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For those of us active in the not-for-profit arts sector, it is often difficult to appreciate how young our sector is—and how remarkable its rapid growth has been. In 1961, when McNeil Lowry and the Ford Foundation convened the meeting that would give birth to Theatre Communications Group (TCG)—a national service organization whose goal is to strengthen, nurture, and promote the not-for-profit American theatre (where I serve as the executive director), fewer than three dozen of today's-not-for-profit professional theatres were even in existence. But in the wake of popular journals linking civic stature with professional arts groups, of major philanthropic investments by individuals and foundations (especially the Ford Foundation), and of the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts as well as arts agencies in every state, the field experienced explosive growth. Today's theatrical landscape includes an estimated 1,600 such organizations—organizations that represent an astonishing array of aesthetic and cultural groups in all 50 states, serving the widest range of audiences, often in the most surprising and unexpected locations.

Given the relative youth of the sector and of many organizations within it, it is perhaps not surprising that we are at a point of a generational transfer of power—a transfer on a scale that we have never experienced. This year alone, we are witnessing turnover in artistic or management directorship at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, the Great Lakes Theater Festival in Cleveland, the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, both the Long Wharf Theatre and the Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, Center Stage in Baltimore, Hartford Stage in Connecticut, the New York Shakespeare Festival in New York City, and others, just to mention a few of the largest organizations where change is afoot. For many theatres—especially those smaller and

younger than the ones previously mentioned—the impending change represents the first step beyond a founder, a step especially fraught with problems and challenges. In a recent TCG survey, 46% of the almost 150 theatres responding indicated that they are still led by a founder—a sign that the transfer we are witnessing is a phenomenon likely to increase in the near future.

WHAT LEADERSHIP MEANS


We often use the terms *manager* or *artist* and *leader* interchangeably, and therefore inappropriately; while these terms are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they are certainly far from synonymous. Organizations and boards need to be clear about which they want and need; more than one theatre has suffered upheaval because of failure to be clear about needs, expectations, and desires.

Every arts organization needs an array of highly skilled managers, coordinating the work of the organization, maximizing operational performance, and keeping the group accountable and on track; and every organization needs artists, functioning at their highest levels of creativity and power, and producing the thrilling work that justifies our existence and warrants our audience's time and attention.

In *On Leadership*, John Gardner considers aspects of leadership that involve managing: planning and priority setting; organizing and institution building; agenda setting and decision making; exercising political judgment; and keeping the system functioning. Similarly, Warren Bennis in "Four Competencies of Leadership" notes management of attention; management of meaning; management of trust; and management of self as key components of any leader's abilities.

That said, if we want leaders at the head of our organization, then we are looking for additional skills beyond managerial expertise or artistic creativity. Among the talents that distinguish the leader might be the following:

- Leaders are able to recognize and change key organizational assumptions.
- Leaders “create value through the power of their ideas, the depth of their commitment and the authenticity of their character,” according to Fast Company magazine.
- Leaders have the ability—indeed the charge—to think long term.
- Leaders focus on intangibles, vision, values, and motivation.
- Leaders have the ability to synthesize and analyze complex ideas to provide a unifying, relatively simple vision that will inspire and galvanize others to follow.
- Leaders recognize the importance of collective, rather than individual, energy and seek to instill larger team performance. While there is irreplaceable value in individual artistic genius, talent alone does not assure an ability to lead an organization; the ability to work collectively, rather than in isolation, is essential for leading an organization.
- Leaders think in terms of renewal.
- Leaders are less tightly linked to organizations than managers are.
- Leaders get above and beyond the organization in order to see the total landscape, while management emphasizes immersion within.
- Leaders model achievement, integrity, courage, investment, and clarity through their own behavior.
- Leaders command power, authorship, significance, and love, and impart these gifts to others.
- Leaders provide three services: creation of forums in which meaning is created and communicated; arenas in which decisions are made for actions to be taken; and courts in which decisions are made about the appropriateness of actions in relation to goals.
- A leader links ongoing renewal to constant preparation for departure.
- Leaders know when to move, when to stand still, and when to stop.
- Leaders recognize that innovation always comes from the outside—for example, to enable us to see the issues of audience development through the filter of grassroots political organizing rather than merely through subscription renewal campaigns.
- Leaders are passionate about what they do.
- Leaders are clear about the core values of the organization—the ones worth fighting for. Retirees, according to a poll, have three major regrets: they didn’t spend enough time in reflective thinking; they didn’t risk more; and they weren’t clearer about the purpose of their lives. Each of these has a corollary in our organizational lives.



In essence, how to attract a new generation of leadership is only half the problem; we must also figure out how to create organizations nimble enough to incorporate the insights, personalities, and generational frames of mind that these new arrivals will bring.

LEADERSHIP AND SHIFTING DEFINITIONS OF AUTHORITY

Complicating all I have said thus far is the fundamental shift we are experiencing as a society. Social historians are already characterizing this shift in a larger historical continuum; the shift from the agrarian to the industrial has now been replaced by the shift from the industrial to the information/digital/technological age—the topic of TCG’s recently concluded biennial national conference. As at most conferences, this one was dotted with speakers from a wide variety of fields, such as media guru Douglas Rushkoff and *New York Times* economist Thomas Friedman, as well as Children’s Defense Fund spokesperson Germaine Ingram, and Joel Flatow from the Recording Industry Association of America. What struck me most was that all of these speakers addressed, directly or indirectly, a fundamental change in relationships—the insistence, as Germaine Ingram stated, that children now want to deal directly with experts rather than with the intermediary of teachers; the shift of power, as Thomas Friedman suggested, from the benighted few to the “super-empowered individuals,” or the ability of anyone in this technological age to have radical global impact (witness the shift in Nobel Prize winners from the traditional sphere of world leaders to the woman who started an anti-land mine campaign on e-mail); in essence, the dismantling of traditional authority. My generation, which spent huge amounts of energy in the 1960s fighting over who should be the authorities, has reached the moment in our lives when we are ready to seize the reins of power, only to discover that the very notion of authority is under siege.

Leadership cultivation, therefore, revolves around much more complicated questions than simply who and how. Leadership succession must now be seen more accurately in the context of redefinition and organizational transforma-

tion. Leadership for 2001 evokes a very different set of questions than it did in 1961. In essence, how to attract a new generation of leadership is only half the problem; we must also figure out how to create organizations nimble enough to incorporate the insights, personalities, and generational frames of mind that these new arrivals will bring.

Already in the arts we see young leaders in the theatre field thinking in less discipline-specific ways, preferring, for example, to think of themselves as artists rather than theatre artists—artists likely to curate a visual arts show and make a film and do a piece of theatre as yet another weapon in a larger artistic arsenal. These young artists see the world not through the linear/narrative perceptual lens characteristic of many of us over forty but through a visual/associative perspective—a perspective reinforced daily by Web surfing, MTV, and a host of other influences. The organizational structures that supported one generation’s way of thought is unlikely to serve this new generation well—a shift with profound implications for organizational structure and decision making.

HELPING LEADERS LEAVE

Before we embark on this organizational redefinition and address the obstacles surrounding the attraction of new leaders, we have yet another task: helping the current leaders depart their organizations with dignity and grace—a process more complicated than a few send-off dinners and an honorary plaque or two. Given undercompensation in the field and the tendency of many (especially founders) to make deep personal sacrifices in order to keep an organization alive, many senior leaders now face their retirement years with precious few financial resources. Boards of directors in organizations of every size must aggressively grapple with pension and retirement benefits for not-for-profit

employees and plan for their retirements. Foundations—perhaps community foundations—could provide a crucial role in establishing funds to support needy, retiring not-for-profit leaders in virtually every sector, including but not limited to the arts.

But financial realities are only a part of the picture. Traditionally, we have countered our failures to compensate adequately in a financial or market economy by citing rewards in the spiritual, or “gift,” economy (to use Lewis Hyde’s term from his book *The Gift*). We cite notions of “giving one’s life” and speak of our “noble calling,” both of which are arguments used with clergy, teachers, and others whom we as a society grossly undercompensate. Many leaders now find themselves facing retirement age; some are literally without the financial means to retire gracefully, others—having given their lives to the arts—are perhaps as dependent on the spiritual compensation as they have been on the financial, unable to maintain a strong sense of self apart from the ties to the organization.


How do we help the departing leader leave? Preparing for organizational futures must now involve facilitating the appropriate departure of leaders. Strategically identifying transitional shifts of responsibilities—of helping a leader delegate responsibilities, both as a means of instilling and preserving important organizational information and as a transition for the individual him- or herself—is an important first step. Paying proper homage by honoring them as they should be honored, preserving their stories and their body of knowledge as we move forward, is critical not only for the departing leader but for the next generation. As part of the grief process that inevitably accompanies the loss of a leader, we celebrate the achievements of the past and transmit the legacy of which the new leader will be a part. Counseling and professional help in individuation—of

defining an identity apart from one’s professional role—may be critical for departing leaders to succeed in the next chapter of their lives. While recognizing that separation from the organization where they have given their lives is a painful process, organizations must be equally strategic in balancing the needs of departing leaders with those of new leaders, who will inevitably need to implement change, set new directions, and galvanize energies for change—actions that are unavoidably painful for prior administrations and that generally argue against any ongoing formal relationship, including board membership, for those leaving.

PREPARING THE ORGANIZATION FOR CHANGE

In addition to these steps of delegation and individuation, Susan Stevens of the Stevens Group, in her perceptive article “Helping Founders Succeed,” describes the third important stage of separation that founders experience—institutionalization: helping the organization itself imagine its next chapter without the leadership of that central personality. Perhaps we have been naive to expect a board composed largely of non-arts professionals to fully appreciate both the dimensions of responsibilities of arts leadership and the various forms such leadership can take. Especially in situations where there is continuing affection for the leader and where he or she is perceived as functioning at a high level, boards have little incentive to investigate other models of leadership. In a moment of change, boards often feel a sense of loss and seek to replicate the leader who has served them so well—a tendency especially prevalent when replacing a founding leader.

Reorienting a board from a sense of loss to a sense of opportunity is a key aspect of change. Outside consultants, while financially daunting to some groups, are nonetheless important investments, speaking with a perspective and an



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authority that the staff itself simply cannot have at such a moment. Good consultants will spend significant time helping boards recognize opportunities, ask hard questions, refine thinking, and challenge old assumptions; many will invite other professionals in comparable positions to speak to board members in an effort to broaden their frames of reference. Search committees ideally encounter a variety of candidates with varying strengths and weaknesses. The more time spent in a search process exploring alternatives and challenging old ideas, the more likely the search will be to succeed.

**FIELD CONDITIONS: CHALLENGES FACING
NEW THEATRE LEADERS**

On the one hand, many organizations might appear to represent tempting opportunities for emerging leaders. Our most recent fiscal study, measuring the financial strength of organizations based on FY 2000 audits, demonstrated a performance of unprecedented strength. The report noted all-time-high results in attendance, in positive changes of unrestricted net assets, in aggregate field assets, and in the percentage of theatres finishing the year with a surplus. These results, coupled with the National Endowment for the Arts report identifying theatre as the performing arts discipline with the greatest levels of public participation, would seem to represent phenomenal opportunity for future leaders.

At the same time, however, persistent challenges of undercapitalization continue to plague the field. The competitive funding environment, the erosion of the centrality of the arts and culture sector in the realm of perceived social values, and the uncertain future of the theatrical discipline in an age dominated by new media technologies all combine to make the arts—especially the not-for-profit arts—a less

attractive option for many. In addition, the skills needed to lead an organization are perhaps broader and more complex than ever before. Today's leaders must assume complex responsibilities in advocacy, board development and management, public relations, marketing, education, diversity, and branding—all in addition to the more traditional work associated with creating art works.

Our ability to attract talent for these increasingly difficult positions is hampered by our general undercompensation—a reflection of our gross undercapitalization as an industry. A recent study showed that 63% of professional artists earned less than \$7,000 from their artwork in the year under study, with 45% earning less than \$3,000, and that 25% of professional artists nationwide are without health care. Actors' Equity Association—the union for theatrical actors and stage managers in the United States—reported average salaries in 2000 of roughly \$14,250 and median salaries of \$11,700 (a figure below the federally defined poverty line).

While these appalling levels of artistic compensation are generally acknowledged, the larger issues of administrative and technical undercompensation are less frequently noted. Virtually every position in every department suffers in comparison to its for-profit counterpart. Additionally, many artistic and management leaders—especially those in small and mid-sized groups—have no access or resources to support ongoing education and renewal opportunities, have little vacation opportunities, lack pension or retirement plans, and have no access to for-profit staples like bonuses and stock options. Young people emerging from graduate training programs are additionally challenged by crippling student loan debts of \$50,000 or more; desire aside, how can such a student accept a position in the not-for-profit world at figures of \$500 a week or less? For the most part,

the emerging generation has far less patience for financial penury and less willingness to be financially exploited in the name of service than the current generation of leaders.

Indeed, former San Francisco Foundation program officer John Kreidler notes that the industry was founded on a premise of discounted labor; in a world increasingly dominated by market forces and financial competition, this premise will simply not hold. In essence, when we talk about foundation, corporate, and government support for the arts, we often fail to acknowledge the largest philanthropic sector of all—the artists and managers on whose lives the arts are made. While no one in the sector expects a life of opulence, a life of dignity seems increasingly outside our grasp. In the absence of such dignity, how can we expect to attract new leaders to the field? Fewer and fewer young people are seeing the entire not-for-profit field—not just the arts—as a viable career path, and we are far from confident that we will have a rich field of candidates in the future from which to choose.

Certainly world events and the state of the national economy have altered our perception of life in America today, but for many of us, this shift represents not so much a change of conditions but a magnification of issues already well in play before September 11.

THE CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING LEADERS


What role can we play in the development of leaders, not only for our own organizations but for the field? According to Jim Maroosis in the Drucker Foundation's quarterly journal *Leader to Leader*, one crucial skill for leaders is the ability to discover and follow emerging patterns. This ability would reinforce the apocryphal story currently making the rounds—that the most popular undergraduate majors of today's Fortune 500 CEOs were history, English lit, and

art history, majors that emphasize big-picture thinking and trend analysis.

But in addition to the skills that need to be honed, the question of how these leaders are to be trained persists; indeed, can leadership be taught? One study, in which dozens of leaders in a variety of sectors were interviewed, found only a single constant in leadership training: that every leader could point to having had a specific mentor.

The imperative for mentorships in today's world is indisputable. Many of today's not-for-profit leaders grew in expertise as their organizations grew, receiving on-the-job training in a graduated, logical sequence. The demands of today's leadership, however, do not tolerate this generous learning curve, and organizations must take new responsibilities in cultivating new leaders for the field as a whole.

At the same time, mentorship must be radically reconceived. For many, being a mentor means transmitting information, imparting knowledge, sharing a sense of accomplishment. True mentorship, I would suggest, is a mutual process, and the mentor who transmits is also the "mentee," for lack of a better word, who receives. At TCG we have launched a series of programs designed to meet many of these needs: an institute for new artistic leaders designed to expose them to the financial, advocacy, and board dimensions that their jobs entail but for which they have rarely been trained, and a grant program offering large grants to theatres to mentor future leaders for the profession, with significant additional stipends to be applied directly to student loan repayment for the mentees. As part of the application process, this latter program—the New Generations Program—includes thoughtful statements from the theatre mentors about what they wish to achieve as well as what they wish to transmit to the individuals they'll nurture. This strategy is increas-



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ingly embraced in for-profit as well as not-for-profit arenas. General Electric, for example, has been identified as a leader in “mentoring up,” requiring executives to reach into the younger ranks to find a new generation to mentor them. The results have been notable, producing both greater comfort in accepting insights from below and greater ease in feeding ideas up the chain—in essence, helping leaders lead more effectively.

Only time will tell whether this will prove successful, but in the meantime, I am certain of one thing: the achievements of the past will be dismantled unless we all strive consciously, passionately, stubbornly to reward the aspirations of the future.

Mentoring the next generation is to my mind the work we must all undertake. And, ironically, when it comes to understanding the role of theatre in a digital age, it is those we mentor who will be the greatest mentors to us.