



# first person

with James Canton, Ph.D.

by Christine Fisher

**First Person** is a monthly Q&A that features compelling people who excel in their chosen endeavors. Ideas for future Q&As? Email [edit@thriveswla.com](mailto:edit@thriveswla.com).

**F**uturist James Canton, Ph.D., has spent the last 30 years predicting the key trends that have shaped our world. He has advised companies such as General Electric, Boeing, Fed Ex and others on business sectors such as innovation, financial services, health care, energy, globalization, and workforce development.

He is CEO and chairman of the Institute for Global Futures, a think tank he founded in 1990. Dr. Canton has advised three White House administrations, the National Science Foundation and MIT's Media Lab in Europe.

Mike Wallace of CBS's 60 Minutes profiled him as "one of the world's greatest minds." Dr. Canton is a frequent commentator on CNN, MSNBC, and FOX where he reports on the global trends that are shaping the future of our society. He is the author of *The Extreme Future: The Top Trends That Will Reshape The World for the Next 5, 10, and 20 Years* and *Technofutures: How Leading-Edge Innovations Will Transform Business in the 21st Century*.

Dr. Canton was the featured speaker at the Southwest Louisiana Alliance's 110th annual banquet in January. We spoke with Dr. Canton about his thoughts on our area's remarkable growth potential and sought advice on how to manage it.

**You've consulted with many large companies. What are the benefits you've seen in companies and regions that have carefully planned a roadmap for their future?**

If they do it right, they become a magnet for talent. Communities can plan to layer the right kind of services and structure, whether they are dealing with healthcare, education, or jobs. The key advantage is planning for tomorrow; having a future vision of where your community or region is going.

Most folks, quite frankly, don't plan or envision. When you don't plan or envision, change happens to you as opposed to you shaping the future. The most successful businesses and communities are the ones who plan their own future and then work towards it. What kind of future do you want for your community? When do you want it to happen? What does the future look like? These are questions that are beneficial to ask now, as you gear up for growth.

**What trends do you feel will have the most significant impact on business?**

The most important aspect is talent. Having the right talent and developing it is the key advantage. Businesses today and in the future will migrate to regions where they have access to talent. That means they have not just raw amounts of human resources, but also an infrastructure of education and quality of life so that the talent will want to stay in that region and is made up of skill sets that will enable businesses to grow.

Secondly, the trend is technology. Clearly,

all jobs of the future will require a certain amount of technology, but, most importantly, will be computing and networks. Higher-level knowledge skills are in demand by businesses.

The formula for the future is the right people, with the right technology, in the right place. This will create a successful business.

**If you had to narrow it down, what are two or three key factors for predicting business success?**

The most important is anticipating change. We have to get better at anticipating change. Innovation is the new norm; things will not stay the same.

Another key factor for business success is to be able to manage more complexity. It may be global, it may be based on personnel or technology; whatever it is, things will continue to get more complex. We need to get comfortable managing complexity.

Finally, a successful business needs a clear vision of where you're going, when it will happen and what it will take today. I call that being future smart.

**SWLA has many positive aspects for attracting businesses and residents, such as our culture and family friendly traditions, our food and also our strong industry infrastructure. As people relocate to our area with the coming jobs, how can we preserve our culture while embracing the growth and change?**

Preserving culture is something that a community does by orienting the new residents,

the talent, into the activities you offer. Involve them in the things that make your community unique. Festivals, conferences, and community events are a way to welcome the new residents joining your community. Keeping your cultural traditions alive and honoring them is critical.

**What is your projection for how business might change in 15 or 20 years?**

All businesses within 20 years will live in a globalized world in some way. Small businesses today, like the hot dog stand on the corner, or should I say the etouffe stand on the corner, will be affected by the price of spices, shrimp and grain. No matter where you are, you'll be dealing in a globalized world.

Business follows innovation. Do you want to be a business magnet? Be an innovation leader.

**Over \$62 billion worth of capital investment has been announced by area industries, casinos, and agriculture businesses. It's unprecedented growth for Southwest Louisiana. How does this compare to other areas of the country at this time?**

In terms of numbers, ya'll are ahead of the game. You need to ask yourselves: how can we blow it? It's an honest, strong question leaders should be asking, and I know they are and they're working on managing the growth. The way to blow it is to not go far enough, to not be bold enough. I've seen it happen.

\$62 billion is unusual; it doesn't happen every day. This could be an historic moment in Southwest Louisiana's history. **Be bold.**