In-Conversation Reference

Founder Alignment Conversation User Guide

These tables are for use during the conversation. There is no expectation to work through every prompt. These are listed as memory aids as much as anything but can also come in handy if the conversation stalls or needs direction. The goal remains to listen for signal patterns across all five arcs while noting the strongest signals after the meeting using Tool 3.

Remember: Green, yellow, and red are signals and not final grades. Focus on patterns across all five arcs without trying to keep “score”. Foundational misalignment (identity, motivation) usually points to a different pathway. Structural gaps (capacity, role) can often be addressed in Stage 2.

Arc 1: Identity & Career Alignment How does entrepreneurship fit this person's professional identity and career goals?

Key Prompts

- "How do you describe yourself first: as a researcher, a builder, or something else?"
- "How important is tenure to you right now?"
- "How would a startup fit within your vision for your academic career?"
- "What would you regret more in five years: trying and failing, or never trying?"

Signal Patterns

GREEN	YELLOW	RED
• Builder/operator language alongside researcher identity • Tenure is one goal among several • Sees entrepreneurship as expanding, not threatening, their identity	• Researcher identity dominant but curious about building • Tenure matters but trade-offs are articulable • Frames entrepreneurship as "worth exploring"	• Entrepreneurship framed as external expectation ("should") • Tenure imminent and non-negotiable • Department views entrepreneurial activity as detrimental

Arc 2: Risk, Control & Sacrifice

What is this person's real relationship to uncertainty, shared control, and long-term commitment?

Key Prompts

- "What kinds of risk are you comfortable taking right now?"
- "How would you feel if someone else ultimately ran a company based on your work?"
- "What are you not willing to sacrifice?"
- "Are collaborators' goals, risk tolerances, and timelines aligned?"

Signal Patterns

GREEN	YELLOW	RED
• Views failure as data, not identity threat • Can name specific things they won't sacrifice • Comfortable with shared credit and delegated execution	• Comfortable with financial but not reputational risk (or vice versa) • Will share control but wants visibility into key decisions • Family/personal trade-offs are manageable but real	• Cannot name anything they're willing to sacrifice • Describes failure as "devastating" or reputationally catastrophic • Financial situation is precarious; startup equity is expected income

Arc 3: Motivation for Entrepreneurship

Is this person motivated by building a company, or by the outcomes a company could produce?

Key Prompts

- "Why a company, specifically?"
- "What does entrepreneurship give you that licensing wouldn't?"
- "If this technology were licensed tomorrow and widely adopted, how would you feel?"
- "What parts of a startup most excite , and most worry , you?"

Signal Patterns

GREEN	YELLOW	RED
• Gets animated discussing customers, hiring, operational challenges • Motivated by building something that works, not just proving it can work • External validation is nice but not the driver	• Primary motivation is impact; company-building is instrumental • Excited about outcomes, less clear on day-to-day work • Would be equally satisfied with licensing if impact were guaranteed	• Cannot articulate what company-building uniquely offers • Motivation is status, recognition, or proving critics wrong • Discusses entrepreneurship only in terms of exit or acquisition

Arc 4: Capacity & Commitment

Does this person have realistic time and bandwidth to engage meaningfully?

Key Prompts

- "How much time could you realistically devote over the next 12-18 months?"
- "What other obligations would compete with this?"
- "If this demanded more time than expected, what would give?"
- "How would you feel about stepping back into an advisor role?"

Signal Patterns

GREEN	YELLOW	RED
• Provides specific time estimates (hours/week) • Identifies competing obligations and which could flex • Has discussed this with family or partner	• Time estimate is optimistic but grounded in experience • Multiple obligations but willing to deprioritize some • Acknowledges advisory role as a viable backup	• "I'll find the time" with no plan for what gives • Currently overcommitted; adding venture to the pile • Expects to lead company while maintaining full research program

Arc 5: Technology in Context

Given this person's alignment, what does commercializing this technology require and does it fit?

Key Prompts

- "What kind of company does this technology need to succeed in the real world?"
- "If speed to impact mattered more than ownership, how would that change your thinking?"
- "Who would need to be involved for this to work , and are they aligned?"
- "What would success look like if you didn't start a company?"

Signal Patterns

GREEN	YELLOW	RED
• Can translate technology requirements into organizational implications • Identifies external dependencies (capital, regulatory, partners) realistically • Can argue for AND against a spinout with equal clarity	• Understands venture demands intellectually but hasn't fully internalized them • Defensive when challenges are raised but recovers and engages • Role they want doesn't perfectly match what the technology needs but could adapt	• Dismisses non-technical requirements (regulatory, capital, partners) • Cannot make the case against a spinout; sees it as obviously correct • Venture timeline is fundamentally incompatible with their goals or life stage