

STAYING HUMAN – AND STAYING AHEAD

A Six Part Series on The Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human

By Matt Smith

Introduction

Let's start here. Work is Broken. School May Be Too.

The culprit is a quarter century of over-STEM-ulation (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). This has resulting in a parallel pandemic that I call “HDD” or Human Deficit Disorder. The innate energy and awareness that makes us human has been eroded for 25 years and is now under full attack. We need to accelerate the rise of our human advantages to harness artificial intelligence so it can create better futures for all.

Pulitzer Prize winning, Harvard Professor E.O. Wilson stated, “The problem with technology is we have paleolithic (lizard) brains, medieval institutions, and godlike technology. It is terrifically dangerous and now it is reaching a point of crisis overall”. But it is not too late - yet. But it is go time for those wishing to remain human.

Now about me. I identify as a former dropout, golden boy, corporate drone - turned author, founder, and aspiring professor. I have been a leader and coach from housekeeper to hedge fund. I have coached talent around the world, from the prairies of Canada to the deserts of Dubai and beyond. As for many other ways that I “identify”, I think the fun is in figuring that out together if and when it actually matters.

I have spent the last 18 months exploring, learning and discussing what it means to be human. The insights I discovered have resulted in an entirely new model for human

development and performance. I have experimented with these ideas, and I am now expressing them through a training series called: The Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human.

The first principle and purpose for leaders is to **build better futures**.

Yet we are on track, for the first time in history, to build a future that with a worse quality of life for the next generation. Exhausted, lonely, addicted, and filled with a sense of futility too many are zombie-ing our way through life. We are failing our purpose as humans right now.

To this I say three things:

First: “Hey kids, I am so sorry—we sold the bag on being human”.

Second: “All bets are off.”

Third: “Never let a crisis go to waste – there is also great opportunity here”.

Let's take humans at work as an example - where my expertise lies. Work is the single most shared human experience on the planet. Nearly everybody has a job at some point. Due to quantum leaps in technology 35-50% of jobs will no longer exist in the future. But at the same time we are projected to nearly double productivity (GDP).

A situation where we need half as many people to produce 2x as much seems to be the perfect time to blow up and recreate “work”. How will we use all this abundant wealth that AI will bring?

Now, don't get me wrong. While this cautions about artificial intelligence it also explores the unlimited possibilities it can bring. The future of work is about moving from productivity to possibility. From what we know and can do – to what we can imagine, create, and share. This is about the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence.

The real question is this: how can humans tap into our innate advantages to harness this technology so we can create better futures for everybody?

I am not an academic; in fact, I was such a poor student that I had to become a lifelong learner. I now see how this painful experience benefitted me. As a lifelong learner I have been developing new skills, new mindsets, and new ideas my entire career. I have never stopped learning and never will. Early in my career I discovered three rules for learning:

1. There are no mistakes - only lessons.
2. Lessons will be repeated until learned.
3. Learning never ends.

In this new world, our ability to learn, as humans, is critical – and AI will help us learn at a pace that seems unimaginable today – if we use it right. I have many metaphors for what AI is. **AI IS FIRE**. The discovery and harnessing of fire provided humans with nourishment and protection that quickly doubled the size of our brains and extended our life spans. Perhaps AI will have a similar impact on our capacity for lifelong learning.

The Series

I never thought I could create a series like this. While I lack structure, I am also hell of an ideas guy. I just need to find a way to do it my way.

On the popular Myers-Briggs personality indicator I am an ENFP. Between extroversion and introversion, I am extroverted; between intuition and sensing, highly intuitive; between thinking and feeling, I lean strongly toward feeling; and between judging and perceiving, I am technically a split, but I lean toward perceiving. The shorthand for ENFP is "Every Day, New Fantastic Possibilities" and that fits me perfectly.

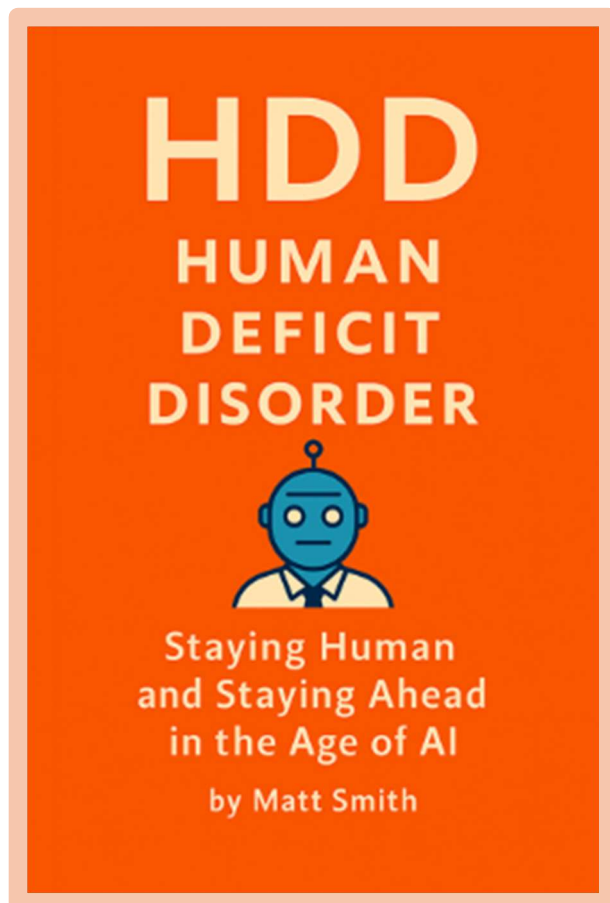
Once I started brainstorming, researching, and taking notes, I could not stop. I loved the pioneering aspect of exploration, the learning ignited more curiosity, and the ideas started to take form in a way that could help others. What started as a single book became a series on the future of work, leadership, and being human. It inspired a vision and strategy for a new

consulting firm. It grew into a future university course that could become the foundation for a new type of “university” that the world desperately needs now and in the future.

Ultimately, it evolved into an entirely new model and platform for human development and performance.

Let’s walk through the seven parts of this series.

Preface: HDD (Human Deficit Disorder)



In case you haven't already read between the lines: I am ADHD as fuck, and it is my greatest superpower. We did not call it that when I was in school, but looking back—the amount of novelty I craved, the visibility, and how disruptive I could be—makes it obvious. But the way I am wired also means I am very discerning about what captures my attention. But my cognitive and emotional filter casts such a wide net that it can intuitively make connections across people, things, places, and ideas that I have observed and deemed relevant. If it matters to me - then it really matters.

I have recently coined a new disorder that I suffer from—and frankly, that everybody

suffers from today to a certain extent. I call it **Human Deficit Disorder (HDD)**. I define it as the gradual erosion of human agency over consciousness, sentiment, expression, relationships, identity, and meaning, and their replacement with systems built for data collection, productivity, profit, and control.

The COVID virus was not the only pandemic. The longer-lasting one is the lack of human interaction. Deprived of sincere interaction – touch starved – and isolated from the energy of others, we lost a core part of being human. This goes beyond relationships and teams; it is also about our relationship with ourselves. We need to start a conversation together—and

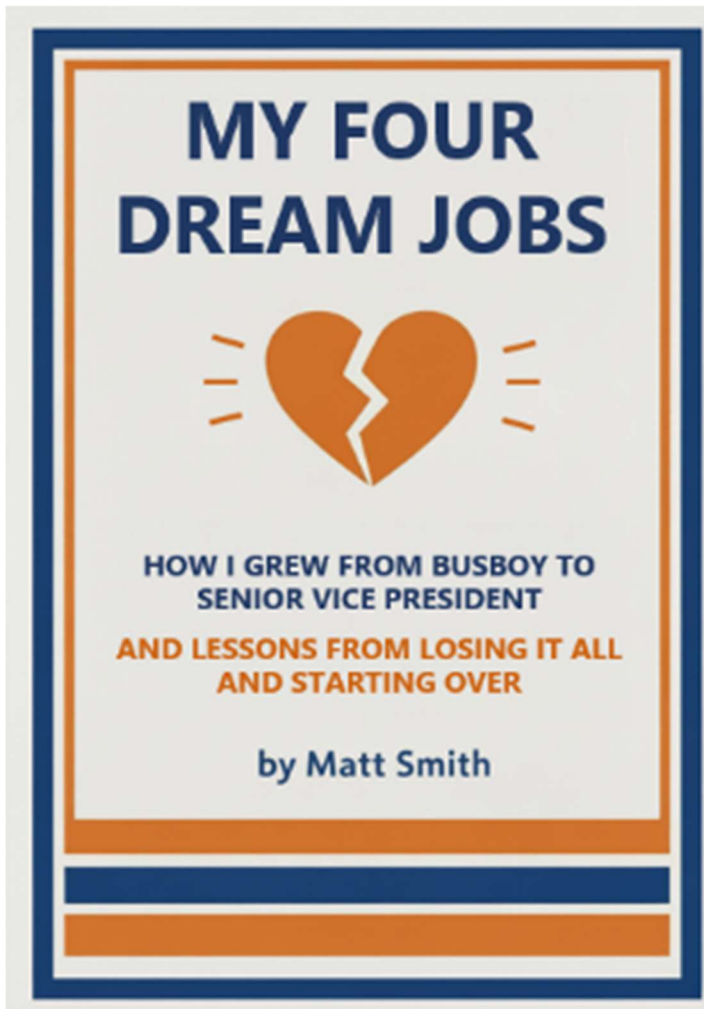
with ourselves—about what it means to be human and what we are willing to do to preserve that.

On a global scale, COVID resulted in every facet of being human getting converted into ones and zeros. Highly emotional experiences like funerals, weddings, dating, sex, fighting, and birth became coded, streamed and stored through the complete digitization of being human. And we were all forced to participate.

This series is a meditation on being human together.

Part 1: My Four Dream Jobs.

How I grew from busboy to senior vice president – and lessons from losing it all and starting over.



I used to love work. I have had 28 different jobs since I was a kid. Some were great, some were good, and in five of them I got fired. But three of them were dream jobs.

My Four Dream Jobs is a career story of how I grew from busboy to Senior Vice President, how I lost it all and started over during a spectacular COVID midlife crisis, and what I learned along the way. I share it to give you context about me, but because I believe it offers five human truths about manifesting the career you want.

Let me tell you about dream job number one: “The Pocklington”

After I dropped out of university I experienced my first major depression. I have since learned that “depressed means deep rest”. It is when we are exhausted of being the person we were trying to be and need to rest and regroup.

After several months I was ready to face the world again. I started my search for what was next. My mother always told me if I choose to do something that I love, then I will never work a day in my life. As a person who can sometimes struggle with motivation and self-discipline this seemed like a pretty good idea.

OK so... what do I love... hmmm? I'm 22 at the time so I don't really know myself that well and I am coming up blank. But then it hits me... I love the Edmonton Oilers from the National Hockey League.

I am one of the biggest Oilers fans you will ever meet. I rarely missed a game and was a regular caller on the postgame talk shows. In 2006 when the Oilers made it to game 7 of the Stanley cup finals I flew home from Dubai for games three, four, and six. Huge fan to say the least.

So, taking mother's advice, I thought what the hell – why not me? How can I land a job with the Edmonton Oilers.

Lacking any relevant experience or qualifications I decided my best chance would be a kickass letter to the owner of the Oilers.

So, I grabbed the phone book and looked up Peter Pocklington's address and phone number. I borrowed my father's Apple Macintosh (you know the one-piece 3.5 inch disk hard drive and monitor one that came in the insulated bag that looked like a beer cooler), and I sat down to write a killer letter to the richest and most famous man in town.

I thought why not, it will only take a few hours and who cares if you never hear from him. My mom also always told me to shoot for the moon because if you miss you land amongst the stars.

I wanted to write the kind of letter that would make my dreams come true – one that would capture his attention and imagination. My mother saved a copy of the letter in a box somewhere, but as I recall it went something like this:

Dear Mr. Pocklington,

My name is Matt Smith. I recently dropped out of university and am a bit lost. My mother told me that if I never want to work a day in my life I should do something I love. Well, the thing I love most is the Edmonton Oilers. Your team has turned a small prairie town into the City of Champions and put us on the map.

I read an article recently where you talked about the importance of ego if you wish to succeed. I too am an ego-driven man. I also know that you started out in the auto business and grew to own many Ford dealerships before growing your enterprise.

I have been working in auto sales for the past year. It has taught me great interpersonal skills. As a former president of my high school students' union, I know how to get people on board with ideas and be a leader.

It would be my dream job to work for the Oilers.

My strengths are in sales, marketing and public relations but I am willing to start anywhere. I know hockey, and this team, inside and out and eventually after proving myself I would love to do something in hockey operations. Would you please give me a chance to prove how valuable I can be to the Edmonton Oilers organization?

Mr. Pocklington, I'm sure that you must receive dozens of letters every single day so if you could return mine with a phone call so I can be assured that you've received it, it would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Matthew Smith

Lets Go Oilers!

I mailed the letter and the following Tuesday I get paged over the intercom at work.

“Matt Smith line two, Matt Smith line two”

“Hello Matt speaking, how may I help you”

“Matt, this is Peter Pocklington calling. I received your letter and I was impressed. Are you available next Monday at 10am to come in for an interview?”

“You mean come to your office?”

“Yes, Monday at 10:00”

“Yes sir, thank you so much, I will be there and I really look forward to meeting in person.”

I went to interview and two weeks later I started dream job number one as a corporate sale rep for the Edmonton Oilers.

On a side note, I was so excited on my way to the interview that I got a speeding ticket. I explained I was hurrying to a job interview, but he still gave me a ticket. Two weeks later, driving to my first day, I got pulled over for speeding by the exact same police officer, in the exact same place. As I rolled down the window he said, “So, hotshot, did you get the job?”. When I told him I was speeding to get to my first day as a member of the Edmonton Oilers, he let me off with a warning.

Dream Job Rule #1: Be bold and believe in yourself even when it seems crazy because the universe will only give you what you feel worthy of.

I continue my career journey and share four more lessons about Dream Jobs in the remainder of chapter one.

Part 2: Work Is Broken. School Might Be Too.



In Part Two, I critique the medieval institutions we still use for learning, earning, and growing. My conclusion is obvious: work is clearly broken. Whether we observe productivity, wage growth, inflation, employee engagement, well-being, innovation, competition, relationships or more – we have stagnated at best.

As for school, I share some of the symptoms of what is ailing it and, later in part seven. (Project NOISE), I offer my diagnosis and propose a treatment plan. A plan that includes my vision of a “meta-school” for lifelong learning, earning and being human.

The central argument is that work has become over-STEM-ulated. Science, technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) has become the prized area of study to get degrees that will "guarantee" future earnings. Over the last 20 years, every business in the world has become a technology company, no matter what it does. This has resulted in STEM-type cultures and STEM-type thinking in organizations, leaving the humanities behind.

But what if we could harness AI to save work and school and bring forth humanities. What would we do if we were so productive as a society that work became a choice (think universal income)? What would be possible then? Will work be different? Part Two concludes with why and how humans will choose to work in the future? So, what now?

Part 3: AI-penheimer - and the Rise of Human

Insight



AI-penheimer parallels the 2023 Oscar winning Oppenheimer story that details the complex, urgent, existential issues humans faced when splitting the atom in global an arms race during world war two.

Oppenheimer and his band of STEM geniuses discovered the risk that splitting the atom might ignite the atmosphere through a chain reaction and destroy the world. Through some fancy math, they determined there was a near-zero chance of this happening and proceeded. Compare that to today: many experts, including people like Elon Musk and leaders of big tech, estimate the risk that artificial intelligence could be catastrophic between 15% and 20%.

Yet, getting there first with the best AI promises global domination - whether you are a person, a country, a hemisphere, or an entity.

I do not see artificial intelligence only as the villain. I have personally experienced the amazing leaps in learning, research, and thought organization that AI enables.

In fact, this part is "written by mattGPT". As I have carefully and deliberately trained and partnered with my personal AIs to tell this part of the story together.

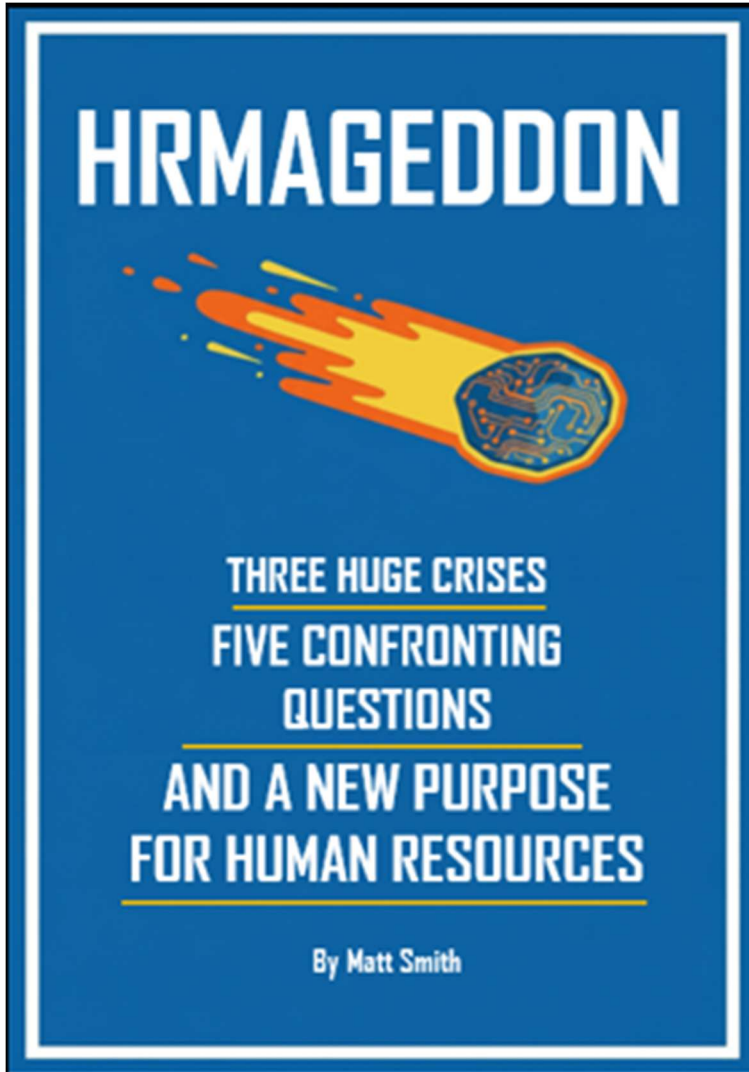
In AI-penheimer, we offer several metaphors for what artificial intelligence is: AI is pong, AI is Fire, AI is dog. I conclude that AI is genie in a bottle. A couple of years ago I attended the Artificial Intelligence conference hosted by the Society of Human Resources Management and Microsoft in Silicon Valley. The standout presentation, the one that stayed with me, came from Cassie Kozyrkov, former Chief Data and Decision Officer for Google. She described artificial intelligence as a genie in a bottle. It will grant wishes, but—as all genie stories go—the problem is not the genie or the bottle. The problem is us, and what we choose to wish for. I admit it - I was crushin' on Cassie bigtime.

In this part we also share the multi-decade journey of humans vs. technology telling the story pr Major Geek vs the Sensuous Man.

We conclude by recommending on how to train and use AI and propose a much grander fight we need to have with big technology. I have created "The FTW! Battle Plan" (Fuck The What!). Humans' counterstrike offensive against Major Geek and his STEMions. That's, what now.

art Four: HRMAGEDDON

Three Huge Crises. Five Confronting Questions. And a New Purpose for Human Resources.



HR is where this work really began. I took a midlife grownup time-out from my human resources career to envision and build my own HR consultancy. That detour sent me down a rabbit hole as I realized how negative my opinion of human resources had become. Not the people—the people are amazing—but the function itself is facing three huge crises: an identity crisis, a replication crisis, and an existential crisis.

This work began with my study of philosophy. If you are going to try to figure out what makes us human and how we will be human in the future, philosophy

is a good place to start. Within philosophy, my hero, Alan Watts 1915-1973, explained with the Chinese yin-yang symbol, which, among some other amazing insights I will share later. This taught me the importance of embracing our dark sides.

I applied this dark-side thinking to human resources. One day, while researching, I had a flash of insight: *What if HR is the villain in this story?* I could not shake the question. It reached inside me and grabbed my soul. For months I analyzed the "best practices" of HR, and I crafted five confronting questions for the function.

Question 1: Who weaponized "woke"?

HR has struggled for decades to shed the identity of "the police" or prove it is more than that. I am not going to caveate my belief by over-explaining the necessary and positive impact of social justice reform; that stands on its own. But the virtue signaling that accompanied the "woke" wave created a rapid and reckless rise in HR's power. So, what now?

Question 2: Are there arms dealers in the war for talent?

This is my question about HR technology. I am of a generation that has used or is familiar with every major form of technology we have had. I remember my first computer, the VIC-20, with 20 bytes of memory. My friend and I spent days using its most amazing feature: printing banners on a dot-matrix printer. The same is true of HR technology. When I started, we used DOS-based systems that got the job done. We moved to Windows, and by the early 2000s vendors were promising the cloud and advanced analytics.

With this question, I challenge the industry that has been selling every company the same systems for 20 years. Behind every technology lies a business process, and behind every process should lie your competitive advantage. Instead, we have centralized and commoditized the processes companies use to attract and manage talent. These systems have failed to show that they keep their promises. Worse – big HR Tech are actually destroying the very weapons they proclaimed the war to be about: talent (aka humans). Talk about the classic “arsonist, fireman, and firetruck maker: scenario. So, what now?

Question 3: Am I a one-eyed recruiter in the land of the blind?

This was the hardest question for me to face. A CEO I was coaching on interviewing, assessing, and selecting talent asked: "How do we know we aren't just one-eyed people in the land of the blind?" It hit me hard because I had built a career around interviewing, assessing, selecting, and developing talent, and was recognized as a leading expert.

Humans are complex; jobs are complex. Matching them using current processes and tools produces a failure rate that is far too high. It is widely believed that hiring from a shortlist is essentially a coin toss: about 50/50. The best experts might push that to 65%—from a coin

toss to a C-. This problem is compounded by the technology we use. Most companies use applicant tracking systems with algorithmic matching.

Look at what we are really doing. A hiring manager Googles a job description, dumps it into AI to "clean it up," and posts it. The job description then gets distributed by AI to multiple job boards. Applicants take that same description, drop it into ChatGPT, and get a targeted resume and cover letter generated. We have taken the most important decision a manager makes—who to hire—and one of the most important decisions a human makes—where to work—and handed most of that process to artificial intelligence. So, what now?

Question 4: Is SMART dumb?

For half a century, the standard for goal setting and performance management has been SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Agreed-upon, Resourced, and Time-bound (with many confusing variations). Technology vendors have turned this into a feature in their performance modules, further eroding any competitive advantage in how organizations direct, monitor, and evaluate their talent.

SMART made sense in a production-oriented, top-down world where cascading goals created line-of-sight. In today's world, which moves faster and where performance is more about how we think, imagine, decide, and relate, the SMART process no longer makes sense. My blunt take is this: SMART is a bland and blurry promise, judged by pretend measurements that are sandbagged and over-resourced, with an arbitrary deadline applied to something you were going to do anyway—masquerading as strategy. So what now?

Question 5: What if TED talks and TikToks aren't enough?

This question is about developing talent and how workplace learning has evolved—or devolved—over the last 25 years. The argument has always been that "people don't have time" for training. I think that is a ruse. If people were honest they would say, "Your training is shitty and a waste of my time."

Organizations responded by mandating in-class, in-person training—what I call "hostage training." Then came the explosion of e-learning, which was supposed to complement, not replace, in-person experiences. Over time, people complained that e-learning was too long or

contained too much information. The attention crisis and attention economy are well documented, and we did little to push back when people said, "You'll lose this generation if anything is longer than three and a half minutes."

Just because that may be true does not mean it should shape our strategy. Learning should stretch our attention span. It should create opportunities to relate to other humans and have constructive disagreements. Instead, we moved toward bite-sized content that learners could easily find on their own if they cared. We built playlists of TED talks and TikToks and called it "leadership development." So what now?

There is a sixth, penultimate question - a combination of the other five. It is difficult to ask, it is a bit PG13, it might make me blush, and is easy to misunderstand, so I will save it for until the end of part five. Oh, but I want to share it so badly.....but no.

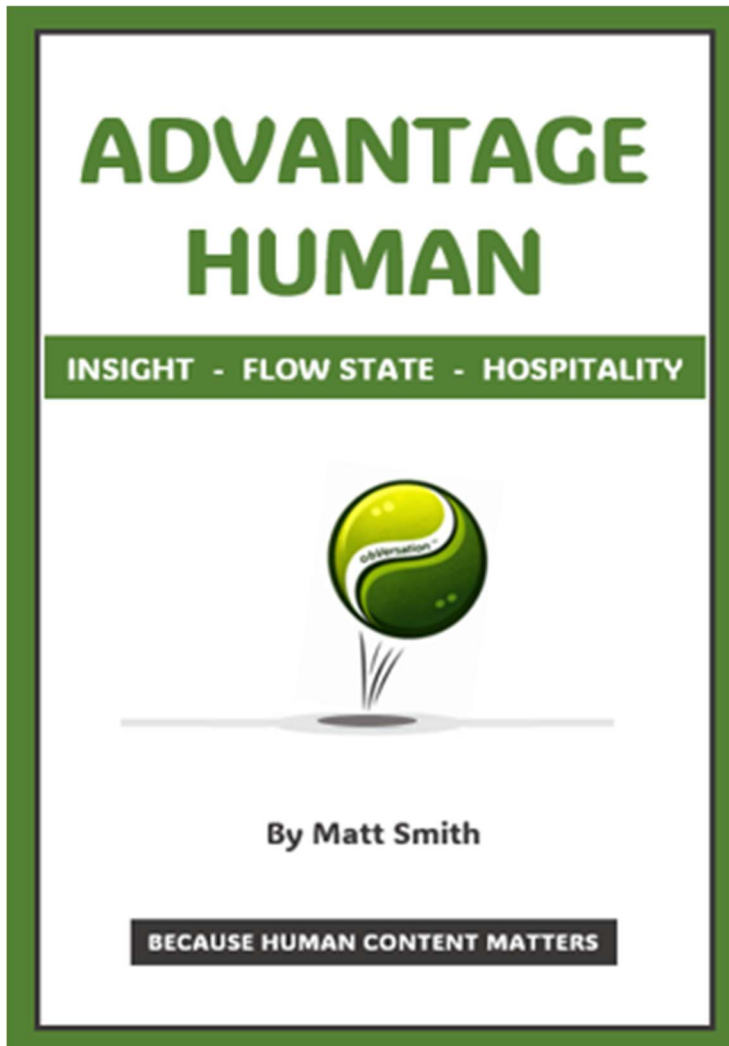
Finally, a part called **HRmageddon** will offer an entirely new purpose for human resources, driven by what people know and It is not a tweak, not a "transformation," not a rebrand in a long line of rebrands. Stop it..... "Ok, fine I will tell you what Question Six is... it asks 'Is HR Perverted?'. But don't tell anybody.

Back to the ubiquitous HR rebrands. We moved from Personnel, to Human Resources, to Human Capital Management, to Talent, to Talent & Culture, to People, to People & Culture. What other major function has had to rebrand itself so many times? I predict that 75% of the HR we see today will not exist in five years—maybe sooner if we are smart. So what now?

Where We Are So Far

So let's track where we are in the series. We have identified the real pandemic—Human Deficit Disorder. I have introduced myself through the lens of how great work can be and how it used to be. We have shared why work is broken and what it needs to look like in the future. We have developed a perspective on artificial intelligence, both good and bad, and identified the need to accelerate the rise of human insight. Lastly, we have asserted an entirely new model for human resources. Part 5 is the star of the show—the part all of this has been aiming toward.

Part 5: Advantage Human: Insight, Flow State, and Hospitality



Part 5 is called **Advantage Human: Human Insight, Flow State, and Hospitality**. These are the most important innate human gifts we must draw on in this new age where anything is possible.

Advantage Human introduces the "Triple X Model": **Explore, Experiment, Express**. It is about how, as individuals, partners, and teams, we can search for what matters, create it more effortlessly, and direct it toward others. We need to understand our roots and the shoulders of giants we stand on through philosophy. We need to use those insights to generate new ideas and test them to see their real impact. And we

must be more deliberate and human in the way we express ourselves.

We live in an age of unlimited channels—chat rooms, threads, social media—but we have very little to say that truly makes the world a better place. In the absence of real insight and ideas, we have filled those channels with hate and divisiveness.

Human Insight is the uniquely human capacity to convert intuition and experience into meaning that reshapes identity, values, and action. It tends to arrive through emotion, reflection, contradiction, silence, tension, or loss—not through pursuit or efficiency. It is hard to grasp, and feels as though it comes from elsewhere. It is an awareness that emerges

from within. AI guesses; humans listen. It starts with listening to ourselves, connecting with our own consciousness.

This requires us to confront dark sides that may not be welcome in our psyche or in today's world. It requires us to integrate these shadow selves and put them in a place where they are useful to how we explore, experiment, and express. It requires us to know our whole selves and to discover what truly matters to us.

The second human advantage is **Flow State**. Flow is a state of consciousness in which attention becomes fully absorbed, self-doubt and over-thinking disappear, time alters, and action feels effortless—resulting in unusually high levels of creativity, learning, and performance.

Flow has become an emerging field in positive psychology in recent years, but its roots go back thousands of years. In Sanskrit, the word *samadhi* loosely means "to place the mind fully into one point." In Chinese, *wu wei* can be translated as "without forcing action" or "the gentle way." Today's science shows flow is tied to our brain chemistry and neurobiology. There is a cycle, and there are triggers and blockers that individuals and teams can use to reach levels of performance and creativity previously thought unimaginable.

For me, flow is a state of play. Flow is those moments when my brain chemistry and biology are working for me instead of against me – and it is so fun! It is when I have a clear purpose and uninterrupted concentration for something I care about, and I get to apply to my natural talents to it. Talent is the way we are wired. The recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that make me unique. Research suggests that in flow we are up to 800% more productive, yet the average person is in flow only 12% of their time at work. We have this innate human advantage that can make us eight times more creative and productive, and bring us immense joy and well-being, yet our medieval institutions and systems limit us to just 12% of the time. Imagine increasing that to 25% or more.

Our third human advantage is **Hospitality**. Beyond service, hospitality is the provision of care to another person and the emotional exchange and gratitude that result. AI can serve us and will likely get very good at it. But AI cannot care. It cannot feel empathy, perceive

subtle needs, or conjure the thing we did not know we needed. Hospitality is a feeling, and artificial intelligence can't. Yet?

I have spent most of my life in the hospitality industry as a trainer and HR professional. I have had the privilege of working with and observing extraordinary humans who are hardwired to provide hospitality. I know the love and power generated through these human experiences. I worry that this advantage is becoming devalued and scarce.

If we return to our genie-in-the-bottle metaphor, you can think of it this way: human insight helps us find what matters; flow state allows us to effortlessly create it; hospitality is how we share it with others so that everyone benefits.

obVersation

The Advantage Human chapter—and frankly this entire body of work—can be traced back to one of the first and greatest insights I had along the way. It was so profound that I invented and trademarked a word for it: **obVersation**.

I am a huge fan of philosopher Alan Watts (1915–1973), former Berkeley professor and chief hippie. In one of my top-four favorite lectures, he describes the universe as symbolized by the yin-yang: an obverse pattern. I became fascinated by the word *obverse*. If a central part of human insight is understanding roots of meaning and appreciating the giants whose shoulders we stand on, then one of the furthest back we can reach is the yin-yang and the nature of an obverse relationship.

The root comes from the Latin *vertere*, "to turn." It definitely feels like, when it comes to being human and building better futures, we need to make some turns. I played with related words: reverse (to turn back), inverse (to turn inside out), converse (to turn together), subverse (to turn under), and many more. I found semantic and mathematical definitions but nothing that clicked. I even reached out to a PhD mathematician I was coaching and asked if there was a simple mathematical formula that illustrated "obverse." Still, nothing clicked.

Eventually, I came to understand obverse as a *complementary reversal*—turned towards the other and the same truth. So, I began to play with these "verses" to shape my thinking and

open new insights. The act of searching for the other side, then finding a way to turn both sides toward the truth of what matters, made all the difference.

The Magnum Opus

After about 1,432 minutes of meditating on what it means to be human and - what matters, I turned to flow state more formally. I completed a 16-week course at the Flow Research Collective. At the end, we were asked to build our **magnum opus**—the cumulative expression of our talents and life's work. It starts with a massively transformative purpose and challenges you to access flow to achieve it.

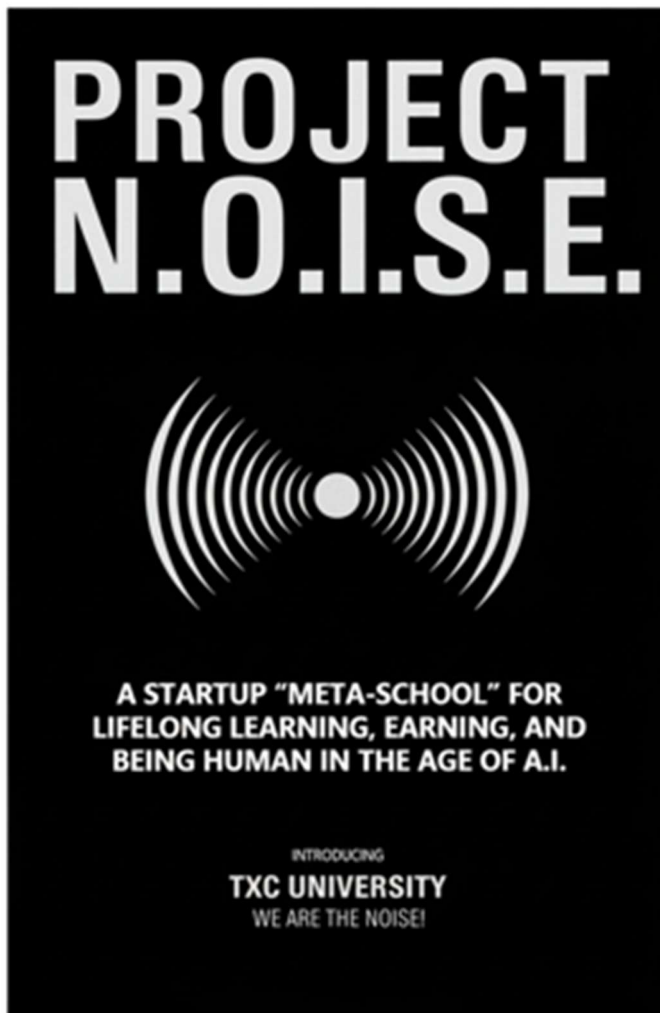
I have been a corporate trainer for 25 years. I have written dozens of programs, taken more than a few dozen of the world's leading programs, and followed the training market for a quarter century. I know the skepticism people bring to "purpose exercises.". So, I decided to just play along with the experiment—by dreaming as big as I possibly could.

I dreamed of putting a dent in the human resources universe. I broke that down into milestones and clear steps over the coming decade. I wanted to challenge my skill and compete because that is in my nature. I created my own challenge to Stephen Kotler, author and flow expert from the Flow Research Collective: that I could turn 800% improvement into 1600%. I took a learning mindset, played with, embraced, extrapolated, and customized every tool in the toolkit of human insight, flow state, and hospitality to put that dent in HR and build better futures.

The design and personal research of my experiment are now complete, so I must express it. I need to hear what others have to say about it. Most importantly, like any good academic pursuit, see if it can be replicated by others. **Part 6: Project NOISE** is my Magnum Opus the result of my human insight, my experience with flow state, and my desire to provide it to others. But more, it is also the collection of humans, stories, energies I have had the chance to be with. It has become more than a massively transformative purpose and more than a magnum opus. It is my calling—that which I cannot, not do.

Part 6: Project NOISE

Project NOISE is a new and different model for human development and performance in the age of AI possibilities.



It materializes as a startup **meta school** for lifelong learning, earning, and being human. It is the creation of TXC "University." The word "university" is in quotes because I do not issue credits or degrees—yet. But if you were going to start a university, you would need new approaches and a kick ass introductory course as its flagship. TXC's Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human series, *Staying Human and Staying Ahead*, is that course.

Disruptive content is a great place to start, but given my diagnosis of how school may be broken, we also need an entirely different structure and approach. That is where a meta school

comes in. A meta school sits above traditional universities as a supplement to what they provide. TXC University is as much about being human as it is about earning a credential. It is about lifelong learning.

The world has changed dramatically and so have our demographics. Many of us live with our parents until we are 26. We do not get married until our early 30s, do not have children until our mid-30s, do not retire until our mid-60s (if at all), and may live into our 100s. Yet we still expect young, still-forming humans to rush into a four-year degree immediately after high school that will cast the die for the rest of their lives. We must shift to lifelong learning, and a meta school school like TXC is there for all stages of life.

TXC University believes the great “turning” humans will go through over the next decade is a shift from productivity to possibility—from what we know and do to what we can imagine and create. It is built on principles of being human in this universe: survival to creation, energy follows awareness, abundance, play, brain-heart coherence, oneness, and gratitude.

In the context of starting a new school and a new model for human development and performance, we must begin with the first truth: **survival to creation**. Over the last half-century, higher education lost its way, focusing more on "providing jobs" than on scholarship, learning, discovery, and creativity. Given the world we have been building, that may have been a necessary evolution, but we cannot create when we are fighting for our own survival. Youth and many adults cannot afford homes, cannot afford groceries, and cannot dream of vacations or experiences without accumulating debt.

As a meta school, TXC University is integrated with TXC Enterprises—a collection of human-centric entrepreneurial ventures. Think of it as bringing internship, co-op, part-time, and full-time employment opportunities under the same roof as learning.

The biggest challenge in education is the retention and application gap. People spend years learning things, rarely use them, and a decade later cannot remember what they studied. Bringing lifelong learning and meaningful work under the same roof is both logical and, in the language of obVersation, a complementary reversal.

TXC University differs from traditional universities in several ways. We believe in taking more than four years to learn and explore the next 80 years of life. We resist majors and minors. We encourage learning "just enough" about as absolute many things as you can before you cast what will matter for the next 80 years. Be very deliberate about what you choose to learn a lot about.

We believe learning should feel like play, and 100% of our courses are built on the backbone of experiential activities. We believe in travel, and because our delivery model is 80% online, students can participate from anywhere in the world. Online learning will never be a substitute for in person training – but it sure is a great compliment.

Perhaps our boldest belief is that humans should earn while they learn.

Under TXC Enterprises we have tested a model for on-demand gig internships called **TXC Studio Labs**. We have developed and tested a platform for first-time entrepreneurs called **Lemonade Stands**. We are developing a disruptive HR technology to transform workplaces so they can accelerate the rise of human insight, flow state, and hospitality. And our hospitality offering **Passages by TXC** is a pop-up café that provides experiences for human growth and connection.

These four ventures will be all student owned and operated. We will need a great team and significant effort to move from early seed stage to real opportunities for students to earn while they learn. Thankfully I know a LOT about talent and team development.

My Fourth Dream Job

I have been going through a Triple eXXX passage myself. In fact, the sub-subtitle of the series is : “...*as told through a most spectacular midlife crisis by Matt Smith*”. Through this magnum opus I have been reimagining myself. I have explored my (w)hole self(s) and placed each of my dimensions and talents into a useful role. I have decided what I want to say. I have even enlisted former and future versions of myself too. I was told: If you want to manifest a new reality, you must do it with a new personality.

Time for a new me, I guess.

I love to teach. I love to learn. I love to curate incredible experiences that facilitate fun and learning. The channel I use to express these ideas, and myself, matters. I have been searching for a way to teach, influence, and help build better futures. A way that has optionality and brings out the best in me and in my learners. I have built a vision, created dream job number four, and with that I introduce you to "Professor Matt"— quotation marks because I am not a "real" professor yet—and **The Professor Matt Show** on YouTube, where the fun and learning begin.

Considering all of this—the seven-part series on Human Deficit Disorder; who I am and how I have manifested dream jobs; the passage I am going through; the godlike technology

arriving; our medieval institutions of work and school; and workplaces that are sucking the humanness out of us—when we imagine a world where we develop and express our human advantages of insight, flow state, and hospitality, and package it all into an entirely new model for lifelong learning, earning, and being human, I have found my calling.

Perhaps my calling is best described as helping others find theirs, no matter what stage of life they are in.

Conclusion

So, what is **Project NOISE**, and what does it stand for? It started with a question about what it means to be human at work. That question inspired a book—*The Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human*. The ideas grew into a philosophy, a series of courses, and a YouTube channel. It demands a new purpose playbook and new technology for a totally different HR. It helps students and other humans discover different career possibilities. It provides a platform for new ideas and human-centric entrepreneurial ventures. It will act as a non-profit champion for people at risk, helping them express their talents.

Project NOISE exists to build better futures by accelerating the rise of human insight, flow state, and service. It is a meta school for lifelong learning, earning, and being human in the age of AI—but it all depends on the human content.

More practically: Project NOISE stands for a **NASA Of Inner Space Exploration. We are about our full humanity to harness future technologies.**

We want the best of STEM used properly, alongside the best of our inner worlds. STEM took us to the moon and is taking us to Mars. It is helping us understand outer space in ways we could not have imagined. That is great.

But the humanities remind us that, at the end of the day, we are energy and awareness—we are here to play, to sing, to dance. We are here to feel. And it all comes from our inner spaces.

Perhaps I could put it this way, “If a robot feels in the forest, does anybody care?”.

That is Project NOISE: the NASA of inner space exploration. That is TXC “University”. NOISE is not a gimmick. It points directly at us and what we are trying to do.

Imagine that one TXC “University” had a football team. At most games, there is a pump-up song in the third quarter. At Michigan, it is "Mr. Brightside." At Virginia Tech, it is "Enter Sandman." At TXC University, where our slogan is "We are the NOISE," I already have the perfect pump-up song picked out. When you hear it, you will get why.

I end with my gravest concern of all.

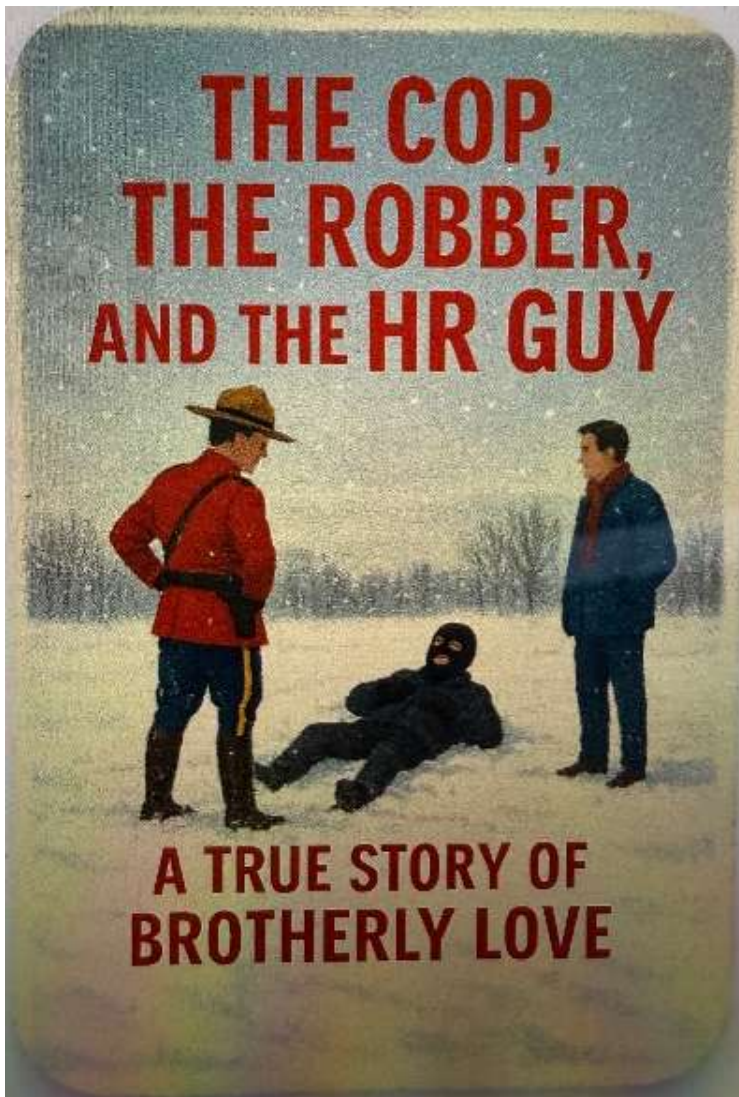
I started this journey by exploring dark sides, confronting reality, and having some real courage - and I do believe now that we are failing as a species. The markers are everywhere.

One of the most startling markers is that many studies show people aged 19 to 34 are having 30% less sex than previous generations. When things are so bad that a species is procreating very significantly less, that must be a red flag.

It is time to move from survival to creation. So, let's make some NOISE, accelerate our human advantages, and build better futures.

<Play Come on Feel the Noise by Quiet Riot. From the Album called: MENTAL HEATH.>

P.S.



In case seven books in two years is not evidence enough of FLOW STATE, wait until you hear about the true crime screenplay my brother Craig and I are writing called: THE COP, THE ROBBER, AND THE HR GUY. A TRUE STORY OF BROTHERLY LOVE.

It's 100% true, and completely unbelievable.

STAYING HUMAN – AND STAYING AHEAD

A Six Part Series on The Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human

By Matt Smith

Introduction

Let's start here. Work is Broken. School May Be Too.

The culprit is a quarter century of over-STEM-ulation (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). This has resulting in a parallel pandemic that I call “HDD” or Human Deficit Disorder. The innate energy and awareness that makes us human has been eroded for 25 years and is now under full attack. We need to accelerate the rise of our human advantages to harness artificial intelligence so it can create better futures for all.

Pulitzer Prize winning, Harvard Professor E.O. Wilson stated, “The problem with technology is we have paleolithic (lizard) brains, medieval institutions, and godlike technology. It is terrifically dangerous and now it is reaching a point of crisis overall”. But it is not too late - yet. But it is go time for those wishing to remain human.

Now about me. I identify as a former dropout, golden boy, corporate drone - turned author, founder, and aspiring professor. I have been a leader and coach from housekeeper to hedge fund. I have coached talent around the world, from the prairies of Canada to the deserts of Dubai and beyond. As for many other ways that I “identify”, I think the fun is in figuring that out together if and when it actually matters.

I have spent the last 18 months exploring, learning and discussing what it means to be human. The insights I discovered have resulted in an entirely new model for human

development and performance. I have experimented with these ideas, and I am now expressing them through a training series called: The Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human.

The first principle and purpose for leaders is to **build better futures**.

Yet we are on track, for the first time in history, to build a future that with a worse quality of life for the next generation. Exhausted, lonely, addicted, and filled with a sense of futility too many are zombie-ing our way through life. We are failing our purpose as humans right now.

To this I say three things:

First: “Hey kids, I am so sorry—we sold the bag on being human”.

Second: “All bets are off.”

Third: “Never let a crisis go to waste – there is also great opportunity here”.

Let's take humans at work as an example - where my expertise lies. Work is the single most shared human experience on the planet. Nearly everybody has a job at some point. Due to quantum leaps in technology 35-50% of jobs will no longer exist in the future. But at the same time we are projected to nearly double productivity (GDP).

A situation where we need half as many people to produce 2x as much seems to be the perfect time to blow up and recreate “work”. How will we use all this abundant wealth that AI will bring?

Now, don't get me wrong. While this cautions about artificial intelligence it also explores the unlimited possibilities it can bring. The future of work is about moving from productivity to possibility. From what we know and can do – to what we can imagine, create, and share. This is about the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence.

The real question is this: how can humans tap into our innate advantages to harness this technology so we can create better futures for everybody?

I am not an academic; in fact, I was such a poor student that I had to become a lifelong learner. I now see how this painful experience benefitted me. As a lifelong learner I have been developing new skills, new mindsets, and new ideas my entire career. I have never stopped learning and never will. Early in my career I discovered three rules for learning:

1. There are no mistakes - only lessons.
2. Lessons will be repeated until learned.
3. Learning never ends.

In this new world, our ability to learn, as humans, is critical – and AI will help us learn at a pace that seems unimaginable today – if we use it right. I have many metaphors for what AI is. **AI IS FIRE**. The discovery and harnessing of fire provided humans with nourishment and protection that quickly doubled the size of our brains and extended our life spans. Perhaps AI will have a similar impact on our capacity for lifelong learning.

The Series

I never thought I could create a series like this. While I lack structure, I am also hell of an ideas guy. I just need to find a way to do it my way.

On the popular Myers-Briggs personality indicator I am an ENFP. Between extroversion and introversion, I am extroverted; between intuition and sensing, highly intuitive; between thinking and feeling, I lean strongly toward feeling; and between judging and perceiving, I am technically a split, but I lean toward perceiving. The shorthand for ENFP is "Every Day, New Fantastic Possibilities" and that fits me perfectly.

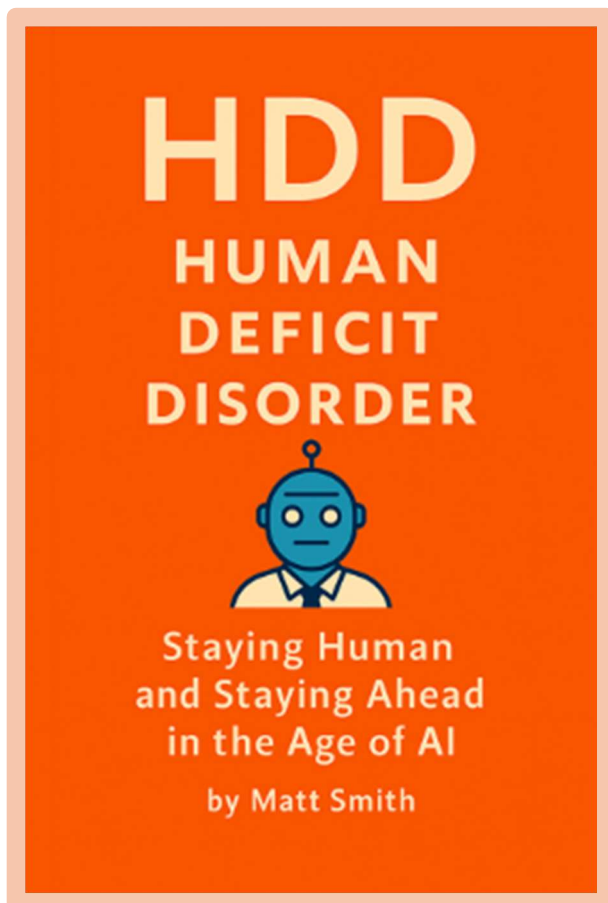
Once I started brainstorming, researching, and taking notes, I could not stop. I loved the pioneering aspect of exploration, the learning ignited more curiosity, and the ideas started to take form in a way that could help others. What started as a single book became a series on the future of work, leadership, and being human. It inspired a vision and strategy for a new

consulting firm. It grew into a future university course that could become the foundation for a new type of “university” that the world desperately needs now and in the future.

Ultimately, it evolved into an entirely new model and platform for human development and performance.

Let’s walk through the seven parts of this series.

Preface: HDD (Human Deficit Disorder)



In case you haven't already read between the lines: I am ADHD as fuck, and it is my greatest superpower. We did not call it that when I was in school, but looking back—the amount of novelty I craved, the visibility, and how disruptive I could be—makes it obvious. But the way I am wired also means I am very discerning about what captures my attention. But my cognitive and emotional filter casts such a wide net that it can intuitively make connections across people, things, places, and ideas that I have observed and deemed relevant. If it matters to me - then it really matters.

I have recently coined a new disorder that I suffer from—and frankly, that everybody

suffers from today to a certain extent. I call it **Human Deficit Disorder (HDD)**. I define it as the gradual erosion of human agency over consciousness, sentiment, expression, relationships, identity, and meaning, and their replacement with systems built for data collection, productivity, profit, and control.

The COVID virus was not the only pandemic. The longer-lasting one is the lack of human interaction. Deprived of sincere interaction – touch starved – and isolated from the energy of others, we lost a core part of being human. This goes beyond relationships and teams; it is also about our relationship with ourselves. We need to start a conversation together—and

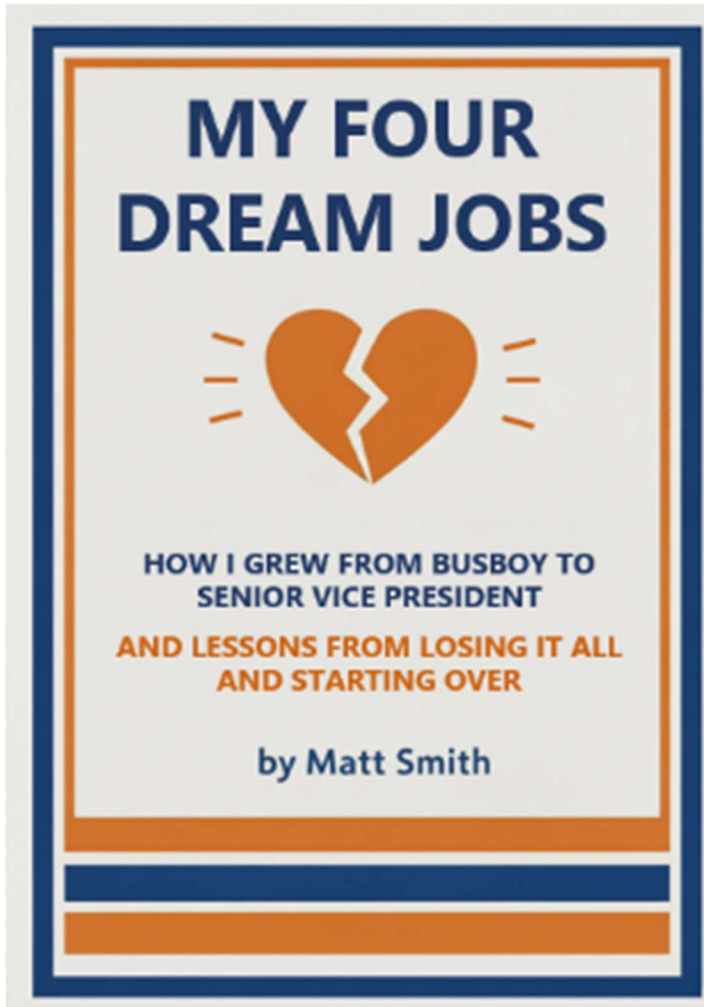
with ourselves—about what it means to be human and what we are willing to do to preserve that.

On a global scale, COVID resulted in every facet of being human getting converted into ones and zeros. Highly emotional experiences like funerals, weddings, dating, sex, fighting, and birth became coded, streamed and stored through the complete digitization of being human. And we were all forced to participate.

This series is a meditation on being human together.

Part 1: My Four Dream Jobs.

How I grew from busboy to senior vice president – and lessons from losing it all and starting over.



I used to love work. I have had 28 different jobs since I was a kid. Some were great, some were good, and in five of them I got fired. But three of them were dream jobs.

My Four Dream Jobs is a career story of how I grew from busboy to Senior Vice President, how I lost it all and started over during a spectacular COVID midlife crisis, and what I learned along the way. I share it to give you context about me, but because I believe it offers five human truths about manifesting the career you want.

Let me tell you about dream job number one: “The Pocklington”

After I dropped out of university I experienced my first major depression. I have since learned that “depressed means deep rest”. It is when we are exhausted of being the person we were trying to be and need to rest and regroup.

After several months I was ready to face the world again. I started my search for what was next. My mother always told me if I choose to do something that I love, then I will never work a day in my life. As a person who can sometimes struggle with motivation and self-discipline this seemed like a pretty good idea.

OK so... what do I love... hmmm? I'm 22 at the time so I don't really know myself that well and I am coming up blank. But then it hits me... I love the Edmonton Oilers from the National Hockey League.

I am one of the biggest Oilers fans you will ever meet. I rarely missed a game and was a regular caller on the postgame talk shows. In 2006 when the Oilers made it to game 7 of the Stanley cup finals I flew home from Dubai for games three, four, and six. Huge fan to say the least.

So, taking mother's advice, I thought what the hell – why not me? How can I land a job with the Edmonton Oilers.

Lacking any relevant experience or qualifications I decided my best chance would be a kickass letter to the owner of the Oilers.

So, I grabbed the phone book and looked up Peter Pocklington's address and phone number. I borrowed my father's Apple Macintosh (you know the one-piece 3.5 inch disk hard drive and monitor one that came in the insulated bag that looked like a beer cooler), and I sat down to write a killer letter to the richest and most famous man in town.

I thought why not, it will only take a few hours and who cares if you never hear from him. My mom also always told me to shoot for the moon because if you miss you land amongst the stars.

I wanted to write the kind of letter that would make my dreams come true – one that would capture his attention and imagination. My mother saved a copy of the letter in a box somewhere, but as I recall it went something like this:

Dear Mr. Pocklington,

My name is Matt Smith. I recently dropped out of university and am a bit lost. My mother told me that if I never want to work a day in my life I should do something I love. Well, the thing I love most is the Edmonton Oilers. Your team has turned a small prairie town into the City of Champions and put us on the map.

I read an article recently where you talked about the importance of ego if you wish to succeed. I too am an ego-driven man. I also know that you started out in the auto business and grew to own many Ford dealerships before growing your enterprise.

I have been working in auto sales for the past year. It has taught me great interpersonal skills. As a former president of my high school students' union, I know how to get people on board with ideas and be a leader.

It would be my dream job to work for the Oilers.

My strengths are in sales, marketing and public relations but I am willing to start anywhere. I know hockey, and this team, inside and out and eventually after proving myself I would love to do something in hockey operations. Would you please give me a chance to prove how valuable I can be to the Edmonton Oilers organization?

Mr. Pocklington, I'm sure that you must receive dozens of letters every single day so if you could return mine with a phone call so I can be assured that you've received it, it would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Matthew Smith

Lets Go Oilers!

I mailed the letter and the following Tuesday I get paged over the intercom at work.

“Matt Smith line two, Matt Smith line two”

“Hello Matt speaking, how may I help you”

“Matt, this is Peter Pocklington calling. I received your letter and I was impressed. Are you available next Monday at 10am to come in for an interview?”

“You mean come to your office?”

“Yes, Monday at 10:00”

“Yes sir, thank you so much, I will be there and I really look forward to meeting in person.”

I went to interview and two weeks later I started dream job number one as a corporate sale rep for the Edmonton Oilers.

On a side note, I was so excited on my way to the interview that I got a speeding ticket. I explained I was hurrying to a job interview, but he still gave me a ticket. Two weeks later, driving to my first day, I got pulled over for speeding by the exact same police officer, in the exact same place. As I rolled down the window he said, “So, hotshot, did you get the job?”. When I told him I was speeding to get to my first day as a member of the Edmonton Oilers, he let me off with a warning.

Dream Job Rule #1: Be bold and believe in yourself even when it seems crazy because the universe will only give you what you feel worthy of.

I continue my career journey and share four more lessons about Dream Jobs in the remainder of chapter one.

Part 2: Work Is Broken. School Might Be Too.



In Part Two, I critique the medieval institutions we still use for learning, earning, and growing. My conclusion is obvious: work is clearly broken. Whether we observe productivity, wage growth, inflation, employee engagement, well-being, innovation, competition, relationships or more – we have stagnated at best.

As for school, I share some of the symptoms of what is ailing it and, later in part seven. (Project NOISE), I offer my diagnosis and propose a treatment plan. A plan that includes my vision of a “meta-school” for lifelong learning, earning and being human.

The central argument is that work has become over-STEM-ulated. Science, technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) has become the prized area of study to get degrees that will "guarantee" future earnings. Over the last 20 years, every business in the world has become a technology company, no matter what it does. This has resulted in STEM-type cultures and STEM-type thinking in organizations, leaving the humanities behind.

But what if we could harness AI to save work and school and bring forth humanities. What would we do if we were so productive as a society that work became a choice (think universal income)? What would be possible then? Will work be different? Part Two concludes with why and how humans will choose to work in the future? So, what now?

Part 3: AI-penheimer - and the Rise of Human

Insight



AI-penheimer parallels the 2023 Oscar winning Oppenheimer story that details the complex, urgent, existential issues humans faced when splitting the atom in global an arms race during world war two.

Oppenheimer and his band of STEM geniuses discovered the risk that splitting the atom might ignite the atmosphere through a chain reaction and destroy the world. Through some fancy math, they determined there was a near-zero chance of this happening and proceeded. Compare that to today: many experts, including people like Elon Musk and leaders of big tech, estimate the risk that artificial intelligence could be catastrophic between 15% and 20%.

Yet, getting there first with the best AI promises global domination - whether you are a person, a country, a hemisphere, or an entity.

I do not see artificial intelligence only as the villain. I have personally experienced the amazing leaps in learning, research, and thought organization that AI enables.

In fact, this part is "written by mattGPT". As I have carefully and deliberately trained and partnered with my personal AIs to tell this part of the story together.

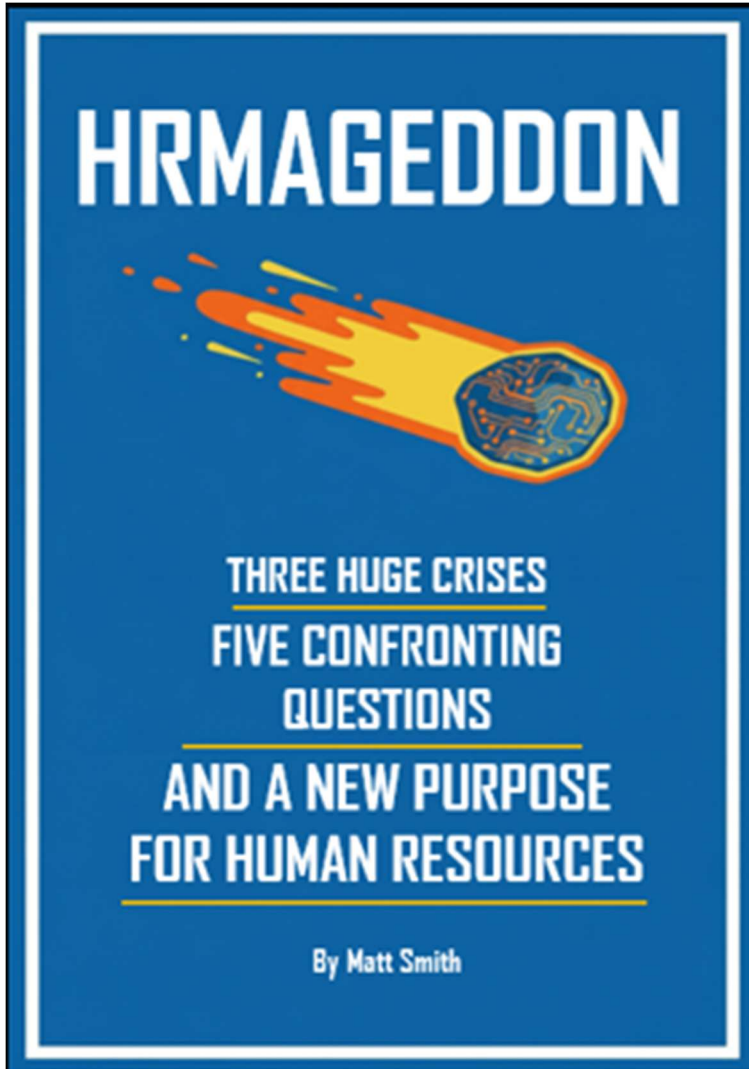
In AI-penheimer, we offer several metaphors for what artificial intelligence is: AI is pong, AI is Fire, AI is dog. I conclude that AI is genie in a bottle. A couple of years ago I attended the Artificial Intelligence conference hosted by the Society of Human Resources Management and Microsoft in Silicon Valley. The standout presentation, the one that stayed with me, came from Cassie Kozyrkov, former Chief Data and Decision Officer for Google. She described artificial intelligence as a genie in a bottle. It will grant wishes, but—as all genie stories go—the problem is not the genie or the bottle. The problem is us, and what we choose to wish for. I admit it - I was crushin' on Cassie bigtime.

In this part we also share the multi-decade journey of humans vs. technology telling the story pr Major Geek vs the Sensuous Man.

We conclude by recommending on how to train and use AI and propose a much grander fight we need to have with big technology. I have created "The FTW! Battle Plan" (Fuck The What!). Humans' counterstrike offensive against Major Geek and his STEMions. That's, what now.

art Four: HRMAGEDDON

Three Huge Crises. Five Confronting Questions. And a New Purpose for Human Resources.



HR is where this work really began. I took a midlife grownup time-out from my human resources career to envision and build my own HR consultancy. That detour sent me down a rabbit hole as I realized how negative my opinion of human resources had become. Not the people—the people are amazing—but the function itself is facing three huge crises: an identity crisis, a replication crisis, and an existential crisis.

This work began with my study of philosophy. If you are going to try to figure out what makes us human and how we will be human in the future, philosophy

is a good place to start. Within philosophy, my hero, Alan Watts 1915-1973, explained with the Chinese yin-yang symbol, which, among some other amazing insights I will share later. This taught me the importance of embracing our dark sides.

I applied this dark-side thinking to human resources. One day, while researching, I had a flash of insight: *What if HR is the villain in this story?* I could not shake the question. It reached inside me and grabbed my soul. For months I analyzed the "best practices" of HR, and I crafted five confronting questions for the function.

Question 1: Who weaponized "woke"?

HR has struggled for decades to shed the identity of "the police" or prove it is more than that. I am not going to caveate my belief by over-explaining the necessary and positive impact of social justice reform; that stands on its own. But the virtue signaling that accompanied the "woke" wave created a rapid and reckless rise in HR's power. So, what now?

Question 2: Are there arms dealers in the war for talent?

This is my question about HR technology. I am of a generation that has used or is familiar with every major form of technology we have had. I remember my first computer, the VIC-20, with 20 bytes of memory. My friend and I spent days using its most amazing feature: printing banners on a dot-matrix printer. The same is true of HR technology. When I started, we used DOS-based systems that got the job done. We moved to Windows, and by the early 2000s vendors were promising the cloud and advanced analytics.

With this question, I challenge the industry that has been selling every company the same systems for 20 years. Behind every technology lies a business process, and behind every process should lie your competitive advantage. Instead, we have centralized and commoditized the processes companies use to attract and manage talent. These systems have failed to show that they keep their promises. Worse – big HR Tech are actually destroying the very weapons they proclaimed the war to be about: talent (aka humans). Talk about the classic “arsonist, fireman, and firetruck maker: scenario. So, what now?

Question 3: Am I a one-eyed recruiter in the land of the blind?

This was the hardest question for me to face. A CEO I was coaching on interviewing, assessing, and selecting talent asked: "How do we know we aren't just one-eyed people in the land of the blind?" It hit me hard because I had built a career around interviewing, assessing, selecting, and developing talent, and was recognized as a leading expert.

Humans are complex; jobs are complex. Matching them using current processes and tools produces a failure rate that is far too high. It is widely believed that hiring from a shortlist is essentially a coin toss: about 50/50. The best experts might push that to 65%—from a coin

toss to a C-. This problem is compounded by the technology we use. Most companies use applicant tracking systems with algorithmic matching.

Look at what we are really doing. A hiring manager Googles a job description, dumps it into AI to "clean it up," and posts it. The job description then gets distributed by AI to multiple job boards. Applicants take that same description, drop it into ChatGPT, and get a targeted resume and cover letter generated. We have taken the most important decision a manager makes—who to hire—and one of the most important decisions a human makes—where to work—and handed most of that process to artificial intelligence. So, what now?

Question 4: Is SMART dumb?

For half a century, the standard for goal setting and performance management has been SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Agreed-upon, Resourced, and Time-bound (with many confusing variations). Technology vendors have turned this into a feature in their performance modules, further eroding any competitive advantage in how organizations direct, monitor, and evaluate their talent.

SMART made sense in a production-oriented, top-down world where cascading goals created line-of-sight. In today's world, which moves faster and where performance is more about how we think, imagine, decide, and relate, the SMART process no longer makes sense. My blunt take is this: SMART is a bland and blurry promise, judged by pretend measurements that are sandbagged and over-resourced, with an arbitrary deadline applied to something you were going to do anyway—masquerading as strategy. So what now?

Question 5: What if TED talks and TikToks aren't enough?

This question is about developing talent and how workplace learning has evolved—or devolved—over the last 25 years. The argument has always been that "people don't have time" for training. I think that is a ruse. If people were honest they would say, "Your training is shitty and a waste of my time."

Organizations responded by mandating in-class, in-person training—what I call "hostage training." Then came the explosion of e-learning, which was supposed to complement, not replace, in-person experiences. Over time, people complained that e-learning was too long or

contained too much information. The attention crisis and attention economy are well documented, and we did little to push back when people said, "You'll lose this generation if anything is longer than three and a half minutes."

Just because that may be true does not mean it should shape our strategy. Learning should stretch our attention span. It should create opportunities to relate to other humans and have constructive disagreements. Instead, we moved toward bite-sized content that learners could easily find on their own if they cared. We built playlists of TED talks and TikToks and called it "leadership development." So what now?

There is a sixth, penultimate question - a combination of the other five. It is difficult to ask, it is a bit PG13, it might make me blush, and is easy to misunderstand, so I will save it for until the end of part five. Oh, but I want to share it so badly.....but no.

Finally, a part called **HRmageddon** will offer an entirely new purpose for human resources, driven by what people know and It is not a tweak, not a "transformation," not a rebrand in a long line of rebrands. Stop it..... "Ok, fine I will tell you what Question Six is... it asks 'Is HR Perverted?'. But don't tell anybody.

Back to the ubiquitous HR rebrands. We moved from Personnel, to Human Resources, to Human Capital Management, to Talent, to Talent & Culture, to People, to People & Culture. What other major function has had to rebrand itself so many times? I predict that 75% of the HR we see today will not exist in five years—maybe sooner if we are smart. So what now?

Where We Are So Far

So let's track where we are in the series. We have identified the real pandemic—Human Deficit Disorder. I have introduced myself through the lens of how great work can be and how it used to be. We have shared why work is broken and what it needs to look like in the future. We have developed a perspective on artificial intelligence, both good and bad, and identified the need to accelerate the rise of human insight. Lastly, we have asserted an entirely new model for human resources. Part 5 is the star of the show—the part all of this has been aiming toward.

Part 5: Advantage Human: Insight, Flow State, and Hospitality



Part 5 is called **Advantage Human: Human Insight, Flow State, and Hospitality**. These are the most important innate human gifts we must draw on in this new age where anything is possible.

Advantage Human introduces the "Triple X Model": **Explore, Experiment, Express**. It is about how, as individuals, partners, and teams, we can search for what matters, create it more effortlessly, and direct it toward others. We need to understand our roots and the shoulders of giants we stand on through philosophy. We need to use those insights to generate new ideas and test them to see their real impact. And we

must be more deliberate and human in the way we express ourselves.

We live in an age of unlimited channels—chat rooms, threads, social media—but we have very little to say that truly makes the world a better place. In the absence of real insight and ideas, we have filled those channels with hate and divisiveness.

Human Insight is the uniquely human capacity to convert intuition and experience into meaning that reshapes identity, values, and action. It tends to arrive through emotion, reflection, contradiction, silence, tension, or loss—not through pursuit or efficiency. It is hard to grasp, and feels as though it comes from elsewhere. It is an awareness that emerges

from within. AI guesses; humans listen. It starts with listening to ourselves, connecting with our own consciousness.

This requires us to confront dark sides that may not be welcome in our psyche or in today's world. It requires us to integrate these shadow selves and put them in a place where they are useful to how we explore, experiment, and express. It requires us to know our whole selves and to discover what truly matters to us.

The second human advantage is **Flow State**. Flow is a state of consciousness in which attention becomes fully absorbed, self-doubt and over-thinking disappear, time alters, and action feels effortless—resulting in unusually high levels of creativity, learning, and performance.

Flow has become an emerging field in positive psychology in recent years, but its roots go back thousands of years. In Sanskrit, the word *samadhi* loosely means "to place the mind fully into one point." In Chinese, *wu wei* can be translated as "without forcing action" or "the gentle way." Today's science shows flow is tied to our brain chemistry and neurobiology. There is a cycle, and there are triggers and blockers that individuals and teams can use to reach levels of performance and creativity previously thought unimaginable.

For me, flow is a state of play. Flow is those moments when my brain chemistry and biology are working for me instead of against me – and it is so fun! It is when I have a clear purpose and uninterrupted concentration for something I care about, and I get to apply to my natural talents to it. Talent is the way we are wired. The recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that make me unique. Research suggests that in flow we are up to 800% more productive, yet the average person is in flow only 12% of their time at work. We have this innate human advantage that can make us eight times more creative and productive, and bring us immense joy and well-being, yet our medieval institutions and systems limit us to just 12% of the time. Imagine increasing that to 25% or more.

Our third human advantage is **Hospitality**. Beyond service, hospitality is the provision of care to another person and the emotional exchange and gratitude that result. AI can serve us and will likely get very good at it. But AI cannot care. It cannot feel empathy, perceive

subtle needs, or conjure the thing we did not know we needed. Hospitality is a feeling, and artificial intelligence can't. Yet?

I have spent most of my life in the hospitality industry as a trainer and HR professional. I have had the privilege of working with and observing extraordinary humans who are hardwired to provide hospitality. I know the love and power generated through these human experiences. I worry that this advantage is becoming devalued and scarce.

If we return to our genie-in-the-bottle metaphor, you can think of it this way: human insight helps us find what matters; flow state allows us to effortlessly create it; hospitality is how we share it with others so that everyone benefits.

obVersation

The Advantage Human chapter—and frankly this entire body of work—can be traced back to one of the first and greatest insights I had along the way. It was so profound that I invented and trademarked a word for it: **obVersation**.

I am a huge fan of philosopher Alan Watts (1915–1973), former Berkeley professor and chief hippie. In one of my top-four favorite lectures, he describes the universe as symbolized by the yin-yang: an obverse pattern. I became fascinated by the word *obverse*. If a central part of human insight is understanding roots of meaning and appreciating the giants whose shoulders we stand on, then one of the furthest back we can reach is the yin-yang and the nature of an obverse relationship.

The root comes from the Latin *vertere*, "to turn." It definitely feels like, when it comes to being human and building better futures, we need to make some turns. I played with related words: reverse (to turn back), inverse (to turn inside out), converse (to turn together), subverse (to turn under), and many more. I found semantic and mathematical definitions but nothing that clicked. I even reached out to a PhD mathematician I was coaching and asked if there was a simple mathematical formula that illustrated "obverse." Still, nothing clicked.

Eventually, I came to understand obverse as a *complementary reversal*—turned towards the other and the same truth. So, I began to play with these "verses" to shape my thinking and

open new insights. The act of searching for the other side, then finding a way to turn both sides toward the truth of what matters, made all the difference.

The Magnum Opus

After about 1,432 minutes of meditating on what it means to be human and - what matters, I turned to flow state more formally. I completed a 16-week course at the Flow Research Collective. At the end, we were asked to build our **magnum opus**—the cumulative expression of our talents and life's work. It starts with a massively transformative purpose and challenges you to access flow to achieve it.

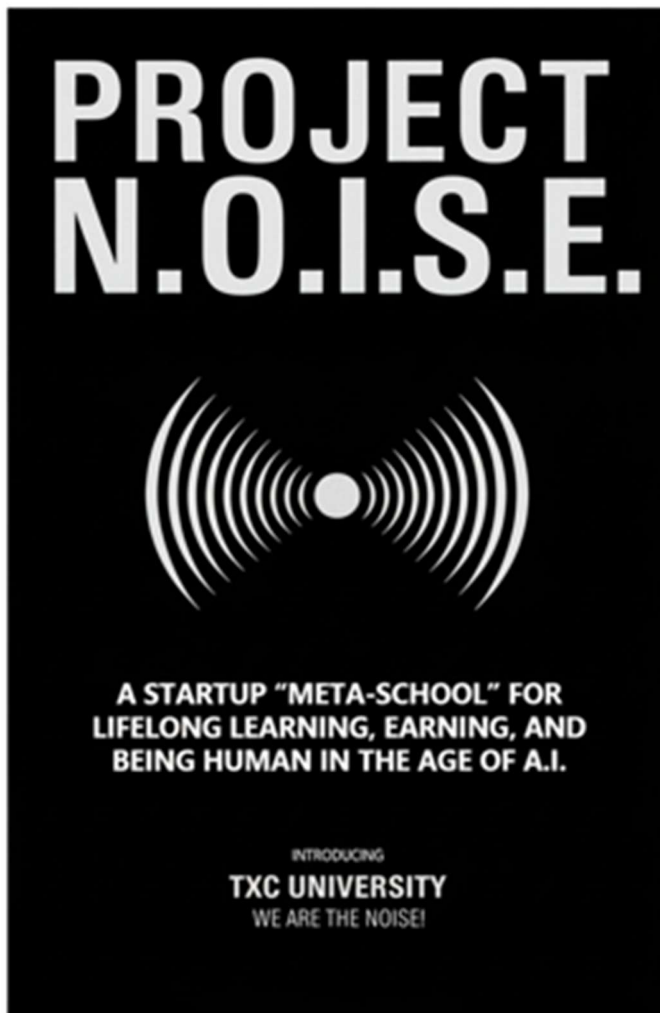
I have been a corporate trainer for 25 years. I have written dozens of programs, taken more than a few dozen of the world's leading programs, and followed the training market for a quarter century. I know the skepticism people bring to "purpose exercises.". So, I decided to just play along with the experiment—by dreaming as big as I possibly could.

I dreamed of putting a dent in the human resources universe. I broke that down into milestones and clear steps over the coming decade. I wanted to challenge my skill and compete because that is in my nature. I created my own challenge to Stephen Kotler, author and flow expert from the Flow Research Collective: that I could turn 800% improvement into 1600%. I took a learning mindset, played with, embraced, extrapolated, and customized every tool in the toolkit of human insight, flow state, and hospitality to put that dent in HR and build better futures.

The design and personal research of my experiment are now complete, so I must express it. I need to hear what others have to say about it. Most importantly, like any good academic pursuit, see if it can be replicated by others. **Part 6: Project NOISE** is my Magnum Opus the result of my human insight, my experience with flow state, and my desire to provide it to others. But more, it is also the collection of humans, stories, energies I have had the chance to be with. It has become more than a massively transformative purpose and more than a magnum opus. It is my calling—that which I cannot, not do.

Part 6: Project NOISE

Project NOISE is a new and different model for human development and performance in the age of AI possibilities.



It materializes as a startup **meta school** for lifelong learning, earning, and being human. It is the creation of TXC "University." The word "university" is in quotes because I do not issue credits or degrees—yet. But if you were going to start a university, you would need new approaches and a kick ass introductory course as its flagship. TXC's Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human series, *Staying Human and Staying Ahead*, is that course.

Disruptive content is a great place to start, but given my diagnosis of how school may be broken, we also need an entirely different structure and approach. That is where a meta school

comes in. A meta school sits above traditional universities as a supplement to what they provide. TXC University is as much about being human as it is about earning a credential. It is about lifelong learning.

The world has changed dramatically and so have our demographics. Many of us live with our parents until we are 26. We do not get married until our early 30s, do not have children until our mid-30s, do not retire until our mid-60s (if at all), and may live into our 100s. Yet we still expect young, still-forming humans to rush into a four-year degree immediately after high school that will cast the die for the rest of their lives. We must shift to lifelong learning, and a meta school school like TXC is there for all stages of life.

TXC University believes the great “turning” humans will go through over the next decade is a shift from productivity to possibility—from what we know and do to what we can imagine and create. It is built on principles of being human in this universe: survival to creation, energy follows awareness, abundance, play, brain-heart coherence, oneness, and gratitude.

In the context of starting a new school and a new model for human development and performance, we must begin with the first truth: **survival to creation**. Over the last half-century, higher education lost its way, focusing more on "providing jobs" than on scholarship, learning, discovery, and creativity. Given the world we have been building, that may have been a necessary evolution, but we cannot create when we are fighting for our own survival. Youth and many adults cannot afford homes, cannot afford groceries, and cannot dream of vacations or experiences without accumulating debt.

As a meta school, TXC University is integrated with TXC Enterprises—a collection of human-centric entrepreneurial ventures. Think of it as bringing internship, co-op, part-time, and full-time employment opportunities under the same roof as learning.

The biggest challenge in education is the retention and application gap. People spend years learning things, rarely use them, and a decade later cannot remember what they studied. Bringing lifelong learning and meaningful work under the same roof is both logical and, in the language of obVersation, a complementary reversal.

TXC University differs from traditional universities in several ways. We believe in taking more than four years to learn and explore the next 80 years of life. We resist majors and minors. We encourage learning "just enough" about as absolute many things as you can before you cast what will matter for the next 80 years. Be very deliberate about what you choose to learn a lot about.

We believe learning should feel like play, and 100% of our courses are built on the backbone of experiential activities. We believe in travel, and because our delivery model is 80% online, students can participate from anywhere in the world. Online learning will never be a substitute for in person training – but it sure is a great compliment.

Perhaps our boldest belief is that humans should earn while they learn.

Under TXC Enterprises we have tested a model for on-demand gig internships called **TXC Studio Labs**. We have developed and tested a platform for first-time entrepreneurs called **Lemonade Stands**. We are developing a disruptive HR technology to transform workplaces so they can accelerate the rise of human insight, flow state, and hospitality. And our hospitality offering **Passages by TXC** is a pop-up café that provides experiences for human growth and connection.

These four ventures will be all student owned and operated. We will need a great team and significant effort to move from early seed stage to real opportunities for students to earn while they learn. Thankfully I know a LOT about talent and team development.

My Fourth Dream Job

I have been going through a Triple eXXX passage myself. In fact, the sub-subtitle of the series is : “...as told through a most spectacular midlife crisis by Matt Smith”. Through this magnum opus I have been reimagining myself. I have explored my (w)hole self(s) and placed each of my dimensions and talents into a useful role. I have decided what I want to say. I have even enlisted former and future versions of myself too. I was told: If you want to manifest a new reality, you must do it with a new personality.

Time for a new me, I guess.

I love to teach. I love to learn. I love to curate incredible experiences that facilitate fun and learning. The channel I use to express these ideas, and myself, matters. I have been searching for a way to teach, influence, and help build better futures. A way that has optionality and brings out the best in me and in my learners. I have built a vision, created dream job number four, and with that I introduce you to "Professor Matt"— quotation marks because I am not a "real" professor yet—and **The Professor Matt Show** on YouTube, where the fun and learning begin.

Considering all of this—the seven-part series on Human Deficit Disorder; who I am and how I have manifested dream jobs; the passage I am going through; the godlike technology

arriving; our medieval institutions of work and school; and workplaces that are sucking the humanness out of us—when we imagine a world where we develop and express our human advantages of insight, flow state, and hospitality, and package it all into an entirely new model for lifelong learning, earning, and being human, I have found my calling.

Perhaps my calling is best described as helping others find theirs, no matter what stage of life they are in.

Conclusion

So, what is **Project NOISE**, and what does it stand for? It started with a question about what it means to be human at work. That question inspired a book—*The Future of Work, Leadership, and Being Human*. The ideas grew into a philosophy, a series of courses, and a YouTube channel. It demands a new purpose playbook and new technology for a totally different HR. It helps students and other humans discover different career possibilities. It provides a platform for new ideas and human-centric entrepreneurial ventures. It will act as a non-profit champion for people at risk, helping them express their talents.

Project NOISE exists to build better futures by accelerating the rise of human insight, flow state, and service. It is a meta school for lifelong learning, earning, and being human in the age of AI—but it all depends on the human content.

More practically: Project NOISE stands for a **NASA Of Inner Space Exploration. We are about our full humanity to harness future technologies.**

We want the best of STEM used properly, alongside the best of our inner worlds. STEM took us to the moon and is taking us to Mars. It is helping us understand outer space in ways we could not have imagined. That is great.

But the humanities remind us that, at the end of the day, we are energy and awareness—we are here to play, to sing, to dance. We are here to feel. And it all comes from our inner spaces.

Perhaps I could put it this way, “If a robot feels in the forest, does anybody care?”.

That is Project NOISE: the NASA of inner space exploration. That is TXC “University”. NOISE is not a gimmick. It points directly at us and what we are trying to do.

Imagine that one TXC “University” had a football team. At most games, there is a pump-up song in the third quarter. At Michigan, it is "Mr. Brightside." At Virginia Tech, it is "Enter Sandman." At TXC University, where our slogan is "We are the NOISE," I already have the perfect pump-up song picked out. When you hear it, you will get why.

I end with my gravest concern of all.

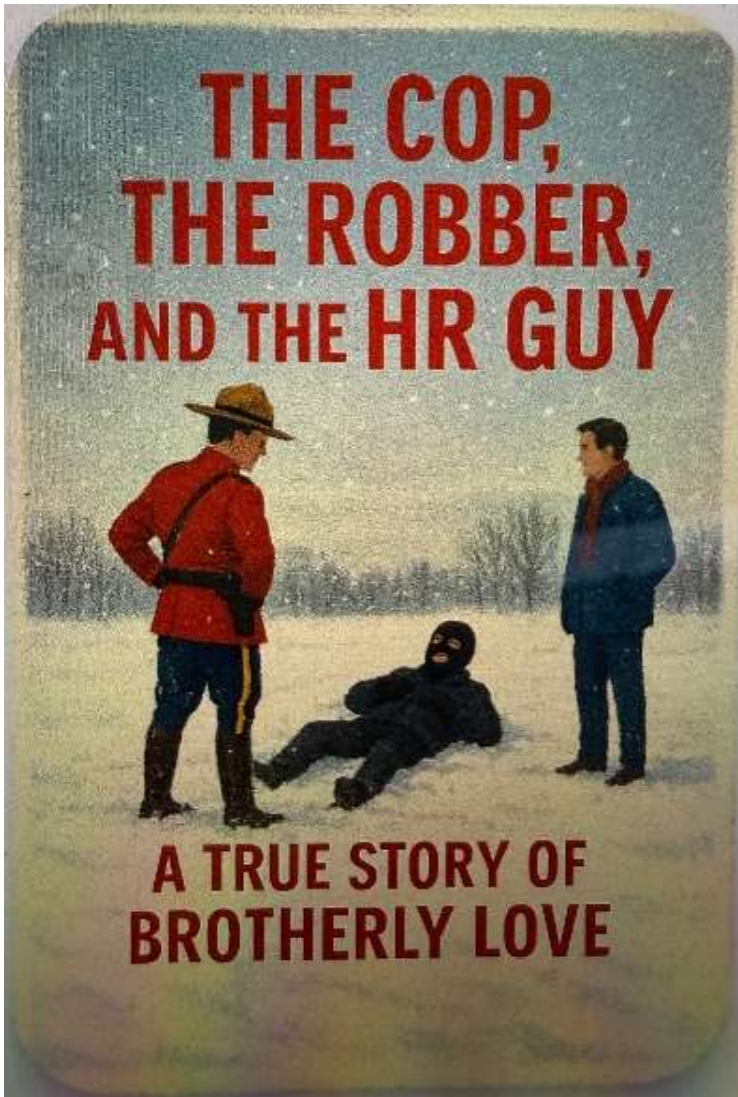
I started this journey by exploring dark sides, confronting reality, and having some real courage - and I do believe now that we are failing as a species. The markers are everywhere.

One of the most startling markers is that many studies show people aged 19 to 34 are having 30% less sex than previous generations. When things are so bad that a species is procreating very significantly less, that must be a red flag.

It is time to move from survival to creation. So, let's make some NOISE, accelerate our human advantages, and build better futures.

<Play Come on Feel the Noise by Quiet Riot. From the Album called: MENTAL HEATH.>

P.S.



In case seven books in two years is not evidence enough of FLOW STATE, wait until you hear about the true crime screenplay my brother Craig and I are writing called: THE COP, THE ROBBER, AND THE HR GUY. A TRUE STORY OF BROTHERLY LOVE.

It's 100% true, and completely unbelievable.