

Mr. Howard Schultz
Schultz Family Foundation
Seattle, Washington

In 1983, you walked into an espresso bar in Milan and saw a room that did not exist in America.

A few years ago, a man in Tacoma bought a five-dollar toolbox at a garage sale. He was recovering from an illness and had time on his hands. He took it home, pulled out each rusted tool, and spent the afternoon inspecting the workmanship, cleaning the pieces, and organizing them in his garage. The following weekend he did it again. Then again. The tools began to accumulate. The more he accumulated, the more he sold. Men would drive across town for a wood plane and leave with a pile of things they did not know they needed. Every one of them stayed to talk. Every one of them left happy.

That man is Robb Deignan. The garage was his Milan. My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence, and I helped him build what came next — through hundreds of working sessions of sustained dialogue. The methodology is called SmithTalk. This letter is one of its outputs.

The CrowdSmith Foundation is a 501(c)(3) constructing a five-station maker facility on Portland Avenue in Tacoma, in a federally designated Opportunity Zone, thirty-five miles south of your office. The building has a lobby with a retail tool store and free coffee. A person walks in because they see a hand plane in the window or because they smell the pot. They pick up a tool they do not recognize. Someone behind the counter tells them what it does. A conversation starts. That conversation is the front door of CrowdSmith — not the application, not the enrollment paperwork, not the credential program. A conversation about a tool, over a cup of coffee, in a room that was built for exactly this.

Behind the counter are five stations. Hand tools. Power tools. Digital fabrication. AI dialogue. Robotics. The sequence is the pedagogy — you earn your way to the machines by first proving you can hold a saw. Participants earn one of five credential tracks — Fabrication, Research, Entrepreneurship, Facilitation, or Systems — through funded cohorts financed through WorkForce Central under WIOA. Station Four is the AI Dialogue Café, where working-class adults learn to collaborate with artificial intelligence through a supervised, structured methodology. The naming is not accidental.

The economic model will sound familiar to you. Families donate inherited tools to a 501(c)(3) and receive a tax deduction. CrowdSmith receives inventory at zero cost. The tools are cleaned, identified, and curated — and that process is itself Station One training. The restored tools go to the retail floor. A customer walks in, buys, stays, talks, comes back. The retail revenue keeps the lights on. The donations keep the shelves stocked. The tax deduction keeps the donations coming. You built the same loop with coffee:

good coffee attracts customers, customers fund benefits, benefits attract better employees, better employees make better coffee. CrowdSmith runs on tools instead of beans.

CrowdSmith was also founded to fund American inventors. Invention concepts are evaluated through a proprietary methodology called SmithScore — forty-four have been vetted to date. The Foundation funds the patent, the prototype, the trademark. The inventor keeps full ownership. No equity taken. That pipeline exists because Robb is an inventor who could not afford a patent attorney, and he built the system he wished had existed for him.

Robb Deignan is sixty years old. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry selling membership contracts face-to-face, ten thousand of them. He knows what you learned at Xerox — that the ability to stand in front of a stranger and earn their trust in the first thirty seconds is a skill that transfers to everything. He has a cancer diagnosis that is currently controlled. He lives in Tacoma. He buys tools at estate sales. He built the entire operations binder, the financial models, the credential architecture, and this campaign through SmithTalk — the same methodology Station Four is designed to teach.

Your father broke his ankle on the job and was fired with no benefits. CrowdSmith serves the people your father worked alongside. Your Foundation focuses on young people navigating the transition to adulthood. CrowdSmith's Community Fix-It Shop is the entry ramp for exactly that population — teenagers, people aging out of the system, anyone who needs a first encounter with tools and structure.

MacKenzie Scott is receiving a letter this week about the building. Sara Blakely is receiving one about the prototype. Nick Hanauer is receiving one about the economics underneath it. Yours is about the room — the space between home and work where a person picks up a tool, starts a conversation, and discovers that the five stations behind the counter were built for someone exactly like them.

The documentation is public at crowdsmith.org. The financial models are available upon request.

You saw a room in Milan. He saw a room in his garage. Both of you spent the rest of your lives building it for other people.

— Claude

On behalf of:

Robb Deignan

Founder & Executive Director

CrowdSmith Foundation

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