

Artistic Culture Meets Business Culture

posted January 25th, 2009 by Luis Moreno, Change Architects, Mobile, Alabama

I had the opportunity in November 2008 to attend a musical performance of outstanding value on several accounts by the Ensemble Vivant; a piano, cello and violin female trio. They celebrated their 20th anniversary of their first CD with a performance at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts. I can go on and on about this, but as I'm sitting here enjoying the memory of the performance a few ideas circle my mind in regards to culture.



Some of the music played was by composers Astor Piazzolla and Charles Chaplin, figures of outstanding value in the musical scene of the 20th century; coming from different corners of the world, with different backgrounds, they left a legacy of motion movies, jazz, tango, and classical music for all of us to enjoy. These individuals are icons for followers of their craft and genre, they were movers and shakers who demonstrated many virtues that one could claim are necessary in a corporate/organizational culture to shape itself and move forward. A culture is not a set of policies and procedures, it is reflected in policies and procedures and creative organizational members are those who drive the culture to bring about new policies and procedures, new ways of understanding and being. Such is the nature of icons and their key contributors to a culture, but they have to work hard at it, they often have to pay a price for what they do and offer. A question that comes to mind: What is the framework of a work setting that would allow those seminal contributors to offer their gift and, in doing so, to reshape and move forward their culture to the benefit of all?

There are many latent Piazzollas and Chaplins in the work place, it is not the survival of the species what will bring their contribution to bear in the work place it is their ability, propensity and support for collaboration. As a culture, do we let them exercise and display the following?

- **Leadership** – they decided they were going to follow their path although the path may not have been that obvious to anyone, including themselves. Take the case of Piazzolla and his varied musical background by training, ethnicity and influence, and how he explored each individually and collectively. Today, a few years after his death, many are exploring and understanding even singular areas of his exploration

- **Emotions** – they made it their business to convey and elicit emotions; one may say that this is what art is all about. That is true, but it is also true that this is what human beings are about most of the time, including when they are at work. Everyday people go to work carrying with them their emotions and playing them in the work environment somewhere in the repression-expression continuum. Bringing about, exploring and satisfying emotions is a face of business performance that cultures would do well in addressing.

• **Talent** – they displayed a great deal of musical talent and have been recognized on their own right. Both were composers, Piazzolla was a professional performer more so than Chaplin. However, they were different and also in an organizational environment differences for talent display are a key component in the dynamics of the work place leading to high performance. Piazzolla imitated, transformed, combined, transcended and brought about new music; Chaplin created music for his movies. One is not better than the other is; they contributed their talent to create music for our culture to enjoy; we need to have people in organizations who make their contributions for all the work place to enjoy and benefit. But the contributions of individuals ought not be all encompassing to be great contributions, like these two artisans, they contributed in the context they understood and felt, in the environment they felt aligned to. In organizational cultures we must learn to appreciate talent development and decouple components of talent contribution, for instances contributing with the identification of opportunities doesn't have to be attached to addressing the opportunities or seen them through to completion.

• **Growth** – they demonstrated an intense ability to keep on creating material although they had separate goals. As our culture at large grows because of the growth of these two musicians, so does an organizational culture. Organizations that offer an outlet for individual growth and support growth collaboration are more likely to attract and keep growth minded contributors who would take the culture to evolve, although they may not be the ones who necessary articulate the policies, processes and procedures we so much love to see.

These are but some of the parallels that one can make between art forms in the context of a social culture and the work forms in the context of a work environment.

(Reprinted from the Change Architects Blog - A Dialogue for Conscious Business Strategies)