New Work Habits for a Radically Changing World
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New Work Habits for a Radically Changing World is the title of a publication on change that came across my desk recently and it provides some interesting and important advice for educators. One of the important statements in the book indicates "Less than half the workforce in the industrial world will be holding conventional full-time jobs in organizations by the beginning of the 21st century. Those full-timers or insiders will be the new minority."

The book goes on to offer "13 Ground Rules for Job Success In the Information Age" among which are: "Commit fully to your job", "Hold yourself accountable for outcomes" and "Stay in school". The last "Ground Rule" is a critical one, which suggests that workers need to be "lifelong" learners and has implications for schools today. As educators, we need to develop a facility for learning and the motivation for students to continue to learn after the formal school years. What skills and knowledge do we need to equip our students with to be successful in the changing global marketplace?

First and foremost, I believe we need to ensure that our students are able to communicate clearly and effectively. They need to be comfortable with all the new technologies for communication in our information age but they also need to be able to read for meaning and write with purpose. Literacy is a critical skill and one that should be high on any good school's curriculum priorities.

Secondly, we need to train our students to locate and evaluate information. There has been an explosion of information in the past two decades and we have an obligation to teach our students the critical thinking skills they will require to evaluate the enormous mass of data available to them.

The third skill set that is required is a level of comfort in dealing with numerical data. Our students need to be able to manipulate numbers with accuracy and have the ability to interpret data.

Students also need to be taught and encouraged to maintain healthy, well-balanced lifestyles. Lifestyles that include physical activity, an appreciation for arts and culture and recognition of the importance of community, including family and friendship.

A tall order for our schools but tasks which the Conference of Independent Schools in Ontario take very seriously. C.I.S. schools believe strongly in the need to develop these skills and knowledge sets in our students and design programmes to achieve these goals. We offer a rigorous academic curriculum with an appropriate integration of technology to deliver our programmes. We encourage our students to be fully involved in the rich co-curricular life of their schools, which includes athletics, art, music, drama and vigorous community service programmes. Our students embrace the opportunities we offer them and are well on their way to becoming lifelong learners capable of meeting the challenges of the coming information age.

Employers today are recognizing the development of "human capital" as being a critical job to be done by schools and organizations in partnership. They are seeking a "complete business person" who is not just measured by ability to perform their job
function but brings additional qualities to the organization. Some employers feel today's "complete business person" needs to embrace three characteristics that transcend his or her specific skills in a specific job:

- The first characteristic is the ability to adopt ... and live without compromise ... a set of unchanging values ...
- The second is a lifelong passion for learning ... a passion that mines knowledge from the depths of information ...
- And the third characteristic is the capacity to develop the emotional intelligence that is the mark of outstanding leaders...

At a recently held Canadian Independent School Conference a keynote speaker from the financial sector suggested the following - "Independent Schools have generations of experience in communicating strong values. You have a proven system and an obvious passion for imparting knowledge. And, I believe, you may have a unique opportunity within the entire realm of primary and secondary education to strike a better balance between the development of IQ and the learning of Emotional Intelligence".

Independent schools, particularly CIS Member Schools, have the experience, the passion and the opportunity to achieve success in preparing our students for work in a radically changing world. It is a mission we take very seriously and to which we commit ourselves fully.