

## PREDICTING THE FUTURE WITH THOMAS FREY

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*“Foresight is the most important skill of the 21st Century”*

IBC recently hosted renowned futurist speaker Thomas Frey. Thomas, founder and executive director of the DaVinci Institute, a futurist think tank, delivered a compelling presentation entitled “Preparing for the Coming Tidal Wave of Disruption & Opportunity.” Thomas is also an entrepreneur and award-winning engineer and has shared his insights and observations about the possibilities of the future with thousands of people around the world.

Thomas began by discussing the possibilities of human health for the future. He mentioned that at the DaVinci Institute there has been discussion and debate about whether “no human should ever die...ever!” The thinking is that if we could solve the problems of aging, accidents, diseases, and “deviant behavior,” then death would not be necessary. The question has been carried further to ask whether this should be our ultimate goal. Thomas and his associates also acknowledge that there are countless obstacles to a goal like this, given the current state of human physical and mental health.

According to Thomas, some of the ways that we could move closer to such a goal could be tied into the usage of digital twin technology, which is already in use today in many industries. This technology allows remote monitoring of many types of equipment, from farm machinery to power plant turbines, and it enables us to determine the cause of problems or breakage in equipment and will eventually provide the ability to anticipate equipment failures before they occur, eventually removing the need for the physical presence of an operator.

Another way that digital twin technology will prove advantageous will be through the use of remote robotics in the medical field, technology which is becoming more widely used in surgical applications. Thomas and his colleagues are now asking how long before doctors will be able to remotely monitor a patient’s health through the patient’s digital twin, allowing a doctor to diagnose a patient without being physically present.

Thomas also shared that he is frequently asked if he predicted the pandemic, and his response to this was that, “Yes, but...as a futurist we all have lots of, what we call ‘wild-card scenarios’ that we deal with all the time,” and a pandemic was definitely one of those scenarios, but that no one was able to predict the “rule-set” for this crisis, especially with the means of transmission and spread. He also posits that this will be the most expensive crisis in human history, even more expensive than World War II, because “businesses were never designed to be shut down and restarted months later,” and that society will be dealing with the unintended consequences of this crisis for many years to come.

Mr. Frey provided a list of ten intriguing predictions for the future:

A mass exodus from the inner cities (around 10% or less of people leaving).

30-40% of inner city retail stores will never reopen.

Roughly 50% of universities will close permanently over the next few years.

Tiny homes will be out; the home fortress is now “in” with the onset of working from home.

Contact phobia will permeate our thinking for generations.

The end of internal combustion engine production around 2025.

Lab-grown meat production facilities will be common in 2025.

Driverless technology will be the most disruptive in all history.

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*(CONTINUED)*

By 2030, the largest company on the Internet will be an education-based company that has yet to be invented.

We will experience the biggest job transition in history.

Thomas sees the future of retail as one featuring driverless mobile businesses, from fully automated convenience stores to mobile offices to banks, hair salons, and dog grooming services, among many other types of businesses. He also sees increased usage of mobile hotel rooms and hospitals and healthcare centers, which could also be utilized by agencies such as FEMA during disaster response.

When asked about the future of the demographics in different countries around the world as a result of the varying responses to the pandemic, Thomas's response was that complying with lockdown was nearly impossible for people in poverty around the world. This was a failure on the part of governments' responses to consider the ramifications for all of their citizens, from a "top-down" point of view.

Another question was about the evolution of the historical "nation-state" in the era of globalization. His response was that since privacy, especially as it relates to technology, is increasingly difficult to achieve, he proposes the creation of a "global privacy council," in order to perhaps establish uniformity in privacy laws across the globe.

When asked about whether we can combat climate change, and, if not, what does Thomas see happening, as a result. Thomas responded that we are making some progress with clean energies, but that the involvement of different governments complicates response to problems, such as pollution. He hypothesized that eventually our greatest assets could be our landfills, becoming a source for recyclable materials. He also expressed an interest in studying how the fluctuations of the planet's core temperatures might affect climate as well.

A member asked Thomas what he thought of the likelihood of another world war in the next twenty years. His response was that wars will not look like they once did, with the rise of cyberwarfare, airborne drones, and many naval vessels will eventually be unmanned. Thomas says this could be both good and bad, because warfare could become even more lethal.

Thomas foresees that we are entering a period of "great opportunity," and he expects that the next twenty years will likely see humanity change more extensively than any other period in human history. Coinciding with these changes will be also be a rise in our risk factors, as we become more dependent upon technology. He reminds us that future generations are counting on us.

In conclusion, Thomas urged us not to be blindsided by the future. Anticipate it and move ahead of the competition. Imagine how your life, organization, and community improve when you confidently know what's coming. Take advantage of foresight, THE most important skill of the 21stCentury, and create your future.