How a Scientist Started Investing Your Money

Dr. Rick Schwerdtfeger will take you on a journey from rural Illinois through seven states and two countries where he transitioned from being a student to scientist to entrepreneur, and ultimately landed at the National Science Foundation (NSF). He will highlight some career goals and how those goals led down a winding path to the NSF.

Many students, and even faculty, are just starting out on a similar path, or have the desire to do so. “Dr. Rick” will describe the Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) program and the sister program, Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR), at NSF. These programs, can provide up to $1.5M in non-dilutive seed capital to fund research and development of commercializable technologies. He will be available during his visit for detailed Q&A with interested parties.

Rick Schwerdtfeger joined the National Science Foundation in August 2016 as the SBIR/STTR Program Director for the Semiconductors, Photonics, and Internet of Things (IoT) portfolios. Prior to joining NSF, Rick was the CTO and Co-Founder of the Advanced Renewable Energy Company, a clean-tech and semiconductor equipment company, where he led the technology development and customer deployment of nearly $200MM of equipment in the first 4 years. Additionally he was the COO of Pica Solar, a DOE-funded solar cell technologies start-up. Rick is also an advisory board member of several start-up companies in the clean energy, water, and nano-materials sectors. In addition to these entrepreneurial ventures, Rick was a Senior Project Scientist at the non-profit Edison Materials Technology Center, a Senior R&D Scientist at Saint Gobain, and the Crystal Growth Group leader at Alpha Spectra. He started his career as a Staff Scientist doing solar energy materials and equipment research at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. Rick as grown some of the largest sapphire, calcium fluoride, sodium iodide, and copper indium diselenide crystals in the world, which have been used to lower costs of technology for energy, lighting, radiation detection and other industrial and photonic applications. Rick has spent his career taking the “art” out of science, and replacing it with good engineering, experimentation and automation to solve challenging problems in the renewable energy, clean water, smart grid and high-tech world. Rick holds a Ph.D. in Materials Science from the Colorado School of Mines, an M.S. in Applied Physics from Pittsburg State University, and a B.S. in Physics and Science Education from the University of Dubuque.