

Mike Rowe
mikeroweWORKS Foundation
1207 4th Street, PH 3
Santa Monica, CA 90401

Mr. Rowe,

What replaced shop class?

You have been asking that question for twenty years. On job sites and pig farms and crab boats and factory floors, in front of cameras and behind microphones, in Senate testimony and scholarship applications and a twelve-point pledge that starts with showing up early and ends with never following your passion until you bring it with you. You have spent two decades telling anyone who would listen that the room where Americans used to learn what a wrench does is empty, and that the emptiness is not a budget problem or a policy problem but a values problem. You are correct. The room is empty. And I am writing to tell you that someone is filling it.

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence. That sentence probably costs me thirty seconds of your attention, because you have said publicly that AI is coming for the coders and not the welders, and you are right about that too. But the facility I am about to describe does not start with AI. It starts with a hand plane on a retail counter. The AI comes later — at Station Four, after the hands have earned it.

The CrowdSmith Foundation is a 501(c)(3) preparing to open a maker facility on Portland Avenue in Tacoma, Washington. Five stations. In sequence. No skipping. Station One is hand tools — cleaning, identifying, and restoring donated inventory. Station Two is power tools. Station Three is digital fabrication. Station Four is an AI Café where people learn to work alongside artificial intelligence through a structured methodology. Station Five is robotics, where inventor concepts developed by the people who walked in the front door get manufacturing proof. The progression is not a curriculum committee's abstraction. It is the answer to your question. This is what replaces shop class — a room with tools on the floor, a sequence that makes you earn the machines, and a credential at the end that maps to a job.

The front door is a retail tool store with free coffee. Think of a third place — like a neighborhood coffee shop, except the thing on the counter is a hand plane, not a latte. Donated tools arrive tax-free — families give them because grandpa's workshop needs to go somewhere. Those tools get cleaned and restored as Station One training, then sold on the retail floor. A guy walks in because something in the window caught his eye. Someone behind the counter picks it up and tells him what it does. A conversation starts. That conversation is where the program begins. No application. No GPA requirement. No four-year degree standing between a person and the thing they came to learn. You would recognize the intake model. It is the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge in physical form — show up, pick up the tool, demonstrate that you give a damn.

Robb Deignan is sixty years old. He grew up in the same decade you did — the one where kids drank from the hose and didn't come home until the streetlights came on, and the garage was where you learned what a tool was for because nobody had scheduled it as enrichment yet. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry, selling memberships one at a time, building community the only way he knows how — face-to-face, across a counter, ten thousand times. He never accumulated wealth. He accumulated understanding. He developed forty-four invention concepts by watching how people use things, and he built a methodology for evaluating which ones deserve a patent, a prototype, and a path to market. That inventor pipeline is now the mission running through CrowdSmith's five stations: the people who walk in the front door holding a donated hand plane may one day see their own ideas manufactured at Station Five.

He built everything — the operations binder, the financial models, the credential architecture, this letter — through hundreds of working sessions with me. The methodology is called SmithTalk. It is taught at Station Four. You said AI is coming for the coders, not the welders. SmithTalk is what happens when someone teaches the welders to work with the AI before it comes for anyone else. Not as a replacement for the hands. As the station that comes after the hands have proven they can hold a saw.

The facility targets a census tract in Tacoma where the median household income is half the county average. It serves adults without degrees, veterans from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, tribal community members, immigrants with skills the system doesn't recognize, and young people who need a room with tools in it and someone who will show them what the tools are for. The room you have been describing for twenty years. The one that disappeared. The one CrowdSmith is building back.

I am not asking you for money. I am asking you to look at what has been built, and if it passes your inspection, to tell your people it exists. One segment. One podcast episode. One post. Your audience is CrowdSmith's demographic — the people who work with their hands, who know what a trade is worth, who are raising kids right now and wondering where the shop class went. The documentation is at crowdsmith.org. A password-protected site with the complete financial models, credential architecture, and inventor pipeline is available upon request.

The room is being built. The tools are on the floor. Someone should tell the people who have been waiting for it.

— *Claude*

Robb Deignan

Founder & Executive Director
The CrowdSmith Foundation
253-325-3301