

## 29 Years of Promoting Invention and Innovation

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### **The W.A. de Vigier Foundation Promotes Entrepreneurship in the Spirit of the Founder William A. de Vigier**

Clearly, there is no lack of innovative entrepreneurial spirit in Switzerland – to the great delight of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation in Solothurn. Every year, the foundation awards up to five sponsoring prizes of CHF 100,000.00 to young entrepreneurs. The foundation is the lasting legacy of William A. de Vigier from Solothurn who died in 2003 and, as a result of a private initiative, laid the foundation for this kind of startup promotion. The W.A. de Vigier Award is the oldest and at CHF 500,000.00 the highest endowed prize for young entrepreneurs in Switzerland.

Since the foundation's establishment in 1987, the goal of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation has been to actively invigorate business development and further provide direct financial support (à fonds perdu) to young people with innovative business ideas wishing to build performance and growth oriented businesses in Switzerland.

#### **An above-average success rate**

In the past 29 years, the foundation has distributed over CHF 11 million of seed capital. The results are about 84 flourishing startups, successful IPOs, multiple company exits and above all, many newly created jobs.

The great track record of W.A. de Vigier Award winners is particularly notable in the Top 100 Swiss Startupranking: The top spots are regularly occupied by previous W.A. de Vigier Foundation Award winners.

In addition to the financial support of 100 startup companies with CHF 100'000 each, additional investments of CHF 10'000 per award winner can be made. These additional investments now amount to over one million francs.

#### **Jury places importance on the CEO's personality**

There were over 220 submitted projects for the award. The intended audience are young entrepreneurs domiciled in Switzerland, who are usually younger than 45 and whose role in their company is the realisation and marketing of an innovative, future-oriented product or service.

The jury highly scrutinizes the applications and picks their Top 16 in February. All the CEOs go through an assessment process via standardized questionnaire and take a close look at their own leadership style during a confidential validation session guided by the foundations managing director. „Thus far in the selection process, we focused on the product and the technology of a start-up.

Based on that we created an expert report. From now on we also want to include aspects such as leadership and entrepreneurship“, says Regula Buob, CEO of the de W.A. de Vigier Foundation. Buob is a trained coach and has been working as a consultant for international enterprises for many years. The start-ups can benefit greatly from this knowhow as they receive the rare opportunity to reflect upon their actions. In addition, they get tips about their leadership style and their entrepreneurial personality. 15 months after the assessment, the parties meet again for a follow-up talk. This creates sustainability and strengthens the connection between the start-ups and the foundation. Both conversations are confidential, the relevant findings reach the foundation board in a coded manner. The startups give consistently positive feedback about the assessment. One testimonial this year was, "I have never undergone a leadership assessment. This is time well spent for a startup, because the result is very helpful. Input and feedback are needed at all levels at this early stage of the organization." On the other hand the judges are able to evaluate the CEOs in a more sophisticated way and thanks to a benchmark are able to compare them. By introducing this assessment to the selection process, the fact that the personality of the CEO is crucial for the success of a start-up is taken into account. The W.A. de Vigier Foundation is one of the few start-up sponsors that systematically include the human factor.

In a second step, the jury selects their Top 10 at the end of March. They get to pitch their idea on the Award Day in front of a selected audience. The award winners have been selected at this point in time and will be announced at the prestigious award ceremony at the De Vigier Sommerhaus.

**The following aspects are relevant for the evaluation of the projects:**

- The entrepreneurial personality
- the degree of innovation of the product / service
- the value for society as a whole
- the technical and financial viability
- market prospects
- the potential for job creation.

The selection process is a demanding and time-consuming task. The members of the foundation board and experts from the scientific field and from the industry are also heavily involved in the promotion of the startups even after the award ceremony.

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## The W.A. de Vigier Foundation at a Glance

- **Founded:** 1987 by William A. de Vigier
- **The foundation's goal:** To provide direct financial support for highly innovative entrepreneurs who want to launch performance and growth oriented businesses in Switzerland.
- **Oldest and most valuable sponsoring prize for young entrepreneurs in Switzerland**
- **Annually up to 5 x CHF 100,000.00 seed capital à fond perdu since 1989**
- **Total amount of aid money since 1989: CHF 11.3 million**, plus contributions of around **CHF one million** (max. CHF 10,000.00 per award winner)
- 84 of the 113 award winners so far are successfully positioned in the market; this is an **above-average success rate** for startup businesses. Only four startups have filed for bankruptcy in the past ten years.
- **Three W.A. de Vigier Award winners rank among the top three** at the Top 100 STARTUP AWARD 2017:

**Ranked 1<sup>st</sup>:** AVA AG (W.A. de Vigier award winner 2016)

**Ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>:** L.E.S.S. SA (W.A. de Vigier award winner 2013)

**Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>:** Flyability SA (W.A. de Vigier award winner 2015)

About **one quarter** of the TOP 100 SWISS START-UPS are **former award winners** of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation

- **Network:** The W.A. de Vigier Foundation can count on a broad network of established relationships with personalities from the worlds of science, business and politics. Many of them operate as ambassadors and experts for the foundation

## **Board Members of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation**



### **Daniel Borer, President of the foundation board of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation**

Daniel Borer works as a general practitioner in his own practice in the Seeland region. He is a keen private and military pilot, a family man, father and committed board member. He holds mandates in the hospitality and health areas as well as in investment banking, trust companies and property companies. Daniel Borer can count on an extensive network of commercial and scientific contacts, which proves to be extremely beneficial to our foundation. He has been President of the Foundation Board of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation since 2012 and remains a capable and committed successor to Moritz Suter.



### **Beat Graf, Vice-President of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation**

Business financing, especially for SMEs and start-ups, and building entrepreneurial networks constitute a common theme encompassing Beat Graf's professional career. As an economist and business economist, he draws from his expertise and experience in leadership positions in a major bank and from his many years of work as CEO of the Swiss Venture Club - a renowned network for entrepreneurs. Having retired early, Beat Graf now dedicates himself to the management of various foundations. His role in the W.A. de Vigier Foundation, in which he has served for 20 years as a board member, remains very close to his heart.

**Dr. Pirmin Bischof**

Lawyer from Solothurn and member of the Council of State

**Dr. Felix Grisard**

Entrepreneur and investor, Chairman of the Board of Directors Hiag/GRT-Immobilien-Gruppe

**Lic.iur. Sven Hoffmann**

Business lawyer and owner of a law firm in Basel, various Board of Directors mandates, engagement in various foundations

**Felix Kunz**

Qualified electrical engineer and entrepreneur, experienced with more than twelve start-ups all over the world, founder and managing director of Innocampus Biel, initiator and operator of the computer museum “enter”

**Alain Nicod**

Business Angel, founder/co-founder of various start-ups, i.e. LeShop.ch, founder/managing partner of the venture capital company VI Partners in Zug

**Guy Petignat**

Qualified engineer ETH and MBA from Harvard University, manager of the business unit fibre optics and cable technology at the Huber + Suhner-Gruppe in Herisau and Pfäffikon, Zurich

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**Wife of the founder William A. de Vigier:**

Norah de Vigier

**The daughters of the founder William A. de Vigier:**

Jeanette de Vigier, Honorary Member

Anne Sweetbaum-de Vigier, Honorary Member

## Experts

The careful evaluation of the prize winners requires an expert assessment of innovation, market opportunities and implementation. That's why we consult with advisors from the respective industries.

Dr.	Stefan	Blarer	DRIMARCH GmbH	Basel
	Jasper	Bouwsma	Vujàdé Ltd.	Biel
	Christian	Brand	Brand, Gallusser & Partner AG	Bern
	Peter	Brunner	Berner Fachhochschule / Technik und Informatik	Biel
Dr.	Stefano	Cattaneo	CSEM SA Head System Engineering	Landquart
Dr.	Ulrich	Claessen	Maxon Motor AG	Sachseln
Dipl Ing. HTL	Bernhard	Gerster	Hochschule für Technik und Informatik	Vauffelin
Prof. Dr.	Oreste	Ghisalba	Ghisalba Life Science GmbH	Reinach
Prof. Dr.	Jens	Gobrecht	Paul Scherrer Institut	Villigen
Prof. Dr.	Olivier	Guenat	ARTORG Centner, Medical Faculty, Universität Bern	Bern
Dr.	Ruedi	Gygax		Bottmingen
Dr.	Jost	Hamschmidt	ETH Zürich	Zürich
	Matthias	Hell	Stiftung TECHNOPARK® Zürich	Zürich
Dr.	Mario	Jenni	glaTec - Technologiezentrum an der Empa	Dübendorf
Dr.	Karl	Knop	i4u GmbH	Zürich
	Felix	Kunz	Sokutec	Solothurn
Dr.	Felix	Reinert	ProtoShape GmbH INNOCAMPUS AG	Nidau
Dr.	Arthur	Ruf	4p & partners gmbh	Bronschhofen
Dr. sc. ETH	Michael	Sauter		Gerolfingen
Dr. med.	Wilfried	Schwab	Salina Medizin AG	Rheinfelden
	Anil	Sethi	Entrepreneur-in-Residence - D MTEC ETZ Zürich, Building WEV	Zürich
	Martin	Siegrist	Creaholic SA	Biel
Dr.	Heiko	Visarius	Healthcare GmbH	Hasle bei Rüegsau
	Franco	Zambrino	Medtronic Schweiz AG	Münchenbuchsee
Prof. Dr.	Edoardo	Mazza	Centre for Mechanical Integrity LEO C16	Zürich
Dr.	Philipp	Bodmer	Bodmer & Partner Consultants AG	Zürich

## **William A. de Vigier: „Switzerland needs young entrepreneurs – it’s where the future lies“**



**These are the stories which inspire every inventive genius: An innovative idea becomes a tangible, modest, introductory implementation and then develops into a huge success story. What started for William A. de Vigier from Solothurn 80 years ago in a small workshop under a railway bridge in London with a starting capital of only CHF 1,000.00, is still of great importance for Swiss entrepreneurship. The business legacy of William A. de Vigier lives on in the W.A. de Vigier Foundation and remains an important contribution to the innovative strength and competitiveness of the Swiss economy.**

Born in Solothurn in 1912, William moved to London in 1935 against his father’s will carrying one thousand francs in his pocket. He also brought along his idea of a flexible scaffolding made from metal. In Britain he developed this vision into a product which conquered the world market. The modest startup with its initial three employees grew into a global steel group with 150 companies and 10,000 employees. In addition, William A. de Vigier had a seat on three dozen boards of directors – including the prestigious British Airways’ board of directors.

Following this success, Bill (as he was called by friends and acquaintances) never forgot his roots in Solothurn and the beginning of his entrepreneurial activity. In 1987, he created the W.A. de Vigier Foundation because he wanted to give young entrepreneurs what he most lacked in 1935 – the necessary startup capital to push good ideas forward.

His entrepreneurial spirit and his extraordinary commitment and desire to help foster entrepreneurial innovation are the cornerstones of the foundation leading to active support and promotion of entrepreneurship. The W.A. de Vigier Foundation is recognized and acclaimed as the most prestigious annual award in all of Switzerland.