

# FOREWORD

If you are a middle, high school or college student today you face an important challenge because education is at a crossroads.

Projections for the workplace of your future feature rapid, unpredictable change including multiple careers which frequently requiring learning, unlearning and relearning of skills and technical knowledge. Yet, most schools today are not designed to prepare you for a future that includes incalculable change.

In the past, it was enough to follow adult directions and learn only what was taught. Today's students must be ready to learn regardless of whether a teacher is present and instruction comes as a formal lesson. Unless you commit to preparing yourself for the future you will face, you risk being under prepared, without the flexible, independent learning and other skills crucial for success.

*Smarter*<sup>2</sup> is a unique and practical book that provides the personalized learning solution in response to the current "one size fits all" educational model. Despite the mismatch between the design of most schools and the demands of the future, there is much you can do to position yourself for success. This book is filled with powerful strategies and approaches you can learn and use.

The mismatch is not due to a bad design. The problem is that the current design was intended to meet the challenges a past era. For more than one hundred years we have depended on a system modeled after the moving assembly line. Yet, over the past 40 years it has become increasingly clear that this standardized, instruction driven model does not possess the capacity to meet the needs of a student population that is increasingly diverse and a society and economy that are rapidly changing, often in unpredictable ways.

For the first several decades of its existence, the design and operation of our schools largely paralleled and supported the needs of our society and economy. Our economy required only a minority of students to achieve at high levels to meet our needs for educators, academics, clergy and civic and business leaders. The remainder of the population generally went to work in jobs with modest demands for academic preparation that also paid well enough to support a family and build a life.

The fundamental design of this system features “one-size-fits-all” instruction as the driving force, largely delivered by a trained educator. The design rests on the assumption that learning is largely the transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student.

Instruction is generally delivered in formal classes with common content, regardless of learner readiness, need or interest. If a student does not understand or learn the content, efforts are made to “fix” the student. Like the assembly line, the group continues to move forward, driven by a pre-set curriculum and standard pacing regardless of whether students have mastered skills and concepts.

Students and families can no longer even be assured that performing well in the current education system is adequate to be prepared for success in careers and life.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most important resource we have is people with strong core academic knowledge and skills and creativity, innovative thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Simply learning what is taught does not necessarily prepare students to be good learners, an essential skillset in our rapidly changing society. *Smarter<sup>2</sup>* includes specifics to help students adapt and become life-long learners.

The fundamental fact that learning is a personal, autonomous action and that most learning happens as a result of connections, purpose, relevance and utility from the perspective of the learner conflicts with our current model of education. We can no longer rely on the happenstance of being ready to learn when the teacher is ready to teach. This approach leaves far too many learners under challenged, disconnected or otherwise unable to benefit from what is taught.

We urgently need a system focused on and driven by learning. Instruction must be seen as one of a number of flexible resources available to support learning rather than assume that delivery of instruction guarantees learning.

Today’s students must commit to becoming powerful learners, not just good students. It is crucial to become active, committed participants in learning, not passive recipients of instruction. Where possible students must become co-designers of their learning paths, not travelers on a prescribed, standardized path that may not reflect their learning needs, readiness or interests.

Educators, learning advocates, policy makers and others committed to a

learning-driven system are developing, testing, and perfecting this new design. They are committed to ensuring that every learner has before them a realistic, future-focused, personalized learning path for which they feel ownership and to which they are committed.

Someday, hopefully soon, every learner will be offered an education that features personalization as a key element. However, it will take time for this system to be scaled to a point where it is available to all learners. Yet, learners cannot afford to wait.

In the meantime, learners need all of the support they can find to personalize learning for themselves.

*Smarter*<sup>2</sup> is a treasure trove of ideas, skills and strategies learners can employ to design a personalized learning path and make learning work for them. Educators and experts from around the world share powerful, accessible strategies that learners can use to ensure that their learning is engaging and useful and prepares them for a life filled with opportunity and success.

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