



# Why? How? Curiosity and the Human Core of STEM in the Age of AI

AI has mastered the **Who** and the **What**. It can find any fact faster than any student. What AI can't do is ask **Why?** and **How?** It doesn't notice what's missing, nor does it care to build what is needed. That kind of curiosity is exactly what STEM education exists to develop, and contrary to what we assume, curiosity can be taught.

In this year's *Bridging the Gap* opening keynote, global educator and serial entrepreneur **Daniel McQuade** draws on four decades of building companies and teaching entrepreneurship and innovation across six continents to demonstrate what solution-oriented curiosity looks like, why AI enhances its value rather than diminishes it, and how educators can foster the human qualities — curiosity, empathy and the instinct for what's missing — that no machine can replace.

## About the Speaker:

Daniel McQuade will be the first to tell you he never had a plan. His career, involving beef, blockchain, classrooms around the world and now AI, was never driven by a strategy. It was driven by curiosity, followed by one question at a time: *How does this work? What could I learn from it? How does that make me more useful than I was yesterday?*

McQuade teaches innovation because he has spent a lifetime practicing it. In the mid-1980s, with his first startup, he and two partners produced the first beef the USDA permitted to label "natural light," a disruptive move before the term was even in common use and, in his own words, "brutally hard but also the most valuable education I ever received."

Decades later, when a foodborne illness outbreak showed that no one could trace contaminated food to its source, he helped pioneer IBM Food Trust, one of the first blockchain solutions to trace seafood from boat to plate. Two industries, one instinct: reach for the newest tools and fix what's broken.

From 2013 to 2024, he taught entrepreneurship as a director and adjunct professor with Venture for All® at Columbia Business School, reaching students across six continents. He later carried this work forward through his own firm, InnoventureLAB.

Today, he helps founders build in a world reshaped by AI, which he views not as a replacement for human judgment but as an amplifier of it. AI is exceptional at processing existing information but blind to what's missing. The empathy and creativity that allow people to recognize those gaps are exactly what AI can't reproduce. As these tools become more powerful, he tells every audience, human capital becomes more valuable, not less. That is why teaching curiosity, judgment and original thinking has never been more important.