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Insider Biotech: Career Starter Pack

Real lessons from founders, scientists, and innovators

We sit down with biotech leaders and ask them the questions that matter. This guide distills the sharpest insights from our first eight episodes — no filler, no generic advice, just hard-won wisdom from people building the future of medicine.

Welcome

We sit down with biotech leaders — in person — and unpack the real story behind the science. No scripts, no PR answers. This guide distills the sharpest insights from our first eight episodes into one resource. Every insight below comes directly from our guests. Every lesson was earned the hard way.

Meet the Guests

GUEST	ROLE & EXPERTISE	KEY ACHIEVEMENT
Christian Tidona	CEO, BioMed X Institute	Built a private research institute without VC or public funding.
Patrick Most	CEO, Aavigen	Contacted 60+ investors before funding cardiac gene therapies.
Axel Schumacher	Epigenetics Pioneer	Inventor of the epigenetic microarray assay.
Volker Stadler	CEO, PEPperPRINT	Built a peptide microarray platform.
Abdelrahman Mahmoud	CEO, CellRewire	Building AI architectures for predictive medicine.
Dominik Niopek	Professor & PI	Leading a 20-person lab in programmable biology & CRISPR.
Julia Schaft	Managing Director, BioRN	Runs one of Europe's leading biotech clusters, now 185 members.
Andreas Schmidt	MD & Co-founder, Springboard Health Angels	Built and exited companies across three continents; now backs founders.

LESSON 01

The Successful Entrepreneur Just Tries One More Time

Success in biotech is often a war of attrition. Christian Tidona's first startup failed, ending in a lawsuit and total financial loss. Axel Schumacher wrote 4,000 job applications before turning to entrepreneurship.

> *"The difference between the successful entrepreneur and the not so successful entrepreneur is not luck. It's not money. It's not where you come from. The successful entrepreneur has just tried one more time."*
>
> — Christian Tidona, Episode 1

> *"Like Winston Churchill said, never give up because if you give up you have already lost. You have to be perseverant — and at that point you already distinguish yourself from a lot of other people."*
>
> — Patrick Most, Episode 2

LESSON 02

Trust Over Talent

In the early stages of a company, reliability is more valuable than genius. The "superstar" with a difficult personality is often a liability.

- **Hiring rule:** Always choose the loyal, reliable candidate over the "uncertain" superstar.
- **Team structure:** Use equal incentives to ensure shared responsibility.

> *"The most expensive mistakes in entrepreneurship are hiring mistakes."*
>
> — Christian Tidona, Episode 1

LESSON 03

Be Radically Open and Honest

Secrecy is a trap. While you may fear someone "stealing" your idea, the benefits of building trust through transparency far outweigh the risks.

> *"Be open always, because despite the couple of people that take advantage, this is where you meet the people and build the most trustful relationships that will then carry you into a very successful career."*
>
> — Christian Tidona, Episode 1

LESSON 04

Find a Mentor — A Real One

A mentor is not a consultant. They are someone who has "been there" and wants to give back. To attract one, provide value first.

The Shoelace Anecdote: Christian Tidona noticed a potential mentor had a broken shoelace at a conference. He ran to buy a new lace and gave it to him. That small gesture led to a lifelong mentorship.

LESSON 05

Follow Your Own Fundamental Question

Your career should be the pursuit of a question that is "super connected to your identity."

> *"Try to find your own fundamental question... you follow step by step to reach certain answers, and these answers most of the time bring you new questions and even new challenges."*
>
> — Abdelrahman Mahmoud, Episode 5

LESSON 06

Challenge the Status Quo — Use First Principles

Don't let "experts" tell you something is impossible if the logic holds up. Axel Schumacher was told epigenome mapping would take 50 years; he did it in six months.

- **Logic:** "If our cells can do it, we can do it too."
- **Design:** Start with the end product (e.g., manufacturability) in mind from day one.

LESSON 07

Build Your Network — You Cannot Do It Alone

Science and business are team games. You need an "inner trust circle" (roughly 10 people) and a broad professional network (1,500+).

> *"If you don't know the right people, you're screwed. It doesn't matter how good you are, you need to know people that help you."*
>
> — Axel Schumacher, Episode 3

LESSON 08

Take Smart Risks

Take risks while you are young, but avoid "leaps of faith." Ensure you have a solid foundation to fall back on if a step fails.

> *"If you have a solid foundation, if you have moved forward and the next step fails, you can always jump back and you are on safe ground. Don't do a leap of faith."*
>
> — Patrick Most, Episode 2

LESSON 09

Expect Mistakes & Be Patient

Entrepreneurs chronically underestimate timelines. Moving from an idea to a business-standard prototype takes significantly longer than you think.

> *"Be patient about your work. Be realistic... The enthusiasm about new things decreased over time because you find out in the long term that it's possibly less important than you was hoping for."*
>
> — Volker Stadler, Episode 4

LESSON 10

The Joy of Discovery

Despite the struggle, the feeling of being the first human to see a specific biological truth is incomparable. This joy is what sustains the long game.

> *"There's almost nothing better in life than figuring things out and having this feeling that you see something — you're the first human being on the planet who sees this."*
>
> — Axel Schumacher, Episode 3

LESSON 11

Biotech Is an Accidental Marathon

Everything in biotech takes longer and costs more than you expect. What separates the founders who make it isn't brilliance — it's grit, endurance, and a steady pace over years. The decisive work happens on the last meters, not the first.

- **Rule of thumb:** Whatever timeline you imagine, assume it takes twice the time and twice the money.
- **The last 1%:** Going from 90% to 99.99% is where most of the resources go — and where success is actually decided.

> *"Eventually, what decides if people are successful is the grit, the endurance, the steady pace. I don't know any industry where things take longer than biotech."*
>
> — Andreas Schmidt, Episode 8

LESSON 12

Make a Decisive Decision — Don't Stand on the Platform

A handful of moments determine the shape of an entire career. At those intersections, most people drift onto the obvious, well-worn road. The one thing that never works is freezing — refusing to choose at all.

> *"You're standing on this diving platform. At some point you'll have to jump into the water, or you can go down. The only thing that never works is to stand on the platform and not make a decision."*
>
> — Andreas Schmidt, Episode 8

LESSON 13

Don't Close Any Doors — Get a Sniff of Both Sides

You don't have to commit to academia or industry forever before you've seen either one. Try both, keep your options open, and choose only once you have real exposure. Some of the most career-defining experiences come from things that don't strictly "fit" your degree.

- **For scientists:** Even a small taste of industry sharpens how you think about your own work — and the people doing translation are exactly who the ecosystem needs.
- **Side quests compound:** Founder conventions, China study trips, scout leadership — none of it fits a PhD neatly, but it builds the network and judgment that pay off twenty years later.

> *"See the most of both sides and then just choose — and try, and not close any doors."*
>
> — Julia Schaft, Episode 7

The Big Ideas

Looking further out — the trends our guests are betting on.

The Gene Therapy Tipping Point

Patrick Most is targeting 2027 for clinical trials in heart failure. Gene therapy is moving from experimental to clinical reality faster than most expect.

AI as a Time Compressor

AI won't replace scientists, but it will solve problems in weeks that used to take decades. The bottleneck shifts from computation to interpretation.

Treatable Aging

Epigenetic clocks show biological age can be influenced by lifestyle — this is no longer science fiction. Axel Schumacher's work is at the frontier of making aging a manageable condition.

Purpose-Built AI

Breakthroughs will come from AI architectures designed around biological questions, not retrofitted tech. Abdelrahman Mahmoud's CellRewire is building exactly that.

Europe Closing the Funding Gap

The bottleneck isn't the science — it's the risk capital that dries up between seed and the clinic. Julia Schaft sees matching funds, tax incentives, and returning expats as ways Europe can stop losing its best companies to the US.

The Whole Financing Spectrum

VC is the most expensive money there is. Andreas Schmidt argues founders should get creative — early revenue, customer-investors, family offices, and public funding — and reach for venture capital only when it's truly the right tool.

About Transcribed

Every episode, we sit down with a biotech leader — in person — and unpack the real story behind the science. No scripts. No PR answers. Just honest conversations about the path from curiosity to breakthrough.

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