



## The New Renaissance

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### Abstract

*Within the past two decades every area of business switched into a mode of operation where technology progress, communication, and quality of information are crucial more than ever before. It would be natural to expect a similar, ardent innovation in our schools, educational systems and policies, and teaching philosophy. Instead, we struggle in designing and implementing the “right” educational reform. The researchers, scholars and practitioners are alarmed by the situation of US public, urban schools. Despite numerous attempts to implement a school reform, the results are disappointing. What seems to be lost in the discussion about the reform is: what is it exactly we want to achieve, what are the improved results and students’ achievement? Although very relevant - leadership, school culture, best practices, motivation, science of learning, teacher empowerment, and high performance in schools - offer only fragmented propositions. What we need is change in the way we think about school in general, at any level, across the cultures, and in the global context. Today’s school should have a single mission in place: promote, live and achieve high performance. This means that high performance is mandatory for everyone involved in shaping our youth: teachers, principals, coaches, mentors, and parents. The new definition of high performance parallels the notion of a contemporary polymath or a “renaissance person”. An entire generation of true polymaths, young people well educated in a variety of subjects, proficient and competent in multiple fields, would be a true high achievement for the society. This means teaching philosophy must focus on ten areas to form a perfect contemporary polymath who is: an erudite, an entrepreneur, a soldier, a teacher, a writer, an artist, a linguist, a computerist, a volunteer, and a handyman. With today’s fast flowing information and formidable technology, the bar is not too high.*

### 1 The “Right” Educational Reform

Economic progress and recent developments in technology are some of the critical drivers in raising the importance and value of providing young generation with access to the highest quality education possible. Throughout the first decade of our century, the literature provides endless accounts of proposed new approaches and methodologies aiming at achieving a successful educational transformation.

In the United States the general perception of declining student performance is seemingly attributed to educators’ resistance to effective system-wide change. However, this might not be the case. As the recent literature suggests, the lack of academic success could be a consequence of too many reform ideas that have been tried in quick succession and in a nonsystematic manner.

### 2 The Magic Numbers

The approaches to improve student achievement, to discover better teaching methods or evaluate the overall school performance are abundant. In the last decade a trend for finding the “ultimate solution” to brighten the future of education is seemingly dominating the literature. As we can see in the titles of recently published books, the scholars, researchers, and authors are desperately looking for a “formula” to address the issues of struggling system. Some examples include:



- The **Six** Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive
- Ten Best Teaching Practices: How Brain Research and Learning Styles Define Teaching Competencies
- **13** Steps to Teacher Empowerment
- **9** Strategies to Bring Everybody on Board
- **4** CORE Factors for School Success
- What Great Principals Do Differently: 15 Things That Matter Most
- **50** Ways to Improve Student Behavior
- Seven Simple Secrets: What the BEST Teachers Know and Do!
- Education Nation: Six Leading Edges of Innovation
- Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College
- Five Minds for the Future
- The High-Performing School: Benchmarking the 10 Indicators of Effectiveness

It's clear that the focus here is on finding the "magic number" of action oriented or value-oriented interventions. In reality however, what we need is the focus on OUTCOMES based on a clear definition of what and why we are trying to achieve; then on setting high standards, and rigorous evaluation requirements.

### 3 The New Philosophy Of Education

Disappointing results of many educational reform attempts may be attributable to the fact, that reform efforts seem to address the issues like policies, school and community leadership involvement, interventions and programs, teaching methodology, cultural and ethnic students' backgrounds, or types/levels of schools to name a few. Surprisingly, not much attention is given to the teaching philosophy, which should be the pillar of any reform. We owe it to the current young generation and those generations who will come after - the need for change of the way we think about education, the way we think about teaching, why and how we teach, and what the ultimate true goals of education are.

### 4 High Performance Redefined: The Polymath Of 21st Century

We need to realize that as long as achievement in school (at any level) is exclusively associated with students' basic reading or writing capability, graduation rates, SAT scores, or even admission to college rates – the future of education in US looks very bleak.

Similarly to other industries - like healthcare, manufacturing or government, - innovation and constant improvement in order to achieve high performance should be a primary mission and part of the curriculum; the part of the curriculum which should be taken very seriously.

Simply saying, high performance in school should be focused on discovering and developing true polymaths – students of multiple talents, skills, and experiences, as well as a strong personality. The most common contemporary definitions of polymath describe it as a person well educated in a variety of subjects or fields, or a person proficient and competent in multiple fields. The most common case is that the polymath usually achieved a success in one or two main areas and was also proficient and involved in other fields.

For the purpose of a deep cultural, and technical development and human skills evolution, the education system should be focused on raising multiple, consecutive generations of the "natural high performers", contemporary polymaths capable of driving businesses economic growth as well as the intellectual capital of society.

Today's most sought after polymath should be person with the following combination of expertise, skills, and personality characteristics:



- **Erudite:** degrees from at least a four-year college is an absolute must, preferably in liberal and fine arts, as well as a business degree. Highly diversified education is important from a cultural point of view, not a technical one (since the specific skills can always be acquired or adjusted to the employer needs). Diversified education promotes diplomatic skills and savoir-vivre (business and social etiquette) qualities that far exceed the usual academic goals and pure know-how. A person with a variety of educational achievements is more apt to learn new things and explore unknown fields with a natural curiosity and self-motivation. The determination comes from a constant need for improvement and self-actualization.
- **Entrepreneur:** a person with an entrepreneurial spirit will always look for new innovative ideas and sustain the energy - a unique driving force that motivates all, inspires a constant entrepreneurial work ethics and brings any business to the next level. This helps to maintain high-performance standards, to generate enthusiasm and, ultimately, to bring valid results.
- **Soldier:** value of military experience - regardless of whether it is active duty, reserves or National Guard - is pure gold. A person trained by the US military gets an education that will not only benefit the employer during his/her military career but can be easily transferred into the civilian world. The truth is that governments around the world send their military personnel to be trained with American soldiers. Military members are generally considered to be excellent workers because of their discipline, integrity, and reliability. They know how to organize the work, meet deadlines, follow procedures, and develop programs. Veterans also know how to focus on getting the job done.
- **Educator:** a person with teaching skills is able to effectively communicate in creative and understandable terms so others can gain from the information. This experience is extremely valuable in helping others develop their skills, understanding processes, and better perform their tasks. Teaching is also important because it involves excellent presentation and organization skills. As the 18th century French moralist Joseph Joubert said, "to teach is to learn twice".
- **Writer:** good writing skills are essential for effective communication. The ideal business associate or employee must be a good writer. This skill is crucial in drafting internal memos, corresponding with clients, designing sales materials, or creating technical documents (like manuals, instructions, etc.). Writing skill also promotes the discipline of clear and concise thought formulation and thorough thinking preceding any written or verbal form of expression.
- **Artist:** in order to gain a true competitive edge, having employees with artistic spirit is highly beneficial. An artist's abstract perspective stimulates creative problem solving and innovative thinking "outside the box". Today many Fortune 500 companies encourage their employees to develop their creative side by participating in artistic workshops or by organizing company art exhibits where employees can display their work.
- **Linguist:** contemporary top talent should be able to speak, write, and read in at least one foreign language and preferably two or three. In today's global economy knowledge of several languages is an ultimate business tool. Familiarity with foreign cultures is an absolute necessity, as it facilitates international business relationships and transactions.
- **Computer savvy:** advanced computer proficiency with its two major elements - the knowledge of computer hardware and, the most up-to-date relevant software applications - are the absolute must for today's high performing people. First element, the knowledge of computer hardware refers to understanding the basic system components like: central processing unit, memory types and applications, data storage media, and peripherals. Second element refers to the practical knowledge of software types and applications like: word processing, spreadsheets, internet, database (client management, marketing), multimedia (graphic design, publishing, and presentations), reporting, accounting, and project management. Computer knowledge may seem like an obvious skill to have, yet today's managers/business owners quite often are incapable of performing basic troubleshooting, installation or configuration related tasks.



- **Volunteer:** helping others is indeed an important part of the American way of life. In fact, many high schools require their students to participate in volunteering programs in order to graduate. Being a volunteer is a very enriching and humbling experience. Those who volunteer their time and effort to make the difference are making a real contribution, and stand out from the crowd. They are usually more open to learning new skills and being proactive and self-motivated - indispensable skills in today's business environment. Volunteers have a unique sense of personal responsibility for those who are less fortunate because they choose to take action and make things happen.
- **Handyman:** while the progress in technology is flourishing and the abundance of electronic gadgets on the market is overwhelming, the good old-fashion hands-on skills like building things, fixing things, operating machines and so on seem to be on decline. Being technology savvy, intellectually mature, or having amazing artistic talents should never be an excuse for the basic manual skills handicap. Important especially for the young generation, development of manual-mechanical skills and getting kids away from the computer games will have priceless benefits for the future generation of survivors, problem solvers, and role models.

## 5 The New Renaissance

The school is an exceptional environment for opening and forming human minds. Young people should be aware of the fact that what they learn today will make a tremendous difference in the near future. Therefore it's critical for all those involved in educating, teaching, and coaching that the young generations are not only the ambassadors of innovation, but the makers of what can be called "the New Renaissance". The world of 21st century is about to see an unprecedented abundance of knowledge, skills, experiences, creativity, and human character of the highest quality and depth than ever before.

We are presented with an amazing opportunity to recapitulate everything we have achieved within the past decades and evaluate from this perspective: who we are, who we have become, what makes us what we are. As the Renaissance Generation is growing, the educators, teachers, and mentors need to help them embrace their new future role as those who will have a chance to achieve the levels of success never attempted before.

From the Organizational Development perspective the education reform is a chance for improving school as an institution which needs to be transformed into a proactive, future-oriented, and learning organization, ready to teach better.

There is no better place to declare the new Renaissance for education than Florence, Italy – the place of once lived, World Renaissance and a home of those who opened the route for liberation of human mind from the medieval shackles.

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