URL: https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/dont-pursue-the-obvious-ideas/

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, declines to share AI challenges for new startups to address because, he says, ideas that are obvious enough for someone to publicly share are probably not great startup ideas. He advises aspiring entrepreneurs to chart their own course.

Transcript

- So if somebody wants to start a company, 00:00:03,570 they want to be in AI.. What do you think are the biggest near term challenges that you're seeing in AI that are the ripest for a startup? And just to scope that, what I mean by that are, what are the holes that you think are the top priority needs for OpenAI that OpenAI will not solve in the next three years? - Yeah.. 00:00:27,240 So, I think this is like a very reasonable question to ask in some sense, but I think it's, I'm not gonna answer it, because I think you should never take this kind of advice about what startup to start ever from anyone.. I think by the time there's something that is like the kind of thing that's obvious enough that me or somebody else will sit up here and say it, it's probably like not that great of a startup idea.. And I totally understand the impulse.. And I remember when I was just like asking people like, "What startup should I start?" But I think like one of the most important things I believe about having an impactful career is you have to chart your own course.. If the thing that you are thinking about is something that someone else is gonna do anyway, or more likely something that a lot of people are gonna do anyway, you should be like somewhat skeptical of that.. And I think a really good muscle to build is coming up with the ideas that are not the obvious ones to say.. So I don't know what the really important idea is that I'm not thinking of right now, but I'm very sure someone in this room does it, knows what that answer is.. And I think learning to trust yourself and come up with your own ideas and do the very like non-consensus things, like when we started OpenAI, that was an extremely non-consensus thing to do..

And now it's like the very obvious thing to do.. Now I only have the obvious ideas 'cause I'm just like stuck in this one frame, but I'm sure you all have the other ones.. (interviewer chuckles)..