



Travis Dirks, PhD

Chief Technology Officer · Founder · XLabs

Speaker Details

Bio

Dr. Travis Dirks is CTO at XLabs, building moonshots powered by artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing and neurotechnology. Prior to XLabs, Travis was co-founder and chief science officer of Seldn, an AI that could accurately predict rare global socio-economic disruptions in 12 countries. Travis led the team at Seldn to predict ‘black swans’ such as labor strikes, jumps in commodities & currencies, and societal riots four months before they happened with 95% accuracy. His superpower is in connecting complex science and math to challenging business problems and designing new software solutions with AI. Travis has pioneered several AI algorithms and new approaches to engineering moonshots and novel breakthroughs, including ‘Mental Model Arbitrage’. Prior to Seldn, Travis co-founded and led Rotary Gallop – a machine learning fintech firm that applied game theory to corporate control (for M&A, hostile takeover, and activist situations). Travis’s analyses and quotes have been heavily featured in popular media, including the Wall Street Journal and New York Times. Travis received his PhD in Nanotechnology from the world’s leading institution for condensed matter physics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and holds a B.S in physics from Purdue University.

Travis is also an accomplished Strongman, who bends steel with his bare hands. He is currently training to lift the legendary Dinnie stones in Scotland.

Expertise

Artificial Intelligence, Moonshots & Breakthrough Innovation, Nanotechnology & Exponential Tech

Achievements: Six Impossible Things OR (Six Impossible Feats)

Dr. Travis Dirks has uncovered new heights across fields using his expertise to deeply research a topic and make uncommon connections, a method he has termed mental model arbitrage. E.g., He has

1. Built the world’s 1st carbon nanotube transistor with a superconducting quantum tunneling probe.
2. Built a machine learning system that accurately predicts the outcome of activist takeovers of major corporations.
3. Created a meta-AI called Seldn that could predict the unpredictable – blackswan events.
4. Bends steel horse shoes with bare hands.
5. Grew skeleton as an adult over the past 2 years at 7.4% larger as well as stronger and more dense than 99.95% of humans as measured by DXA Scan.
6. Carried a 205lbs Strongman Yoke overhead with one arm for 36 yards.

Featured by



Popular & Upcoming Talks

Moonshot Workshop

AI Summit — Sept 2019, San Francisco, CA

AI: a fireside chat debate

Artificial Intelligence Unlocked, Executive Education at Berkeley Law, University of Berkeley — Sept 2019, Berkeley, CA.

Battling the Impossible - How to Think Bigger and Practically Pursue Moonshots

Department of Biostatistics and Bioinformatics UCSF — June 2019, San Francisco CA

How to AI - AI Project Leadership for Non Technical Leaders

Salesforce Tower - April 2019 San Francisco CA

XLabs Moonshot Workshop

Haas School of Business - Dec 2019 Berkeley CA

Mental Models and Building Genius

Private Silicon Valley Retreat - Palo Alto CA

Testimonials

“Everything really locked into place when you said it! You have a great ability to simplify the complex without losing nuance.”

Charles Yao
EVP, Director of Intellectual Talent at The Lavin Agency

Sample Podcasts & Talks

[How we should adopt a Moonshot Mindset](#) — Future Proof with Bill Sheridan

[How to Create the Future of AI Systems](#) — HumAI

[Moonshot Fuel: Mental model arbitrage](#) — XLabs

[Mental Models & Building Genius](#) — Palo Alto Private Salons for Investors & Entrepreneurs

Popular Talk Titles & Descriptions

Moonshots: Battling The Impossible

Battling The Impossible is a story about Moonshots — highly ambitious endeavours that change the world's perceptions of what is possible, such as, solving cancer, eliminating human disease or going to Mars. In this powerful and engaging talk, Dr. Travis Dirks uncovers the unexpected connections between dancing pigeons, Artificial Intelligence, simulated life and Charlie Munger's concept of mental models to discuss how moonshots require both a completely different mindset and methodology. He discusses why the world chronically underinvests in them, how funding and management best practices actively slow them down, and how to optimally pursue them. Audience members will walk away with 3 powerful and immediately applicable concepts required for tackling grand challenges. They will also leave with a visceral feeling for why and how to rethink modern management practices, which while being great for productivity, kill creativity.

Clients often pair this talk with the workshops **Managing for Breakthrough** or **Living for Breakthrough**, which teach participants how to apply the concepts from the talk as a company and/or as an individual respectively.

Ascension: AI to Elevate Humanity

Can artificial intelligence help us become more human? Ascension is the story of XLabs's hidden fourth theme and Dr. Travis Dirks' mission to leverage the power to AI to help people superpower themselves. In this charged and inspiring talk, Travis discusses XLabs' moonshot of redefining human culture for the better. Part of that mission is awakening in people the lifelong and terrifying opportunity of becoming a being that can improve itself. Dr. Dirks' discusses his personal algorithms that helped him lose 55lbs, lift 1944lbs, bend steel like superman and grow his skeleton 7.4% larger and more dense than 99.95% of human beings. Along the way, you'll also hear about the 120lbs man who bends massive horse shoes with his bare hands, The 5' 2" vegan woman who tears license plates, the 46 year old man who lifted the front of a 10,000lbs semi trailer, and their connection to new AI algorithms. Audience members will leave with a new perspective for how AI can improve the world, an understanding of how to find outstanding mentors for stunning results and a primer of the one mental superpower Dr. Dirks has been developing for over 15 years.

How to AI - AI Project Leadership for Non Technical Leaders

In this engaging and hands-on talk, Dr. Travis Dirks delivers the quickest possible gut-level understanding of what AI is, what it could be and how organizations can adopt AI. Travis discusses the common pitfalls of most failed AI projects and coaches leaders on how they can learn to predict and circumnavigate organizational resistance to the adoption of AI.

Audience will learn the three biggest mistakes that AI project leaders make and how to avoid them. The talk will also cover the two AI superpowers that all non-technical people bring to the table, and how to

effectively use them. Finally, the audience will leave with a practical guide on how to become leaders of AI technical projects and the right way to work with AI teams.

This keynote is often done in conjunction with the AI project leadership workshop, where Travis guides teams through a hands-on sample AI project.

Select Workshops

XLabs Moonshot Workshop

Think “outside the box”. Words like these and others like “innovation” and “white space” are thrown around a lot, but have you experienced it? What does innovation look like? How does it feel?

The XLabs moonshot workshop is a practical immersive experience that leaves participants with a visceral feel of what it is to actually think outside the box. Based on the internal XLabs process, itself a derivation of nearly 2 decades of actual dedicated practice in that art of technology innovation, the workshop leverages applied neuroscience to engineer the entire experience so that from the moment participants walk in the door, their minds are opening. The creativity feels like it just happens, and the participant experiences a framework for what it is like to think way more ambitious than they ever thought possible.

Battling The Impossible – Managing for Breakthrough

Modern management best practices unintentionally, but actively, destroy innovative ability. The leader in accepting this truth is the Pharma industry, which now spends over \$200Billion annually on acquisition of new drugs. In this workshop, participants come to understand why this is so, and that the situation is not inevitable. Participants will come to understand and deeply integrate XLabs’ exponential methodologies, including the Moonshot Maze. They will actively explore application of the three principles for navigating the Moonshot Maze to their organizations.

Battling The Impossible – Living for Breakthrough

In this workshop, Dr. Travis Dirks brings to life the creativity principles which are deeply rooted in XLabs’ and are common to other massive innovation giants like Parc and Bell Labs. Creativity in the workplace has been massively misunderstood. In this workshop, participants will learn the difference between creative work and productive work, and exactly how creative work must be structured differently. Participants will also learn how to get the most out of themselves personally based on their own mental makeup. Finally creation is mentally and emotionally taxing. Participants will learn why along with strategies for managing these difficulties to allow them to tackle bigger better things.

How to AI - AI Project Leadership for Non Technical Leaders

The How to AI Workshop will deliver the fastest gut-level understanding of what AI is, and what it could be. It will then go into the three biggest mistakes that AI project leaders make. Participants will learn the XLabs' process for brainstorming new potential moonshots. They will then participate in activities

designed specifically to mitigate the three major mistakes that AI project leaders typically make. Finally, Participants will learn to watch out for and circumnavigate organizational resistance to the adoption of AI.

On Dr. Travis Dirks' current Company: XLabs AI

XLabs builds AI to amplify humans. We build meaningful futuristic moonshots powered by artificial intelligence, quantum computing and neurotech. Each of our breakthroughs cascade on top of a core meta-learning AI. We use next-gen technologies to change 3 future slices of the world: culture, genetics and the internet.