

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/growing-into-a-ceo>

Alice Zhang describes three moves that helped her transition from founding Verge Genomics to becoming its CEO: She launched an intense early-stage hiring search, fearlessly reached out to gain missing expertise, and systematized her own growth.



## Transcript

- While I consider us in this kind of new era of biotech companies, Life sciences is still a very traditional field.. For example, it's very rare for there to be a founder who is also a CEO, today in Biotech.. And most are really started by a small group of venture capital firms, that bring in professional management.. So in the very beginning, it was quite challenging for a company like ours to really break through.. And I learned a couple really important lessons, in how you can actually create an advantage from scratch.. And the first thing I learned was, Do things that are laborious.. Especially in the beginning.. Because as a founder, you will need to be the one doing things yourself to really kickstart the company.. As an example, when I first started the company, to hire the team, our initial team, I personally interviewed about a thousand 200 people myself.. And I did that by actually going on Upwork.com, finding some outsourced people on Upwork, and actually then going through a decades worth of publications from nature, cell, science, whatever had the words genomics in it..

I found the first three authors, found their emails, and I would email out hundreds of people per week.. I'd like to think every computational biologist has an email from me in their inbox.. But that was really really critical for me, because not only did I understand and learn the field, understand how to hire, but I was able to recruit a rockstar team, exactly in the mold of what I envisioned for the team.. And it was after building that really stellar team, that made recruiting actually so much easier after that.. The next lesson is when I take, consider really important for myself personally, which is that I think it's really one of my greatest responsibilities as a CEO, to grow faster personally than your company does.. So what do I mean by that? The first thing is that, you have to get really comfortable with taking a hard look at yourself, and understanding what it is you're bad at, What you don't know, and what you need to learn.. And you get really okay with that, and then you need to be absolutely shameless about learning it, finding advisors, filling the gaps.. And so I always like to say a bridge was built on a foundation of cold emails.. Whenever I found I didn't know anything, whether it was business development, or drug development, I would literally go and put together a list of emails of who I think is the best of the best, and I would just cold email them.. Actually, I was very surprised by how many people responded, but that's kinda how I started building my foundation of expertise..

I think the last thing is that you have to stay hungry to find step wise functions for personal growth.. So rather than trying things through trial and error, how can I find things that will really boost my own growth.. And so things that have worked for me for example are: executive coaching, reading a ton of books, and finding other founders who have gotten through it..