Hope you were able to attend the AI in Fintech lunch discussion at DCU Innovation Center Boston, September 13, 2017.

The event was well attended, and oversold! You can watch the video here https://youtu.be/rF6Td_WB8Ig Here's a summary of the key points discussed:

OUR ESTEEMED PANEL:

Ra'ad Siraj, Moderator: Professor of AI/Machine Learning, **Boston College**, Harvard, MIT, Expert

Louie Balasny, Managing Director **BotKeeper**, Machine Learning based accounting

Greg Woolf, CEO **Coalesce**, AI based business search knowledgebase

Ra'ad asks, "What About Artificial Intelligence Hype? Good, Bad, or something else?"

Greg discusses the example of the mall security robot that committed suicide by driving into a fountain, not very threatening. But, also discusses the challenge of the online video game that provided AI based players the ability to improvise, and they innovated so much that they defeated all the paying customers. Louie reinforced the idea that "Bots" are not actual robots, but software based helpers that are not replacing humans anytime soon.

Ra'ad asks, "Why now, why is AI making its presence known?"

Greg discusses the skepticism, particularly of folks who remember AI from the 90's. But shares that 2017 has witnessed a huge change, which he attributes to Amazon's ALEXA. As is often the case, the technology in our home helps us ask the question, "If I have this at home, why can't I have something similar at work?"

Ra'ad asks, "What's happening in Financial Services with this technology?"

Louie shares that the market is huge, over $40 Billion in projected purchases of AI technology and services by 2020. There aren't many areas of the Financial Services business that this technology won't touch. Greg reinforces that investors in this space are comparing AI investment to the likes of Cloud Computing and Mobile in terms of size and impact. It's here to stay.

Ra'ad asks, "What are the use cases?"

Louie shares that the BotKeeper product is allowing clients to make better, more informed decisions by tying together disparate systems, using historical data. Greg shares that clients are using Coalesce in

Risk Management, Investment Research, Customer Service, increasing the productivity of personnel in some cases by 90%.

Ra'ad asks, "So, what is AI? How can we demystify?"

Greg suggests that Machine Learning is the current state of the art, where software learns a simple, repeatable task that typically bores humans to tears. Artificial Intelligence occurs when that software begins to find insights, and can predict and recommend those insights to the user. Coalesce answers the questions "who are my best customers", "what are my best investments…"Ra'ad suggests that these technologies have been around for some time and are an "optimization problem" and that "prediction is becoming cheaper" and easier for firms to take advantage of. "It allows one to do more, with less".

Ra'ad asks, "How is that exemplified in the use cases?"

Louie talks about how BotKeeper begins to sort through and understand examples of expenses, or costs, and the system quickly learns to categorize and sync so the system "seeks" the information that's required and expected, but uses a human decisionmaker to avoid sending payments where none is warranted. Greg adds that while the systems are quickly going to be able to be predictive, we as workers have to learn to trust the system and know how it's making its decisions before we can take that next "AI Step".

Ra'ad asks, "How does the technology effect humans in this use case?"

Louie talks about a client that manages restaurants, and one manager may have 5 restaurants to manage. The company wants consistency, so BotKeeper allows the manager to focus on the things humans do best, while BotKeeper takes care of the accounting basics consistently. Both company and manager see this as a better outcome. Greg shares a story of an investment manager that is processing huge quantities of statements manually that is high risk, and high burnout work for the employees. By allowing Coalesce to automate the process, employees work on valuable tasks, risk is mitigated as well.

Ra'ad asks, "Is Machine Learning making a difference now, is it ready?"

Greg shares that it is, and it's being used now as we've discussed. The keys are understanding the incredible growth of unstructured data which will soon be unlimited, and practically free. What are the risks for not deploying technology against this asset. In the future, we will all use virtual "employees" in the form of software bots to find key information.

Audience member asks, "What are the risks as we move from the current model to the future model?"

Greg suggests that transparency is one of the biggest issues as we move forward, and uses the example that Nvidia, a company that makes AI/Machine Learning chipsets have begun to show human users what its computer sees in an auto-driving car, to help us understand how the system thinks, preventing misunderstandings and accidents.