

# Foreword

by

Nancy J. Adler

## Leadership Artistry

*Only by investing in the artistry of our humanity  
will we create a peaceful, prosperous planet*

“These times are riven with anxiety and uncertainty” asserts poet, philosopher, and management consultant John O’Donohue.<sup>1</sup> “In the hearts of people some natural ease has been broken. ...Our trust in the future has lost its innocence. We know now that anything can happen. ... The traditional structures of shelter are shaking, their foundations revealed to be no longer stone but sand. We are suddenly thrown back on ourselves. Politics, religion and economics, and the institutions of family and community, all have become abruptly unsure. At first, it sounds completely naive to suggest that now might be the time to invoke beauty. Yet this is exactly what ... [we claim]. Why? Because there is nowhere else to turn and we are desperate; furthermore, it is because we have so disastrously neglected the Beautiful that we now find ourselves in such a terrible crisis.”<sup>2</sup>

Twenty-first century society yearns for a leadership of possibility, a leadership based more on hope, aspiration, innovation, and beauty than on the replication of historical patterns of constrained pragmatism. Luckily, such a leadership is possible today. For the first time in history, leaders can work backward from their aspirations and imagination rather than forward from the past.<sup>3</sup> “The gap between what people

can imagine and what they can accomplish has never been smaller.”<sup>4</sup>

Responding to the challenges and yearnings of the twenty-first century demands the practices and perspectives of artists. Designing options worthy of implementation calls for levels of inspiration, creativity, and a passionate commitment to beauty that, until recently, have been more the province of artists and artistic processes than the domain of most managers.<sup>5</sup> The time is right for the artistic imagination of each of us to co-create the leadership that the world most needs and deserves.

*The Talmud*, among many ancient traditions, reminds us that “We don’t see things as they are; we see things as we are.” Fred Mandell, with his unique fusion of executive experience, artistic creativity, and profound humanity presents the world as only he can see it. Through an equally singular blending of memoir, storytelling, poetry and reflections on the creative process, Fred challenges us to believe in the power of art and art-making to transform the maker, the viewer and the broader community. He calls upon us to introduce the aspiration for beauty into conversations at all levels of society. *Can Art Save Us?*, offers a rare and precious opportunity to see the world, not as it is, but as it could be; not as we habitually see it –reinforced daily by yet another onslaught of the horrifying, sensationalized cacophony masquerading as the morning news –but as we yearn to see it and to live in it. That yearning is not for some idealized utopia, but for a world that grants us efficacy – the efficacy of our reclaimed belief in ‘Yes’: Yes we can make the world (and our country, community, and organizations) better. We yearn for a

world that reflects our collective humanity, and the belief that “Yes, we can achieve it.”

Philosopher and scholar Thomas Kuhn, in explaining how thought systems change, counsels that it is impossible to see something new until you have a metaphor that will let you perceive it in new ways.<sup>6</sup> So to be able to invent a new, more peaceful, prosperous, sustainable, and beautiful world, each of us needs first to change ourselves and our own thinking. To be able to change our thinking, we must first change the metaphors through which we view the world. In asking the question “Can art save us?”, Fred offers us just such a new metaphor. Not surprisingly, in the process of opening to this new metaphor and new way of thinking, we find ourselves unfolding to the possibility of beauty.

What allows individuals, organizations, and whole societies to let go of prior worldviews and approaches that seemingly worked in the past but are no longer either appropriate or efficacious? To even ask the right questions requires profound courage and commitment. Otherwise, the completely human response would be resignation - “Why bother?” Canadian Ian Wilson wisely observed that “No amount of sophistication is going to allay the fact that all your knowledge is about the past and all your decisions are about the future.”<sup>7</sup> To move ahead in spite of not knowing, which is where profound hope and commitment lead people, is to embrace the unknown, while not yet knowing if it will ultimately become knowable or continue to remain beyond the grasp of our understanding. Art offers us, artists and non-artists alike, pathways into just such commitments and courage. As Fred reveals in *Can Art Save Us?* artistic processes offer

us a way to face unacceptable reality, to confront the unknown and unknowable, to marry aspiration with empiricism, and ultimately to expose leadership as the embodiment of artistic processes, and not merely the application of ever more sophisticated analytical algorithms. As Roger Martin, former Dean of Toronto's Rotman School of Management wisely observed, "What the world needs is more business artists, not more business analysts." *Can Art Save Us?* invites us to bring the studio out into the world and to begin reclaiming our capacities as leadership artists. Ultimately, Fred's work is a tribute to what we are individually and collectively capable of, unfettered by a regrettable past or a daunting present. In the words of singer/songwriter Phil Ochs:

*"In these ugly times,  
the only true protest is beauty."*

---

<sup>1</sup> O'Donohue, J. (2003:2). *Beauty: The invisible embrace*. NY: Harper Perennial

<sup>2</sup> Op cit, 2-3; also see Adler, N.J. (2015, in press) "Global Wisdom: Not a Panacea, but absolutely Necessary for Transcending Yesterday's Managerial Failures" in Anders Ortenblad (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Management Ideas and Panaceas: Adaptation and Context*. Cheltenham, U.K. & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

<sup>3</sup> Paragraph based on Adler, N. J. (2006). The arts and leadership: Now that we can do anything, what will we do? *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 5(4), 466-499.

<sup>4</sup> Hamel, G. (2000:10). *Leading the revolution*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press

<sup>5</sup> See Adler, N.J. (2011) "Leading Beautifully: The Creative Economy and Beyond", *Journal of Management Inquiry*, vol. 20 (no. 3), pp. 208-221.

<sup>6</sup> Kuhn, T.(1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson as cited at: <http://home.bi.no/fgl88001/sigs.htm>