

## **Innovations in Thinking and Learning**

### **Roger Martin – Everyone has Potential**

ROGER: So I come from a small town in Ontario, very small town, Wallenstein. And it had some good things, and some not so good things. The good thing about it, actually, I believe, is that when you grow up in a small town, it's a very simple system, as opposed to growing up in Manhattan. And so you get this impression that you can figure stuff out. So that's the good side. The bad side about being, I think, from a little town in the middle of nowhere is that you are sure that there are smarter people out there who come from a background that causes them to be able to do things that of course you can't do, because you're from nowhere. And that's plagued me throughout my entire career. I went to a regional high school; it was a pretty good regional high school, but not an elite high school by any stretch. And I got the strange idea that I would go to Harvard in my head, which wasn't exactly what people from Elmira District Secondary School did.

And I applied and I got in, and I came this close to not attending. If it wouldn't have been from an intervention from my history teacher, Mr. Huschka, Robert Huschka. And so I only went because of that, but I almost didn't go, because I thought that's for where the really smart ones go, not somebody like you. And when I got there, I was going to major in psychology, but my roommate was the son of a psychologist and a psychiatrist, and already knew what graduate school he wanted to go to to do his PhD. And I just said, "Oh my God, I'm not smart like that, I'd better not do that," and I actually gave up on being a psychologist. Throughout my life, I've had this challenge of imagining there are smarter people lurking out there somewhere. I didn't -- I'd written lots of books and articles, they all happened after 1998, because I thought, it's the smarter people who have something to say who should write books. So in the first 17 years of my career, I wrote zero books and four total articles. In the last 18 years, I've written 10 books and 500 plus articles, because I had to convince myself that I'm smart enough.

So one of the things that I tell the kids in the schools, "You imagine that there are smarter people lurking out there with whom you cannot compete. There aren't. There aren't. There literally aren't. You're smart enough." Everybody's smart enough in their own domain to accomplish anything. And the only people that prevents people from accomplishing what they could is they think, they imagine, that there are smarter people out there who are destined to do those things. And there aren't.