

**Book Excerpt****Rana Florida: Workplaces need diversity to drive innovation****RANA FLORIDA**

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In her new book, Upgrade, Rana Florida aims to provide readers with the tools to achieve success in work and life. It gathers best practices from CEOs and other business executives, as well as entrepreneurs, innovative thinkers and creative leaders. This passage is from the chapter titled The Power of We.

Diversity is the key to a successful collaboration. Bringing together a creative mix of backgrounds sparks new innovations and discoveries.

When I asked Dr. (John) Noseworthy about the Mayo Clinic's take on diversity, he said, "Bringing together great minds from a spectrum of backgrounds has always been crucial to our mission. Our diversity allows us to accelerate innovation and solve problems faster. Ultimately, it fuels the medical discoveries that lead to better care for our patients and people around the world.

"To drive innovation to meet their changing needs, we nurture an environment in which our physicians, scientists, and staff can use their unique backgrounds and perspectives to tackle important problems. Collectively, their diverse perspectives enhance our productivity and help us better meet the needs of our increasingly diverse patients.

"Yet as a goal or strategy, diversity is not enough. Inclusion, or creating a workplace where each member of our staff feels valued and empowered, is crucial."

Think about what happens when five people of similar background, age, sexuality, race, religion, education, and profession sit around a table to offer their perspectives on a new initiative. It is likely that they will reach consensus very quickly. Then think about having five completely diverse people sit around the same table, discussing the same thing. Instead of five 30-year-old executives who went to the same university and grew up in the same neighborhood, imagine that there are five people who vary greatly in ages, from young to old, who are black and white, French and Turkish, gay and straight, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, and atheist. I imagine that the conversation would be much more interesting, heated, engaged, and eye-opening. When different perspectives interact, you're much more likely to learn something new.

Mario Batali was recently interviewed in the New York Times column “Corner Office.” The headline read, “In Mario Batali’s Kitchen, You Will Refrain from Shouting.” “One of the most important things,” he said, “is realizing you’re not the most important or the most intelligent person in the room at all times.” Surprisingly, Batali told me he’d learned this important life lesson by listening to my husband talk passionately about cities when they were college students together at Rutgers. “Understanding that is a crucial component of the kind of self-deprecation that makes someone really good at understanding other people, especially when they’re faced with their own limitations and they come to you for help. It’s about being able to empathize and understand and communicate, even under stress, in a way that helps them solve a problem, as opposed to becoming part of the problem. The first day that a chef believes that he or she knows everything is the first day for the rest of their life that they will be a jerk, because you can’t know everything about our field.”

Collaboration in work and in life is about listening, lending a hand, and learning when to step in and when to step back. When I asked Tim Brown of IDEO what he looked for in his team members, he answered in detail. “From a skills perspective, we look for depth and diversity,” he said. “Sometimes this is described as T-shaped: people who have depth of ‘craft’ in a discipline such as design, business, engineering, or the social sciences, but who also have a breadth of perspective and an insatiable appetite to cross disciplines and collaborate. In terms of traits, we look for people with empathy (because it is hard to design for others if you are not interested in understanding them), with creative imagination, with a drive to make ideas real rather than merely speculating about them, and, finally, with storytelling skills, because new ideas rely on great storytelling to get out into the world successfully.”

Collaboration rests on the premise that you believe you can learn by listening to others, that everyone on your team has something to contribute. Give this experiment a try. Approach someone you would never think to approach about a problem or initiative you have at work that you are trying to sort through. Ask your mother, for instance, or someone from outside the industry. Ask someone from a different country; ask an eight-year-old. Jot down their answers and see if you learned anything. See if you gained a new perspective on the situation by getting a broad range of inputs.

In their book *Becoming a Life Change Artist*, Fred Mandell and Kathleen Jordan help readers connect with their own creativity and build on their innate talents to create a more fulfilled and satisfying life by examining the creative processes of great artists such as Henri Matisse, Vincent van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, Willem de Kooning, Frida Kahlo, and Georgia O’Keeffe, among others.

Their list of four important outcomes of personal collaboration, I believe, provides an excellent summary on the benefits of collaboration:

Bridge to new networks

Collaboration with others helps bridge us into new networks that facilitate change.

Better decisions

As powerful and inventive as our minds are, they work within the boundaries of our own backyards, but when we collaborate with others, we extend our boundaries. We see how others have arranged their gardens. We benefit from their perspective and creativity. Collaboration is a source of fresh ideas, which in turn get us to better solutions.

Emotional support

Life change has its good days and bad days. Change even has its very painful days. Sometimes we have the sense that time is moving much too slowly, and other times we feel that events are getting the better of us. Collaborating with others provides not only practical support in figuring out how to navigate change but the emotional support to remain afloat during the tough times.

Accountability

Sometimes support for personal change comes in the form of being accountable to others for things we say we will do but let slip. Change never follows a straight line, but true collaborative partners will call us on those slips.

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