

# Leadership as Jazz

*I used to think that running an organization was equivalent to conducting a symphony orchestra, but I don't think that's quite it; it's more like jazz. There is more improvisation.*

~Warren Bennis, Distinguished Professor of Business Administration, founding chairman of The Leadership Institute, University of Southern California

As part of my research to assist in the development of AMM's new Leadership Academy, I enrolled in a 9-month program offered by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council of Minneapolis/Saint Paul. Titled "The Art of Leadership," this project was open to senior staff members or department heads at arts organizations in the seven county Twin Cities region. The 25 participants agreed to attend monthly group meetings plus monthly coaching and small group sessions. The series began with a daylong retreat and ended with an overnight retreat and celebration.

The goal of this program was very similar to AMM's Academy – to provide an opportunity to cultivate and enhance the leadership skills in each participant and to develop a cohort of participants who would provide support for one another after the program was completed. Consultant Jean Hammrick of InsideOutcomes, led the training, beginning with a foundation in emotional intelligence that included Myers-Briggs testing (I'm an ESTJ - one of life's administrators) and Daniel Goleman's Emotional and Social Competency Inventory, a 360-degree evaluation of the participant's work colleagues, direct reports, and supervisor. From these personalized tools, she guided the group to apply the knowledge gained from these reports with an understanding of adaptive leadership to a new understanding of workplace leadership.

I am struck by the practical application of this training with staff at my museum, the Goldstein Museum of Design. I am more aware of effective communication, methods of managing my responses, and assessing the group's overall dedication to getting the work done. Throughout the training, the peer group sessions have allowed me to focus on my responses to difficult situations, termed "critical incidents," in the program and through observation of my own tendencies, understand how to enhance my contribution and minimize activities that derail us from getting the work done.

Leadership is a creative balance of inherited traits and learned experiences. Learning to identify both develops a strong foundation that encourages innovative thinking – an important trait for the dynamic operation of museums as well as other organizations. The great trumpet player, Miles Davis said: "The thing to judge in any jazz artist is, does the man project and does he have ideas." As leaders, we gain strength to project positive ideas and emotional stability by developing of an awareness of our effect of others and how to channel it to get work done.

Lin Nelson-Mayson

Director, Goldstein Museum of Design