Investing in the here and now



“I want to help turn research into applied innovation”.
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She didn’t learn what a stock was until after her studies at ETH. Today, Evelyne Pflugi is CEO of investment boutique The Singularity Group and promotes young entrepreneurs at her alma mater.

How does someone go from being a food scientist to CEO of a fund manager?

EVELYNE PFLUGI – Actually, I’d always wanted to work for Nestlé. At the Polymesse job fair, I was approached by several companies, including Capital Group, the world’s largest asset manager at the time. It would never have occurred to me to enter the world of finance. In those days, I hardly knew what a fund or equity was. However, recruiters for a certain programme at Capital Group were explicitly looking for trainees without a financial background. Their credo was: to be a good investor, you must be willing to take risks. And a person demonstrates a willingness to take risks if they’re good at something yet still do something else. The attractive thing about their offer was that the programme would take place in Los Angeles. I really liked the idea of going to the USA, so I accepted – and learned everything there was to learn the hard way, on the job.

Today you’re an entrepreneur. What do you like about your job?

A few years ago I’d have said: the exciting bit is what we do as a company. Today my focus has shifted: as an entrepreneur, you’re constantly testing your limits. Your own limits and the limits of the system. What I find most

fulfilling about my work today is getting to know myself better, my strengths and my weaknesses, and building a system around them that functions. In the meantime, I've discovered my greatest strength is my accuracy in spotting what others are good at and in helping them develop their talents.

What memories do you have of your university days?

I was very disciplined and competitive; I wanted to get a good degree. But I was also actually very interested in the programme's content.

I really enjoyed this sense of "being in the learning process". Even today, I love absorbing myself in a topic. At the same time, I went out a lot, made friends for life and earned money as a nanny. What I don't miss from that time is the pressure I felt, knowing I'd have to make the leap into the working world later on. In those days, I believed my studies were basically a question of "doing a bit of research" and then "real life" would begin, where no one makes mistakes anymore. Today I know that a lot of bungling goes on at work, especially in large companies. As a student, I was unfamiliar with the working world and took it far too seriously. (Laughs.)

You donate to ETH's Pioneer Fellowship programme – why?

I see it as an opportunity to play my part in enabling research to find practical application. Being an ETH donor allows me to support the early stages of a concept that also interests me in investment consulting: what, how and in which industries do innovations emerge and in what ways do they change the world? Much of what happens in the investment world can be described as "guessing the future". Indeed, many investment products invest in companies' research and development spending. At the other end of the spectrum, investments are made in companies that make a lot of money from their existing product and service offerings. We move in the space in between and call it applied innovation.

How do you spend your time when not managing your investment boutique?

In my professional role, I talk to an incredible number of people. In my private life, I seek tranquillity, nature, I love hiking. I don't need any additional stimulants like sports or nightlife anymore, business offers me enough adrenaline.

About Pioneer Fellowships



The ETH alumna supports future entrepreneurs such as Patrick Barton (pictured) and Aurel Neff from Caterra who are looking to bring a laser-based weeding robot to market.

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