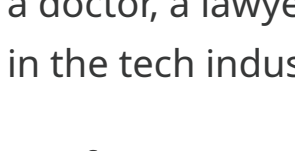




THE PULSE


The 10x “overemployed” engineer

A software engineer worked at several AI startups at the same time, without his employers knowing anything about it. Then one frustrated founder who hired him went public...



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The 2002 movie [Catch Me if You Can](#) stars Leonardo Di Caprio as a talented 19-year-old fraudster, who forges millions of dollars in checks while pretending to be a doctor, a lawyer, and even an airline pilot. That Hollywood film now has echoes in the tech industry, in a story which has come to light in Silicon Valley.

A software engineer in their mid-twenties, based in India, successfully scammed approximately a million dollars annually from tech startups by excelling in interviews, getting hired remotely, and then not doing their assigned work, all while being simultaneously employed by many companies.

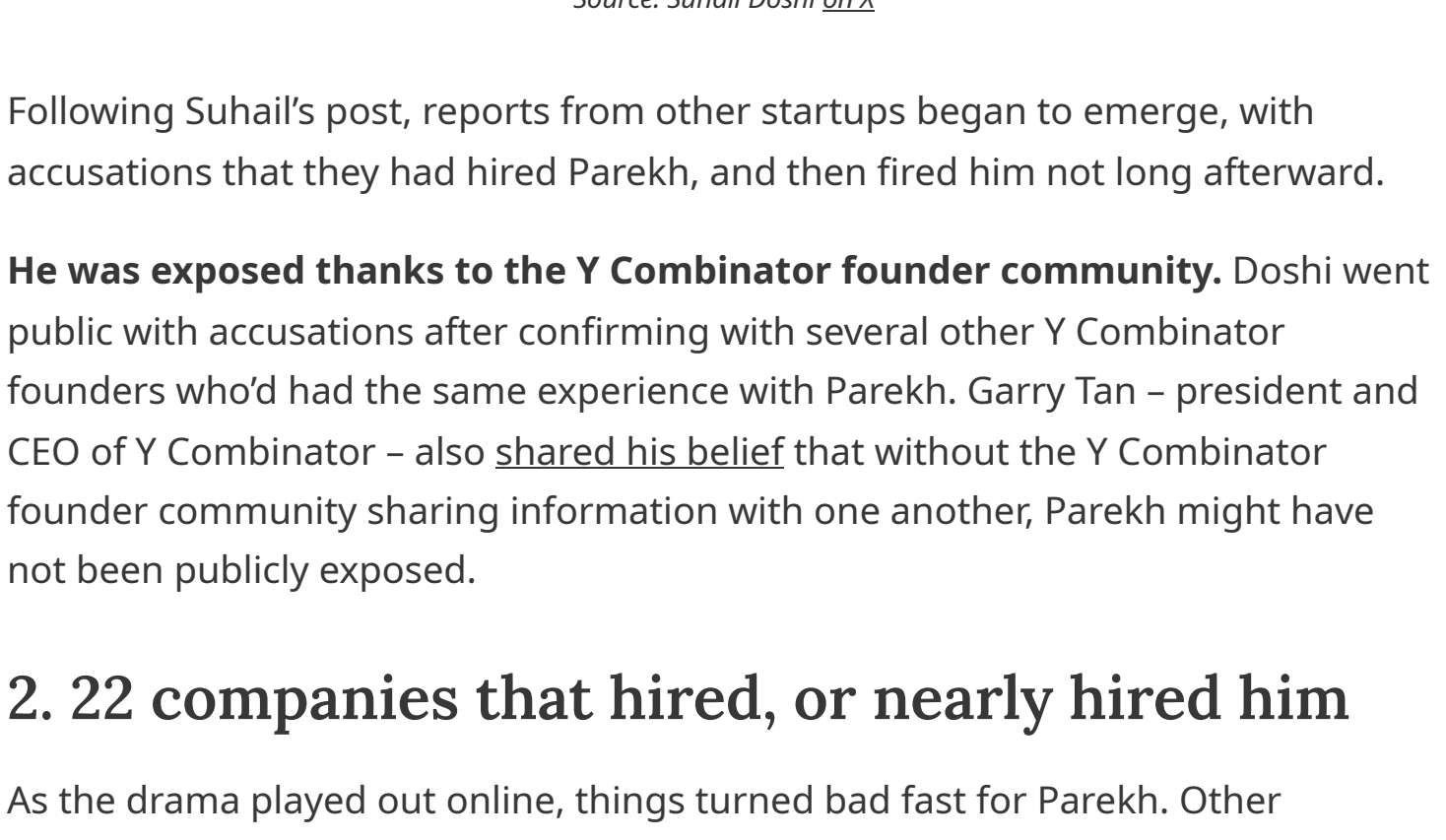
As in ‘Catch Me if You Can’, in this story there’s an unusually talented main character who gets into a dramatic showdown once exposed.

Today’s issue covers what happened, and some learnings from this highly unusual incident:

- Exposé.** An engineer named Soham Parekh is accused on social media of working at multiple Y Combinator startups at the same time by one employer, and other workplaces come forward.
 - 22 companies that hired, or nearly hired this engineer.** Almost all are recently-founded AI startups.
 - Excuses, excuses...** This engineer was hard to contact, and had bizarre reasons as to why.
 - Skyrocketing demand for AI engineers.** One thing is clear: demand for AI engineers is through the roof, and capable software engineers who can integrate LLMs are in high demand.
 - How did a dev outside the US get hired by hot Silicon Valley startups?** False US work authorization status, Silicon Valley startups desperate to hire, and “business-minded 10x engineers” being in high demand, all helped.
 - Spotting “overemployed” software engineers.** Suspicion of ‘overly green’ GitHub profiles, the importance of background checks, and recruitment advice from an ex-Facebook and ex-Uber founder of scaleup hiring business, [Dynosaur Labs](#). Additionally, [Digger](#) founder Igor Zalutski confirms that Soham was genuinely among the top 0.1% of software engineers, in terms of both technical skills and business acumen.
 - What does it mean for remote work?** Remote work makes being “overemployed” much easier – and AI tooling will make it even more so. Are more in-person interviews and hybrid work patterns a solution?
- Update: shortly after publishing this article, Soham appeared in the TBPB podcast where he [admitted to having worked multiple jobs in parallel since 2022, confirming the allegations in the below article. In a follow-up email, he also told me he previously spent time living in the US “with some of the founders \(at Sync Labs and Antimetal.\)”](#)*

1. Exposé

Yesterday (2 July), startup founder Suhail Doshi made an accusation: that a software engineer named Soham Parekh was working at several Y Combinator startups at once, and had been doing so for over a year, all while failing to do the work he was hired to do:



Initially, the post got a bit of pushback. After all, in California – where most startups which hired Parekh are based – it’s not forbidden to have a second job (aka ‘moonlighting’), as long as it doesn’t overlap with other commitments. *Indeed, many leaders founded startups on the side of their main job, and an employer cannot claim intellectual property ownership of a new project which is fully separate from someone’s primary job.*

What makes this story stand out is the unusually high number of parallel jobs this one dev took on. All together, the combined workload of all these roles was evidently impossible to maintain, and would inevitably lead to questions being asked by individual employers, who wondered why a clearly-talented engineer was unable to deliver their work.

Suhail said his issue was not that Parekh had a side job; it was something more fundamental:

He was exposed thanks to the Y Combinator founder community. Doshi went public with accusations after confirming with several other Y Combinator founders who’d had the same experience with Parekh. Garry Tan – president and CEO of Y Combinator – also [shared his belief](#) that without the Y Combinator founder community sharing information with one another, Parekh might have not been publicly exposed.

2. 22 companies that hired, or nearly hired him

As the drama played out online, things turned bad fast for Parekh. Other companies at which he worked reportedly started taking action, [as per](#) Suhail:

Showdown: founders learned their employee worked at multiple companies at once.
Source: Suhail Doshi on X

Many companies went on record about the fact they had employed and quickly dismissed Parekh. [Links to companies below lead to their job pages, if they have one.](#) *All are hiring for fullstack software engineers or AI engineers.*

- Playground AI** (YC19, AI-first graphics editor.) Hired Soham in 2024 and [fired](#) him after a week.
- Leaping AI** (YC W25, building voice AI agents that are human-like and self improve): hired him, then [fired him](#) when they found out he also worked elsewhere
- Fuse AI** (YC W25, agentic sales platform for GTM teams): [fired him](#) when they found out that Soham was working parallel at Leaping AI
- Digger** (Terraform pull request automation) onboarded him, but terminated him a few days into the job, founder Igor Zalutski told me. The company terminated Parekh when background checks raised red flags. Digger was conscious about the risk of “moving fast” in hiring before background checks completed, but this was a calculated risk.
- Fleet AI** (agent engineering platform). Hired and [fired](#) within a week.
- Lindy** (AI assistant platform). Hired and [fired](#) two weeks later. Aced the interview, but then “the impact of his work was negative.” Founder Flo Crivello said
- Create** (creating software with AI): hired him and promptly [fired](#) him. Create is an in-person startup. Amusingly, Soham showed up for one day at their SF office, then did not deliver work, and denied vehemently that he was employed at Sync Labs (below) when Create founders confronted him. But he was!
- Sync Labs** (AI lipysnc tool). Soham was featured in their team video in the summer of 2024: and it’s how Create (listed above) [learned](#) Soham lied about not having other employment.
- Antimetal** (AI platform for infrastructure) Hired in 2022 and fired shortly thereafter. They realized he must be working multiple jobs.
- Ponder.ai** (video AI). Worked at the startup until the news broke, when he [was fired](#).
- ComfyUI** (open source, [Node.js](#)-based app for GenAI) hired Parekh for 3 weeks in June. The interview went well, then things started to [fall apart](#).

The video made by Sync Labs about their team that showed how he was working at this company, while also being employed by Create. Source: Sync Labs

And how it all started:

One of the first AI companies to hire Parekh back in 2022. Source: Matt Parkhurst, founder of Antimetal on X

Then there are companies which interviewed Soham, but decided against employing him:

- AIVideo.com** (YC S23, AI-powered video production) They were very close to hiring him after he [did very well](#) on the interview.
- Pally AI** (YC S25, AI relationship management) They offered him a founding engineer role, which he rejected because the in-person requirement was non-negotiable.
- Mosaic AI** (YC W25, video editing AI agents). Spent a month interviewing Did great in interviews, but the company [did not hire](#) him.
- Reworkd** (YC S23, extracting data at scale). Interviewed him and rejected it after confirming he lied about his location during the interview - as the startup [used](#) an IP logger during the interview (Soham said he was in the US at the moment, but his IP was in Mumbai, India)
- Weave** (YC W25, ML-powered tool to measure engineering). Cofounder Andrew Churchill confirmed they interviewed him in May, and he was impressive. They rejected him after hearing rumors from fellow YC founders on holding multiple jobs.
- Bestever AI** (AI-powered, stunning ads). Interviewed him, but [rejected](#) after the initial screening.
- Cassidy AI** (AI automation powered by company data). Soham [reached out](#) to this company with an email discussed below.
- Railway** (infrastructure as a service). [Rejected](#) in 2023 during early screening.
- Graphite** (the AI developer productivity platform. Disclaimer: I’m an investor). Cofounder Jacob Gold interviewed Sohan and [said](#) it “was one of the best system design interviews I’ve conculed.” Graphite has strict reference checks: Soham did not proceed with these — likely suspecting he could get caught. A reminder that reference checks work, and are important!
- An early-stage startup** cofounded by former Warp engineer Michelle Lim [booked him](#) for a 3-day paid work trial, but cancelled it when the story came to light.

A startup advocating for ‘cheating on everything’ also nearly got duped. Cluey is a startup building an AI tool to “cheat on everything”, and as fate would have it, the company’s founder and CEO [shared](#) that they were at the second-round interview stage with Parekh. The company [shared](#) interview notes taken during their session:

Candidate Evaluation:

- Candidate seen as knowledgeable in React and frontend optimization.
- High-level answers are considered good; some fumbling through details noted.
- Strong devops and infrastructure experience inferred from GitHub and past projects.
- Candidate’s GitHub is reviewed, showing significant contributions and experience.
- Comparison to other candidates in terms of technical strength and fit.
- Discussion of candidate’s background (e.g., internships at Meta, Waterloo education).
- General consensus that the candidate is a good fit, with a strong, “startery” profile.
- Plan to schedule a follow-up interview for further evaluation.”

3. Excuses, excuses and lies

Parekh consistently delayed his supposedly-imminent relocation to the US. Most startups that employed him usually knew he was based in India, but all assumed he *wanted* to relocate to the US. He assured several employers that he was taking care of his O1 visa (discussed below). For example, here is an email sent to the CEO of Fleet AI:

“Ideally, I’d love to be in person. However I am also undergoing the renewal process for the current visa. Is it okay if I let you know earliest by this Tuesday if it would be possible to be in person in New York for this [the team working together]. At this point, I’d say it is 80% likely that I should be able to come in person.”

Excuses were frequent. One recurring feature was Parekh’s creative excuses for why he was slow at getting things done. Arkadyi Telegin, cofounder of Leaping AI, wondered why it took him so long to do pull requests. Parekh replied that a military drone had damaged his house during fighting between India and Pakistan. Later, it turned out he was not near the conflict zone:

Why the work was slow, allegedly. Source: Arkadyi Telegin on X

Some lies were caught. Soham used excuses like having been diagnosed with a chronic illness to explain his lack of work — when, in reality, he was busy working for other companies. When confronted about working at another startup, Soham lied about his involvement — but to his misfortune, the other startup publicly posts a team video that includes Soham working in their team. Shruv Amin, cofounder of [Create.xyz](#) (AI app builder) [shared](#) his frustrating experience of hiring Soram:

- Did well on the onsite (in-person) programming challenge in New York
- Monday (first day at work) and Tuesday: calls in sick
- Wednesday: cofounder notices that he made lots of GitHub commits in the middle of the day. This feels like he’d be working at another company! Also: Soham did not even clone Create’s repo while clearly working on something else, in private. More red flags!
- Thursday: they call him up to ask what happened with commits the previous day. Offered he can come clean and move on. Soham denies doing other work and claims he “couldn’t sleep so was playing with DeepSeek in his own repos.” Too sick to work on his main job but not too sick to “play with DeepSeek?” Sure...
- Friday: comes into the office in New York, does a great job, and stays late.
- Next weeks: all falls apart. Says he is diagnosed with chronic condition and is “really scared.” Work doesn’t get done, excuses keep piling up.
- Create cofounders start to become suspicious that Soham might be employed by another startup called Sync Labs.
- Confronted Sohan about this suspicion. Sohan denies being an employee at Sync.
- Sync Labs shares an end-of-month video of their team, which includes Sohan: making it clear he is employed at the company.

Another time Soham caught lying was in an interview, where interviewers asked him about his location. Rohan Pandey, cofounder of Reworkd [shared](#):

“Call 1: says he’s in US, but we suspect he’s in India

Call 2: we call his BS, he admits “was in India last week to visit family, but now back in US”

Call 3: @asimdotshrestha puts an IP logger on Zoom link and it shows up in Mumbai 🤖 The thing with soham is that all his lies are so believable and he delivers them so innocently

Each time we’d go into a call thinking he’s sus and come out 30 min later saying he’s great.

Until we’d discuss it among ourselves and be unable to pinpoint any fact supporting him.”

It’s alleged Soham misled at least one employer about his location. A founder said they thought he was US-based, and even showed a [company laptop](#) sent to a US address. The laptop was later returned – Soham claimed it was sent to his sister. However, he never had a US address, and could not have one legally since he did not have any USA visa.

Igor Zalutski, founder of Digger (AI that understands infrastructure) gave me examples of what it was like working with Soham:

“He said he applied for o1 visa and paid for premium processing so he was “few weeks at most” away from getting it. He said that his lawyers told him it’s just better to be out of the US while the application is ongoing, and after it’s done he’s back, he “got an apartment in North Beach (San Francisco)”.

Later, a founder I background checked with told me that he [Soham] was telling them the same for over a year.

And funnily enough, Soham started his dirty tricks from the very first day: he asked to push his onboarding meeting to the next day. He wrote how “this is unusual but it’s been unusually windy and rainy so I think that might have messed with the internet wire, I will have someone look over it tomorrow.”

Digger AI terminated Soham’s contract a day or two into his onboarding. By that time, they had placed an order for an Apple laptop to be shipped to Parekh’s home address in India. Luckily, they could still cancel the order.

4. Skyrocketing demand for AI engineers

One puzzling part of the story is how he got hired by Silicon Valley startups, particularly by “cream of the crop” places like Y Combinator AI startups. These businesses are well-funded, offer good base salaries close to the \$200K/year range for senior engineers, and also attract more candidates than average. But the reality is complicated, and also explains why some parts of the tech market are still “candidate’s markets”, compared to the norm.

This is a reminder that becoming an “AI engineer” as a software engineer is straightforward enough: we covered [Seven examples of software engineers picking up AI engineering, The “AI engineering stack” with Chip Huyen, and How Janvi Kalra became an AI Engineer at Coda — which later helped her get hired at OpenAI.](#)

This is why the market is so hot for AI engineers:

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