

Inspiring the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

by Douglas L. Becker, Chairman and CEO of Laureate Education, Inc., and Chairman of the IYF Board



Ideas and a vision can come at any age. I was 17 years old when I had an idea to use optical storage technology to create a wallet card that could store hundreds of pages of a patient's medical records. With the help of my 21-year-old brother, two of our best friends, and the support of a great mentor, we created a system that we ultimately sold to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Maryland. The experience kick-started my passion for entrepreneurship and provided a foundation for me to explore additional business interests.

My next stop was as CEO of Sylvan Learning Systems, which became the world's largest tutoring company with over 1,000 Sylvan Learning Centers. I always believed that a great business could also be great for society. Sylvan equipped young people with the skills and confidence to be successful in school and in some cases helped them overcome obstacles to college admission.

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At the same time that Sylvan was focusing on K–12 education, I began to see opportunities to expand our work into higher education and ultimately helped to create what is now called Laureate Education. Our belief is that quality higher education should and can be much more accessible and affordable especially in developing countries.

I was fortunate to come from a family where taking risks and choosing the less traveled path was both accepted and supported. My parents demonstrated the importance of hard work and discipline, and always encouraged me to think differently. Not everyone has this level of family support, but successful entrepreneurship can still be achieved with perseverance and determination. That is why I believe so passionately in instilling these same entrepreneurial skills and values in today's young people—regardless of where they live, or what challenges they face.

I have long admired the work of the International Youth Foundation to support young entrepreneurs around the globe. The Foundation's international reach and focus on young people made them a natural partner for Laureate. So, for nearly a decade we have supported IYF and its *YouthActionNet*® program. To date, the Laureate-based *YouthActionNet*® programs have provided 250 young social entrepreneurs in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Spain, and Turkey with funding, training, and networking support to promote positive social change in their local communities. These programs allow our institutions to expand well beyond their own walls to leverage the creative ideas and passion of young people who can invent new solutions to society's toughest challenges. Our hope is that by scaling up global efforts like *YouthActionNet*®—which by 2015 expects to support 1,500 young social entrepreneurs worldwide—we can make a deeper positive social impact on a greater scale.

In addition to the positive social change this generation of young entrepreneurs is delivering to society, they have the potential to create significant economic benefit for our world as well. Today's young people will need to create the future solutions to our social ills as well as our economic struggles. Their work is of great importance to us all. I am reminded of what Laureate's Honorary Chancellor, President Bill Clinton, once told a group of our students in Manaus, Brazil: "Many of the jobs in the 21st Century, even in developed countries, will not require a university degree. But almost all of the new jobs will be created by people who have a university degree."

One day soon, a young graduate from a university in the Laureate network or a participant in *YouthActionNet*® will create a product—or develop a solution—that will have a profound impact on our world and improve the lives of millions of people. I very much look forward to that day. **Y**

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— **BILL CLINTON**