



Stanford eCorner

Aim for Usefulness Optimization

Elon Musk, *SpaceX*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3625/Aim-for-Usefulness-Optimization>

Elon Musk, CEO of SpaceX and Tesla Motors, discusses the benefits of a “purpose-driven company” with venture capitalist Steve Jurvetson, adding that a business’s mission need not be world-changing, but just useful to many, even if only in some small way. “Even if something isn’t changing the world,” Musk says, “if it’s making people’s lives better, I think that’s great.”



Transcript

I'm curious-- what do you see, from your vantage point, as the benefits of a purpose-driven company? Meaning when you have this thing that every employee and customer knows is the purpose of the company, how do you see that flowing through to benefits for the company? Well, I think having a purpose, certainly, is going to attract the very best talent in the world. Because if there's something that's intrinsically enjoyable, and the financial rewards are good, but then also it's something that's going to genuinely change the world, then I think that's a pretty powerful motivator. But I don't think like everything needs to change the world. I mean, honestly, there's lots of useful things that people do. And I think really it should be a usefulness optimization. Just say, is what I'm doing as useful as it could be? You're talking about the goal of an organization? Or a goal in general, yeah. And even if something isn't changing the world, if it's making people's lives better, I think that's great. And even if some things, like making people's lives only slightly better, but it's a large number of people, then the area under the curve is quite good. This is that mathematical first principles point-- utility and numbers. Yeah, exactly.

I mean, one could say, is some app really making people's lives better? But if it's affecting a lot of people, even in a small way, then yeah, I think the sort of area is good.