

NeoCon Chicago keynote speaker  
**Richard Florida** discusses the impact  
of the “creative class” on work, play,  
the economy and popular culture. BY ROSS FOTI

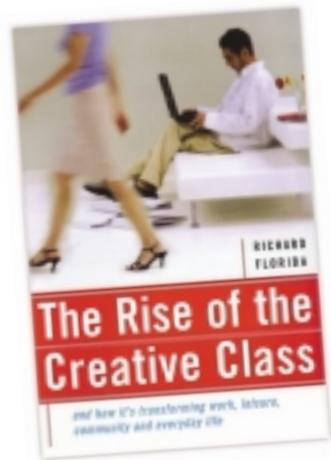
# The Brave New World



## Businesses prize it. Cities are shaped by it. You possess it.

Creativity is an intangible quality that leaves a substantial imprint on our lives. To remain competitive, business leaders are adapting the workplace to attract and cultivate creativity. Cities are evolving to accommodate a new balance between work and play. What's more, a "class" has formed around creativity.

As a preview to his upcoming keynote speech at NeoCon Chicago, Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* [Basic Books: 2002] discusses this dynamic demographic and how their attitudes, values and lifestyles are molding today's culture.



**WHY IS CREATIVITY GAINING IMPORTANCE IN TODAY'S SOCIETY?** Creativity can't be mined from the ground, it can't be manufactured or bought, it's not a resource like fresh water and it's not rooted to one city or country in the world.

In the evolving creative economy, [it is] the place with the most creative people, the most people doing work they really like and feel suited to, the place that nurtures, develops and stimulates the highest rates and returns of creativity and innovation.

**GIVEN THE DIVERSITY WITHIN THIS NEW GENERATION, WHAT TYPES OF VALUES ARE TYPICAL?** Members of the creative class haven't taken vows of poverty, but you cannot motivate and stimulate creative people by money alone. They're hard working when they believe in what they're doing.

However, you can't pay them enough to work in traditional, repetitive occupations. The great refrain these days is, "I'd rather work in Starbucks." Creative people have always been intrinsically motivated.

**HOW DO THESE SHARED VALUES FLAVOR THEIR LIFESTYLES?** There isn't a single lifestyle that defines or is embraced by the creative

class; there are many. Having said that, there are values that are widely shared by the entire creative class. These people expect and move to diverse environments that allow them to be who they genuinely are and not places where they're expected to blend in or adhere to some hierarchical lifestyle mandate. The corporate man/Brooks Brothers button-down model just isn't cutting it with this group.

**HOW HAS THIS CLASS CHANGED THE MEANING OF "CULTURE?"** I think the creative class is the resolution of the centuries-old tension between two value systems: the Protestant work ethic and the bohemian ethic. The Protestant ethic said that hard work is a duty and we are put here to serve others. The bohemian ethic says value is found in pleasure and happiness, not necessarily in gross indulgence or excess, but in experiencing and appreciating all that life has to offer.

The "culture wars" of the '60s were about this

seeming split, but the emergence of new forms of music, like hip-hop and electronica, seem to be bridging the divide — if a divide even exists anymore — between high and less-high art. Every art form is being "Warholized," so that anyone with access to a computer can create art and music.

**HOW ARE CITIES EVOLVING?** The cities with the highest concentration of creative class occupations are unfortunately also regions with the greatest inequalities in the country. The creative class account for roughly 30 percent of the workforce today but earn more than 50 percent of wages paid. In these cities, the percentage of wages paid can be even higher, and the resulting inequalities are a looming problem that we have to address. If we don't begin a meaningful political dialogue around this issue, we're in danger of pulling apart into two separate and unequal constituencies.

### HOW DO YOU THINK THE NEW URBAN ENVIRONMENT WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE?

We're currently witnessing the largest migration in this country, and globally, since the end of World War II. But this migration is a talent migration, with the most creative and talented among us moving to a relatively few cities.

Those cities and regions that create the kind of open environments favored by the creative class will thrive and new ones, like Austin, Texas, and Providence, R.I., will arise. But the cities that cling to old, exclusive/non-inclusive power

structures and social forms will continue to slip further behind.

### IN A CREATIVE ECONOMY, IS "BIG" STILL CONSIDERED BETTER? DOES "COOLNESS" ENTER THE MIX?

Currently, big is considered better, and size does matter to the creative class.

It's not so much "coolness" per se as livability and acceptance. Not everyone in the creative class accepts the same definition of coolness, but everyone wants to live in communities where they are accepted as they are and can find or develop a voice for community involvement and change.

### WHAT URBAN CHARACTERISTICS ARE POPULAR WITH THE CREATIVE CLASS?

Jane Jacobs said, "New ideas need old buildings," so communities with older, preserved or regenerated buildings are at an advantage.

Communities that can offer live/work/play environments like loft buildings and can offer easy access to amenities like bike and roller blade trails, rivers and lake-fronts and wilderness are also advantaged. You'll see a lot of coffee bars and art galleries and art spaces — the type of funky street-level culture that always seems to be

the leading edge of newly evolving neighborhoods.

### WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE WORK NEEDS OF "CREATIVE" PEOPLE?

Since creativity is an inherent human condition, part of the challenge of the "creative age" is to create more stimulating work environments for everyone. For people fortunate enough to get paid for thinking and working creatively, the old nine-to-five corporate work environment is not ideally suited for creative industries. Often, I'll take a break mid-day and go ride my bike for 40 miles or meet some students for coffee or go for a swim. These "breaks" allow me to

## High Five

Based on a Carnegie Mellon University study of major U.S. cities, urban regions were ranked by index score. The top five cities in each category are shown. For a complete listing and other research data, visit Richard Florida's Web site at [www.heinz.cmu.edu/~florida](http://www.heinz.cmu.edu/~florida).

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Diversity</b>	San Francisco	Washington, D.C.	Austin-San Marcos, Texas	Atlanta	San Diego
<b>High-Technology Industry</b> (Milken Index)	San Francisco	Boston	Seattle-Bellevue-Everett	Washington, D.C.	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington
<b>Scientists and Engineers</b> (Per 1,000 population)	Washington, D.C.	Seattle-Bellevue-Everett	San Francisco	Denver	Houston
<b>Professionals and Technical Workers</b> (Per 1,000 population)	Washington, D.C.	Austin-San Marcos, Texas	Denver	Seattle-Bellevue-Everett	Minneapolis-St. Paul
<b>Talent</b> (Bachelor and Above Percentage)	Washington, D.C.	Boston	San Francisco	Austin-San Marcos, Texas	Atlanta
<b>Coolness</b>	New York	Chicago	Seattle-Bellevue-Everett	Austin-San Marcos, Texas	Boston
<b>Bohemian Lifestyle</b>	Los Angeles-Long Beach	New York	Washington, D.C.	San Francisco	Seattle-Bellevue-Everett

## A Brief Introduction

Richard Florida is a founder and principal of Catalytix, a Pittsburgh-based strategy-consulting firm that works with regions, governments and global corporations.

In addition, Florida is the H. John Heinz III Professor of Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University, where he is founder and co-director of the Software Industry Center. He also co-authored five other books and more than 100 articles in academic journals.

He earned his Bachelor's degree from Rutgers College and his Ph.D. from Columbia University.



re-energize for the second working day that will often go until 1 or 2 a.m.

A less hourly structured environment is vital. I'm not advocating a return to the go-go '90s, with rock-climbing walls on the south side of the building, but creativity occurs at all times of the day or night.

### **IN WHAT TYPE OF WORK ENVIRONMENT DO CREATIVE PEOPLE THRIVE?**

Because of the inherent nature of creativity, I think most people thrive in similar environments: places where their contributions are recognized, where they're encouraged to think and speak freely, to innovate and to work collaboratively when necessary. Also, people should not be made to fear failure — if no one ever failed, we'd be living in a perfect world and the last time I checked, it wasn't.

### **HOW DOES THIS SITUATION AFFECT COMPANIES WHO WANT TO ATTRACT THESE WORKERS?**

More and more companies are beginning to recognize the blurring of

the home/office distinction, by offering day care for those who want to be near their young children, by offering laptops for home office set-ups and by facilitating creativity and productiveness in as many ways as they possibly can.

As our economy continues to evolve and become more creatively centered, corporations need to become more flexible than they've been in the past. Before, a company or corporation matched a person with a job to be done. Now companies need to be aware of treating their workers more like volunteers and creating environments that nurture and sustain people's creativity.

### **WHY DO EMPLOYERS NEED TO BE CONCERNED WITH A GREATER DEGREE OF TOLERANCE?**

What we've found in interviews with graduates making job and location decisions is that they're very aware of their environments. If a work environment lacks diversity, whether it's women and

minorities in management or simply in the overall workforce, it acts as a subtle signal saying, "Your kind not tolerated here."

The creative class believes in diversity in ways that are often overlooked by many organizations and businesses. If a large corporation decides against same-sex health benefits, it's going to hurt them in the long run. You want to create environments where people feel validated and appreciated for their unique contribution.

### **HOW IMPORTANT IS LEADERSHIP TO GROWING A CREATIVE ECONOMY?**

Leadership is important at some levels, but the creative class seems to be self-organizing in ways that other groups haven't been. They tend to go around resistance by creating new organizations and methodologies for change.

### **HAS INNOVATION GAINED MOMENTUM?**

The rate of innovation has accelerated because there are more people today who are paid to think and work

creatively than ever before, and creativity and innovation are so closely intertwined. We need to see greater innovation and creativity in every human endeavor, from government, science, education, medicine, entertainment, the arts and the environment if we're going to continue to thrive.

### **WHAT ABOUT THE LEISURE NEEDS OF THE CREATIVE CLASS? IS "PLAY" JUST AS IMPORTANT AS WORK?**

Our focus groups indicate that members of the creative class value active, outdoor recreation very highly. They are drawn to places and communities where there is a prevalence of outdoor activities, both because they enjoy these activities and because the presence of these activities is viewed as an embrace of a broader, creative lifestyle. Play is always important, whether it's playing an instrument during the day or going for a kayak ride after work. Play is a way of relaxing and refocusing the mind. 