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Keys to success: Talent, technology and tolerance

By: Toby Fyfe
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Richard Florida is director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto and author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* and *Who's Your City?* His new book, *The Great Reset*, was published in April by HarperCollins. He shares his views on what needs to happen if cities are to succeed.

You argue that individuals should actively seek out cities to live in that suit their needs. To flip this around, from a policy perspective, what should urban areas do to attract the right kind of people?

Talent, technology and tolerance represent what I call the 3Ts of economic development. The 3Ts approach represents a comprehensive strategy for organizations, cities, regions and countries to compete and prosper in the creative age.

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.

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. Universities are paramount to this, and provide a key hub institution of the creative age.

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. Places receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles, and new views on social status and power structures will benefit significantly in the creative age. Some people complain that tolerance is too benign of a term. In *Flight of the Creative Class*, I define it as proactive inclusion.

What can cities do to improve tolerance?

Government must set the climate for tolerance. Creative talent defies classification based on race, ethnicity, gender, appearance or sexual preference. If a community is viewed as a place less open to



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gays and lesbians, immigrants or young people, it will fall considerably behind other creative global giants. Governments can do this with policies as well as the tone they set in their messages. Places like the U.S. are falling more and more behind with this. Remember, America's willingness to welcome those who the rest of world rejected during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s is what made the country so great. During that time, the U.S. embraced some of the best and brightest scientists – Enrico Fermi to Albert Einstein. The U.S. is no longer communicating that same message to the rest of the world. Places like Toronto, on the other hand, are doing quite the opposite. The government has helped to create a climate that is opening and welcoming and, because of this, the region is reaping the economic benefits.

How can governments integrate discrete policy segments like transportation, poverty and sprawl into a holistic approach to sustainability?

We will see sustainability as a common practice rather than an added value in the future. Many of the economic forces – the concentration of assets, for example – will require us to evaluate our choices and needs more holistically. For example, infrastructure will have to develop and adapt to our new economic reality. We need new infrastructure that can dramatically speed the movement of goods, people and ideas. Part of that will mean people moving closer to where they work, working flexibility and walking or riding a bike to work – a more sustainable approach. It will also require new infrastructure like high-speed rail which can speed the connection and reduce the commuting time between far-flung places.

The best cities you describe seem to be built around rich and creative people. Cities can't ignore the disadvantaged: what happens to them?

We can't ignore the service and manufacturing sectors. In the middle of the 20th century, we saw a massive shift in the way people worked. Manufacturing jobs transformed from low-paying and generally oppressive menial jobs to jobs that weren't just respectable but actually desirable. Now, of course, most of those great jobs have gone overseas and the majority of North American jobs are now service jobs. We need to find ways to transform the millions of service-oriented jobs in the same way, rewarding workers financially, encouraging and empowering creative participation, creating professional



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communities, and so on. We can look to any number of new companies – from Zappos, to Starbucks, to American Apparel – for examples of how this idea might play itself out. We need to do more to make service jobs into higher-paying family-supporting jobs of the future

In a world of social media and instant peer-to-peer communication, why does physical location still matter?

As I explained in *Who's Your City*, the place we choose to live is the single most important decision we make. It has a profound impact on the jobs we have access to, our career path, our social networks, the people we date, family and lifestyle choices and ultimately the wealth we accumulate as well as our overall happiness.

You have five categories (singles, mid-career, families, empty nesters, retirees) that define the best cities in Canada, and Ottawa ranks either first or second in all five. Does this tell us something about the contributions that public servants make to urban improvement?

I am not sure that it speaks so much to the good public servants provide to terrific cities as it speaks to Ottawa's success at obtaining an economic development approach that is grounded in the 3Ts. Ottawa has a strong technology community that is grounded with companies like Mitel and March Networks. Moreover, the area has become a welcoming and opening place for all kinds of talent – families, young creatives, minorities – ensuring that its labour market is diverse and talented across many sectors. Simply put, Ottawa offers the features of a complete authentic community: a good job market, thick amenities (restaurants, arts, parks, etc.), appealing aesthetics, safe neighbourhoods, viable transportation, connectivity, etc. It is no wonder the community ranks at the top of our best places rankings.

One idea you put forward for nurturing creative capital is to make “managers responsible for sparking creativity.” How can public sector managers ignite that spark in their teams?

Effectively managing creative talent is the most important decision companies and even public sector organizations can make for their future. Creative employees spur economic growth. They will invent



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new technology, develop increased expertise, improve government efficiency and stimulate scientific thinking. In an interview with the Harvard Business Review, James Goodnight, founder and CEO of SAS Institute, and I outlined three principles employers can use to guide their management of creative types.

First, an employer must eliminate distractions for its creative workers. This allows employees to remain fully engaged in their work. Goodnight did this at SAS by creating a campus setting equipped with a Montessori school and high school. Second, managers are responsible for sparking creativity. Goodnight built a campus that included public art, landscape sculpture and jogging trails. Finally, employers must engage creative workers as invested equals in the company's future. At SAS, Goodnight gave each of his employees individual challenges and tasks instead of stock options or bonuses. "It's [a challenge] different for a salesman than it is for a software coder." Goodnight says that long-term employment is essential. Creativity is embedded in relationships and it thrives among people who have worked together a long time. If he keeps people for 20 or 30 years, that human capital forms creative capital.