

PHILANTHROPY AND CULTURAL SYMPOSIUM

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NOTES FOR "MAKING THE CASE FOR THE ARTS"

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Merci Christian (Whelan) - Bonjour mesdames et messieurs. Thank you for inviting me to make these "kick off" remarks at the start of this conférence Espace Culturel Atlantique.

Let me start with a disclaimer. I do not come with any magic prescription on how to attract significant new private sector donations to arts and heritage organizations. So anyone looking for a "how to" lecture should leave now! What I will try to do in these few minutes is to make some personal observations on the challenges and barriers - and suggest some strategies and arguments that may help all of us who care about the arts to reverse the decline of support and make the case - or cases - that must be made if decision makers - both public and private are to be convinced of the value of these activities - which unfortunately are still labeled with the quaint Victorian word as "charities".

Let's take a quick look at the reality of philanthropy in Canada. In 2001, the latest available figures indicate that there were more than 77,000 registered charities (with religious charities forming the majority). The National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, showed that overall financial contributions and gifts of volunteer time were increasing. However, the survey indicates that there are roughly one million fewer volunteers than in 1997 and the increased giving remains largely the work of the top 25% of Canadian donors.

In light of this, relationship building - to broaden the base of support - is critical. The keys to attracting and leveraging new resources, I think, would seem to lie in placing an increased emphasis on effective management and governance, using the new technologies, building credibility - and being prepared to allocate more resources towards revenue generation - and providing fair compensation, and quality professional development opportunities for those engaged in raising funds - and valuing the "revenue generators" as critically important members of your organization. I submit that cultural organizations must be prepared to re-balance themselves - and build their capacity to survive!

I am not saying this to please the people in this room who are responsible for fundraising. I profoundly believe that this role has been chronically under-valued - as have the roles of all those who work on the management side of the arts. We are facing a critical shortage of people qualified and willing to see that work on the administrative side of the arts is a viable career option - and we need skilled visionaries who can run their organizations like a business.

Everything I read suggests that the arts sector is losing ground in its efforts to attract corporate donations - sponsorship is flat - and will inevitably decline as a result of the tobacco legislation. The hollowing out effect of mergers and acquisitions - and head offices moving out of Canada will have a negative impact on corporate contributions. There will simply be fewer major Canadian companies. The decision-making processes regarding corporate donations are, in the main, working against the performing arts, galleries and museums.

Decisions which were often made by enlightened CEO's - possibly influenced by their wives - are now being influenced more by the employees - who by and large are more interested in health care issues or educational improvements.

The dramatic increase in major fundraising campaigns for hospitals and universities (which some of us thought were primarily the responsibility of the government) has dramatically altered the balance in philanthropic giving patterns. It is interesting to note that many of those engaged in hospital and university campaigns began their careers in fundraising for cultural organizations - but found to their dismay, that while they loved the arts - very few arts organizations were prepared to provide reasonable working conditions. The mindset was deeply entrenched that in the boards of many arts organizations we'll find some young women to do the fundraising - and probably the marketing as well - and pay them \$27,000 to do a \$50,000 plus job! This must change.

The unwillingness to invest now in the long-term sustainability of our arts organizations is, I think, indicative of the short-term thinking of boards and management. We are still far removed from the notion of the board member being a "trustee" who is responsible for the safeguarding of the organization and passing it on in a healthier condition for the benefit of future generations. We must be able to persuade the decision makers in these organizations (I often refer to them as the 3 solitudes) - to think strategically and invest in the building of lasting relationships with donors and potential donors - people give to people they trust and believe in. The cultivation of the relationships which will assure your future takes well qualified people and time! Time to develop those loyal and hopefully generous individuals who care about ensuring the future of the art form and who feel a strong sense of ownership in the future of your organization.

There has to be a real commitment on the part of cultural boards to bring a greater sense of entrepreneurialism to the organization. Build your audience! In my opinion, too much effort has been spent on cultivating relations with government departments and agencies - and we have all seen how unreliable some governments have been as continual sources of core support! (With the exception of the Federal governments new commitments last May - and the more recent commitment of Premier Lord in February.)

The board must lead in the crusade to build more solutions by directing more of the organizations efforts towards attracting and retaining the interest of the community. The artistic leadership must embrace the notion that development and marketing are crucial parts of the organizations long-term sustainability. It costs the same to mount an exhibition or production - whether anyone comes to see it or not. Surely if you believe

in the "product", you want to share the experience with as many people as possible - and always keep in mind that the ticket buyer - or the person who pays the admission charge to your exhibition - is also a potential donor - and possibly a life long friend of your organization.

Your friend-raising/relationship building strategy can be greatly advanced by the skilled use of the new technologies. I urge you to invest in the development of web based services and products that are easy to use and provide access to valuable information about your organization, or institution and its programs. The skilled use of the electronic box office and your ability to interact with your "customers" is still in its infancy - but it will be the best investment you can make because in our time-challenged world people are not willing to hang on the phone waiting for the box office - or be bound by the regular box office hours.

A recent study showed that the majority of the on-line ticket purchases took place between 9:00 pm and midnight. Similarly, I understand that the banks are experiencing a vast number of transactions on Sunday mornings!

Your board must take decisions with the staff to think strategically together about the desired outcomes of every relationship building and fundraising activity. The entire staff (and the artists) need to be constantly reminded that each persons work contributes in some way to the overall success of fundraising. The development operation has to be tied into the heart of the organization - not another solitude! If development is tied into the heart then there will be a greater appreciation of the critical role of loyal and generous donors. Never forget that the support of business in your community is greatly influenced by those the business people know and respect - and rub shoulders with.

Enhance the recruitment and involvement of effective board members. They must be selected based on his or her ability to help the organization achieve its objectives. The right selection of board members/trustees is crucial in developing community support and having your organization seen to be an essential service - and key to the quality of life in your community.

Each board member must become an active advocate for the art form and for your organization - they must understand and be prepared to explain why the arts and heritage organizations are vital to your community. In short - each member of your board must be equipped to make the case for the arts.

It is leaders in the community who must speak out. If the artists undertake advocacy it is often seen as self serving - and comes across as whining and begging. Difficult as it may be, your board members must be prepared to articulate your case - and open doors to attract the private sector support which is essential to your survival and to your rootedness in the community.

We have a lot of work to do. We made some wrong assumptions about the acceptance of the arts in our society.

We assumed that governments, at all levels, would slowly but inexorably increase their support for core funding; we assumed that the private sector, businesses and foundations, would provide ever-increasing support; we assumed that as more and more Canadians became better educated they would automatically embrace the arts. These assumptions fell into the same category as the paperless society and the 25 hour work week we were promised!

We need to face the new challenges together. It is a time for what I call "creative consolidation"! If we believe in the importance of theatre and music and dance and galleries and museums - and the value of sustaining these activities and adding more of our Canadian content to the body of creative expression built up over the centuries - then we must articulate and justify what we care about - why the arts matter. Unfortunately this cannot be explained in a 30 second sound bite or on the back of a cereal box. We must explain the arts in ways that do justice to them for what they are, while recognizing that statistically they are still, sadly, on the margins of people's discretionary time and spending.

As a starter list I would suggest we further develop arguments that build on the following special attributes of the arts.

These are in no particular order. Firstly, some practical arguments one can use:

- The arts improve the quality of life in our communities. They can help significantly to retain and attract productive citizens to your community.
- They keep city centres lively and make them more attractive to visit.
- They can re-generate neighbourhoods.
- The arts contribute significantly to the regional economy.
- They create meaningful jobs.
- They should be treated on a par with sports as crucial to good health.
- They are a source of civic pride and create a sense of community well being.
- They make people feel good about the place they have chosen to live.
- They are valuable to early child development.
- Art programs in health care centres are therapeutic.
- They comfort the elderly; they can help youth at risk lead productive lives.
- They can overcome social disharmony and lower social barriers.

While all of these are valuable justifications - the most important values are surely in the ability of excellent artistic work to amaze and delight us, to keep us in touch with our emotions, to make us laugh or cry. The arts can take us out of ourselves. They offer a shared experience rather than a solitary one. They encourage the imagination and link us to our past and open the door to the future.

John Tusa - in his book "Art Matters" - states it well when he writes "the arts matter because they embrace, express, and define the soul of a civilization. A nation without the arts would be a nation that has stopped talking to itself - stopped dreaming - and had lost interest in the past and lacked curiosity about the future"

The arts in all their forms help us to understand our society - and the uniqueness of the Canadian experience.

You become a relentless advocate for the arts, you must make your own choice of arguments. Each of you in this room has an important role to play in helping, not only your organization to position itself in your community, but in spite of the many challenges, helping the arts to flourish in the Atlantic provinces.
Good luck to you all.

Thank you.