

Creatives must bring everyone along, says Florida

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I was wrong about Richard Florida's Rise of the Creative Class....I, and apparently a lot of people, thought that the book was elitist, that it was about the need for cities to bring in the amenities that would appeal to the creative-class workers that Florida says are the backbone of the new economy.

But that's not what he said yesterday when he gave the keynote "Engaging Creative Communities: The New Global Competition for Talent" here at CPSI. His main point, made yesterday in his speech and in his newest book Flight of the Creative Class, seems to be that all people are creative and that the way a community can attract jobs and economic prosperity is to engage the creativity of everyone in that community, not just the 30% of people who are actually in creative-class jobs.

Here are some highlights of his talk. Some of them are linked to appropriate short video clips:

"What powers economic growth? It's not technology -- technology is a raw material. What makes human being unique is one thing -- creativity. All else are subsets. Creativity powers economic growth."

"Political polarization is the recoil from the rise of the creative economy. And the blame [for stoking the fears] goes on both sides of the aisle." Paraphrase of what followed: Part of this political polarization is because of the widening gap between the creative haves and the have-nots, expressed in such statistics as the cost of housing, which is increasingly out of reach for lower- and middle-income people in high-creative areas.

"It's **not** about the creative elite, but about the creativity of **everyone**. It's the collective intelligence of [all the workers] that gives companies....For real economic impact, we must tap into the creativity of the 70% of the people who are not in the creative class."

"In order to attract creative-class jobs, a community needs technology (high-tech businesses), talent (the ability to educate the local talent as well as to keep talent and attract talent), and tolerant (must be proactively inclusive of all kinds of people, not just grudgingly accepting)."

"The real competition is for global creative talent...If you ask people in their 20s where they would like to move, the list [of places] is international. The world is an open system and friendship networks are international among 20-somethings."

Reacting to Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat*, Florida said, "the world is not flat, but simultaneously incredibly concentrated and spiky...there are two dozen spiky places in the world that account for 98% of innovation.

Solutions: According to Florida, the political class at the national level is clueless, which he says not a U.S.-specific problem but "the same all over the world." He urged everyone in the audience that the work must be done at the local level, by councilpeople and mayors.

"The models that we have to build on are those that build a more inclusive, creative society, such as Helsinki, Stockholm, Melbourne, Sydney....and Minneapolis-St. Paul is a good model."

Following Florida's talk, Minneapolis councilman Don Samuels spoke about the challenges of building the creative talent in inner-city neighborhoods, where often "the brightest and most creative often end up on the wrong side of the law -- the frustration of creativity attacks the brightest first." There was a very interesting discussion that followed, about how the kids that "get out" of challenging childhood circumstances are usually those who are smart, but not "street-smart" and entrepreneurial..."the really bright, tough, smart kids are the ones who don't get out" which Samuels attributed to the attitude that "there has always been a group of people in this country that it's not OK to educate....[and] every day I have to re-educate myself as to the value of the kids in my community." Florida's comment: "The society that solves its crime or gang problem will be an economic engine."

The starting points for solutions: 1) See every individual as creative; 2) Be open; 3) Leave no one behind.