



## An interview with Richard Florida

Richard Florida, Author, *Who's Your City* and Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, will be the keynote speaker at HIEC's 20th Anniversary event on Nov. 17, 2009. He agreed to an interview with us prior to this event:

In your book, *Who's Your City*, you say: "On the job experience, wisdom and savvy, creativity, ambition and entrepreneurial talent are among the many qualities... that are requisite for success in the creative economy."



In Halton, experiential learning programs, like cooperative education at the secondary school level, are extremely valued in our community. What is your perspective on experiential learning?

I believe experiential leadership is the new paradigm for education in both the U.S. and Canada. We must embrace the concept of learning everywhere; we need to develop training programs and education opportunities that capitalize on the strengths of workforce. For our communities to experience even greater economic prosperity in the future, we have to tap into the creativity of everyone and focus on the further development of human creative capabilities. It is the greatest challenge of our time; experiential learning programs provide our workforce with the opportunity to gain the necessary hands-on training to do so.

Halton is recognized as a desired place to live in Ontario. What recommendations can you give us on how we can better build creativity and innovation to remain competitive?

In the Rise of the Creative Class, I presented a 3T approach to economic development that provides communities like Halton with a strategy for positioning their community for growth in the global economy.

**Talent:** The driving force behind any effective economic strategy is talented people. We live in a more mobile age than ever before. People, especially top creative talent, move around a lot. A community's ability to attract and retain top talent is the defining issue of the creative age. As the global economy becomes more competitive, Halton will be challenged to attract and retain the brightest talent, as well as provide the necessary skill training and education opportunities to stay competitive.

**Technology:** Technology and innovation are critical components of a community or organization's ability to drive economic growth. To be successful, communities and organizations must have the avenues for transferring research, ideas, and innovation into marketable and sustainable products. Educational institutions are paramount to this and provide the innovational infrastructure necessary for the creativity and technology transfer.

**Tolerance:** Economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific, and artistic creativity. Creative workers with these talents need communities, organizations, and peers that are open to new ideas and different people. Halton has to be a place that is receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles, and new views on social status and power structure.

How do you feel about the role of Industry and Education working together to help young people make informed career decisions?

It's a critical role. As the creative economy moves forward, the creative economy will require a new set of skills — critical thinking and problem solving. Industry and education can help guide the future creative worker to make the best decisions about the necessary and needed skills and expertise to be successful in the new global economy. Communities who have successfully leveraged the connection between industry and education have been more effective at retaining young creative workers.

What advice would you give to employers as they compete for talent?

Talent is the driving force behind innovation or any effective economic or business strategy. As the creative economy moves forward, talent will become more concentrated than ever before. Talent is one of the most important criteria impacting an employer's decision to expand, scale up or even relocate the business. As firms look to scale up or relocate, they must evaluate the talent pools of target areas to determine if there is a match

between their needs and a community's human capital strengths.

To retain and effectively manage the talent, employers can utilize three key principles. First, an employer must eliminate distractions for its creative workers. This allows employees to remain fully engaged in their work. Some employers have done this by creating campuses that include schools, daycares, dry cleaners, etc. Second, managers are responsible for sparking creativity, which may include creating a workspace that has public art, landscape sculpture, and innova

tive uses of space. Finally, employers must engage creative workers as invested equals in the company's future. Creativity is embedded in relationships, and it thrives among people who have worked together a long time. If a company or organization can keep people for 20 or 30 years, that human capital forms creative capital.

### **Biography — Richard Florida**

Richard Florida is one of the world's leading public intellectuals. Esquire Magazine recently named him one of the 'Best and Brightest' in America. He is author of the national and international best-selling book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, which received the Washington Monthly's Political Book Award and was cited as a major breakthrough idea by the Harvard Business Review. His ideas have been featured in major ad campaigns and such as BMW and are being used globally to change the way regions, nations, and companies compete. He is founder of the Creative Class Group, an advisory services firm, charting new trends in business and community.

Richard is a regular columnist with the Globe and Mail newspaper and has written articles for the Atlantic Monthly, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Harvard Business Review, the Boston Globe and the Financial Times. His new book, *Who's Your City?* has been hailed a National Best-Seller, an International Best-Seller and Amazon Book of the Month. Richard has also been appointed to the Business Innovation Factory's Research Advisory Council and recently named European Ambassador for Creativity and Innovation.

He is Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and Professor of Business and Creativity at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto. Previously, Florida held professorships at Carnegie Mellon University, a visiting professor at Harvard and MIT, and a visiting fellow of the Brookings Institution. Florida earned his Bachelor's degree from Rutgers College and his Ph.D. from Columbia University.