



BEING FORWARD

Mark Elgart

'WHEN WE STOP LEARNING, WE STOP TEACHING'

Mark Elgart is president and CEO of Cognia.

Why has professional learning been important to you throughout your career?

One of my first revelations when I started teaching was that my preparation to teach did not adequately prepare me for all the realities and complexities to be an effective teacher. I made a commitment in my first year of teaching that I still maintain today: I must always engage in my own learning. I continue today to participate in formal learning through the Harvard Business School and other offerings. In leading an improvement organization, I believe that learning is a continuous improvement process.

What is one memorable professional learning experience that shaped your work as an educational leader?

When I was a beginning principal, I attended a seminar at Amherst College focused on the growth and decline of civilizations, including the role that culture plays. The seminar revealed that school leaders must tend and nurture every day the culture of the school community. Culture is the key to unlocking a great school where children can thrive in their learning.

What would you like to see educators understand better about professional learning?

Professional learning is not an event; it is a continuous journey. As educators, we must embrace and reveal our own learning to our colleagues and our students. When we stop learning, we stop teaching.

What do you see as the most pressing professional learning priorities in schools right now?

Although much attention is being given to supporting teachers in using new technologies, the most important and beneficial professional learning is helping students, parents, and teachers strengthen inter- and intrarelationshps regardless of the medium of instruction. The primary stakeholders in the learning process have been disrupted and upended. Professional learning must focus on helping key stakeholders establish new norms to guide and reinforce the necessary constructs of the effective relationships for supporting new ways of teaching and learning.

At Cognia, you work with educators around the world. What differences do you see in professional learning across countries, and how can we learn from each other?

The value of professional learning has no geographic limitations. However, we have witnessed that the commitment and engagement of professional learning is more consistently part of institutional planning and teacher life in our international settings. In the U.S., the resource allocations in support of professional learning are less per educator than in other parts of the world. We must dramatically increase our investment in educator growth as the primary strategy to improving student success.

What inspires you about Learning Forward's current work?

Learning Forward's critical mission to influence and impact one of the most significant needs in education inspires me. Education invests limited resources in helping professionals grow and improve in their craft so that those served, our students, benefit. Learning Forward is a passionate and persistent advocate for growing and improving our investment in professional learning, which is essential if we are going to achieve our primary purpose to prepare students for their future. ■

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Mark Elgart is a member of the Learning Forward board of trustees.