

CEOs must be artists?

McGill teacher paints, thinks executives need skills her ilk rely on

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McGill University Professor and artist Nancy Adler at Galerie MX in Montreal, where her interactive show *Reality in Translation, Going Beyond the Dehydrated Language of Management*, is being presented. Adler believes more CEOs should be using artistic thinking.

PETER MCCABE/TORONTO STAR

Matt Symonds Special to the Star

It's time to start developing a new type of business leader, according to Valerie Gauthier, associate dean at one of Europe's top business schools, HEC Paris. The modern world is so complex, she argues, that we need people in corporate boardrooms who can embrace science, art and philosophy as comfortably as they can financial analysis and management theory.

Gauthier suggests creating renaissance MBAs by opening up MBA programs to people with backgrounds in disciplines such as political science, history or the creative industries, not just focusing on candidates from banking, commerce or management consultancy.

Other schools are trying to tackle the challenge through the use of unconventional teaching techniques. At Warwick Business School in the U.K., for example, MBA

students are put through a theatre course which involves the Royal Shakespeare Company

In Canada, some of the country's top business educators are putting their faith in the use of the creative arts to shape the next generation of corporate leaders. Roger

“Art should be a required subject at every level of education”

**Roger Martin, Dean
Rotman School of Management**

Martin, of the Rotman School of Management, for example, is an enthusiastic advocate of what he calls “design thinking,” a way of shifting the emphasis in the corporate world from analysis to intuition, and has gone as far as suggesting that Perhaps the most high

profile supporter of the use of art in the development of business leaders is to be found at the Desautels faculty at McGill University in the person of Dr. Nancy Adler.

Adler's day job is teaching at McGill. And helping major international corporations such as Rio Tinto and the Business Families Foundation with cross-cultural management issues.

She has also built a reputation as a highly respected watercolourist over the past 20 years.

She's found a way of combining both careers.

“There's been a tradition of hostility between the arts and commerce,” she says. “Artists, too often, think of businesspeople as Philistines, and they, in turn, think of artists as a bit flaky.

“But if you dig deep enough, then you find there is a lot of common ground to creating a great art work or a great business.”

Adler argues that successful leaders and successful artists share three qualities: the ability to see reality as it is, to imagine possibilities on the basis of this and to inspire others to see both reality and possibility.

“A real life example of imagining possibilities would be BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. A visionary leader would recognise that the goal shouldn't have been to just get a cap on the leak, but to build a truly sustainable economic model in the region.”

Works of art can help inspire leaders to achieve all, rather than just part, of their potential

She believes that works of art can help inspire potential leaders to achieve all, rather than just part, of their potential.

“You'd be hard pressed to find a painter who didn't approach a blank canvas wanting to produce something of high quality, but all too often people in the commercial world end up settling for the just-good-enough.”

Adler works with some of the world's best-known companies because of her professional credentials and track record.

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Nancy Adler, artist, McGill University

Her second career as a painter allows her to use art as a catalyst for more effective thinking amongst her clients. She cites the example of a company that was struggling to integrate new acquisitions across Asia and the Americas into its overall strategy.

She says she helped break the deadlock by taking the senior management team to an exhibition of Cubist paintings. Adler explains that traditional artists painted as if there was just one viewer, while Cubists presented the same image from multiple perspectives. The exhibition helped the team realise it needed multiple perspectives, a combination of both a global and local outlook, if it was to succeed.

As one of her McGill-Desautels MBA students, Eric Daye, puts it, “What Dr. Adler shows is that art doesn't provide the answers to business problems in itself. But what it can do is allow you to step back and reflect, so that you can come up with your own solutions, perhaps outside the constraints of accepted practice.”

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