

CO-FOUNDERS

stories

ALWAYS ONE MORE QUESTION

ATRANDI BIOSCIENCES CO-FOUNDER
JUOZAS NAINYS ON DISCOVERY, MEANING,
AND THE FREEDOM TO KEEP GOING

There is a specific kind of person who, when looking at a tree, cannot simply see a tree. They see water travelling upward through vessels they can't observe. They see gas exchange through openings invisible to the naked eye. They see a system - dynamic, intricate, never fully still or understood and they think "what comes next?"

Juozas Nainys, co-founder and CEO of Atrandi Biosciences, has been that kind of person for as long as he can remember. What changed over time is not the instinct, but the scale of the question.

LAYERS

As conversations with Juozas often do, ours begin somewhere philosophical. I ask him what discovery is, exactly. Whether it's something you find, or something you create the conditions for? He considers it through the lens of how knowledge has expanded throughout history. At first, discovery was geographical. Before anyone had circumnavigated the globe, discovery simply meant moving further – sailing farther, mapping what was found, expanding the edges of the known world. The environment was larger than anyone's knowledge of it, and so exploration alone was enough. Then came the moment the map closed. And then something different began.

"Think about the microscope," he says. "There was no understanding of cells as the unit of life, until the microscope existed. Once it did, someone looked and said – cells exist. And suddenly, within that layer of cells, you could study the same trees, the same leaves, without needing any additional tool. The exploration happened through human effort alone."

Knowledge, in his view, is structured like an onion. Each layer requires certain conditions before it



yields anything at all; within a layer, curiosity and persistence do the rest. The microscope was not just a tool – it opened an entirely new class of questions.

"Every new instrument," he adds, "has revealed another layer of biological reality."

Science is not simply a story of answers. It is a story of continuously creating new places where questions can be asked.

THE BOY WITH THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



Juozas grew up deeply curious about nature, not necessarily as a future career path, but as a way of experiencing the world. He remembers scout encyclopedias, nature books, and the instructions for making a basic magnifying glass to look more closely at things most people walked past.

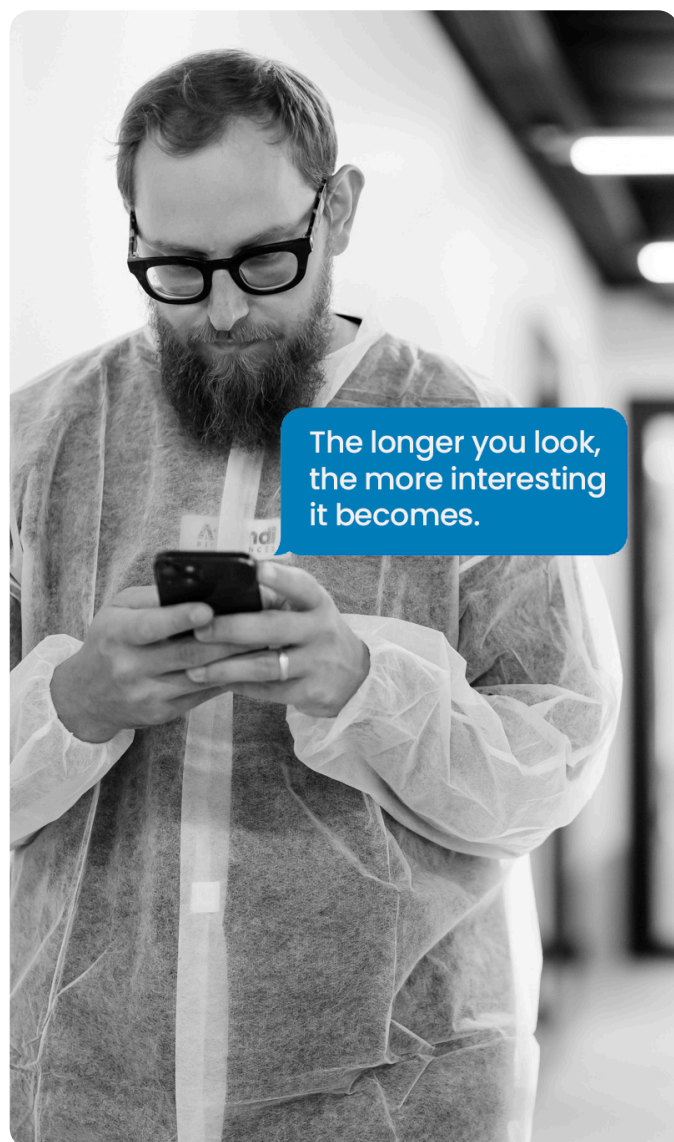
"It was always exciting to see something new," he says. "The more you look, the more there is." That realization never stopped being true to him.

"People say you can watch three things forever: burning fire, flowing water, and someone working. I think you can add nature to that list too. It's a dynamic system, constantly changing. The longer you look, the more interesting it becomes.

And scientific understanding is the natural continuation of that. Once you see the tree, you start asking how it got there, how it works, how it takes water from the ground, how it absorbs CO₂. There is always that question – what comes next?", Juozas says.

Curiosity is necessary. But it isn't always enough on its own.

"Curiosity is the desire to ask questions. But it's easy to follow curiosity somewhere else before you've dug all the way through something. What you also need is persistence, that has to go with it. If you have both, results can be truly exceptional. Curiosity alone is good, but probably not always enough," Juozas says, without judgment, almost as an observation about human nature itself.



THERE WAS NEVER A GRAND PLAN



There is a version of the Atrandi's origin story that is clean, sequential and makes obvious sense in retrospect. Juozas would be the first to tell you to take it with a pinch of salt.

"There was never a sequential plan," he says. "But there was always a clear next step."

At the time, a PhD felt less like the natural decision. Single-cell analysis was emerging as a field with enormous potential, and biochemistry felt like a meaningful direction.

And the decision to co-found a company was not born from some singular entrepreneurial vision. It arrived more as a crossroad: stay in a lab and go deep into one scientific niche, or build tools that would allow many scientists to go deeply into many niches. "Two parallel paths. Both good. Both right. Circumstances shaped my choice," Juozas says.

He pushes back, gently, on the idea that founding stories are ever as tidy as they appear. Retrospectively, every history organises itself into a sensible arc, and that is precisely what makes it misleading. Winners write history. The decisions that looked certain were often anything but certain, the milestones that feel inevitable were, at the time, merely the least bad option among several unclear ones.

"All the successful companies, all the co-founder stories, when they're laid out historically,

everything makes sense, everything looks simple and clear. And you think: why isn't my own life that straightforward? But it never is. From A to X, you can go through the whole alphabet in order... if you know the alphabet exists," Juozas laughs. "If someone pours the letters on the table and you don't know what they are, it's hard. That's what all the stories actually are." He pauses and laughs again. "At least, that's what I tell myself."

THE HAMMER AND THE HOUSE



Ask Juozas what he is building toward and he will arrive, eventually, at the metaphor that inspires him – the person who makes the hammer.

"If you make a hammer, you can walk around the city afterwards and say – look, all of this, all of these buildings, is because of me. Morally, it's a nice place to be," he smiles.

He is describing a particular kind of contribution, one that is generative and enabling rather than direct. Atrandi does not make discoveries. Atrandi builds the conditions that make discoveries possible. The Semi-Permeable Capsules (SPCs) that sit at the core of the company's technology are, in his framing, precisely that – a new layer of the onion, new questions made possible to ask (and answer) by a new tool.

"I may not make any discovery myself. But I can contribute, in many ways, to the greater good of the work researchers are doing," Juozas says.

He thinks the logic extends further than biology or Atrandi itself. He sees it, in many ways, as a characteristic of the Lithuanian scientific community – a culture focused on enabling others and multiplying impact collectively. He traces a line from companies like Fermentas, whose success brought capital back into Lithuanian science and helped fund a generation of researchers, through to the founding conditions that also made Atrandi possible.

"We don't exist in a vacuum. These things happen because of what came before us," Juozas says.

That logic feels even more urgent now, as AI begins to alter the scale and speed at which biology can be interpreted. But interpretation still depends on access. Models can only work with what has first been made visible, and much of biology remains exactly that: not yet visible, not yet measured, not yet translated into data.

Even with the best AI models, biology remains only partially measured, not fully understood," Juozas says.

"The importance of tools is only growing. You can't train a model on data that doesn't exist yet."

THE DEEPER CONTEXT

Juozas reads biographies. A lot of them. From scientists, founders, to leaders, anyone who built something over a long arc of time. He is specific about what he is looking for.

"I seek deeper context," he says. "Things weren't always as they seemed. Some decisions were made carefully and deliberately, others – not at all. And in that, there are many lessons, including the ones that sometimes you simply don't know, and you have to decide anyway. That's not weakness. That's how it is."

There is something reassuring in that recognition, he admits. The distance between Atrandi's

trajectory and the mythologised stories of famous companies narrows considerably once you see the original manuscripts – all the mess, pivots, and wrong turns that were edited out before publication.

"Steve Jobs 1.0 is not the same person as Steve Jobs 2.0. You can't compare them," Juozas says. "You look at Apple's story from beginning to end, but it isn't a straight line. It's where it is because of how his life happened – the experiences, the departure, the return as a completely different person. The narrative makes it look like it was always heading "there". It wasn't." He finds that honest. He finds it, if anything, encouraging.



NO PRE-WRITTEN MEANING

At some point in every conversation with Juozas, you arrive at the philosophy underneath everything else – the way he actually moves through the world.

"When you place one life against the scale of evolution, history, and the eight billion lives being lived all at once, it becomes very small," he says. "And strangely, that feels liberating. It means there is no pre-written meaning waiting for you. Meaning is something you make, through what you choose to build, what you choose to care about, what you decide is worth your time."

It is not detachment, if anything, it produces the opposite. Without the weight of a fixed script or definition of success, you are free to care more intensely about the things you actually choose. To pursue them on your own terms, without needing someone else to validate the choice.

"I'm not sure that I've figured everything out," he adds with honesty. "But that's also fine. Because the point isn't to have everything figured out. The point is to keep going."

And when I ask whether that is his definition of success, he resists the frame entirely.

"Defining success too concretely is, I think, a key to unhappiness. Five years ago, success looked one way to me. Now it looks different. That's a good thing, it means I never set the ceiling for myself. The journey matters more than the destination, because it is the journey that keeps widening what you are able to build, and what you are able to understand. In many ways, the journey is the destination."

ONE MORE QUESTION

Somewhere in the history of biology, a person looked at everything around them, the trees, the soil, the sky, and thought – there must be something smaller. They built an instrument that let them see it. And the world has never looked the same since.

Juozas Nainys is building technologies for a version of that same moment – the one where a researcher can look at a single cell and, for the first time, see more of its full molecular story at once: the genome, the transcriptome, and the layers of biology that become visible only when the right tool exists. If Atrandi succeeds, more researchers will be able to ask better questions, generate data that does not yet exist, and see further into biology than they could before. That is the larger ambition – not just to build a company, but to expand what becomes possible to discover.

He may not be the one to make those discoveries. But he will be the person who built the hammer.

