevant, not random.
  - **Example:**
    - "I'm a product manager with 5+ years in fintech and data-heavy SaaS, focused on complex user journeys."
- **Part 2: What you do (value & capabilities)**
  - **Goal:** Make your value legible to crypto/AI teams.
  - **Example:**
    - "I specialize in turning ambiguous technical products into clear user flows, and I work closely with engineers to ship fast, measurable improvements."
- **Part 3: Where you're going (direction & focus)**
  - **Goal:** Show a clear, intentional move into crypto/AI.
  - **Example:**
    - "Right now I'm focused on joining an early-stage crypto or AI infra/product team where I can own onboarding, activation, and retention."

- **Putting it together (positioning statement):**
    - "I'm a [background] who specializes in [value], and I'm currently focused on [specific direction in crypto/AI]."
- **How to use this framework:**
    - **On your LinkedIn/Twitter/X bio.**
    - **At the top of your resume.**
    - **In your DMs, intros, and interviews.**

Exercise: Draft 3 variations of your positioning statement.

Assignment: Update your resume header + social bios with your final positioning.

Module 3

Finding high-signal opportunities in crypto and AI requires abandoning the traditional belief that job discovery begins with LinkedIn, Indeed, or any mass-market job board, because in these frontier industries the real hiring happens in the informal, fast-moving channels where founders, builders, and early contributors communicate long before a role is ever formalized or posted. The candidate who understands this immediately gains an advantage, because they stop competing in the crowded, low-signal arenas where thousands of applicants submit generic resumes into automated systems, and instead begin operating in the high-signal spaces where teams reveal their needs in real time, often unintentionally, through conversations, community updates, funding announcements, product releases, and the subtle language of "we need help with…" that appears in Discord threads, founder replies, and ecosystem chats. In crypto and AI, the most valuable opportunities surface not through polished job descriptions but through the organic friction of building—when a founder mentions a bottleneck, when an engineer asks for help on a feature, when a community manager signals that a team is scaling, or when a protocol announces a grant, bounty, or hackathon that quietly indicates they are expanding their ecosystem. These signals form the backbone of a candidate's opportunity pipeline, and learning to recognize them is one of the most important skills in a modern job search.

To operate effectively in this environment, a candidate must build a weekly rhythm that mirrors how information flows through these ecosystems. Instead of passively waiting for roles to appear, they develop a daily habit of scanning the channels where builders actually talk: the Discord servers where contributors coordinate, the Slack groups where operators share updates, the Twitter or X lists where founders and investors post their thoughts, frustrations, and hiring needs, and the ecosystem job boards that aggregate roles from specific chains, protocols, or AI platforms. Over time, this routine becomes a personal "signal feed," a curated stream of high-leverage information that reveals which teams are growing, which products are gaining traction, which founders are overwhelmed, and which ecosystems are accelerating. This feed is not built once; it is refined continuously, shaped by the candidate's interests, target companies, and the evolving narratives of the industry. It becomes a living dashboard of opportunity, far more accurate and timely than any job board, because it reflects the real-time pulse of the builders themselves.

But finding opportunities is only half the work; the other half is learning to identify which teams are actually building and which are merely signaling activity without substance. In crypto and AI, where hype can overshadow reality and narratives can outpace execution, the ability to evaluate a team's momentum is essential. A serious candidate learns to assess product velocity by examining release notes, GitHub commits, changelogs, and public roadmaps; they evaluate user traction by looking for real engagement rather than

vanity metrics; they study technical depth by reading documentation, architecture explanations, and the backgrounds of the engineering and research leaders; and they gauge momentum by observing community calls, AMAs, blog posts, and the general energy surrounding the project. This research does not require hours; a disciplined candidate can form a clear picture of a team's health in twenty to thirty minutes by trying the product, reading the onboarding flow, scanning the founders' histories, and reviewing the team's recent activity. The goal is not to become an expert on every project but to develop a reliable instinct for distinguishing between teams that are shipping and teams that are merely talking.

This discernment becomes even more important when evaluating early-stage projects, where the line between extraordinary upside and significant risk is often thin. Green flags—such as clarity of mission, transparency about tradeoffs, focused execution, and a team with complementary skills and credible experience—signal that a project is grounded in reality and capable of sustained progress. Red flags—such as vague narratives, constant pivots without learning, token-first strategies with no product foundation, opaque leadership, or unrealistic promises—indicate that a project may be driven more by speculation than by substance. Candidates must learn to weigh these signals not only in terms of whether a project will succeed but in terms of what joining that project would mean for their own career trajectory. Early-stage work can offer immense upside in learning, ownership, network, and skill compounding, but it can also carry reputational risk, burnout potential, regulatory exposure, and the possibility of sudden collapse. The most effective decision-making lens is not "Will this succeed?" but "What do I gain if it succeeds, and what do I still gain if it doesn't?" because in frontier industries, even failed projects can accelerate a candidate's growth if the experience is meaningful and the team is strong.

Finally, high-signal opportunity discovery requires understanding the relationship between funding, ecosystem growth, and talent flows. Funding rounds are among the most reliable predictors of upcoming hiring, because new capital almost always leads to new roles within thirty to ninety days, especially in product, engineering, go-to-market, and operations. Ecosystem growth—such as the launch of a new L2, a major protocol upgrade, or the release of a new AI model—creates demand for developer relations, community, partnerships, and ecosystem roles. Talent flows, particularly senior hires like a new VP of Engineering or Head of Product, often signal that a team is preparing to scale and will soon build out a department beneath that leader. A candidate who tracks these signals systematically, maintaining a simple but consistent tracker of companies, funding events, key hires, product milestones, and personal outreach notes, develops a "market radar" that reveals opportunities before they become visible to the broader public. This radar

becomes a strategic asset, enabling the candidate to reach out early, position themselves ahead of the competition, and build relationships with teams at the exact moment when they are most open to new contributors.

In the end, finding high-signal opportunities in crypto and AI is not about luck or volume; it is about learning to see what others overlook, to listen where others are silent, and to operate in the channels where real hiring decisions are made. It is about shifting from a reactive job-seeker mindset to a proactive builder's mindset, one that treats opportunity discovery as an ongoing practice rather than a sporadic search. When a candidate masters this approach, they stop chasing roles and start identifying them before they exist, positioning themselves not as applicants but as early, trusted contributors in the ecosystems shaping the future of technology.

MODULE 3 — Finding High-Signal Opportunities

Lessons:

- Where founders actually hire
- How to track funding rounds
- How to spot red flags
- How to find roles before they're posted

Module 3 — Finding high-signal opportunities

3.1 Where the real hiring happens (hint: not LinkedIn)

- **High-signal channels vs. low-signal channels:**
    - **Low-signal:** Mass job boards, generic LinkedIn postings, "spray and pray" application portals.
    - **High-signal:**
        - Founder posts and replies.
        - Ecosystem job boards and Discords.
        - Investor portfolio boards and talent networks.
        - Hackathons, grants, and bounties.
- **Your weekly "opportunity pipeline" routine:**

    - **Daily (15–20 minutes):**
        - Check 3–5 key Discords/Slacks.
        - Scan Twitter/X lists of founders, investors, and builders.
        - Save any "we need help with…" or "looking for…" posts.
    - **Weekly (60–90 minutes):**
        - Update your target company list.
        - Add new roles, projects, or teams to your outreach queue.
        - Review funding and product launch news.
- **Building your own "signal feeds":**
    - **Curated lists:** Twitter/X lists of founders, PMs, engineers, researchers, and ecosystem leads.
    - **Newsletters & digests:** Ecosystem updates, funding round summaries, protocol announcements.
    - **Community channels:** Specific channels for jobs, collabs, grants, and bounties.

Exercise: Build your Twitter/X founder list.

Assignment: Create your weekly "signal feed" dashboard.

3.2 How to identify teams that are actually building

- **Signals a team is truly building:**
    - **Product velocity:** Frequent releases, changelogs, GitHub activity, public roadmaps.
    - **User traction:** Real users, not just vanity metrics; active communities, real feedback loops.
    - **Technical depth:** Clear architecture, thoughtful tradeoffs, credible technical leadership.
- **How to research a team in 20–30 minutes:**
    - **Step 1: Product & users:**

        - Try the product yourself.
        - Read docs, FAQs, and onboarding flows.
    - **Step 2: Team & leadership:**
        - Check founders' and leaders' backgrounds.
        - Look for prior exits, shipped products, or deep domain expertise.
    - **Step 3: Activity & momentum:**
        - GitHub commits, release notes, blog posts, community calls, AMAs.
- **Questions to ask yourself:**
    - "Would I use this product or recommend it to someone?"
    - "Do I understand what problem they're solving and for whom?"
    - "Does the team seem to care about quality, security, and users?"

Exercise: Analyze one project using the "Momentum Scorecard."

Assignment: Record a Loom walking through your research on a team you admire.

3.3 Red flags vs. green flags in early-stage projects

- **Green flags:**
    - **Clarity:** Clear problem statement, target user, and value proposition.
    - **Transparency:** Open communication about roadmap, risks, and tradeoffs.
    - **Focus:** They're not chasing every narrative; they know what they're building.
    - **Team quality:** Complementary skill sets, prior relevant experience, and visible collaboration.
- **Red flags:**
    - **Vague or shifting narratives:** "We're doing everything for everyone" or constant pivots with no learning.
    - **Token-first, product-later:** Heavy emphasis on token price, little on product or users.

    - **Opaque leadership:** Hard to find real people, backgrounds, or accountability.
    - **Unrealistic promises:** Guaranteed returns, "risk-free" yields, or magical AI claims with no technical explanation.
- **How to evaluate risk vs. upside for your career:**
    - **Upside:** Learning, ownership, network, brand, and skill compounding.
    - **Risk:** Reputational risk, burnout, legal/regulatory exposure, lack of runway.
    - **Decision lens:** "If this goes well, what do I gain? If it doesn't, what do I still walk away with?"

Exercise: Evaluate 3 early-stage projects using the red/green flag checklist.

Assignment: Write a 1-page "Should I Join This Team?" analysis.

3.4 How to track funding rounds, ecosystem growth, and talent flows

- **Why this matters:**
    - Funding and talent flows often predict where hiring will spike next.
    - Ecosystem growth signals which skills and roles will be in demand.
- **What to track:**
    - **Funding rounds:** Seed, Series A/B, strategic rounds, ecosystem grants.
    - **Ecosystem growth:** New L2s, major protocol upgrades, new AI model releases, platform expansions.
    - **Talent moves:** Senior hires (VP Eng, Head of Product, Head of Research, GTM leaders).
- **How to turn tracking into opportunity:**
    - **New funding → new roles:**
        - When a company raises, expect hiring in product, engineering, GTM, and ops within 30–90 days.
    - **New ecosystems → new demand:**

        - New chains, infra, or AI platforms need devrel, ecosystem, community, and partner roles.
    - **New senior hires → new teams:**
        - A new VP or Head often builds a team under them—reach out early.
- **Your personal "market radar" system:**
    - Maintain a simple tracker (Notion/Sheet) with:
        - **Company name, sector, stage, funding date, key hires, product focus, your notes, outreach status.**

Exercise: Add 10 companies to your radar using funding/talent signals.

Assignment: Build your Notion "Ecosystem Tracker" using the provided template.

MODULE 4 — Getting Noticed

In crypto and AI, getting noticed is not a matter of luck, volume, or shouting louder than everyone else; it is the result of communicating with precision, clarity, and genuine value in an environment where founders and hiring managers are overwhelmed with noise, inbound messages, and surface-level interest from people who have not taken the time to understand the product, the team, or the problem space. The candidates who consistently break through are those who understand that outreach is not about asking for a job but about demonstrating relevance, insight, and initiative in a way that makes a founder pause, pay attention, and think, "This person gets it." Writing a message that earns a response requires specificity, brevity, and a value-oriented mindset; it requires showing that you know who the person is, what they are building, and why your background is meaningfully connected to their work. A strong DM does not attempt to tell your entire story but instead delivers a concise, targeted signal that you have done your homework, that you understand the team's priorities, and that you have something concrete to offer. The most effective outreach begins with context—an indication that you have been following the project, that you understand a recent launch, decision, or milestone—and then moves quickly into proof that you grasp the nuances of their work, followed by a short explanation of your relevant experience and a low-friction invitation to share ideas or value. This structure works because it mirrors how founders think: they respond to people who respect their time, understand their product, and bring something useful to the table without demanding anything upfront.

Getting referrals follows a similar logic, and the candidates who excel at it are those who understand that a referral is not a favor but a transfer of signal—an opportunity for someone in your network to help a team by connecting them with a prepared, relevant candidate. The key to asking for a referral without awkwardness is to make the process effortless for the person you are approaching by giving them a clear, concise summary of who you are, what you are targeting, and why you are interested in a specific company or role. When you provide context about why the team matters to you, why the timing is right, and how your background aligns with their needs, you transform the request from a burden into a contribution. Offering to provide a short blurb they can forward makes the process even easier, reducing friction and increasing the likelihood that they will say yes. The strongest referral requests come from people who have already built some level of relationship—former colleagues, classmates, collaborators, or individuals you have engaged with meaningfully online—because referrals flow through trust, and trust is built through consistent, authentic interaction rather than transactional outreach.

Standing out in a noisy market requires a deeper level of strategic positioning, one that goes beyond outreach mechanics and into the realm of identity, visibility, and founder-level empathy. In crypto and AI, where thousands of candidates claim to be "passionate" or "interested," the individuals who rise above the noise are those who define a narrow, specific lane that signals expertise and clarity rather than general ambition. Instead of presenting themselves as open to any role in the industry, they articulate a focused value proposition that aligns with a particular type of team, product, or problem. This narrow positioning is reinforced by visible proof of work—public posts, analyses, prototypes, teardowns, or build logs that demonstrate not only what they know but how they think. Founders pay attention to candidates who show their work because it signals seriousness, curiosity, and the ability to execute without being asked. The most compelling candidates also demonstrate founder-level empathy by showing that they understand the tradeoffs, constraints, and priorities that shape early-stage decision-making; they speak the language of builders, not job seekers, and they frame their ideas in terms of impact, feasibility, and alignment with the team's goals. Tactics like Loom walkthroughs, one-page mini-specs, and public build logs amplify this signal by giving founders a window into how a candidate approaches problems, communicates ideas, and reasons about product or technical decisions. These artifacts differentiate candidates not because they are flashy but because they demonstrate initiative, clarity, and a willingness to contribute before being hired.

Even with strong positioning and thoughtful outreach, follow-up is essential, because founders are busy, messages get buried, and silence is often a function of timing rather than disinterest. Effective follow-up is respectful, concise, and anchored in new value rather than pressure; it acknowledges that the recipient may simply have missed the message while offering a brief update on something new you have built, shipped, or analyzed that reinforces your relevance. This approach keeps the conversation alive without creating discomfort, and it signals persistence without aggression—an important distinction in industries where responsiveness varies widely and where timing often determines opportunity. The best follow-ups are those that feel like a continuation of a thoughtful conversation rather than a demand for attention.

Ultimately, getting noticed in crypto and AI is not about sending more messages, asking more people for help, or trying to impress founders with volume; it is about operating with precision, clarity, and genuine value in every interaction. It is about understanding that founders respond to people who understand their work, who respect their time, and who demonstrate initiative through proof of work and thoughtful communication. When you combine targeted outreach, relationship-driven referrals, differentiated positioning, and respectful follow-up, you create a presence in the market that stands out naturally,

consistently, and credibly—one that makes founders think of you not as an applicant but as someone who already behaves like a contributor. This is how you get noticed in the most competitive, fast-moving industries in the world.

Lessons:

- How to DM hiring managers
- How to get referrals without being awkward
- How to stand out in a noisy market
- Follow-up scripts that get replies

4.1 How to write a DM that gets answered

- **Principles of a high-response DM:**
    - **Specific:** Shows you know who they are and what they're working on.
    - **Short:** 4–7 sentences max.
    - **Value-oriented:** Focused on how you can help, not what they can do for you.
- **DM structure:**
    - **Line 1: Context & relevance**
        - "I've been following [project] since [specific event/post/product launch]."
    - **Line 2–3: Proof of understanding**
        - "I especially liked how you [specific decision, feature, or approach]."
    - **Line 4–5: Your value & fit**
        - "My background is in [X], and I've [built/led/shipped] [Y] that's relevant to [Z]."
    - **Line 6–7: Clear, low-friction ask**
        - "If you're open to it, I'd love to share 2–3 concrete ideas for [area] and see if there's a fit."
- **Examples (you'll customize in practice):**

    - **To a founder:**
        - "Hey [Name], I've been following [project] since your [launch/announcement/thread] on [topic]. I really liked your approach to [specific detail]. My background is [X], and I've [done Y] that's directly relevant to [Z]. If you're open to it, I'd love to send over a short Loom walking through how I'd approach [specific problem area] for [project]."

Exercise: Write 3 DMs using the provided templates.

Assignment: Send 5 personalized DMs this week.

4.2 How to get referrals without being awkward

- **Reframe referrals:**
    - Not "doing you a favor," but helping a team find a relevant, prepared candidate.
- **Who to ask:**
    - **1st-degree:** Former colleagues, managers, classmates, collaborators.
    - **2nd-degree:** People you've engaged with meaningfully online (comments, DMs, contributions).
- **Referral ask structure:**
    - **Step 1: Make it easy to say yes:**
        - Provide a 3–4 sentence summary of who you are and what you're targeting.
    - **Step 2: Provide context:**
        - Why this company, why this team, why now.
    - **Step 3: Offer a draft:**
        - "Happy to send a short blurb you can forward if that's easier."
- **Example message:**
    - "Hey [Name], I saw you're connected to [Company/Person]. I've been following their work on [specific thing] and I'm very interested in [specific

role/area]. Quick background: I'm [X] with [Y years] in [domain], and I've recently [built/done Z] that's directly relevant. If it feels appropriate, would you be open to forwarding a short note from me to them? I can send a 3–4 sentence blurb to make it easy."

Exercise: Draft your 3–4 sentence referral blurb.

Assignment: Request 2 referrals using the provided scripts.

4.3 How to stand out in a noisy market

- **Standout levers that compound:**
    - **Narrow positioning:**
        - Instead of "I want any crypto/AI job," say "I help early-stage crypto/AI infra teams improve onboarding and activation."
    - **Visible proof of work:**
        - Regularly share what you're learning, building, or analyzing.
    - **Founder-level empathy:**
        - Show you understand tradeoffs, constraints, and priorities from the team's perspective.
- **Tactics that differentiate you:**
    - **Loom walkthroughs:** Short videos walking through your ideas for their product, onboarding, or growth.
    - **Mini-specs or briefs:** One-page documents outlining how you'd approach a specific problem.
    - **Public build logs:** Threads or posts documenting your learning and building journey in crypto/AI.
- **What not to do:**
    - **Mass-blast messages:** Obvious templates with no personalization.
    - **Overly aggressive follow-ups:** Respect boundaries and signals.
    - **Clout-chasing:** Name-dropping or drama instead of substance.

Exercise: Create a 1-page mini-spec for a real project.

Assignment: Publish a Loom walkthrough of your mini-spec.

4.4 Templates for outreach, intros, and follow-ups

- **Outreach template (cold DM/email):**
    - **Subject/Opener:** "Quick note re: [project/role/problem]"
    - **Body:**
        - "Hi [Name], I've been following [project] since [specific event/post]. I'm especially interested in how you're tackling [specific problem]. Quick background: I'm a [role] with [X years] in [domain], and I've [built/done Y] that's relevant to [Z]. I put together a short [Loom/one-pager/repo] on how I'd approach [specific area] for [project]. If you're open to it, I'd love to share it and get your feedback, and see if there's a way I can contribute more formally. Best, [Your Name]"
- **Intro request template:**
    - "Hey [Name], I'm exploring roles with [type of teams] in crypto/AI, and [Company/Person] is at the top of my list because of [specific reason]. Quick background: I'm [X] with [Y years] in [domain], and I've recently [done Z] that's directly relevant to their work. If it feels appropriate, would you be open to introducing me to [Person] with a short note? I can send a 3–4 sentence blurb to make it easy. Totally understand if now's not a good time. Thanks either way, [Your Name]"
- **Follow-up template (after no response):**
    - "Hey [Name], Just bumping this in case it got buried. No pressure at all—if now's not a good time, I completely understand. Since my last note, I [shipped/created X] that's also relevant to [project/area]. If helpful, I'm happy to share a quick summary or Loom. Best, [Your Name]"

Exercise: Customize the outreach template for 3 companies.

Assignment: Send 3 follow-ups using the timing guidelines.

MODULE 5 — Interviews & Offers

Interviewing in crypto and AI is an entirely different experience from interviewing in traditional technology companies, because these industries operate with a speed, fluidity, and founder-driven decision structure that prioritizes signal over process, clarity over polish, and demonstrated thinking over rehearsed answers. Candidates who enter these interviews expecting rigid stages, standardized assessments, or predictable sequences of behavioral and technical screens often find themselves disoriented, because the conversations tend to be more direct, more exploratory, and more reflective of the real problems the team is facing at that moment. Instead of navigating a multi-week funnel managed by recruiters and coordinators, candidates frequently find themselves speaking directly with founders, CTOs, Heads of Product, or senior engineers who are less interested in whether you can recite frameworks and more interested in how you think, how you reason, how you operate under ambiguity, and whether you can contribute meaningfully to the mission they are building. These interviews are not designed to test your ability to perform under artificial constraints; they are designed to reveal whether you can thrive in the messy, fast-moving, high-ownership environments that define frontier industries.

The interview formats themselves reflect this philosophy. Founder and leadership conversations often feel more like strategic dialogues than interviews, probing your alignment with the company's vision, your appetite for risk, your capacity for ownership, and your ability to navigate uncertainty without excessive hand-holding. Technical deep dives focus less on abstract puzzles or algorithmic trivia and more on the real challenges the team is grappling with—scaling infrastructure, improving model performance, refining token economics, strengthening security, accelerating onboarding, or building new product flows. Portfolio walkthroughs are common because teams want to see how you think, how you build, how you make decisions, and how you respond to constraints; they want to understand not just what you created but why you created it, what tradeoffs you considered, what you learned, and how you would approach similar problems in their environment. Trial projects—short, scoped exercises that simulate real collaboration—are often used to test fit, communication, and execution, and they frequently carry more weight than any conversation because they reveal how you work in practice rather than how you talk about your work in theory.

What these interviews are truly testing is your ability to operate in ambiguity, your depth of understanding of the ecosystem, and your capacity to be a low-ego, high-output collaborator who can integrate quickly into a small, fast-moving team. Founders want to know whether you can make decisions without perfect information, whether you can learn new concepts rapidly, whether you can adapt to shifting priorities, and whether you can

contribute without needing constant direction. They want to see that you understand the industry well enough to be dangerous—that you know the difference between L1s and L2s, between foundation models and applied AI, between real traction and vanity metrics, between sustainable token design and speculative noise. They want to know that you can communicate clearly, think critically, and work with intensity without creating friction or drama. Above all, they want to know that you are someone they can trust in the trenches, someone who will take ownership, move quickly, and elevate the team rather than slow it down.

Technical and non-technical screens in crypto and AI reflect the same principles. Technical interviews tend to focus on real systems, real architectures, real constraints, and real tradeoffs rather than algorithmic puzzles or contrived whiteboard challenges. Engineers may be asked to walk through past systems they have built, explain how they would design a component of the team's infrastructure, or reason through a real performance bottleneck or security concern. Non-technical interviews—whether for product, growth, community, partnerships, or operations—tend to emphasize strategic thinking, clarity of communication, understanding of the ecosystem, and the ability to translate ambiguous problems into concrete actions. In both cases, the interviewer is less interested in whether you know the "right answer" and more interested in how you think, how you structure problems, how you make decisions, and how you respond when faced with incomplete information.

Compensation discussions in crypto and AI introduce another layer of complexity, because offers often include a mix of salary, equity, and in some cases tokens, each with its own structure, vesting schedule, liquidity profile, and risk-reward tradeoff. Understanding token and equity compensation is essential, because these instruments can represent significant upside but also carry uncertainty, volatility, and long time horizons. Tokens may be subject to cliffs, vesting schedules, lockups, or regulatory constraints, and their value can fluctuate dramatically based on market conditions, product traction, and ecosystem dynamics. Equity in early-stage companies may offer substantial long-term upside but typically requires patience, belief in the mission, and a willingness to accept illiquidity. Candidates who understand these mechanics can evaluate offers more intelligently, balancing immediate financial needs with long-term potential and aligning their decisions with their personal risk tolerance and career goals.

Negotiation in crypto and AI follows the same founder-driven logic as the rest of the hiring process. The most effective negotiation strategies are grounded in clarity, confidence, and value rather than confrontation or entitlement. Founders respond well to candidates who articulate their reasoning, who understand the constraints of early-stage companies, and

who frame their requests in terms of mutual benefit rather than personal demands. Negotiation is not about extracting the maximum possible compensation; it is about aligning incentives, establishing trust, and ensuring that both sides feel confident in the partnership they are entering. Candidates who negotiate thoughtfully—who understand the levers available to them, who communicate transparently, and who demonstrate respect for the team's realities—tend to secure stronger offers and build healthier long-term relationships with their future colleagues.

Ultimately, interviewing and negotiating in crypto and AI is not a performance but a collaboration. It is a process of mutual discovery, where both sides are evaluating not only skills and experience but alignment, mindset, and the ability to thrive in environments defined by speed, uncertainty, and ambition. When candidates approach these conversations with clarity, preparation, and authenticity—when they show how they think, how they build, how they learn, and how they operate—they position themselves not merely as applicants but as future contributors to the frontier industries shaping the next decade of technology.

Lessons:

- How crypto/AI interviews differ
- Technical vs. non-technical screens
- Token + equity compensation explained
- Negotiation strategies

5.1 How crypto/AI interviews differ from traditional tech

- **Less process, more signal:**
    - Fewer rigid stages, more direct conversations with decision-makers.
    - Emphasis on how you think, not just how you perform on standardized questions.
- **Common interview formats:**
    - **Founder/leadership chats:** Vision, alignment, risk tolerance, ownership mindset.
    - **Technical deep dives:** Real problems they're facing, not abstract puzzles.

    - **Portfolio walkthroughs:** “Show me what you’ve built and how you thought about it.”
    - **Trial projects:** Short paid or unpaid projects to test fit and collaboration.
- **What they’re really testing:**
    - Can you operate in ambiguity?
    - Do you understand the space enough to be dangerous?
    - Will you be low-ego, high-output, and easy to work with?

Exercise: Write your “interview narrative” (past → present → future).

Assignment: Record a mock founder interview using the provided prompts.

5.2 How to prepare for technical + non-technical screens

- **Technical preparation (engineers, data, ML, infra):**
    - **Fundamentals:** Algorithms, systems design, data structures, ML basics (as relevant).
    - **Domain-specific:**
        - Crypto: smart contracts, security basics, gas, L1/L2, wallets, infra.
        - AI: LLMs, RAG, fine-tuning, evals, latency, deployment.
    - **Project walkthroughs:** Be ready to explain your projects in detail: tradeoffs, failures, and learnings.
- **Non-technical preparation (product, GTM, ops, design):**
    - **Case-style questions:**
        - “How would you grow [product] from X to Y?”
        - “How would you improve onboarding for [user segment]?”
    - **Behavioral questions:**
        - “Tell me about a time you shipped under uncertainty.”
        - “Tell me about a time you disagreed with leadership.”
- **Your interview narrative:**

- **Past:** What you've done and what you've learned.
- **Present:** Why you're moving into crypto/AI now.
- **Future:** How you want to grow with this team and product.

Exercise: Prepare a 3-minute walkthrough of one portfolio project.

Assignment: Complete the "10 Interview Scenarios" practice set.

5.3 Compensation structures (tokens, equity, vesting, cliffs)

- **Key components of compensation in crypto & AI:**
  - **Base salary:** Often benchmarked to tech, but can vary by stage and geography.
  - **Equity:** Stock options, RSUs, or similar instruments in AI and some crypto companies.
  - **Tokens:** Project tokens or protocol tokens, sometimes with complex vesting and liquidity conditions.
- **Vesting & cliffs:**
  - **Vesting:**
    - Equity or tokens typically vest over a period (e.g., 3–4 years).
  - **Cliff:**
    - A period (often 6–12 months) before any equity/tokens vest. If you leave before the cliff, you may receive nothing.
- **Risk & upside considerations:**
  - **Liquidity:** Are tokens or equity liquid now, or only in the future?
  - **Concentration:** How much of your total comp is tied to high-risk instruments?
  - **Alignment:** Does the structure incentivize long-term contribution and success?
- **Questions to ask (for clarity, not advice):**
  - "What is the vesting schedule and cliff for equity/tokens?"

- "Are there any performance conditions tied to vesting?"
- "What are the expectations around future fundraising or liquidity events?"

Exercise: Break down a sample offer using the comp calculator.

Assignment: Write your "comp priorities" document.

5.4 Negotiation strategies that actually work

- **Principles of effective negotiation:**
  - **Clarity:** Know your priorities (cash vs. upside vs. role scope vs. location).
  - **Preparation:** Understand typical ranges for similar roles and stages.
  - **Collaboration:** Frame negotiation as a joint problem-solving exercise, not a confrontation.
- **Negotiation flow:**
  - **Step 1: Receive the offer fully:**
    - Get all components in writing: base, bonus, equity, tokens, benefits, title, level.
  - **Step 2: Reflect & prioritize:**
    - Decide what matters most: salary, equity/tokens, remote flexibility, title, scope.
  - **Step 3: Make a structured counter:**
    - Express enthusiasm.
    - Share your priorities.
    - Propose specific adjustments.
- **Example negotiation script:**
  - "I'm really excited about the opportunity to work with this team and on this product. Based on my experience in [X] and the scope we've discussed, I was targeting a base in the [range] range and a total package that reflects [specific priority, e.g., long-term upside]. Is there flexibility to move the base closer to [X] and/or adjust the equity/tokens to [Y]?"

- **Non-monetary levers:**
    - **Scope:** More ownership, clearer path to leadership, or specific problem areas.
    - **Title:** Alignment with your experience and future goals.
    - **Review cadence:** Agreement to revisit comp after 6–12 months based on impact.

Exercise: Draft your negotiation script.

Assignment: Write a “negotiation prep sheet” for your next offer.