

College Hoops Advice for Arts and Culture Leaders

University of Oregon women's basketball coach Kelly Graves recently described basketball as "beautiful music." He sees an orchestra in his Pacific-12 championship team. Among his star players, Graves identifies a conductor, a violinist, a clarinetist, and a drummer. Like basketball, "there are a lot of moving parts in an orchestra but when they all come together, it makes beautiful music."¹

In the midst of March Madness, is there anything arts and culture leaders can learn from basketball? College sports commentators often refer to the legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden, who was known for his seven-point creed for life.² In this edition of *Arts Insights*, we went into ACG's *Arts Insights* archive to create our own seven-point creed for arts and culture leaders, exploring the connections between Wooden's words of wisdom and ACG's recommendations over the years about how to build winning organizations.

1. Be True to Your Mission, Vision, and Values

In the 2016 *Arts Insights* "Leveraging Values to Strengthen Your Organization," ACG wrote that sustainable arts organizations and their capable board and staff leaders know that their organization's mission, vision, and values "form the central core of a nonprofit organization's strategic direction, articulating its purpose, destination, and guiding principles." They answer the profound questions that define the organization: What does our organization do? Whom do we serve, and how? What do we ultimately want to accomplish? What do we stand for? Arts and culture organizations should remain true to themselves by ensuring their mission, vision, and values are discussed regularly at board and staff meetings and that they serve as a touchstone for both the selection of long-term organizational strategies as well as everyday decision-making.

2. Make Each Day Matter

In the 2014 *Arts Insights* "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Cultural Organizations," ACG adapted Stephen R. Covey's bestseller and applied it to the organizations and people who deliver value to the arts and culture industry. ACG wrote that "being proactive will be the first step to embracing the long-lasting legacy that you seek [for your organization]. Setting priorities will allow everyone to focus on what is most important to your success. Creating win-win relationships internally and externally will be achieved by first seeking to understand before presenting your case. Synergizing will occur as the first five habits are followed and mastered. Finally, sharpening your physical, intellectual, and emotional saw will revitalize and inspire organizational adaptability, vibrancy, and sustainability."

3. Help Others

The concept of helping others has come into play in discussions about how arts and culture leaders can build meaningful relationships with donors and funders. In "Comprehensive Corporate Relations: Forging Mutually Beneficial Partnerships," recognizing that corporations pursue "partnerships that enhance their own business goals, such as increased sales, corporate branding, promotional opportunities, customer relationship development, and employee loyalty programs," ACG provided several tips for securing new and/or increased corporate giving. These included identifying shared goals by matching a company's strategic needs with the organization's strengths, facilitating one-stop shopping to simplify access and accelerate responsiveness, and ensuring frequent communication and information sharing. The 2017 issue of ACG's annual "Recent Trends in Philanthropic Giving" also reported evidence suggesting that "when charities meet the emotional needs of donors, the increased personal

¹ Pac-12, "Kelly Graves conducts Oregon women's basketball players as they 'make their own music,'" <https://pac-12.com/videos/kelly-graves-conducts-oregon-womens-basketball-players-they-make-their-own-music>, (March 7, 2018)

² UCLA Newsroom, "Coach John Wooden's 7-point creed," <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/xx-wooden-seven-point-creed-84181>, (March 7, 2018)

and emotional connection yields much higher giving.” Those who reported personal fulfillment donated five times the amount of those who were not fulfilled.

4. Drink Deeply of Arts and Culture

As a metaphor, this asks: Why does the world need our organization’s art? This is a question that all arts and culture leaders should consider. The November 2016 *Arts Insights* looked at this question through the lens of organizational diversity and reminded readers that the “arts and culture field has always both reflected the world in which content is created and also simultaneously challenged assumptions about that world.” Arts and culture leaders themselves should also ask: Why is art important to me? A 2017 *Arts Insights* on board development proposed that engaged and informed board members should “visit other arts and culture organizations. Museum board members should visit other museums. Board members of a children’s chorus may want to attend an upcoming youth symphony performance. Learn from other organizations doing good work in the field.”

5. Make Friendship a Fine Art

In 2011, “Building an Innovation Organization: Seven Patterns to Achieve Success” discussed the work of author Steven Johnson to identify the circumstances in which innovation emerges and thrives in arts and culture organizations. Friendship allows an organization to be a platform, “a place where ideas can be borrowed, recycled, and reinvented to create something new.” This article suggests supporting young composers, choreographers, writers, and painters; mentoring an emerging organization or a manager new to the field; partnering with other organizations to bring art forms together in fresh and innovative ways; and bringing arts leaders together with other community leaders to talk about how cultural institutions can help address other social, educational, or economic needs in the community.

6. Build a Shelter Against a Rainy Day

“Building a shelter,” as Wooden suggests, means more than fiscal responsibility and solid reserves. ACG considered this in a 2013 *Arts Insights* article. A sustainable business model for an arts and culture organization addresses “who the customers are, what they value, and how the organization delivers value to them.” Arts and culture leaders need to ask whether their business model is aligned with the mission and goals of the organization, self-reinforcing, and robust. Does it capitalize on strengths and opportunities and minimize weaknesses and threats?

Leadership development is another necessary security, and multiple articles have explored this complex topic over the years. Most recently, in the May 2017 *Arts Insights* “Arts and Culture Leadership: Four Action Steps to Create a Stronger Board,” we acknowledged that “good board leadership must be in place for an organization to move forward.” ACG proposed several action steps for board development, such as changing the board meeting agenda to “focus [more] on strategic discussions, including policies, best practices, fundraising, and associated capital, strategic, or program plan updates, all of which tap into the true work of a board,” and providing “training on how fundraising success is defined and what [board member] roles are within that process.”

7. Seek Guidance from and Thank Your Stakeholders

The 2011 article “Strategic Exploration in the Arts and Culture Sector: Creating Value through Community Engagement” recommended that arts and culture organizations actively seek guidance from stakeholders when considering new or expanded programmatic, educational, facility, and other organizational initiatives. “Strategic plans, capital campaigns, facility feasibility studies, executive searches, program advancement, and many other major transitional efforts can all benefit greatly from the advice of a well-chosen group of internal and external stakeholders.”

A 2016 *Arts Insights* focused on the power of saying “thank you” to those many stakeholders—artists, board members, volunteers, staff members, funders, patrons, community partners, and others—who work together to build winning organizations in their communities. Employees who feel appreciated for their efforts work harder, take fewer days off, and stay with an organization longer. First-time donors who are personally recognized for their contribution will give more in the second year.

Connecting Back to Wooden's Creed

While Wooden's guidance to individual players is not perfectly analogous to arts and culture organizations, new or refreshed perspectives may be found in translating these personal affirmations into best practices for organizational growth. As we cheer the accomplishments of talented athletes on the basketball court, take a moment to consider how these principles can help build a winning arts and culture organization.



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A fan of University of Oregon Women's Basketball, Ms. Lambert joined ACG in 2009 with more than 19 years of experience in performing arts management, planning, board development, policy formulation, artistic administration, operations, and program planning. Throughout her career, she has proven herself to be a thoughtful, creative, and flexible leader. Ms. Lambert has held positions at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Young Musicians Foundation, Honolulu Symphony Orchestra, Symphony of Southeast Texas, and Eugene Symphony, where she completed eight concert seasons with surpluses and doubled the orchestra's endowment fund. She also served on the board of directors of the League of American Orchestras and as faculty of the Orchestra Leadership Academy. Ms. Lambert holds a bachelor of music degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara, master of business administration from the Yale School of Organization and Management, and strategic management certificate from The George

Washington University and Strategy Management Group. She is a certified Strategic Management Professional and currently serves as President of the board of directors of ShelterCare, an Oregon-based housing and human services organization. Go Ducks!

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on how we can help you build a winning arts and culture organization.**

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