

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/be-broadminded>

Joshua Hoffman, co-founder and CEO of Zymergen, describes how those who expose themselves to different fields of knowledge are able to probe problems in multidisciplinary ways. He says those who focus on a single discipline — whether that's history, physics or economics — become blind to the limitations of its logic.



## Transcript

- So, I graduated from Berkeley.. I declared, (laughs) I was, in order, let's see if I can get this right.. I was an architecture major.. I was a math major.. I was a history major, and I was a social sciences field major.. I was a dilettante.. And on the one hand, right, that was kind of dumb, right? I wander around.. I took stuff that I thought was interesting.. There's not that much of a connection between architecture and math, between math and history.. I mean, these are all over the spectrum..

But, and I think that that breadth of exposure is actually incredibly valuable in helping you think about problems from different ways.. Now, I'm not saying that everybody here has to go change their majors.. I'm not even suggesting that, so, but what I would say is I think you wanna look for opportunities in your life to think about things in multidisciplinary ways, right? When you think about an academic subject, as an example, there's a kind of discipline for it, right? There's a logic that goes with that discipline.. If you're an economist, you start from, by and large, a rational agent.. You think about how you can set up a set of maximizing conditions, and that's a powerful way of thinking about the world, but it has a bunch of limitations.. But if all you ever do is spend your time as an economist or a physicist or a historian or whatever, it's gonna be very hard for you to understand the limitations of that way of thinking about the world.. Those are all models.. Those are all maps, and the map is not the territory, right? And so you wanna, by looking at different disciplines, by thinking about the world in different ways, you can start to see where the, which, your toolkit, your problem-solving toolkit, expands.. And as an entrepreneur, that is deeply, deeply critical, because part of what you're doing is solving problems that don't have easy and obvious answers...