



If you're reading this: (1) You're a Leader, and (2) Run!

By Thomas Tresser- November 29, 2011

Got creativity?

If you're reading this, no doubt you do.

Are you an artist, manager, producer, cultural activist, owner of an architectural practice, band manager, designer, performer, theater director or board member of a cultural organization? And if you've laboring in the creative sector, my guess is you're already leading in any number of projects, organizations, and local efforts.

You may have no trouble claiming the mantle of a creative professional. But what about a leader in the public sector?

My point to you is that they are one and the same.

After all, the establishment of our country was a creative act. The Declaration of Independence was a profoundly innovative document that sparked the public imagination and gave life to a revolutionary idea. Readings of the declaration across the 13 colonies in 1776 were civic *performances* that formed the colonies into the United States of America in the minds of the listeners.

Creativity and the passion to pursue the dreams released by creativity lie at the heart of America's success as a nation and as a people. The chance to re-invent themselves is why over 30 million who were not born here are in the USA right now.

Collectively, our creative industries are leading the world in new products, entertainment and scientific advancement. America's creative class of artists, cultural workers, writers, software developers, inventors, change agents, community organizers and others live to generate new visions, products and solutions. We also innovate in social change and challenging authority. Jane Addams was just as great an innovator as was Louis Armstrong or Steve Jobs.

In 2007 the total value added to the economy by all the copyright industries was \$152 trillion or 11.05% of our Gross Domestic Product. Over 38 million Americans work in creativity-related industries. Creativity is where the action is for post-Industrial, post-Service and post-Modern societies. This is where the most value will be created and the highest-paying jobs will be. It's also where the fun is. And it's projected to grow by a 4.6 percent compound annual growth rate through 2015.

A 2010 global survey by IBM interviewed 1,500 CEOs from 60 countries and asked them what sort of skills were they looking for from their managers over the next five years to lead their businesses to success? The Number One quality these CEOs said they are looking for is CREATIVITY. [<http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/ceo/ceostudy2010/index.html>]

I imagine the logic chain in laying out the frame behind a call for a Creative America going something like this: You can't have a prosperous and successful America unless you have an innovative America. You need a creative America to have an innovative America. And you need a literate, tolerant and inquisitive America to have a creative America. Put it another way: Openness+Literacy+Opportunity=Creativity->Innovation->Prosperity (AND a robust democracy).

In a sense, creativity is an energy source inside every individual, renewable and endless like sunlight. In fact, creativity is one energy source that is non-polluting, available everywhere in inexhaustible abundance.

As creative professionals, we live these truths every day. And as creatives, we are already in positions of leadership. **So why not run for public office** and formalize your commitment to creativity? Declare yourselves Creativity Champions and take your passions, values and skills into public life!

Here's how I see your experience and talents as creative professionals benefiting the public arena:

- You know how to think outside the box and how to challenge assumptions.
- You know how to create ensembles and high-performance teams.
- You know how to use resources wisely, creatively and effectively.
- You know how to assume diverse perspectives and to emphasize with outsider viewpoints.
- You know how to create beauty and new things.
- You are essentially an optimist and idealist.
- You seek truth and reveal contradictions and ask basic and sometimes troubling questions.
- You are passionate, compassionate and relentless in your pursuit of excellence.

To me, that looks like a list of “must haves” for any civic leader today. What do you say? Will you stand up for a Creative America? If so, consider running for local office in 2012.