[00:00:00.490] - Alexandra Magold
Good morning, Science. My name is Alexandra Magold, and today I am speaking with Professor Adriano Aguzzi from the University of Zurich, where he is the director of the Institute of Neuropathology. He is a prion expert. He and his team have deciphered how prions actually make it from the the gut all the way to the brain, where they are using lots of different cells to get there and different factors to be able to replicate. On top of that, they were able to pinpoint the naturally occurring function of the protein as well as a vulnerable part that can be targeted by antibodies. They were also able to create a B cell based platform that will come up with a whole lot of naturally occurring antibodies that will be tremendously helpful in a whole slew of different diseases. On top of this, Adriano Aguzzi is also very active on social media and is never one to shy away from a critical discussion.

[00:00:48.230] - Alexandra Magold
What is the favorite aspect of your work? When do you feel you're in your element?

[00:00:54.050] - Adriano Aguzzi
Actually, I like everything. It's very hard to sort out what I like best because in reality, I enjoy every day and every minute of what I do. My work is very varied. It also has changed a lot over the years. Like, I think it's probably normal that when you start off as a student as a PostDoc you do all the experiments yourself, and this can also be a lot of fun, and then you grow into the role of a mentor, and then you have your own students whom you help to develop their scientific personality, and that's also wonderful. And then over time, you go even further. I founded the MD/PhD program at my University. I've directed it for 20 years. And I have to say that. So these are students who don't work in my lab. Some of them do work in my lab, but most actually work in other labs. And for me, it's also great to interact with them, to find out what they are doing, what it is that their passion is, and also advise them. And all of these things are actually wonderful. And this goes beyond what probably I think the kind of cliche, which is not really cliche, it is perfectly right. As a scientist, the most exciting thing is when you are confronted with a new discovery, with something that's unexpected and exciting and that open up a new avenue. But in reality, I think that our job is much more than that. And the discoveries, yes, they're wonderful, but they're not so frequent. I think you also need to enjoy all the other things. So if you ask me, what is it that I don't enjoy, why not?

[00:03:19.890] - Alexandra Magold
Yeah, definitely.

[00:03:23.470] - Adriano Aguzzi
And frankly, I have a hard time. I would have a hard time really telling you because there is really nothing where I would say I hate it. But the fact is, particularly now I'm having the time of my life.

[00:03:54.110] - Alexandra Magold
So you have made incredible discoveries. When you're looking back from your own personal viewpoint, what was the most amazing Eureka moment?

[00:04:13.770] - Adriano Aguzzi
I'm not sure I made these incredible discoveries. I think that maybe there is always a disconnect between looking at things from the outside and being in the middle of it. I always have a feeling, actually that I didn't do well enough and maybe this is also a driver. I think that this happens to a lot of scientists. Certainly a part of it is the imposter syndrome and the imposter syndrome can be debilitating, but it can also be a motivator as long as it doesn't become horrible. But I think a little bit of imposter syndrome is actually not bad because it tells you okay, it prevents you from resting on your laurels and that's actually a good thing within reason. I really went through several phases. I think it was a bit of a late bloomer. After medical school, I went into the specialty training as a neuropathologist and the first three years were remarkably unsuccessful and part of it was certainly that I was not in an environment that was very rigorously scientific, but part of it was certainly my fault. I just didn't recognize that if I wanted to make things happen I have to actually make my own destiny in my own hands.

[00:06:13.130] - Alexandra Magold
This, of course, is barely the beginning of a really exciting story that Adriana would see tells in the longer version of the interview right below.