

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/pivoting-toward-impact>

Neuroscientist David Eagleman discusses his pivot from academic researcher to entrepreneur and how it was fueled by a desire to create a positive and practical impact. Eagleman, who teaches part time at Stanford University, contrasts the conservative approach that public agencies take when funding scientific research, versus the fervor venture capitalists feel for “the big, leapy questions.”



Transcript

- I've been running a lab my whole career.. I've got almost a hundred twenty active publications and science and nature and so on.. Maybe six people on the planet read these things.. It took me a long time to figure that out, and then you get caught in these little world war threes and the literature where people lives, and nobody actually cares of the basis, even though it seems to you in the moment like it's the biggest deal what the right answers.. I started getting more interested in figuring out how do I make the rubber hit the road, and build things that can affect 53 million people, for example.. Two years ago, this is an interesting moment for me actually because I got invited to give a TED talk on the vest, and right when I went out there to give this talk, I received two letters from NIH and the NSF rejecting a grant that I'd put in on the vest saying, and I'm not making this up, one of the grant rejections said, it's not incremental enough, but what they meant by that is it's this very forward-looking thing, and what I need to do is show this and then show this and then spend those shown that.. Anyways, the same time I got those two rejection letters, I went out to TED.. I presented the vest.. I showed what it could do.. I showed videos of things happening with it..

All these VC's were there.. - [Woman] I was gonna say how many checks were written? - Exactly.. I didn't think by choice I got to talk to everybody, and then say like "Okay, you seem like you'd be the best match." So we got funded, and it was a real change from this real eye opener for me.. So now the way I see it is there's this spectrum of scientific questions where government granting is useful for some kinds of those questions, and VC funding is useful for other kinds, so now I'm sorta keeping a foot in both worlds, and really trying to take advantage of the big leapy questions that are perfect for VC funding...