

Finding the Right Path

Four Yale Law graduates discuss their varied career paths and the lessons they've learned along the way

Kevin Czinger '87 is designing the future of the car using sustainable, ecofriendly practices. Through film and theatre, **Lily Fan '04** is changing the way people understand the world and one another. **Richard Buery '97** has dedicated his life to improving outcomes for young people in America's most disadvantaged communities. And **Reshma Saujani '02** inspires thousands of young girls and women to be bold and brave, working through her innovative non-profit to achieve gender parity in computer science.

Though their career paths are varied, they share a common bond: they were each uniquely prepared to tackle the world through a dynamic, immersive educational experience at Yale Law School—an experience that challenged them to think critically and expansively across disciplines and ideological divides and question everything.

As our diverse alumni community demonstrates, a degree from Yale Law School can light up the path to many different careers, even those outside the realm of the traditional legal field. The challenge for students is finding the right one for them. Through lessons they have learned along the way, these four accomplished alumni offer students some important advice as they navigate the road ahead—chart your own course, set your own pace, and measure success by your own satisfaction. And most importantly, enjoy the incredible journey along the way.

Theater



Lily Fan '04

Auto
Manufacturing



Kevin Czinger '87

Education



Richard Buery '97

Technology



Reshma Saujani '02

Re-making the Future of Cars



Kevin Czinger '87 is on a mission: the company he founded, Divergent 3D, combines visionary design and software with 3D metal printing. And he believes this revolutionary new model for sustainable auto manufacturing can transform the industry.

The best demonstration of Czinger's new technology is the Blade, the world's first 3D-printed supercar, which goes from zero to sixty in 2.5 seconds. Czinger's career journey, while similarly high-performing, has taken a winding pathway: federal prosecutor, executive at Goldman Sachs, entrepreneur-in-residence at a venture capital firm, co-founder of an electric car and battery manufacturing company. Reflecting on the future of cars, his company, and the many roads he has traveled, Czinger describes how his Law School education prepared him to take on new challenges, and offers advice to graduates as they embark on their own adventures.

How did you become passionate about cars?

I grew up with two older brothers who were car mechanics, builders, and racers. I started working on cars and motorcycles as their "assistant" at a very early age. I loved imagining and drawing vehicles—air, land, sea, and space—and building them. I also loved nature and during the 1970s was taught that we are stewards of our planet. These early, underlying passions motivate my work at Divergent.

What was your time at Yale Law School like and how did it shape your future career path and spark your interest in entrepreneurship?

I was not focused on a particular career path when I came to the Law School. I came to Yale College as a recruited football player who was the youngest of five and the first to attend college. I was successful in football in college and absolutely loved learning. By happenstance, I met Guido Calabresi '58 and he described Yale Law School as "America's *École normale supérieure*." That sold me.

When I first arrived, I was idealistic and working-class conscious. I wanted to fight for justice in the world. In my second year, I thought about returning to Cleveland, where I had grown up, and over time trying to become a prosecutor with the thought of entering politics through the traditional public service pathway. Then I met my wife of thirty years, Katrin, in my third year of law school and worked as a summer associate at Goldman Sachs (strategic M&A advisory) before my judicial clerkship started. Those two events changed my trajectory. Katrin was from Berlin and influenced me to think more internationally, and I started to read the business section of the newspaper. Yale Law School gave me the opportunity to explore ideas and opportunities, and leave with the endorsement of having spent time at a very elite institution. It instilled the confidence in me that I could learn anything if I applied discipline and willpower—and that it is cool to try to do good in the world.

"Life is long, so don't worry about missing out on something. With discipline and willpower, you can learn anything at any stage in life."

Tell me about Blade? What is the future of the car?

We've had a revolution in software—with a small team and objective-oriented software, we can code anything. Now we will have a hardware revolution that combines our ability to use software for generative design with the ability to express that design in the real world of atoms by printing it. Our planet will not survive without this revolution in manufacturing as our current vehicle manufacturing system is economically and environmentally broken.

Electric vehicles are a good example. We think that we can build a large, heavy vehicle that requires large amounts of energy to operate and have it be green because it is electric and there is no tailpipe! That is crazy. The two are fundamentally, mutually exclusive.

As the developing world increases its demand for vehicles, we are about to lock ourselves into infrastructure that will compound environmental damage at a level that is unimaginable. It took us 115 years to build two billion vehicles. In the next thirty-five years or so we will build four billion more vehicles (six billion when looked at from a mass equivalent) with all of the associated damage-compounding infrastructure and fuel use (gas and/or electricity). We need a way to manufacture that is much more capital, material, and energy efficient than in the past one hundred years. We need safe, lightweight vehicles that use less fuel (gas and/or electricity).

The good news is that the technology is available. However, you need to have a full stack software-hardware system (incorporating 3D metal printing) and a killer app to implement it. We think we have both at Divergent. I was initially the lead inventor and sole employee of Divergent, but we now have a team of about one hundred software and hardware engineers and scientists who are making things happen. We are up to 150+ patents issued or filed, have raised around \$140 million, and are working with some of the world's leading auto and technology companies to implement our manufacturing system.

What is your advice to new graduates as they think about what they want to do?

Life is long, so don't worry about missing out on something. With discipline and willpower, you can learn anything at any stage in life. If you really believe in something, keep yourself in the game with patience, persistence, and adapting to opportunities (rather than forcing something to happen)—and you'll achieve some wins sooner or later. But the most important thing is to avoid behaviors and risks that take you completely out of the game.

Bravery Over Perfection



As the founder and CEO of Girls Who Code, **Reshma Saujani '02** aims to transform how the tech world solves one of its most daunting challenges: the dearth of female engineers and scientists.

Growing up in a small Midwestern town, Saujani knew early on that she wanted to make a difference through activism. But along the path that took her from Schaumburg, Illinois, to Yale Law School, to the campaign trail, and now as a successful leader of a thriving nonprofit, Saujani learned that the key to success was not perfection—but bravery. Through her varied experience in law, politics, and policy, Saujani shares what she has learned along the way, how she came to start Girls Who Code, and why it is critical that we develop a pipeline of women running for office, leading companies, and speaking up to create a more equal society.

How did you start Girls Who Code? What has it been like to see it grow and thrive?

When I ran for Congress in 2010, I visited schools and classrooms along the campaign trail. And though I lost the election, something about my time visiting those schools stuck with me—the lack of girls in computer science classrooms. After doing some more research, I realized that no one was even talking about the lack of women and girls in computer science. So, I pulled together some funding and a team, and together we taught twenty girls how to code in a tiny bit of borrowed office space. And now, six years later, we’ve reached ninety thousand girls, and we’re not slowing down. We’re well on our way to reaching gender parity in entry-level tech jobs by 2027. I never could have imagined seeing this kind of success so soon—our college-aged alumni are choosing to major in computer science or related fields at fifteen times the national rate—and I’m so excited to see what’s next.

Can you describe some of your personal background—how that shaped you as you decided what to pursue as a career?

I grew up in Schaumburg, Illinois, the daughter of Indian refugees from Uganda. There weren’t many other people in our small midwestern community who looked like us. By the time I was in middle school I was already very familiar with racism and prejudice. That’s when my activism started—I founded my own advocacy organization called the Prejudice Reduction Interested Students Movement—or PRISM, for short. I led my first march when I was twelve.

What did your time at Yale Law School mean to you?

One of the most important parts of my experience of Yale was the journey to get there—it was an important trial of perseverance and strength for me in my young adult life. For years, I had one obsession: get into Yale Law School. I finished college in three years, took the LSAT, and applied to my dream school. When I didn’t get in, I went to Harvard to study public policy, and then applied to Yale again the following year. And I didn’t get in, again. Most people would have given up after two swings and major misses. I could have chosen another path to my dream, another law school. But I was determined. Eventually, I found myself with an appointment with the Dean of Yale Law School after literally pleading my case at a funeral. He offered me a deal—if I could make it to the top 10% of my class at another law school, he would admit me to Yale. So, I took the deal. And I studied constantly, working my way to the top of my class. I finally made it to Yale, and the experience had pushed me to be a leader. That hustle was what gave me the strength to run for office—

twice—and after losing so publicly, go on to found a national nonprofit that is making a major difference in our country.

You have a powerful message about why bravery is much more important than perfection. How have you incorporated that message into what you are doing now?

When I was a little girl, I knew I wanted to make a difference in the world—I wanted to make it better, for more people. And I thought the best way to do that was to be perfect: that meant going to school, getting straight A’s, attending Harvard, then Yale. With every feather in my cap I thought I was one step closer to what I was supposed to be doing—but at thirty-two I was crying myself to sleep every night, miserable with my safe corporate career.

Then, I saw Hillary Clinton give her first concession speech, and something she said stuck with me—that just because she had failed, it didn’t mean we shouldn’t try. That speech inspired me to do something brave, for the first time in my life. I quit my job, and dumped all of my savings into running for office. I lost the race, but I decided to try again by running for Public Advocate. I lost that race, too. But in those brave moments, I was able to prove to myself that I could do something that seemed really scary, and I saw that even when I failed, my world didn’t end!

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Women are still underrepresented in so many areas of American society: science and technology fields, Csuites, boardrooms, government office, and many other sectors. Why is it important that we teach young women to lead?

It has been absolutely incredible to see the number of women, and particularly women of color, running for office, starting companies, speaking up for equality. I want women to continue to work on exercising their bravery muscles, doing the things that might scare them, and dreaming big. Men have been able to maintain power because we teach them as boys to be brave—while we teach our girls to be perfect. We have to relearn bravery, and keep teaching girls how to step up and lead, because when you give women and girls the tools they need, they can change the world.

Finding the Work that Makes Us Greater



Richard Buery '97 isn't worried about the next job he's supposed to take. He's too busy changing lives.

Beury is a champion for the transformative power of education. He co-founded (with Matt Klein '98) the national youth mentoring organization iMentor.org and the youth development organization Groundwork before going on to work at the Children's Aid Society and becoming Deputy Mayor of New York City in Bill de Blasio's cabinet. He now leads the public policy, advocacy, marketing, and communications efforts at KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Public Charter Schools, a network of more than 200 schools in 20 states.

How did your personal background shape you as you were growing up and deciding what you wanted to pursue as a career?

I grew up in East New York. My parents are immigrants from Panama, and my mother was a high school teacher. Like most resources, educational opportunity is not distributed equally or equitably in America, and that became painfully clear to me when I was admitted to Stuyvesant High School. Stuyvesant was my first experience going to school with students who weren't primarily Black and Brown and from underserved communities. Every day, as I rode the 3 train for an hour from East New York to Stuyvesant, I learned that there were really two New York Cities. There was the New York City I grew up in—with poor schools, poor air quality, poor safety, and poor life outcomes. And then there was this other City—where children were expected to succeed and given the resources to do so.

Can you take us through your early career?

My career really started at college. A friend invited me to volunteer at an after-school program at a housing project in Roxbury, Massachusetts. I started volunteering a day or two each week, and by the end of my freshman year I was volunteering three or four days a week. I spent almost as much time there as I did on the Harvard campus! When I returned after my freshman year, I asked the kids what they had done all summer. And for most, the answer was nothing. Some friends and I (including Daniel Wilkinson '00) decided to do something about that. We started the Mission Hill Summer Program, an educational summer camp. I fell in love with teaching and youth development. But I really fell in love with the social entrepreneurship: the idea that—even as a 17-year-old college student—you could see a problem, organize resources, and do something about it.

At the Law School, I spent my summers doing public interest work—at the NACCP Legal Defense Fund, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, and the DC Public Defender Service. After clerking for John Walker, I spent ten months at the Brennan Center for Justice, and that was pretty much the end of my legal career. The legal work was interesting, but I realized that the people who had the most interesting jobs were the community organizers and advocates who had hired us.



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How do you feel serendipity has played a role in your career?

I think students worry too much about what job they should take after law school and spend too much time trying to map out their careers. If I had taken the traditional lawyer's path, I never would have started iMentor or Groundwork, and then I probably wouldn't have had the amazing professional opportunities that have come since. I don't know whether it's serendipity, but I have always challenged myself to stay open to unique opportunities; to worry less about the job you're supposed to take, and instead think about where you're going to have the best experience. Where will I have the smartest and most creative colleagues, and the wisest and most caring mentors? Where will I learn the most, and get to meet cool and interesting people? Where can I do the most good? I hate giving advice—but I will say that if something seems strange and risky and scary, that probably means you should do it.

The Producer



Any good writer will tell you that it's a stretch to introduce a couple of circus clowns to create a plot complication. But for **Lily Fan '04**, it's a true story—and it worked.

After graduating from the Law School and practicing at two firms, Fan was working as counsel in the New York State Senate when two performers from Cirque de Soleil asked her to help them produce an original show. Now a veteran theater and documentary film producer, Lily is currently supporting the Broadway productions of *Three Tall Women*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Beautiful*, and *The Band's Visit*, and the national tour productions of *An American in Paris*, *On Your Feet*, and *Something Rotten*. Her award-winning documentary *Weiner* focuses on Anthony Weiner's 2013 campaign for New York City Mayor. Future projects include the ACLU documentary, *The Fight*, coming in 2020 and a Showtime docu-series *Couples Therapy*, coming in 2019.

What is the day-to-day work of a producer like?

A producer has to be strategic and fearless in shepherding a creative process. The key is to have the foresight for what is missing from the market and what the audience would appreciate and then commission the right ensemble to create works together accordingly. The job is not pushing paper in an office—it is most rewarding to meet new people everyday, hear pitches and pursue new ideas, and develop and maintain proper relationships so the products can get the developmental investment and attention they need to survive. Most importantly, I have to know when to quit when a creative process is not working. With *Weiner*, I was the first and only front money producer to see the potential of the project. For three years, I recognized the talent of the filmmakers and acted as their cheerleader and helped with crafting the best story with scenes we had shot.

Tell us a little about your career path after law school.

I started my career practicing law at two firms—first at Shearman & Sterling, and then at Morrison & Foerster. In 2008, I left Morrison & Foerster to become the statewide volunteer coordinator for the Obama campaign in Pennsylvania. I returned to my firm briefly after the win, but knew I needed a career change. I was given the opportunity to serve as Counsel to the Standing Committee on Social Services in the New York State Senate. There was a steep learning curve in doing legislative work, but I truly loved being part of the action. When we lost the majority in the State Senate, I decided to make another change. I had some TV experience from my college years and started networking and learning a lot about producing live theater. Eventually I got the opportunity to also work on documentaries, my most favorite form of education and communication. Now eight years later, I have been involved in multiple Tony Award-winning plays and musicals and have won the 2016 Sundance's Grand Jury Prize for the documentary *Weiner*.

What led you to move into producing?

While serving as Committee Counsel, I was asked to moonlight as a lead producer for friends who were performing as disgruntled clowns at Cirque du Soleil who developed their own physical comedy show. It was completely serendipitous that I got to produce a well-received and profitable show as my first. I still remember the audience's roaring laughter that chilled my body with adrenaline. By the second performance, I knew I was not going back to a law firm.

How has your legal background influenced your work as a producer?

Knowing the law, being able to ask the right questions, and mastering critical thinking are helpful skills to have in life. My Yale Law School education adds a layer of context to my judgment and taste and results in a unique producing angle. Because of my educational background, there is perhaps a reasonable expectation of righteousness and good ethics from my colleagues that I work hard to live up to. 🙏



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