By submitting this reflection, the members of our mentoring team affirm that we all participated in the call with our assigned mentor and we all participated in the creation of this reflection document.
David Garfinkle is a fascinating entrepreneur who started off as an entertainment lawyer and is now a Broadway producer. He graduated from undergrad in 1983 and law school in 1987. In between schools, he worked for a year for an Illinois congressman. After law school and upon realizing the competitive nature of the entertainment industry, David took many classes on impacting the arts including courses on copyright law, trademark law, intellectual property, and securities law. Garfinkle now had a leg up on his peers and soon transitioned to a white shoe law firm. In this position, he gained valuable experience in both advertising and copyright law and began focusing on entertainment. In 1994, he started his own law firm and eventually transitioned to Hello Entertainment, his current Broadway production company.

The key insights that we gained after hearing about David Garfinkle’s path to becoming an entrepreneur included his abilities to maintain connections, be resilient, and be consistently genuine. In terms of networking, Garfinkle emphasized having people that can vouch for your work ethic and reputation. If you make strong connections with clients and superiors, you have more people who can speak to your good work. Garfinkle emphasized that it was extremely valuable to obtain mentorship and insight into different companies, litigation work, and gain overall advice to start his own firm. His resilience played an integral part in becoming an entrepreneur because his passion for entertainment never wavered. He stressed the importance of being genuine many times and was adamant about treating his clients equally, from the three-time Tony winners to the small producers with whom he worked.

In terms of a problem definition, Garfinkle entered a competitive entertainment law industry and set himself apart with his wide skillset and experiences. In the early years of the law firm, Garfinkle targeted a small copyright and trademark niche, and capitalized on a few important cases including the Shirley Temple trademark case that put the him on the map. He emphasized the importance of establishing credibility in a small market before diversifying services. From there, Garfinkle was able to expand outwards from this niche, transitioning from copyright law to business development. During this phase of the firm, he worked on cases with Rosie O’Donnell and Oprah. He then decided that he knew enough about the industry and had strong enough connections with producers, lawyers, operations
specialists, and others to start his own Broadway production company. Maintaining a constant understanding of his clients, their industries, and fostering relationships enabled Garfinkle to successfully shift his niche and start a production company.

However, this shift came with several difficulties. David stressed the difficulty of negotiation and contracting in the entertainment industry among the various parties involved. It took him three years to solidify a director, a music group (U2), and Broadway representatives for Spider Man: Turn Off The Dark, not knowing if an agreement would be reached. He stressed the importance of constant resilience and noted that it can make the difference between success and failure.

Before Garfinkle diversified his legal capabilities, he was a copyright and trademark law specialist. He defined the copyright and trademark law niche as his minimum viable service, and only once his bosses recognized his capabilities as a lawyer was he promoted to working on noteworthy cases advancing his career. He had an abundance of legal knowledge, but he had never executed that knowledge in the field. Only after he gained firsthand legal experience was he able to start his own firm and expand his services to include all aspects of entertainment law.

The most important lesson that our team took away from our conversation with Mr. Garfinkle is to always maintain connections. He emphasized the importance of having mentors who could offer advice when business plans were failing. Additionally, networking was essential when creating his own firm because Garfinkle's clients from the white shoe firm were willing to follow him to his new firm. The genuine nature of his personality and the quality of his work were pivotal in his transition to his own business ventures. He could not stress enough how important it is for us to treat everyone equally, regardless of their status or money, for the success of our own endeavors.