

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/from-pure-math-to-entrepreneurship>

Before co-founding Robinhood, CEO Vlad Tenev planned to pursue a career as a mathematics professor. Here, he describes a surprising similarity between studying pure math and founding a venture, and advises founders to play the long game, even if that means enduring some short-term pain.



Transcript

- I think that 00:00:04,410 math and physics is a very great example of playing the long game, right? Like why do people get into it? You make very little money and let's say you graduate.. And I experienced this, right? I graduated Stanford with a math major in pure math.. You're not.... I wasn't very employable at the time, right? Because everyone wanted to know, do you code? And as a math major, you do a little bit of coding, but I'm not a computer science major.. Right? So then obviously the path is a math grad school where a lot of the top programs just don't have high budgets.. You have... I think Harvard has like room for eight math PhD students every year, for example.. And it just gets more and more selective and selective, and the stakes and the competition gets harder and harder.. The more you ascend, and then maybe eventually you get tenured when you're in your 30s or 40s.. And the payoff is creating something that sort of adds to the body of work of society, right? So the general sort of like body of knowledge and maybe if you're lucky enough, they teach it in schools and people will learn, learn your theories and your work..

So it's very much a long game.. And I think that type of longterm thinking of just doing the right thing and tolerating some short-term pain and struggle and being misunderstood.. That's probably the most salient lesson from math, because there's people that studied computer science and hum bio, and they would go off to med school and others would go and get a job at Google when I was there.. And that sort of very direct, but I think (indistinct) and I both were not interested in that.. And we just really wanted to prioritize doing something that made an impact on society.. And it took a different form, but both math and entrepreneurship kind of have that as it's (indistinct)..