

Sam Altman, ousted pioneer of OpenAI, is serial entrepreneur

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Sam Altman has been dismissed from OpenAI, which he created along with Elon Musk and others in 2015.

Sam Altman, the tech titan behind ChatGPT, [was abruptly fired](#) Friday by OpenAI, the company that launched the revolutionary artificial

intelligence chatbot.

The news of his dismissal caught Silicon Valley by surprise, as the 38-year-old had been hailed as a pioneer and one of the leading figures in the high-stakes world of AI.

He said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, that his time at OpenAI had been "transformative for me personally, and hopefully the world a little bit."

Altman, together with Tesla chief Elon Musk and others, started OpenAI in 2015, creating a research company with the stated goal of building generative AI that benefits humanity.

"The [technological progress](#) we make in the next 100 years will be far larger than all we've made since we first controlled fire and invented the wheel," Altman said in a 2021 blog post.

Startup guru

Born in 1985, Altman grew up in a St. Louis suburb, where he got his [first computer](#) at the age of eight, according to a profile in the New Yorker from 2016.

Computers and access to an online community helped him navigate being gay in a conservative part of the country, Altman said in an interview with Esquire.

Like so many tech figures before him, Altman dropped out of Stanford University to start a company, Loopt, which let smartphone users selectively share their whereabouts.

Loopt was acquired in 2012 in a deal valued at \$43.4 million—and

Altman's place in Silicon Valley was secured.

He took a year off during which he "read many dozens of textbooks; I learned about the fields that I had been interested in," the San Francisco resident wrote in a post.

He told of learning about nuclear engineering, synthetic biology, investing and AI.

"The seeds were planted for things that worked in deep ways later," he said.

T-shirt and shorts

In 2014, Altman became president of Y Combinator, an "accelerator" that provides startups with guidance and funding in exchange for stakes in the young companies.

Altman expanded Y Combinator's strategy for investing beyond software startups to biotech, energy and other fields.

"He thinks quickly and talks quickly; intense, but in a good way," said Industrial Microbes founder Derek Greenfield, who met Altman while his biotech startup was getting backing from Y Combinator.



Influential artificial intelligence pioneer Sam Altman, seen here testifying before the US Senate on May 16, 2023, is 'intense, but in a good way,' says Industrial Microbes founder Derek Greenfield.

Greenfield recalled Altman always dressing casually, sometimes in a T-shirt and shorts.

"He was very down to earth," Greenfield said.

Altman left Y Combinator, putting his energy into AI despite feared risks.

"He's a very deep thinker who is incredibly focused on getting things

right," Insider Intelligence senior director of marketing and commerce Jeremy Goldman said.

Altman has proposed that combining artificial intelligence, robotics and cost-free energy could essentially enable machines to do all the work and provide a "basic income" to adults across society.

"A great future isn't complicated: we need technology to create more wealth, and policy to fairly distribute it," Altman wrote in a blog post.

"Everything necessary will be cheap, and everyone will have enough money to be able to afford it."

'Fast cars and survival'

In the New Yorker article, Altman said he was a "prepper," someone who has preparations and supplies in place to survive an apocalyptic disaster.

He has spoken of owning high-performance sports cars and renting planes to fly around California.

Altman said in a blog post that on the last day of each December he writes a list of things he wants to accomplish in the year ahead.

His personal investments include startups working on fusion energy and human life extension.

"I'm super optimistic," he said in a podcast with TED curator Chris Anderson.

"It's always easy to doom scroll and think about how bad things are," Altman added, "but the good things are really good and getting much

better."

But Altman has testified before the US Congress and spoken with heads of state about AI as pressure mounts to regulate the technology against risks, such as its potential use in bioweapons and misinformation.

Just hours before being fired on Friday, he told AFP on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in San Francisco that we can't always predict the future.

"The dangerous thing... it's all the new stuff, the known unknowns, the unknown unknowns that are going to come," he said.

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