Last week's symposium "Ideas Boston 2004" highlighted the enormous breadth and depth of intellectual capital that resides in our region. It was a needed reminder of how blessed we are to have intellectual pioneers who not only are defining new frontiers of knowledge within their disciplines but who are also exploring the potential at the crossroads where their disciplines intersect with others. These "border crossers" are the vanguard of a new generation of interdisciplinary thinkers and doers who are breaking down barriers and leveraging their distinctive competencies to achieve results for society that go well beyond their specialized fields of expertise.

Perhaps the final presenter, Tod Machover, best captured the spirit of the convocation. A composer and high-tech media inventor, Machover has created a synthetic cello for Yo-Yo Ma, developed instruments that allow 5-year-olds to compose their own music, and is harnessing his musical and technological genius to try to reach Alzheimer's patients who have lost speech recognition but respond to familiar words in song. Beyond the science, Machover and others are at the threshold of transformational ideas for society at large.

Boston has always been blessed with innovators - entrepreneurial geniuses who first introduced ether, the telephone, the public school, the public library, the mutual fund, instant photography, the safety razor, and much more.

These inventions have helped to revolutionize society, create entire new industries, produce enormous wealth, and fuel the future of our region, the nation and even the world. Celebrating the next generation of transformational thinkers and doers is a prescription for retaining our region's enormous competitive advantage economically, and for Boston to play a catalytic role in improving society at large.

The good news is that these transformational thinkers and doers are not limited to the sciences or the arts or the academy, but are found in virtually every sector. Consider three.

* City Year.

First begun in Boston 15 years ago as a privately funded urban Peace Corps, City Year now operates in 15 cities across America, has produced 8,000 young corps members who have given 10 million hours of service to their communities, inspired President Clinton to create Americorps, and is poised to introduce its inspiring and transformational concept of youthful, engaged citizenship next year.
in South Africa.

* Jumpstart.

This initiative links college students on work-study with inner-city at-risk preschool-age children. Now operating on 44 college campuses throughout the country, Jumpstart's 1,600 corps members helped improve the life chances and intellectual foundations of 6,000 vulnerable kids this year - and has aggressive plans to expand to 200 colleges and to reach 25,000 children every year. Senator Kerry has proposed a national initiative, built upon the Jumpstart model that might bring this effective, transformational approach to a million kids by attracting 100,000 college students across the country. (I have been an active in partner in both City Year and Jumpstart.)

* Values-driven businesses.

Jane Nelson and I have chronicled more than 60 companies that are internalizing values and principles into their core business strategy, gaining competitive advantage while contributing in meaningful ways to social progress.

They are reinventing their companies to benefit not only shareholders but stakeholders, engaging in new cross-sector alliances with nonprofit organizations and governments, treating their employees with respect, harnessing innovation for public benefit, measuring their performance against environmental and social metrics as well as the financial bottom line, practicing responsible and transparent corporate governance, and pursuing purpose beyond profits.

They are transforming the fundamentals of business as we've known it - they are making a profit while practicing principled leadership, creating great companies that are doing good by becoming a positive force for a cleaner environment and expanding access to economic opportunity for disadvantaged and disenfranchised people here at home and around the world.

Each of these movements is based on innovative ideas creatively and collaboratively applied in ways that go well beyond traditional "silos."

Innovation is a precious regional asset that needs to be nurtured. Innovation is also a critical component in reinventing our basic institutions - transforming them into partners for social progress and agents for coordinated and constructive action that promotes the public good.

More information about Tod Machover’s participation at the Boston Globe’s “IDEAS Boston 2004” conference at:

Summary of Machover’s session
IDEAS Boston talks available online
http://www.wgbh.org/ideas/forum

https://bostonglobe.com/promotions/ideas/speak_machoover.stm