

MIT

Leadership Center

Passion to Action Newsletter

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Get Creative: Use Art to Innovate About the Center

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Learning from Leaders

Apply turnaround insights. A relentless focus on “great art, well marketed” helped Michael Kaiser reverse a \$30 million deficit at England’s Royal Opera House and turn around American Ballet Theatre. Now President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Kaiser spoke with MIT Sloan Dean Emeritus William Pound, a trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts. [View video](#) of the conversation, part of the Dean’s Innovative Leader Series.

Inspire ethical behavior. “[E]thical practice resembles other processes we consider routine, from cooking to running errands, to fixing your car,” writes MIT Sloan lecturer Leigh Hafrey. In [The Story of Success](#), Hafrey describes five steps to ethical behavior, illustrating his advice with children’s tales, film plots, and the life experience of executives.

Find balance in your purpose. When the leaders of MIT, BP,

Dear Jonathan,

Welcome. This issue of *Passion to Action* describes a novel way to develop leaders: **21st Century Visual Arts Workshop for Business Leaders**. Hands-on art projects show the connections among all kinds of creative thinking.

Get Creative: Use Art to Innovate

Right-brain inspiration for left-brain leaders

In an age of innovation, how do you get the Next Big Idea?

Some businesses and educators are finding inspiration in the visual arts. They’re learning that scissors and paint can inspire even the most analytical of leaders.

Twelve MIT Sloan students put this concept to the test at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA) in March. They spent a day with drawing paper and high-definition video cameras and came away marveling at the power of art to connect and communicate.

The day showed that—even if you haven’t held a crayon since grade school—you can use art to create a vision, relate to others, better understand the world around you, and find new ways to collaborate, all [key tasks](#) of leaders.

Adjusting to Surprises

To encourage flexibility, two exercises at the workshop included a surprise, just like many business days. Students who began with one creative vision or expectation needed to switch gears and adapt to a new reality.

One student commented that in the business world, as in the visual arts, there may be no clear right answer. “You’re dealing with an ambiguous range of problems,” said second-year student Alex Bennion. “You struggle with that and you may not find the perfect solution, but you do get closer.”

This ability to [understand a dynamic environment](#) is an important capability of leaders. Both artists and leaders must be able to investigate problems and find solutions. SMFA faculty member David Kelley commented, “There are some serious transferable skills here.”

Tap Your Creativity

and Novartis meet to discuss leadership, what do they say? Read about **“Principle and Profit: Responsibilities of the Global Corporation.”**

For business leaders who want to learn more about visual communication and the role of art in a media-intensive world, Kelley recommended the books of Marshall McLuhan, including *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).

“McLuhan is even more relevant today,” says Kelley. “Media has become even more expansive and integrated into our lifestyle. It’s entertainment but it’s also our business and our way of communicating.”

For more ways to get the Big Idea, read "Imagine That"

About the Center

The MIT Leadership Center is dedicated to advancing the knowledge, perspectives and experiences that enable leaders to transform their passion into action and improve the world. The Center’s world-class researchers and practitioners create cutting-edge theory and applied research, pragmatic tools for action, innovative education, and dialogues and networks to connect diverse individuals, organizations and communities around the globe.

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