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# Dropping Out Of Harvard Isn't An Easy Choice. This Founder Did It Three Times.

By **Frederick Daso**, Former Contributor. ⓘ I write about college students and recent graduate... ▾

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A college student’s summer takes them out of the classroom and into the real world between years. Meeting new people in unfamiliar places is hard, and meeting other college students can be even more challenging. Fortunately, Luke Heine and Raphael Rouvinov created Summer Playbook, a startup dedicated to helping college students meet one another during their summers, bringing on Sean Sullivan as their first full-time employee. This incredibly talented team (Heine is a Forbes 30 Under 30 honoree; Sullivan worked on open-sourcing class materials to schools across the nation, and Rouvinov developed a virtual reality solution to correct lazy eye) recently

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Summer Playbook first employee Sean Sullivan on the left, and the startup cofounders Luke Heine (middle) and Raphael Rouvinov (right).

LUKE HEINE

**Frederick Daso:** I wanted to talk about you and your cofounders dropping out of Harvard. What were some of the factors in your academic and entrepreneurial pursuits that led you to drop out?

**Luke Heine:** One, I think Harvard is extremely understanding of students dropping out. Harvard does this thing where you can leave, and they send you this letter saying, ‘Hey, let us know when you’re coming back,’ and you can reactivate your schooling and education anytime within ten years, with your financial aid carrying over and guaranteed housing. For us, we’re just fortunate to come from an excellent institution that puts trust in its students, and says, “Hey, go ahead and pursue those

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cofounder and is the guy who really brought Playbook into 2018 with his solid technical background. He founded [Luminopia](#), a company that treats lazy eye using virtual reality. Sean's the best teammate I could ever ask for. He's unbelievable and works harder than anyone, given by the fact that he put together a program to open-source courseware to the world. I just feel lucky to be on the team with Raph and Sean. They're the reason we've been able to do what we've done.

But back to the original question, one of the most significant gifts that Harvard gives you is the ability to leave it. After the fall of my sophomore year, I left school to create something called the Fair Opportunity Project, which was highlighted by *Forbes* as one of the top 30 educational nonprofits in the U.S., and I was a *Forbes* 30 Under 30 honoree two years ago.

**Daso:** I didn't know that Harvard gives you ten years to leave the school and come back. That's surprising!

**Heine:** Actually Frederick, this isn't my first time leaving Harvard – it's my third. I took that first semester off. I took the second semester off to run a research expedition in Southeast Asia, which was supposed to be two months, but during the trip in Vietnam, we got an email from Y Combinator saying we've been selected to interview. When an opportunity is there, you got to go after it. You got to do things that you want to do.

**Daso:** Absolutely. When you were working on Summer Playbook while at Harvard, what was the moment or turning point where your team decided to commit to this full time or wind the startup down?

**Heine:** My thinking around startups is that they are the hardest jobs you'll ever work. However, it's the only job I want to work. When we put this product out about a year ago, we got hundreds of stories of people having a fantastic time using the product and meeting people around the world. Most of these people didn't know each other beforehand.

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One of my favorite stories is this student who met another student in Amsterdam using Summer Playbook and felt safe walking home at night because she had gotten her number and knew a bunch of people there. If she got into trouble, she knew that she could call them.

Another one of my favorite stories is a girl who met up with another person in Dallas, and they found out they went to preschool together.

For us, hearing these stories made us feel that we didn't want to live in a world where this product doesn't exist.

**Daso:** That's wonderful. I love the little statement you just said: "I don't want to live in a world where this product doesn't exist." That's so powerful. I'm glad you guys have that kind of motivation to go out and build this thing. One thing I've realized as someone who's currently in a summer internship and wanting to meet someone outside their program is that it's hard to meet other young adults. Do you think Summer Playbook could extend from college students to early-career individuals?

**Heine:** Absolutely. From what we see, the people who need Summer Playbook the most are recently graduated students. The entire strong social network that you had in college – your friends, your community – is gone, it's evaporated. You moved. We've seen recent college grads begging us to extend our product to them. However, our team doesn't want to expand that quickly. We could, but we are patient. We are trying to get people in the college market to like it first. We want to make sure we are building something that people love and have good retention. Once we get that right, that's when we can go to other places and expand.

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**Heine:** Sam Altman, President of Y Combinator, told us at YC, "When you're building these things, don't think about one year or two years, think about the company you want to have ten years from now." That's something that we embody and are thinking about consistently.

**Daso:** Great. My last question to you is: For all of the young college students who are thinking about dropping out to start their own company, what would you tell them?

**Heine:** I would say that there's a season for everything. When you're young, and you're not married or have a mortgage, there's no better time take risks in pursuing what you truly want to do. If it doesn't work out by your 30s, fine, you can get another job. The key here is to do these things while you can. When you're 35 or 40, and you have a family, then you might not be able to do those things you wanted to when you were younger. We're all going to make mistakes in our 20s and 30s. However, if we're going to make mistakes, then make a mistake by shooting too high, rather than too low, every time. You'll learn more, you'll have a more exciting life, and it'll take you to places you can't expect.

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and readability.*

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