

## THE BLOG

# The Arts Add Powerful Voice and Vibrancy to Corporate America

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Fifty years ago, David Rockefeller, Chairman and CEO of the Chase Manhattan Corporation, gave an address to the National Industrial Conference Board (now The Conference Board). It was The Conference Board's 50th anniversary, and his words changed how the business community viewed the arts world.

Rockefeller has always been a visionary who understood a half century ago that the arts could go a long way towards helping businesses as well as humanity. He called for businesses to assume a much larger role in supporting the arts for the many ways that they improve both the business and the community. He helped lead the formation of the Business Committee for the Arts (BCA)—since merged with Americans for the Arts—which has encouraged, inspired, and paved the way for businesses to support the arts in the workplace, in education, and in the community.

Rockefeller invited 100 business leaders to join him as the organization's first members, and the Honorable C. Douglas Dillon was named the first chairman. The membership roster was a who's who of business and included Katherine Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post*, Robert O. Anderson, founder Atlantic Richfield Oil, Robert Sarnoff, chairman of RCA, and Gavin K. MacBain, chairman of Bristol-Meyers Squibb.

In 1966 businesses were allocating \$22 million to the arts; today they are allocating more than \$3 billion, 5 percent of all income for the not-for-profit arts in America. These great strides have been made owing to strong business leaders who recognize the power of the arts and lead by example. These leaders are often best known for their professional trade, but their careers have often been shaped by their passion and engagement in the arts, and their understanding of how the arts benefit their businesses should also be celebrated.

Next week, Americans for the Arts will celebrate Rockefeller's legacy with a [lecture by David Rubenstein](#), Co-Founder and Co-CEO of The Carlyle Group. As part of the David Rockefeller Lecture series—advancing Rockefeller's mission to ensure that the business community supports a thriving and vibrant arts community—Rubenstein will address the vital connection between arts and business. He is known by many as head of the largest private equity firm in the world, but his passion for and investment in the arts—whether through the restoration of the Washington Monument or as chair of the Kennedy Center—sets the stage for creativity and innovation nationwide.

Rubenstein is not alone. Joining the CEOs on today's board of the BCA, led by Chairman Edgar Smith, CEO of World Pac Paper, are CEOs across the country who understand the benefits of the arts to their company and employees. Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, is a lover of literature and poetry, and this sets him apart from the expected. In employee emails he has quoted and referenced Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, and Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke as a way to encourage employees to challenge themselves, transform as individuals, and embrace change. He also compares poetry to coding and says that "the best code is poetry."

Microsoft is no stranger to arts partnerships—the company has one of the world's largest [corporate art collections](#), with nearly 5,000 works of art displayed in more than 180 buildings throughout the world. Microsoft Research's [Studio 99](#) artist-in-residency program provides a space for science and the arts to interact, with the hope of inspiring new kinds of human expression, both scientific and artistic.



Renowned real estate developer Jorge Pérez, Chairman and CEO of The Related Group, also sees that the arts help people understand the world in a deeper way. Growing up, Pérez developed an interest in how Latin American artists used their work to reflect the community's spirit and, over time, as a force for positive change. Later, Pérez saw the opportunity to contribute to the reconstruction of the former Miami Art Museum as a way to allow all of the city's children, regardless of socioeconomic standing, the chance to experience the kind of artwork that so deeply impacted his own personal and professional growth. The Related Group integrates artists' work into their development projects and partners with arts organizations in the hopes of creating inspirational spaces and promoting Miami as a thriving cultural center.

Artist residencies in manufacturing plants, corporate battles of the bands, employee improvisation and creativity training through jazz and visual arts, the transformation of utility facilities for artist exhibitions—these all help improve community relations. They help businesses be better businesses, while corporate support helps the arts be better at art.

Around the country we see examples of the arts partnering with businesses and contributing to thriving cultural hubs, essential in attracting companies and talented people to the region and fostering a creative workforce. Many examples of this can be found on the [pARTnership Movement site](#). According to the [Ready to Innovate](#) study—a partnership of The Conference Board, Americans for the Arts, and the American Association of School Administrators—72 percent of business leaders cited creativity as the number one skill they sought in new hires. Yet, 85 percent of those employers reported that they could not find the creative applicants they sought. The survey results reflect employers' recognition that building an innovative and engaged workforce depends on developing employees' creative abilities. Business leaders must be accountable for engaging their teams with opportunities for creative growth.

It gives me great hope to meet more and more business leaders who are passionate about the arts and are involving the arts in their business culture and providing employees with innovative opportunities for growth and development. Join me in celebrating arts and business partnerships. Supporting the arts is a win-win for everyone—the company, its employees, and the entire community.