**Op/ed: Why business leaders should trumpet the arts**

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**By Ritch Eich**

This year’s Rose Bowl Parade featured dancers and equestrians from Santa Barbara’s Old Spanish Days and an award-winning float from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Besides showcasing their artistry to thousands of cheering parade-goers, the performers demonstrated important lessons for business leaders.

Today, increasing numbers of business leaders are recognizing the power of the arts. They realize that in our hyper-speed, constantly changing global economy, people with artistic talent and training bring many essential skills to the workplace, including:

• Tenacity: Artists have a “staying power,” discipline and doggedness that enables them to overcome many different challenges.

• Mental acuity: Artists have an ability to reason, conceptualize and decipher problems.

• Cooperation and teamwork: Artists collaborate and pool resources.

• Innovation: Artists originate, create, invent or introduce new ideas.

• Self-confidence: Artists have a presence honed in the trenches — whether acting in front of an audience, singing in a choir, painting a mural, being a lead dancer or performing in a marching band.

In a nationwide study of employers by Hart Research, the most sought-after skills that companies seek include innovation, critical thinking, complex problem-solving ability and intercultural aptitude. The study validates the critical importance of the arts by instilling in students the core skills that enable them to navigate constant change in their work environments.

Unfortunately, some people haven’t learned this. CBS radio sports talk host Jim Rome recently insulted marching bands in a tweet on Jan. 1 as scores of bands performed splendidly at the Rose Parade. Rome tweeted, “Is there anyone not in a marching band who thinks those dorks running around in their instruments are cool?”

After the tweet went viral and many people slammed Rome, he apologized for his demeaning remark that some speculate was designed to increase his listener base.

Marching bands that perform in the Rose Parade command respect worldwide. Many ordinary folks enjoy the bands’ music and showmanship. In sports circles, it is well known that the famous Michigan football coach Bo Schembechler developed a close professional relationship with the legendary marching band conductor William Revelli and his marching band.

Schembechler was overjoyed that Revelli volunteered to teach Michigan freshmen football players “Hail to the Victors,” (the University of Michigan fight song) but more importantly, to help instill in them treasured university values and traditions.

President John F. Kennedy recognized the value of the arts in all aspects of life and as a way to elevate the country. Kennedy, in an Oct. 26, 1963, speech at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Robert Frost Library at Amherst College, uttered the following lines that now adorn the wall of the River Terrace at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.:

“I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft. I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standard of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all our citizens. And I look forward to an America which will command respect throughout the world not only for its strength but for its civilization as well.”

Even surgeons recognize how the arts hone their skills. In Bangalore, India, Dr. Devi Shetty, a renowned pediatric cardiac surgeon, plays pop music in his operating room and insists that young surgeons at his teaching hospital attend painting classes so they learn to treat their medical instruments like paint brushes. “Ultimately, we are all artists,” he told NPR.

Maybe Rome should watch a high school or college marching band’s often grueling practices, or he could attend the symphony or take in a play. He might learn the value of the arts in a new way so that the next time he announces on radio, he won’t demean the disciplined artists who work incredibly hard, demonstrate teamwork and use creativity to accomplish key strategic goals.

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