

THE LONG VIEW //

DOUG LYNCH

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Doug Lynch knows how to put innovation into lifelong education. He founded Corporate Learning Services—an advisory program for large organizations such as American Express and JetBlue Airways on developing corporate universities. At Penn, Lynch created the first doctoral program of its kind for work-based learning executives as part of the Wharton School. At the Graduate School of Education, Lynch encourages use of video and virtual open houses to broaden learning opportunities.

Lynch is also a proponent of outreach, as a partner with Teach for America and continued supporter of the Teachers Institute of Philadelphia. He serves as chair of the U.S. delegation to the International Institute of Standards, is commissioner of the University Continuing Education Association, and sits on both the Public Policy Council for ASTD and the Board of Visitors for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Q | WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB, AND WHAT LESSON DID YOU TAKE AWAY FROM IT?

I dropped out of college to go work on the loading docks of Jewel food stores. I made a ton of money, got in the best shape of my life, and fell asleep every night in my clothes. I learned that despite being “smart,” I couldn’t do everything. I was the slowest one there, and I learned to greatly respect hard work, and just workers in general. I went back to school and ended up doing my thesis on the nexus of technology and workers in Sweden.

Q | WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE IMPORTANCE OF DRIVING INNOVATION IN LEARNING?

I am trained as an economist. We love learning because it is a perfect good. In economics, anything that you can make is a good. There are some bad goods like nuclear weapons, but all goods have an intrinsic value. For example, if you make a watch, the value to that watch is what you pay for it.

However, there are other effects called externalities, and there are certain negative externalities—pollution is probably the most famous one. You’re a manufacturing plant. You’re providing jobs,

creating wealth, and making products that the world needs. But you’re also polluting, which impacts the intrinsic value of what it is that you do.

The really cool thing about learning is that it only has positive externalities. What does that mean? So you’re a learning professional; why do you have your job? Because your company basically believes that developing people is good for the company. It improves the bottom line. It also turns out that there’s a really strong correlation between training and development and income. Countries that invest more in their people are more prosperous. The reason that this is all so important is that if we get this right, we help companies, countries, communities, and individuals live better lives. Therefore, we should feel a huge impetus to do something about it, and do it now.

Q | BASED ON YOUR EXTENSIVE OUTREACH EFFORTS, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

I think that this is a loaded question. Milton Friedman, a famous economist who won the Nobel Prize, created all of these problems with his *New York Times Magazine* article in the 1970s. The article basically said that the sole responsibility of a corporation is to make money. All this crap about social responsibility is nonsense. Companies’ jobs are to make money for shareholders. All of this stuff that we’re talking about now is a legacy of framing it that way.

The second you start teasing out social responsibility as something else, it becomes less. I think it’s wrong to think about social responsibility as something in and of itself that happens in this vacuum or cloister because companies who do it that way are basically doing it for lip service. This idea that somehow we are all schizophrenic, and that there are these fundamentally competing interests creates a false dichotomy. Great organizations are great places to work, and are also fiscally and socially responsible. Period. Any good CEO knows this.

Q | ARE YOU WORKING ON ANY NEW BOOKS OR PROJECTS?

Yes, I am all over the place. I’ve been approached by the National Constitution Center to work with them on a system of education for Afghanistan. I’m working on a game with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills folks that will teach teachers and kids.

I have a chapter in a book coming out of Harvard Press on Microsoft’s School of the Future and another chapter on production functions in nontraditional higher education. ASTD would like to see a book on why evidence matters, and Bob Zemsky has asked me to write a book with him. I am also working on a series of studies on the size of the training profession for ASTD.





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