Jeff Goins: Well, Professor Florida, thanks for taking the time to chat with me today.

Richard Florida: Oh, it's great to be with you, Jeff.

Jeff Goins: I want to talk about something that I hope you're not tired of talking about, which is this term, the creative class.

Richard Florida: No, I'm not tired of talking about this. I kind of like it.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Well, I want to talk about what's changed since you wrote The Rise of the Creative Class, but before we get to that, what is the creative class just in a brief definition?

Richard Florida: Well, before I wrote the original book in 2002, people talked about knowledge workers or think workers or economists had a term they called "human capital." That's what we were, we were human capital. The way they typically defined that is whether you had a college degree or not. If you had a college degree, you were a human capital or a knowledge worker, and if not, you were somebody else.

I thought back to lots of things I had read by classical economists. I thought the way our society was shaping up, it wasn't just our education who determined what we do and who we are, it's the kind of jobs we do. I went back to the Bureau of Labor statistics. They have data on over 800 actual occupations, actual jobs.

I identified people that do work that requires their knowledge, their mental skill, their cognitive skill and their creativity. Creativity, in fact, I think is what makes us all human. You see it in every little boy and girl. It's something we share. That would include the typical knowledge worker, the business professional, the management worker. It would include the science and technology worker, the engineer or the scientist, the person who works in a high tech startup, the Silicon Valley company.

It also includes artists and musicians and people who work in entertainment, in media, and writers, and journalists and all of that sort of thing. Initially I was kind of skeptical, and I really was, so we did two things. One, we looked at the share or people who do this kind of work across every city and metropolitan area in the United States.

Richard Florida: We actually traced it back to 1900. We couldn't do that for every city and metro, but we could do it for the country as a whole.

Jeff Goins: Sure.

Richard Florida: When the statistics came back, I was shocked. More than a third of us in the United States were involved in this kind of work, whereas a century ago in the year 1900, less than 5% of us did this kind of work. When I looked across cities and metros there were some places where less than
15% of people did this kind of work and other places were nearly 50% of people did this work.

I was like, "Oh, my God. This is much bigger than I think." Just for folks listening in, my view was if the blue collar worker and the man in the gray flannel suit and the organization man was the kind of typical worker of my father's era, this creative class worker, this person who works with their mind and their creativity, this scientist, this artist, this business professional, this manager, was really the kind of worker and class of our time.

Jeff Goins: How do you know if you're a member of the creative class? I mean, is everybody now a member of the creative class?

Richard Florida: Well, I write them a personal note in the mail and they pick it up and then they know they're officially in. I don't think people know.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Richard Florida: I think one of the reasons the book became so popular and a best seller is people said, "Oh, yeah."

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Richard Florida: Like I didn't expect that. I was writing in a social science tone with lots of statistics and data, but people picked up then the book and said, they told me this. That had never happened to me. I've written many other books. "Oh, you've described me. That's the way I am." I think the reason I did that is because I was just out in the field talking to people and looking at them and talking with what their motivations and desire and passions were.

I think increasingly, though, people have come to see, and one of the things I wrote in the book is it's not just what we do, we share a similar set of values. The creative class is more purpose driven. It's more meaning driven. Money's important, but it's not the only thing.

I looked at what people want in work. What they want in work is not just a big salary and stock options. Yeah, that was on the list, but that was more like near fifth or tenth. What they wanted was a great environment to work in, great peers, great co-workers to work with, to work on great challenging projects, to have flexibility to do their work, to be able to dress the way [inaudible 00:04:21] in a way they want.

All of these things became really important to people in the work they do.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. You told this story that I thought was fascinating. You were on the campus of a university and you ran into a tech company, I think, if I'm remembering it correctly, and they were just hanging out on the quad or something. I think this was actually in Pittsburgh. What you realized was all of these students, these graduates who were sought after for employees for these different companies that were trying to get them to come work for them, they were leaving Pittsburgh, which at one
time, and still today in many ways has a lot of industry there, and they were moving to places like Austin because it was cooler.

Not just because they were getting paid better or because there were better employment opportunities, but because the environment of the city was more appealing to them in terms of their lifestyle. Am I remembering that story correctly?

Richard Florida: Yeah, you know I've actually became friends with a guy who I profiled who was the guy with the earrings that he-

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Richard Florida: He's done quite a migration. He's moved a few places. He's actually back in Austin now. He's become one of the leading designers in the world.

Jeff Goins: Wow.

Richard Florida: Yeah. I think Pittsburgh was really interesting for me because I moved there to be part of the economic revival of the city. I was hired to run a research center at Carnegie Mellon University, which was key to that revival. To help, to work with the mayors, to work with city officials, the universities. In fact, my students took over many of the leading positions in economic development and technology transfer.

Jeff Goins: Wow.

Richard Florida: What we were doing wasn't working. I tell the story in that book, when I went off to do a sabbatical at Harvard, I learned that one of our big tech companies was moving to Boston. Not because Boston gave it financial incentives or bribes or tax incentives, but because the people they needed to do the work.

I came back and the story you described from the book, I asked my students, “How many of you want to stay in Pittsburgh?” Not a hand went up. What I found is, even though I thought Pittsburgh was a great city, with great architecture, great neighborhoods, great industrial feel, if you will, great universities, they wanted to go to places like Austin or New York or San Francisco or Seattle. I could go on. They're self evident places. Boston.

That had this kind of more up to date outlook. That were more diverse, more open minded, more to do, more young people, more fun, more energy was the word they used. I was puzzled over this word. What do they mean more energy?

As I dug into it, what they really were saying is a place that's open to my skill and ability. It's not just a fun place. It's not just a place with coffee shops and latte bars. It's not just a place with a great music scene. It's not just a place that values gay people and women and young people. It's a place where I can make a difference, where I don't have to be a middle aged white man. That everything about this city says it's open to talent and ability, not gender or race or ethnicity.
That's what they were seeing and were witnessing in this country: A great migration. It's still continuing. With anything, it's gotten more of these creative class people to a, really, a couple dozen, maybe twenty metropolitan areas. Again, while places like Pittsburgh have bounced back, while places like Detroit are building themselves fine little creative clusters, we really still see this migration to these 20 or so places that have more fully blown creative economies.

That's been my work is trying to tell people on the one hand, where you choose to live is really important. All right. I wrote a book on this called Who's Your City? Where you choose to live is really the most important decision you'll make in your life. It tells city leaders, business leaders and mayors you've got to get with this thing. It's not just about building a convention center and a couple of stadiums and giving business tax breaks. You've got to make yourself an exciting place and I call it quality of place. It's not quality of life. You've got to have a place people want to come to.

Jeff Goins: Can you elaborate a little more on that? You talk a lot about the power of place in your book and in your work and why geography matters so much. In fact, you've cited that study where you realized that not all places are creatively equal, where some places have more of these creative clusters than others.

Richard Florida: Why is place so important? Especially if I want to do creative work or I want to do something innovative in my career, why is moving to one city over another an important decision? How do I make that choice?

Jeff Goins: Can you elaborate a little more on that? You talk a lot about the power of place in your book and in your work and why geography matters so much. In fact, you've cited that study where you realized that not all places are creatively equal, where some places have more of these creative clusters than others.

Richard Florida: Well, it's so puzzling. You would think with the internet and technology and cell phones, smart phones, you could live anywhere you want.

Jeff Goins: Right, yeah.

Richard Florida: Right, yeah.

Richard Florida: In fact, you can live fewer places than ever because, I think there's a couple reasons. One is because your professional network, your ability to get work, especially if you're not working for a big company. If increasingly you're working as a freelancer or shifting jobs because companies aren't loyal to you anymore. The place you live is where your professional network is and where the people who do your work.

The second thing is that many of these industries themselves are concentrated. If you want to be in movies, you pretty much have to go to L.A. If you want to be in finance and investment, I guess you could work for Warren Buffet, right, but other than that, you're going to be in New York or London. If you want to do music, there are a few more places. You can go to L.A. or you can go to Nashville or you can go to New York, but there aren't a lot of places.

In many of these fields, the opportunity set is pretty constrained. Then, I think the other thing is, what I talk about in my book is, you want to find friends. There are a lot more people like you in a big city, like New York or L.A. or Chicago or even San Francisco or Boston. If you want to get married, you got to go where the boys. I heard that in my research, "Yeah. I moved to XYZ and it was fine, but I had no friends. My work was
great. I worked for this interesting company.” What happens if you get laid off? Where do you go to work if there’s no other jobs? You got to move.

I think for all those reasons, and in my book I called it quality of place. Of course, that means having a great job market. I called it a thick labor market. Having a great market to meet other people. I called it a thick mating market. Then, having all the other things people like to do: places to go out, places to do things, places to meet your friends.

I said this. Not just a lot of bars. One of the things that really struck me is when I asked young people, they said, "We can’t afford the recovery time. We want things that are more interesting to do, to wind down, rather than just go get obliterated." I think all of those things make for an interesting city.

One of the things that's happened since I've written the book, which is really surprising to me, is the amount of young, skilled creative class people who have poured back into the inner city. I think, yeah, I saw a glimmer of that trend, but you look at what is happening from cites from Los Angeles to New York to Chicago to even Detroit and Miami.

The number of young people moving into formally dilapidated industrial zones and remaking them is quite shocking actually. Lots of others have studied this. I think what they're finding is that young people want to be around vibrant, exciting places where they don't have to drive, where they can spend more time doing the things they love, where they can be around other people and have interesting things to do.

That's part of being a creative person. You can't turn it off. You want creative stimuli around you. I think all of those things mean that we're not only working differently, we're living differently as well.

Jeff Goins: I spoke to somebody who was talking about places that have historically been creative hot beds, hot beds of creativity, like New York City and that over time this person observed that these places become more and more expensive to live. New York is a great example. San Francisco. Then, what happens is the places that were made interesting and, I guess, creative by artists, those same places tend to push people out because they're expensive places to live. Have you seen anything like that with your research?

Richard Florida: Well, we should talk again in about a year. I’d like to come back. It’s what my new book is a large part about.

Jeff Goins: Oh. Interesting.

Richard Florida: I’m working on a new book now. It’s just about done. It’s going to come out right about a year from this conversation.

Jeff Goins: Okay. Good.

Richard Florida: A couple things. Jane Jacobs who was my mentor, the greatest urbanist, late urbanist now. She’d be approaching 100 years of age if she was still
alive. When I met her, after I wrote Rise. She lived a little bit longer than when I wrote The Rise of the Creative Class.

When I saw her last, she said something very interesting to me, "When a place gets boring, even the rich people leave." What she meant by that is the artists and creatives cultivate a neighborhood, and then it becomes more status oriented and attracts professional people and yuppies. Then, the super rich. Then, it becomes boring and even they leave and it goes through a cycle.

I think we're seeing that. I don't think we're seeing that in lots of places. I think we're seeing it in Manhattan, and obviously, there's been a lot of, Patty Smith has said it's terrible. David Byrne from the Talking Heads has said it's terrible. Moby said, "To heck with that. I'd move to L.A."

We're seeing it in parts of L.A. Although, what we're seeing is a massive migration of artists into downtown L.A., which is very interesting. We're seeing it in London. In fact, we're certainly seeing it San Francisco because San Francisco has now displaced the Silicon Valley as the number one center for venture capital. The downtown neighborhoods in San Francisco.

What's happened of course is we have this competition for limited space. We have the art galleries and the artists and the tech companies, and the rich people and the yuppies. They all want to live in the same, very small number of neighborhoods. What's generally been happening, though, aside from the movement of artists from New York to L.A., what we tend to be seeing, is that people are spreading out in those areas.

They're moving to Brooklyn and Brooklyn is becoming more expensive. They're moving to Queens or they're moving to Jersey City or some people are moving out to Hudson, New York. I think in London the same thing. I do think it's an issue and many people in my field say the big part of the problem is that we've not built enough urban housing, that, really, we've been building suburban housing and we've been limiting the development. We have too many lands use restrictions that limit the development of urban housing and too many people who don't want more housing. It pushes the prices up.

It is a very real issue. It's an issue that's really reared its head in the past several years. That said, I think it's still having a limited effect. It hasn't really caused New York or London to tumble down. They're still ranked as premiere creative centers. I think it is now reaching a tipping point.

Jeff Goins:

I mean, this is super interesting. I'm just wondering what's the practical implications of all of this? You write in The Rise of the Creative Class that it's time for the creative class to grow up and take responsibility, but first we have to recognize who we are. You talk a lot about that in the book.

I often talk to people who want to do creative work, want to write books or make music or whatever, and then they'll list these long lines of excuses or reasons why they can't succeed because they don't live in
this place or they can’t just up and move their family across the country, across the globe. I’m just wondering, how do you respond to that? How do we take this very interesting sociological information and make practical use of it?

Richard Florida: Well, I think first people [inaudible 00:16:09] buy my book Who’s Your City or just go to my website at creativeclass.com and take our place finder decision tool that we built precisely for this reason. We built a simple decision tool. I have every one of my students do an assignment on it to think about where they’re going to live, not only move after graduation, but make their career.

I think there’s a couple things. One, I think realizing that the place you choose to live, whether you make a conscious choice or not, you’re making a choice, has a critical effect on your ability to do everything in your life, to pursue your career, your work, your love life, educate your children. All of that.

Just be aware of it like the way you’re aware of choosing your career. We have tons of dating sites and advice on marriage and tons of advice on career. We don’t have any advice, and I argue I think, choosing the place you live is more important because all of those other choices flow from it. That’s number one.

Number two, I think don’t sacrifice your passion for money. It’s always a mistake. I talk to students almost every month who say, “I got this great job in consulting or finance and I’m miserable.” Clay Christensen at Harvard teaches a whole course now on your life strategy because he’s found that so many of the super successful people from Harvard Business School go off and make a lot of money and they’re miserable. Their marriages blow up. Their lives blow up. Their wives, or husbands or kids don’t love them because they’ve not thought about the breadth of what makes a meaningful life.

I think if you’re a creative person, you’re naturally included to find meaning and purpose in your life and that’s what you should do. Then, thirdly, and I think this is the big wake up call for all of us. I said in that book the creative class should wake up, should stop just pursuing their own passion and renovating their own little town house or lovely country farm home or loft in thinking with their friends in their little neighborhood they could make urban tribes, make a great life that there were bigger issues in society.

I think now in the United States, when we see the rise of, not necessarily of Donald Trump, but we’ve seen the rise of what happens in a backlash of angry people being left behind and the way that’s split [inaudible 00:18:21] for the creative class to develop more of a social purpose. My research shows this. Those of us in the creative class are doing pretty well.

Even when we take housing into account, we have a lot of money left over to spend on other things. It may not seem that way, but compared to people who work in factories or people who work in these low end service jobs, they’re the ones getting pushed out of these expensive
cities. They're the ones falling into poverty and despair. They're the ones seeing opportunity dry up for their kids.

It's not surprising to me that they're finding these more fringe, political movements to be part of and express their anger. That means we no longer have an America which is a whole society, but America which is two or three societies.

In that sense, the good news, Jeff, is I think young people get this. I think young people that I teach and young people around the country are saying, "It's not just enough for me to do well. I've got to be committed to a society to do well. I've got to make sure my society's more inclusive." I think that's where we're heading and I hope this is just a blip, this split, divided society. I certainly know mayors, not our national politicians, but mayors, Republican and Democrat all over this country are working more to build more inclusive societies with more opportunity for all.

The last thing I'll say on that note, if you want opportunity and if you want to go to a city that provides opportunity, believe it or not, this sounds paradoxical, but the cities with the highest level of inequality, the cities that even have the most divisions often have the most mobility. The cities like New York or L.A. or San Francisco, may be expensive and they may come up as having high inequality, but even for lower income people, working people, they have more opportunity because they're bigger and they're better labor markets.

I think for all of those reasons it may be a time where it looks like, oh, we have to grow up and we should, but I think I'm optimistic looking for the long run.

Jeff Goins: Wow. So great. Thanks for your time Richard.

Richard Florida: Hey, thank you Jeff. It's a pleasure being with you.