

From the HEAD OF SCHOOL



I have never been one for New Year's resolutions. And yet the start of the year provides an opportunity to reflect on the past year and the year ahead. In both my personal and professional life, the opportunity to look back in order to look forward has been invaluable,

ensuring that I continue to grow while staying grounded in the principles I have come to believe in. At Menlo School, the concurrence of our centennial celebration and our strategic planning process creates a similar dynamic: looking backward in order to look forward.

Looking at Our Past

Menlo has, through its 100-year history, always sought to prepare students for the world they would find. From our beginning as a small military institute in the years leading up to the First World War, to the decision following that war to end our military focus and instead develop leaders in the world, Menlo has sought to provide a relevant educational



opportunity for its students. During the Second World War, when students from across the West Coast, Hawaii and even Panama were looking for stability and an education that would prepare them for the radically and racially different world of the 1950s, Menlo's boarding program brought all kinds of young men to campus to live and learn together. In our recent history, when the world shifted to include women in leadership positions, Menlo responded with world-class programs such as M-BEST to encourage growth and leadership for young women in the fields of science, engineering and technology. Menlo has always responded to changes in the world with changes in how it educates its students.

“Menlo has, through its 100-year history, always sought to prepare students for the world they would find.”

The Current Environment

In their 2011 book, *That Used To Be Us*, Thomas Friedman, a *New York Times* columnist, and his co-author, foreign policy professor Michael Mandelbaum, examine the challenges ahead for the United States. Their study is a fascinating (and sobering) analysis of the future—now current—job market, and they propose a new way of thinking about the economy our children will face.

Friedman and Mandelbaum suggest that there will be two kinds of workers: “creators” and “servers.” Dropping the outdated model of white- and blue-collar workers, in their conception (and the conception of author Andy Kessler) “creators” serve society through original research by “writing code, designing chips, creating drugs [and] running search engines.” Servers, on the other hand, provide the support creators need, “building homes, providing food, offering legal advice, and working at the Department of Motor Vehicles.” Without attaching value or status to the concepts of creator versus server—and I don’t think we should—it is plain that some of the roles, especially those traditionally provided by servers, will be replaced by servers in other countries or by machines. In many ways, this is not a new conversation.

Intriguing to me, however, is Friedman and Mandelbaum’s second premise that there will be workers who do their jobs in routine ways and workers who do their jobs in non-routine ways. Their model, best described in their own words, is for four types of workers in the future:

The first are “creative creators,” people who do their non-routine work in a distinctively non-routine way—the best lawyers, the best accountants, the best doctors, the best entertainers, the best writers, the best professors and the best scientists. Second are “routine creators,” who do their non-routine work in a routine way—average lawyers, average accountants, average radiologists, average professors, and average scientists.

The third are what we would call “creative servers,” non-routine low-skilled workers who do their jobs in inspired ways—whether it is the baker who comes up with a special cake recipe and design or the nurse with extraordinary bedside skills in the nursing home or the wine steward who dazzles you with his expertise on Australian cabernets. And the fourth are “routine servers” who do routine serving work in a routine way, offering nothing extra.

Two months ago I had the great pleasure of talking with a current student’s grandparent who runs a law firm that has, by any account, achieved incredible success. In our conversation he described the monumental shifts that have taken place in the legal profession over the last ten years, and he commented on the fact that his firm now looks for entirely different traits in the new young lawyers they hire. This grandparent was effectively describing the impact of the shift that Friedman and Mandelbaum theorize in their book. Lawyers who could perform their jobs in innovative, creative ways were the only candidates worth interviewing. Further, those candidates were coming from all sorts of law schools, not just the traditional powerhouses.

Looking to the Future

A similar dynamic is emerging in our own household as our middle daughter, about to graduate from college, is engaged in a job search for a position in new media. She is finding that her transcript, grades and even the college she went to is much less interesting to potential employers than



what she has done. The companies to which she is applying do not seem to care much about what theory she has come to understand, but instead are much more interested in what she has done with that theory and what content she has produced. Using Friedman and Mandelbaum's language: they are trying to gauge whether she is a routine or non-routine creator. This is a different world that our students will enter. How will Menlo School respond to these changes? The answer to that question could lie largely in our current strategic planning work: shaping our curriculum to continue to meet the demands of our changing world, and giving students opportunities to stretch themselves in endeavors that are most meaningful to them. Menlo has always succeeded by looking forward, and our continued strength as a school is dependent on continuing that practice.

One of the most important opportunities that the occasion of a centennial affords us is to recognize the patterns of strength that have made this school what it is for the

last 100 years. Close relationships between teachers and students, a curriculum that demands and encourages students to take responsibility for their own education, a program that emphasizes and promotes student choice, and, yes, a school that will adapt and change to prepare its students for a shifting world. These are the hallmarks of a Menlo education, and they are the principles we celebrate and fall back on as we decide on our path forward.

Our history is rich and we have much to celebrate. We also have a lot of work ahead of us. I'm excited to do both. I hope you'll join me in this yearlong celebration of the legacy of Menlo School, and that you'll take part in the conversation as we continue to look at our future. I look forward to seeing you at some of the many events we have planned for the year, and I share the pride that we all feel about our affiliation with this fine school.

Than



KnightLine is published in .pdf form on the Menlo School website each month, with an email alert including a link sent to all parents. For questions, please contact Alex Perez, Director of Communications, via email at alex.perez@menloschool.org or by calling 650.330.2001 ext. 2330.

