

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/when-to-be-contrarian>

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to focus on being right above being contrarian. He encourages them to find areas where they have unique insight and learn to trust their own intuition.



Transcript

Audience Member I was wondering how you verify 00:00:06,453 that your idea is non-consensus enough to pursue? - I mean, first of all, what you really want is to be right.. 00:00:15,150 Being contrarian and wrong is still as wrong.. And if you predicted like 17 out of the last two recessions, you probably were contrarian for the two you got right, probably, not even necessarily, but you were wrong 15 other times.. And so I think it's easy to get too excited about being contrarian and again, like the most important thing is to be right, and the group is usually right.. But where the most value is, is when you are contrarian and right.. And that doesn't always happen in like sort of a zero or one kind of way, like everybody in the room can agree that AI is the right place to start a company, and if one person in the room figures out the right company to start and then successfully executes on that and everybody else thinks, ah, that wasn't the best thing you could do, that's what matters.. So it's okay to kind of like go with conventional wisdom when it's right, and then find the area where you have some unique insight.. In terms of how to do that, I do think surrounding yourself with the right peer group is really important, and finding original thinkers is important.. But there is part of this where you kind of have to do it solo, or at least part of it solo, or with a few other people who are like gonna be your co-founders or whatever.. And I think by the time you're too far into like, how can I find the right peer group? You're somehow in the wrong framework already..

So learning to trust yourself and your own intuition and your own thought process, which gets much easier over time.. No one, no matter what they say, I think is like truly great at this when they're just starting out.. Because like, you kind of just haven't built the muscle and like all of your social pressure and all of like the evolutionary pressure that produced you was against that.. So it's something that like you get better at over time and don't hold yourself to too high of a standard too early on it...