

A GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

REX MILLER

BILL LATHAM · BRIAN CAHILL

humanizing — THE — EDUCATION MACHINE

HOW TO CREATE SCHOOLS THAT TURN

DISENGAGED KIDS INTO
INSPIRED LEARNERS



WILEY

Praise for *Humanizing the Education Machine*

“Our current systems of education were designed to meet the challenges of the industrial revolution. What sort of education do our children need now to meet the radically different challenges of the twenty-first century? *Humanizing the Education Machine* explores this dilemma through the numerous voices of educators, community leaders, and parents. It is not just a call to action. It offers a plan of action for what education needs to become to engage our children in the present and prepare them properly for a future that none of us can predict. There can hardly be a more important conversation.”

—**Sir Ken Robinson**, Educator and Author of *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*

“Our work at the Clayton Christensen Institute focuses on elevating the conversation and positive potential of disruptive innovation to transform our struggling education system. *Humanizing the Education Machine* captures the potential with a combination of in-depth research and compelling stories. Read it to further your vision of how you can play a role in this transformation.”

—**Michael Horn**, coauthor of *Disrupting Class* and *Blended*, and cofounder of the Clayton Christensen Institute

“The central issue for education in the twenty-first century is to keep the role of technology in perspective while discovering human solutions to uniquely human problems. *Humanizing the Education Machine* is a valuable contribution to this key topic that can be appreciated by administrators, teachers, and parents.”

—**Lou Cozolino**, author of *Attachment-Based Teaching* and professor at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University

“For decades we have known that our education system is failing our students, teachers, parents, and communities. Now a new kind of education is developing for the connected twenty-first century—and it's kid-centered. How we got here, how we go forward, and what we should expect from our schools is explored in detail, using smart research and lively writing. I was caught up in the text; you will be, too.”

—**Susan S. Szenasy**, publisher and editor-in-chief, *Metropolis*

“More than anything else in education, we need a culture shift. We need to shift from trying to create a one-size-fits-all solution to a culture of continuous innovation and iteration across the classroom, school, and district levels. We must think about the future our students face and ask new questions. The research, stories, and insights in Rex Miller's *Humanizing the Education Machine* gives educational leaders the new questions. It also provides a new framework for that cultural shift.”

—**Jaime Casap**, Google Education Evangelist, Google

“This is one audacious book. In fact, Miller makes the case that education is in such crisis that the only appropriate response is to swing for the fences. Somehow it is personal, global, nuanced, outrageous, and perfectly logical. It is a book for the ages, and it presents the first way out of our current circumstances that makes so much sense. It’s a must-read.”

—**Steve Peifer**, recipient of the 2007 CNN Hero Award, the 2007 Yale Counseling Award, the 2010 Excellence in Education Award from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, and the 2013 NACCAP Guidance Professional of the Year

“Read this book carefully, for as goes K–12, so goes the nation. Each quarter, I ask my college students if they enjoy their classes. They look at me as if it’s a trick question. Truthfully, no, they tell me; most of them do not. They find most classes stifling, rigid, instructor-centric, and dull. Then I ask them if they love learning new things. Yes, they do! This book helps us understand how schools fell off the exciting, engaging, transformative path of teaching and learning new things and how we can change that. Read it carefully—learn new things.”

—**Colleen Carmean**, PhD, Assistant Chancellor, University of Washington Tacoma

“Rex Miller has the rare capacity to go deeply into systems, mine for the wisdom, creativity, and innovation, and then translate his findings for the rest of us to be inspired and welcoming of change. This book is an important part of a larger sea change that has the capacity to reinvigorate education by putting relationships, well-being, and learning back at the center.”

—**Michelle Kinder**, executive director of the Momentous Institute, Oak Cliff, Texas

“For his latest book, Rex Miller has marshaled a distinguished group of professionals to join him in examining successful models of educational innovation around the country. The result? *Humanizing the Education Machine* offers a remarkable and readable wealth of actionable insight. It is a veritable road map to a potential future golden age in education. That future is not inevitable, but this book certainly places it within our grasp.”

—**Eric Hamilton**, professor of education, Pepperdine University

“This is not the usual techno-utopian vision of new technology and innovative corporations stepping in to fix the education system. Rex Miller and his MindShift team start from a deep and profoundly human vision of learning as a rich and messy organic process of growth and discovery that no single and simple technology can provide. But new technologies should not be ignored either. Rex Miller and his team have spent the past two years investigating the shining examples that can give us a glimpse of a better, more human future for learning. Their futuristic visions may not be the future we will live, but the subtlety and richness of these visions allow us all to imagine great questions we have never asked before, and great questions is where learning begins.”

—**Michael Wesch**, professor of digital ethnography, Kansas State University

“The research and road map you will find in *Humanizing the Education Machine* will help any school, district, or educational leader leave their traditional mindset and rediscover true learning through a growth mindset.”

—**Dr. Nido Qubein**, president, High Point University

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Cover design: Wiley

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Names: Miller, M. Rex, 1955- author. | Latham, Bill, 1971- author. | Cahill, Brian, 1958- author.

Title: Humanizing the education machine : how to create schools that turn disengaged kids into inspired learners / Rex Miller, Bill Latham, Brian Cahill.

Description: Hoboken, New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016032571 | ISBN 9781119283102 (cloth) | ISBN 9781119283119 (ePDF) | ISBN 9781119283126 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Educational change. | Classroom environment. | Students—Attitudes.

Classification: LCC LB2806 .M443 2016 | DDC 371.2/07—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016032571>

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

—Theodore Roosevelt

| dare you to . . .

Buck the System. I chair the nonprofit Center for College & Career Readiness, working with hundreds of districts and thousands of schools across America and around the world. Every day, my team and I hear tales of these teachers—committed and caring professionals *who buck the system to save a child*. These brave souls often work against the systems that employ them in order to do their jobs—to meet the needs of real kids, in real classrooms.

Bridge the Gap. The Education Machine can see only a few “standard models,” but great teachers care for the kids as if they were their own family members. The Education Machine believes scientific application of generic teaching principals will “engage” students to “learn rigorous content.” You and I know that all of us are motivated by our imaginations, interests, and passions. Learning is human. The modern Education Machine is not. And we must bridge that gap—now!

This book raises a clarion call to a revolution of the heart and mind. Furthermore, Rex Miller and his intrepid team of educators, parents, and experts provide a vision of education with real children at its heart.

Embrace a New World. Grounded in the real trials and success stories of teachers and kids from around the country, Miller and his colleagues challenge us to set aside notions from the obsolete world of the textbook. In their place they call us to embrace a new world—a new culture—of dynamic learning and collaborative investigation. Miller

shines a light on those educators who are challenging the system and lifting up the imaginations and passions of children—kids who live in a world of endless possibility constrained by schools with mindless rules and never-ending assessments.

Turn Insight into Action. Researchers collapse human experience into statistics and findings. But we do not need another research project as much as we need to act! We must—as human beings—do something to equip and empower our kids and the teachers who care about their dreams, their fears, and their futures.

Use This Map. We all need—and you now hold—a map that will lead you from the Industrial Age model of education to a culture of creative collaboration. More importantly, that map will get you and many others to the place where we can all join in uplifting the hearts and minds of teachers and students.

That is why, upon its publication, *Humanizing the Education Machine* will become required reading in my graduate courses for school leaders.

—Kevin E. Baird,
chairman and national supervising faculty,
the nonprofit Center for College & Career Readiness

FOREWORD

We all know that excellent schools are the glittering diamonds of outstanding communities. They not only educate the young, but also help to build the symmetrical beauty of a community's physical and emotional safety, employment opportunity, rich cultural treasury, responsible governance, civic involvement, and more.

Unfortunately, we have too few outstanding schools, that is, schools in which teachers and learners are actively engaged in the exchange and mastery of knowledge. Yet we continue to support an educational system built on a failing business model.

An education system built around Industrial-Revolution-era ideas about conformity, interchangeable parts, hierarchy, strategy, centralization, and economies of scale no longer works in our time. We've all read the axiom, "Every system is perfectly designed to produce the results it achieves." And our education business model is perfectly designed to produce nineteenth- and twentieth-century results.

But, of course, education should mirror twenty-first-century business realities! In other words they should reflect a wellness culture, intrinsic versus extrinsic values, fulfilling needs instead of creating wants, open communication platforms, Lean structures, niche markets, responsible sustainability, and rapid iterations of our products, services, and even ourselves.

Over two years ago, Paragon Furniture, Inc., was invited to participate in an extraordinary cohort of education stakeholders. The K-12 MindShift served as the locus for changing the way in which Paragon began thinking about our purpose. We now see that our company creates furniture that assists in the transformation of culture, helps to ignite student curiosity, facilitates positive teacher influence, and contributes to the health of the whole person.

Humanizing the Education Machine is like a perfectly built and tuned amplifier. It pumps out a pure, rich, and powerful message. However, our educational system is tone deaf to the music. But, with our front row seats on the concert of collaborative research and synthesis behind this book, we were blown away by the power of the book's signal transmission and broad range frequency.

Rex has created a high-fidelity story that everybody in any community should know and share. In that way, we can all help to create a relevant and rich learning culture. And remember, however great the costs of change may be, it is far more expensive not to change.

—Ricky Kassanoff, CEO,

and

Mark Hubbard,
President, Paragon Furniture, Inc.

FOREWORD

Data from our K–12 schools in the United States sadly reminds us that, despite decades of well-intentioned education reform efforts, student achievement remains stagnant in America. Over 30 percent of our nation’s youth fail to graduate from high school and approximately half of African American and Hispanic students fail to earn a high school diploma. Data also shows that students who do graduate are largely unprepared to enter the work force.

How is it possible that the greatest and most powerful nation in the history of the world built an education system that is now so ineffective, especially when compared to other developed nations?

As the CEO of one of the largest architectural practices in the United States that specializes in educational facility design, I’ve spent the past 35 years working with educators and students to create environments that facilitate all the activities associated with knowledge transfer. In twenty-first-century terms, what are those activities? How do children learn best in today’s world? Is there a new knowledge-transfer paradigm that will lead us out of the doldrums of mediocrity? As a long-time admirer, I was thrilled when I learned that Rex Miller, one of the most successful and compelling research based futurists in the nation, would be exploring the very basic but very complex issue of education and knowledge transfer.

As evidenced by his previous books and now in *Humanizing the Education Machine*, Rex has an uncanny ability to assemble and lead the right people in the right manner and shed light on some of the most important and complicated issues of our time.

To tackle K–12 education, Rex assembled some of the nation’s best educators, teachers, government representatives, architects, contractors and furnishing and environmental specialists. The result of two years of

work is this wonderful expose of some of the most amazing education success stories you've ever read.

Humanizing the Education Machine is a lively read that immediately grabs our attention and doesn't let go. The stories are fun and the message provides a fresh way of thinking about education. The book gives a road map of the paths to personal learning experiences that engage our students and inspire them to learn.

After decades of propping up an outdated model, isn't it time for our schools to do better? Shouldn't they reflect the human principles we hold most dear—the ability to be an individual in every sense, including the way we learn? Isn't it our real goal to create a student body in this country that consists of self-motivated and enthusiastic lifelong learners who follow a path that is most appropriate and fulfilling for each individual?

This book is amazingly powerful in its ability to help us achieve that goal.

—Dan Boggio, CEO,
PBK Architects, Inc.

FOREWORD

Like so many others, I grew up struggling in traditional classroom environments. Having been diagnosed with ADD as an adult, I finally understood some of my challenges with traditional education in a small-town public school. Physically, classrooms represented a tense place for students like me. Unfortunately, they continue to be the same for many students today.

Classrooms of multiple rows of desks and chairs all facing a single plain chalkboard give energetic children no physical outlets for their natural energy. That layout increases distractions and disengagement. In that built environment, the students who live and work at the behavioral extremes are often underserved, their talent unrecognized and their possibilities undeveloped. Our genuine efforts to leave no child behind leaves a sad wake of unrealized talent and unfulfilled dreams because we fail to engage our kids.

Fortunately, Lorraine Moore, my mother, passed on her passion for education to me. She always reminded me that we had both an opportunity and a responsibility to make a difference for the children of this country. That idea and her drive gave me the opportunity and confidence to turn my experience into doing that—I have found great satisfaction working to make a difference by giving all students the right spaces, tools, and advocates.

MooreCo was invited to join MindShift so that we could lend our industry experience to this wide-ranging assembly of education (and other) professionals. We have all worked to understand the past, current, and future of education. And I am proud of how our eye-opening

experiences are so well reflected in *Humanizing the Education Machine*. The book gives a compelling contrast to the current and outdated education model. Readers will clearly see a better path to how we train and equip our kids for the future.

—Gregory Moore, CEO,
MooreCO, Inc.

FOREWORD

We've all heard the sobering data documenting our schools' failure to meet the needs of today's students and employers. We at Bretford see that the real issue behind that failure is a design problem: Our schools continue to function very much as they did a century ago.

But, of course, the challenge facing educators has changed dramatically over that period. The skills that will define students' future success have changed. And students themselves have changed: They're simply and verifiably wired differently from previous generations.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, working well as a team is what today's companies seek and value most in their workforces. But students won't have a chance to learn to collaborate until we see dramatic changes in the design of our K–12 classrooms and teaching practices.

In leading a company that manufactures furniture to support more active, engaging, and collaborative learning environments, I've seen firsthand how the design of learning spaces transforms the activities and outcomes that occur there. And I'm deeply encouraged that futurist Rex Miller has chosen to explore this topic in his new book.

Humanizing the Education Machine provides stories and strategies that give inspiring alternatives to the status quo. This book reveals the approaches that are working for *all* students, enabling us to see what's possible if we have the courage to chart a new course for K–12 education.

The changes presented in these changes are desperately needed. I commend Rex for taking on this subject. We at Bretford are committed to supporting K–12 leaders and students in this critical journey.

—Chris Petrick, CEO,
Bretford

PREFACE

As you read the pages ahead, you will see that *change* is the backdrop issue in this book. Of course, change is the real issue in so much of life. That's why wise people learn to relate to change in intelligent and appropriate ways.

My friend Dan Boggio, is the founder and CEO of PBK Architects, Inc., the largest architectural firm for educational facilities in the United States. Dan also served on the MindShift K–12 project that drove this book.

After 40 years of working with various levels of government, school boards, and other bureaucracies, Dan understands the dynamics of change. When he recently told me his view of why school districts continue to build facilities that are a half-century behind the times, he exposed the true face of change.

“Because school districts are bureaucracies, they are always subject to the political pressures that shape any city. Elected officials always strive to make sure that everyone feels treated equally. So to approve a new, progressive, learning-friendly environment is to invite opposition.”

Secondly, Dan told me, “Most senior administrators—the decision makers—are in the final phase of their careers. So they are not inclined to be trailblazers. Retirement is coming up fast. Playing it safe and avoiding controversy are very important in that time of life. They all know that the ‘cutting edge’ is also the ‘bleeding edge.’”

And, third, as Dan said, “Most senior administrators are generally from a generation that was trained in the old ‘factory model’ school environment. They do not understand or trust the new thinking.”

However, the good news is that change is coming faster than some think. Dan reports that, even though most of PBK’s work still supports the factory model, “. . . about 20 percent of our work is what I consider

progressive.” Dan also sees that, as younger people (including digital natives) move into the senior executive roles, they are turning the tide toward learning-friendly design.

We’re all joining a battle that has raged a very long time. So it’s helpful to hear from a seasoned veteran who has been out on the front lines of change. The past always fights with bloody tenacity to remain. We all have to see it, understand it, and deal with it as we work for change.

But, Dan’s view also delivers good news for change agents. New blood has already entered into the cultural veins. For example, digital natives are already bringing renewal, renovation, and a bright future. The past views them as a threat. And rightly so; after all, they are forerunners of a new day.

CHAPTER 1

Numbers Don't Lie

*You never change things by fighting the existing reality.
To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model
obsolete.*

—R. Buckminster Fuller

Did you know that 70 percent of teachers have mentally checked out of teaching? How is that possible? These are not bad people. They all started out inspired, hopeful, courageous, and even playful. Some of our best novels and films—such as *Dangerous Minds*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Lean on Me*, *Up the Down Staircase*, and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*—have featured these noble, exciting, and often daring figures.

But after a while, the Education Machine just rolled over too many teachers, mashing the life juices right out of their pores.

I'll tell you something else—by the time they graduate 60 percent of students will have also flown the coop. This is not some abstract number: these are the kids on your block, next door, and maybe in your upstairs bedrooms.

We all know that we live in perilous times. But, more than that, we live in the crumbling ruins of obsolete forms. An age is passing

away (as ages always do). Don Berwick famously said, “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.” The prevalent model of public education does what it was designed to do. And in a previous era,

*Public education does what it was
designed to do. And in a previous
era, that served America very well.*

*With the passing of that era the
model has become obsolete.*

that served America very well. With the passing of that era the model has become obsolete.

For that reason, the Education Machine is in genuine and panoramic crisis; it is in personal, social, economic, and national turmoil. Numbers don't lie. But that crisis is because of its obsolescence, not its malice.

Here are a few other features of its rot.

- The Education Machine does not have the capacity to care. And learning requires people who care.
- The Machine's continual cry of "reform" results in kicking the can down the road for future administrators and teachers to solve. This response only makes matters worse and costs a hell of a lot of money.
- We can't wait. We cannot let the Education Machine move another kid down its aged and rusty assembly line until they are broken or left behind. *Now* is already late.

So, how did we end up with an education system that has not only failed in its mission but has also inflicted so much psychological, emotional, and intellectual damage on so many people that it touches? But, far more important, what can we do about it now?

Now, let's pause and consider some other realities that our work on this book revealed:

- Yes, education has become a Machine. But schools, administrators, and teachers can create a kid-centered, human-enriching, and high-achieving learning experience.
- It takes stepping into only one classroom of engaged kids to see the difference between the Machine and the deeply human experience of learning.
- The challenge of education sounds formidable. But it can be brought down to a human scale and transformed through people who care.

Cynicism says we can't change what must be changed. That is not true; we *can* do something about it. This is not an impossible task. That is what this book is about. When you finish reading, you will know the time and money invested in this book was well worth the price. We can change the way we teach and train our younger members. Do not forget that.

I know what I'm talking about. Over the past two years, my associates and I have traveled thousands of miles and talked to hundreds of students, teachers, administrators, parents, suppliers, authors, and community leaders. We heard their stories of life in

the Education Machine. Their time in education was, for too many, a soul-sucking, time-wasting, and stress-producing waste of effort. Not only that, it was a brutally demotivating and damaging experience.

But we also saw transformation. One of the most surprising features of our work was the discovery of fully absorbed, completely riveted students located clear across the K-12 spectrum; we met them in great cities and in small towns, in both "underserved" and resource-rich districts, and scattered across all the data points.

Cynicism says we can't change what must be changed. That is not true; we can change the way we teach and train our younger members. Do not forget that.

To Humanize the Education Machine

Most people know that the earth's surface is composed of tectonic plates—"a dozen or so big crustal slabs that float on a sea of melted rock. . . . The colliding plates grind past one another about as fast as fingernails grow. . . ."¹ As the plates grow, they break off, creating convulsions of new geologic features. Despite its deadly earthquakes and tsunamis, that process, that revolution, is quite natural and essential to the continuation of life on planet earth.

But isn't it also true that the ideas, values, and structures that form civilizations are in perpetual, grinding revolution? That's how they exchange old and dying forms for new life. The life cycles of the planet exist in continuous, and sometimes quite literal, uprisings. The convulsions of history continually heave old forms over the side, where they slip into oblivion. Of course, individuals, groups, and nations work very hard to find ways to take credit for the upheavals.

This book is a manifesto for a secret, but emerging, revolution.

That revolution is challenging public education's grip over the future and well-being of our kids. We all see the relatively small, but very visible, part of that conflict among policy makers, educators, unions, parents, politicians, and a voracious educational industrial complex. They are all pounding their fists, demanding change, pointing fingers,

expanding control, pleading for more funding, and continually changing the rules with no measurable improvement. That war has raged for the past 60 years. Most have fought with good intent; many were and are mercenaries; and some have tried to leverage the dysfunction to gain more power and profit. It doesn't matter; they are all caught in a conflict of irrelevance. It is all part of an era that is passing away.

Today, we all stand before a window of opportunity that recalls Apple's "1984" Super Bowl Ad. That landmark "manifesto" proclaimed the end of Big Brother computing and the dawn of a human-centered experience. As it was then, our highly centralized industrial education system is increasingly arthritic and exhausted. Worse, its death grip is killing creativity—in our kids and in our nation. The mission of this book is to spread hope and methods to parents, educators, administrators, and communities so they may become full partners in the human-centered learning revolution.

Everyone knows the current system is failing to graduate students who are prepared for the demands of the twenty-first century. The United States ranks last among industrialized nations for college graduation levels. Other countries with similar education models are experiencing the same fall out in student engagement and performance. Germany, England, China, Singapore, South Korea, France, Australia, Canada, Japan, and other countries are stepping back and asking the same questions we asked about the effects of their education machines.

Today's oracles, such as Sir Ken Robinson, Tony Wagner, Douglas Thomas, John Seely Brown, and others are painting vividly clear pictures of a harsh system that is killing creativity at the very time in history that most demands creativity and innovation! They are *the* most important survival skills in a postindustrial world.

The book explains how the "Gutenberg to Google" revolution has generated a perfect storm of discontent, dysfunction, and disengagement in our traditional system of education.

While the policy debates and shifting priorities continue to keep schools off-balance and parents in the dark we have a crisis that won't wait.

This book announces that we stand at a true "Oh, my God" moment in history. The numbers tell a story that can no longer be ignored. In addition to the disengagement numbers already cited, half of all students

are considered “at risk.” More than 25 percent of students live in poverty. 1.36 million students are homeless. None of this is a secret. Yet the system cannot or will not budge.

That’s why we need a manifesto, not another proposal. After 60 years of studies, we don’t have time for

After 60 years of studies, we don’t have time for more research, reform measures, or debate. The revolution has already started. It is even now overthrowing an obsolete industrial regime, structure, and set of values.

more research, reform measures, or debate. The revolution has already started. It is *now* overthrowing an obsolete industrial regime, structure, and set of values. That insurgency will reclaim learning as a fundamentally human experience. Gutenberg enabled the first learning revolution more than 500 years ago. Google now symbolizes the new one. Digital technology is disrupting traditional power centers by distributing knowledge to anyone who chooses to join this historical opportunity.

This Book: A Road Map

Before tsunamis bring death and destruction to coastlines, wild and domestic animals sense the coming devastation and escape to higher ground.

Maybe people are catching up. Today’s early warning systems are enabling human populations to flee destruction from natural forces. Our purpose for the book is not to build a case for change. That change is *here*; perceptive people plainly see it. At this point of history, a road map to the high ground would be of more benefit to the students, parents, communities, educators, and others who face destruction.

That is why this book is different from any other. Knowing that this subject carries great urgency and demands great scope and depth, we assembled about 60 career educators, a wide variety of specialists, NFP organizations, and business and community leaders who have been successfully working to rehumanize learning (see Figure 1.1). Many of these contributors have been in the trenches of education for decades.

We convened six summits, between June 2014 and January 2016, around the country in order to study very innovative schools that achieved and maintained excellence (often against great odds). Many books document the failures of our public education system. Others provide a vision for twenty-first-century schools. But there are no road



Figure 1.1 Columbus, Indiana, MindShift Meeting

maps for transforming and rehumanizing local schools or districts. Our book gives a very compelling *why* and, more important, clear maps for the new and uncharted territory.

Who Should Read This Book?

In researching and writing this book, our team focus was always on parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. This book is for them. It is for those who do not have the time or resources to sift through the many books or conferences or websites in order to gather the knowledge essential to taking action. We wrote this for those who are not willing to wait for local, regional, or national regulations to trickle down or be parachuted in.

That is also why we wrote a manifesto and not a typical market-driven volume. The tsunami is racing toward our shoreline. We are announcing a road to higher ground. In short, we want to save lives and join with others in building a safe future.

How One Family Escaped the Great Machine

It may help you to know the short story of one family who lived through the crumbling of the K–12 system and saw the seeding of new possibilities. That family is mine.

Back in the 1990s we moved to one of the best school districts in the state, not because we were snobs, but because we cared. We wanted our three kids to have fine educational experiences, rolling right through K–12. All three of them are, well, exceptional. By that I mean that they are true individuals. Everyone who knows them would agree. They did not come from an assembly line or central casting. Lisa and I did not know it at the time, but in looking back, we can see that our kids were like canaries in the coal mines. Their experiences (and those of thousands of other students) exposed the toxins in K–12 education.

And, I admit that our three children carried some surprising baggage.

Part of what makes Emily, our 24-year-old bold and beautiful daughter, so exceptional is Asperger syndrome. Her challenges have always caused this lovely and brilliant woman to express very unique social skills, perspectives, and boundaries.

I describe our second child, Daniel, as “a merry prankster.” He, the opposite of Emily when it came to social skills and boundaries, did extremely well in elementary school. But later he began to exhibit some discomfort with school rules and expectations. He was eventually diagnosed with ADHD.

Right out of the chute, our third child, Caleb, loved school. But very quickly (and for a whole different set of reasons) he, too, began disengaging in middle school. He started coming home and giving Lisa a hard time.

With all three of our children, we increasingly realized that we were not dealing with an organization of rational, knowledgeable, and empathetic teachers and administrators; we were coping with a machine. For a while, we tried to work with the Machine. We tried to change its speed, update its “software,” find a sense of compassion somewhere within its steel-toothed gears, help our kids to adapt to the

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Machine, help the Machine to adapt to them . . . but in the long run, there we were, caught between our love for our children and our ingrained respect for the education process.

In all three cases the Machine just kept moving our, and many other, students down the conveyor belt, delaying decisions, ordering tests, and pushing them into ill-fitting boxes. No one seemed to *care*. For example, none of Emily's teachers had training for working with students with Asperger's, or even had a working knowledge of the syndrome. Some of them did not believe she had it. After all, she had an outgoing personality and "looked normal."

One of Daniel's teachers did not believe in ADHD. As that teacher chewed gum and gazed out at us from his "bunker" (beneath his U.S. Marines buzz cut and over his folded arms), you could see that he had already diagnosed Daniel. He could see clearly that Daniel was a skateboarder and he knew *that* was "trouble in River City." In fact, he once said (while Daniel was in the room), "Kids who skateboard are always trouble."

It Takes a Village

According to an oft-quoted African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." In other words, all the people, values, institutions, and other cultural components of a village should cooperate harmoniously around the nurture, protection, and preparation of each child.

But what happens when the village does *not* contribute to the safe and orderly maturation of a child? The 2015 "Best Picture" Academy Award went to *Spotlight*, a movie about the sex abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. After quoting "It takes a village to raise a child," one of the main characters in the film observes that it also takes a village to *abuse* one.

I agree.

After the Machine damaged Emily, Lisa and I felt wounded, angry, and drained. Naturally, we wondered at what point we had missed an

Here's the point: two educated, responsible, caring, and hard-working parents could not make the Machine care for, or even protect, those who were entrusted to it.

opportunity to support our child. We strained to see what we might have done differently. I thought, "Hell, if my background as an executive, my work as an author and futurist, my understanding of negotiating and