

I love being in a room with civic leaders – people who are passionate about their city and are willing to work for its success.

As leaders of this city, you are the drivers of its success... because we all know that we can have research and we can have plans, but without focused leadership, our research and plans go nowhere.

So thank you for all that you do to make Wichita a better place to live and work.

But remember that with cities, there is no permanent success and no permanent failure. Consider that Detroit was the Silicon Valley of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Cities inevitably go through cycles, and to the extent that you can make smarter civic decisions for Wichita, you can shorten the down cycles and make them less painful, while you lengthen the up cycles. That's what smart leadership can do.

Last week, I spent time with Harvard economist and professor Ed Glaeser who just released his new book, "Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier."

That just about says it all, doesn't it? Cities are, indeed, our greatest invention.

So why is that so many people want to run away from that fact? Why do they reject all that is good about our cities and about urbanism, hoping for some nostalgic reincarnation of what they remember as a simpler past – a past...

where households were made up of mom, dad, 2.2 kids;  
where everyone looked pretty much like everyone else and had pretty much the same history;  
where everyone could hop in a car and depend on cheap gas, cheap parking, and no congestion to make that a good idea;  
where we could dispose of what we consume without concern for its impact;  
where we could endlessly sprawl without worrying about the cost and about the loss of opportunity that creates for so many people.

That past will not return. It's like Waiting for Godot. We'll be waiting forever.

In his book last year, Richard Florida called for a Great Reset in our society, and I completely concur. And that reset will be all about cities.

So the future is in your hands.

Show me any path to a strong nation that doesn't run right through a successful Wichita. Cities must be the renewed engines for human activities in a complex world. They are where talented people come together in dynamic environments. So unless Wichita works, America doesn't work. Never, ever underestimate the importance of what you do and what you influence as civic leaders.

So what makes a city work?

Here's what the research tells us very clearly that matters. Three things:

Quality of talent

Quality of place

Quality of opportunity

And what drives all three of those success factors? You do -- Quality of leadership. Without it, you can't achieve the other three.

These success factors are stuck to the economy like crazy glue. Talent, place and opportunity are all about the economy.

Let's talk first about Talent. When it comes to success factors for cities, talent is the first among equals. There is nothing more important to your success. Nothing. The percentage of college graduates in your population explains -- conservatively -- 58 percent of any city's success. Some say it is as much as 80 percent.

Wasting human potential is the ultimate crime.

The past two years, CEOs for Cities has been on a mission to convince urban leaders that if they could increase college attainment just a little bit – just one percentage point – it's worth very big money to them.

Here in Wichita, for instance, if you could increase college attainment by one percentage point, it would be worth **\$460 million in additional personal income annually**.

But while Talent is the most important of the city success factors, if you develop Talent but can't hold onto it, then you're in trouble. That's where Quality of Place and Quality of Opportunity come in. They are what "stick" people to community.

Quality of Place seems to be one of those things that your leadership either gets or it doesn't. And when it doesn't, your city is in real trouble.

Because you are all here on behalf of downtown, I'm going to assume that you get it.

For instance, if you invest in more and more roads that enable development farther and farther away from the city center, you are stuck with them and the development they enable for a very long time.

So it really pays to get it right the *first* time because there *may not be* a second time.

Since we're all here on behalf of downtown, I want to spend a few minutes digging into this notion of Quality of Place.

Let's face it: A lot of people in Wichita – maybe even some of your elected officials and key influencers-- don't share your ambitions about a great downtown. We all know this.

But they do have ambitions around at least three things:

More Jobs for Wichita \*\* More Human Capital for Wichita... and \*\*  
Better Brand/Reputation for Wichita.

Interestingly, downtown can help fulfill all of those ambitions. So even if you don't care about *downtown*, you probably *do* care about the things downtown enables.

Let me tell you how that works. Let's start with jobs.

If you follow the logic in Ed Glaeser's new book, it goes something like this:

Cities (or dense collections of people) enable connections and creativity. Connections and creativity enable innovation. And innovation enables jobs growth.

It's right here on your invitation:  
Look at the headline: Connect.  
And the subhead: Growing commerce through creativity.

That's essentially Ed's message in *Triumph of the City*.

So when someone says, "jobs, jobs, jobs"... think "cities, cities cities." More particularly, think cities that look like the downtown you are working together to build.

And then there is the relationship between downtown and human capital – or talent.

This is an increasingly tight knit relationship. Here's why: 25-34 year-olds are the most mobile people in our society, and the more education they have, the more mobile they are.

This is a generation that not only says they prefer central city living. They are demonstrating it in huge numbers. 85% of Millennials says they prefer urban living. 85%??? That's huge. Moreover, their tendency to live within a 3-mile radius of the central business districts in cities across the country keeps growing.

In 1980, 25-34 year-olds in America were 10% more likely than other Americans to live within a 3-mile radius of the CBD.

In 1990, they were 12% more likely. By 2000, they were 33% more likely.

And CEOS for Cities will be releasing a report in the next 10 days that shows that the number of college-educated 25-34 years olds has, this past decade, increased twice as fast in the close-in neighborhoods of the nation's large cities as in the remainder of these metro areas. Even Cleveland and Detroit, which both saw an exodus of 25-34 year-olds in the past decade, saw an increase in the number of young adults with college degrees in their close-in neighborhoods.

Ok, stay with me, because I want to give you one more set of statistics. The relative preference for urban living among young adults, and especially well-educated young adults increased sharply over the past decade.

***In 2000***, young adults with a four-year degree were about **24% more likely to** live in close-in urban neighborhoods than their counterparts with less education. Now, these well-educated young adults are about **64% more likely** to live in these close-in urban neighborhoods. This relative preference for close-in neighborhoods increased in every one of the metro areas examined.

This is no longer an anecdote or clever story in USA Today. The trend is read and unmistakable.

As one of my colleagues has pointed out, every city in the nation has good suburbs and has now for a long time. They provide important consumer choices. But urban neighborhoods surrounding a robust downtown have been missing in most cities until recently. Now, they are a critical choice that you must offer if you want your city to be competitive.

This is one of the most important reasons for supporting the work of downtown redevelopment. You want talented young people to choose Wichita? You'd better have a robust downtown surrounded by robust neighborhoods.

Finally, there is the connection between downtown and the Wichita brand or reputation.

Of the three connections I've laid out here -- The connection between a compact, robust downtown and jobs; a vibrant downtown as an attractor of talent; and a strong downtown and the city's brand or reputation – the most obvious one is the third... the impact downtown has on the city's brand.

It's so hard to get attention for serious things when we are all in information overload. We get hundreds of emails every day, we have 600+ channels to choose from (and still nothing interesting is on) and Charlie Sheen has more than a million followers on Twitter. (Explain that.) We all know how little gets through and sticks. As visitors to new cities, we know how quickly we form opinions about them. For me, it is often the smallest thing, a feeling really, that sticks with me, that distinguishes one place from another and shapes what I remember.

The role downtown plays in shaping those impressions and memories of a city is – let's face it – far greater than that of any other part of the city. And that, alone, ought to make it a priority investment for those who care about Wichita and its future.

Investing in downtown is a bet that quality of place matters. And to a great extent, the bets you make on quality of place are bets on the future of Wichita. You need to make those bets in light of the shifts taking place in lifestyles, demographics, family structure, technology, the economy, and consumer preferences.

We can never be certain about the future. But we can look at some fundamental trends and see that – I'll use that word phrase again – a big reset is underway. We see it in vehicle miles traveled trending down for the first time in 50 years, the increase in cycling, the decline in 16 and 17 year-olds getting their license to drive. We see it in the decline in the so-called traditional family that now makes up only 25% of households. We see it in the permanent rise of gas prices, and the continuing shift toward temporary and contract work...the embrace of all things local, even as we continue on a course toward globalization... the ability technology gives us to multitask, causing us to mash work and play

closer together... the fact that a whopping 85% of Millennials say they prefer urban living. (And just look at what they're doing!)

You need a comprehensive list of such trends that ought to influence the bets Wichita makes on its future.

And then there is Quality of Opportunity.

Some tests of opportunity: Is this an open city? Is it permeable? Can I put my talent to work here? Can I connect to others who will make my work better and my life richer? Do I feel welcome here? Does it matter where I went to high school?

There is an interesting bit of research done by Gallup and supported by the Knight Foundation on the attributes that people say matter most to them when it comes to forming attachments to their community.

Here they are:

- (1) Social offerings --- You can call that Quality of Place
- (2) Openness – That's all about Quality of Opportunity
- (3) Aesthetics – Again, that's all about Quality of Place.

It just shows how these same attributes manifest over and over. And that's a good thing because it ought to give us confidence in what the tests of our civic actions should be:

With any action you take, are you helping Wichita build its Quality of Talent, its Quality of Place, its Quality of Opportunity – and in particular, are your plans for downtown designed to do that?

The answers to those questions will rest largely with the Quality of this community's Leadership – and that's you. Leadership is the thing that drives all the other factors.

To succeed in this unpredictable world, we need the capacity to change quickly, to reinvent, to distribute innovation and explore new realities.

We gain those abilities when we have the kinds of places you are trying to model in downtown Wichita – compact, mixed use, walkable places with a great public realm with lots of reasons for people to be there 24/7. That's what creates vibrant places where happy accidents can occur.

But let's not pretend we have forever to get it done. And we sure don't have forever to get it right. The trends are really clear. You can get on with building the kind of downtown you have planned or you can get left behind.

This next generation is not bound by a small set of cities to choose from. They are not choosing among Wichita and the cities within 200 miles. That was my generation. Now, my stepson is choosing among Beijing, St. Petersburg (Russia) and New York. How does his hometown of Memphis compete with that?

The competition is fierce, the job we have to do is big and time is short.

I urge you to move as quickly as you can to get the next phase of this downtown plan completed. And then, don't stop. Keep making it better. Because that's what your competition is doing.

I wish you much success and I look forward to coming back to see the results.