

## **When the arts spur business**

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Step into a business meeting today and you might see something surprising. World-class jazz ensembles. Poets. Even improvisational actors from the comedy group, Second City. What's going on? Actually, it's all part of groundbreaking business learning. And almost every day a growing number of Fortune 500 companies and smaller firms across the country are using these art forms -- and others -- to learn new ways of developing workplace skills that are imperative in our changing, global economy.

The mantra is that creative thinking, not technical skills, will save U.S. jobs. Harvey Seifter, founder and director of Creativity Connection, a program of the national Arts & Business Council of Americans for the Arts, calls it simply "arts-based learning."

A concept that was in its infancy 10 years ago, arts-based learning represents a major shift in the way corporate America is responding to a non-predictable economy. Seifter notes that the information technology revolution, an accelerated rate of change, globalization and the drive for innovation are propelling the shift.

According to "Are They Really Ready to Work?" a 2006 study conducted by the Conference Board, along with Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the Society for Human Resource Management, companies are seeing a shortage of skills essential for innovation -- critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and effective communication. Seifter's work has found that combining right-brain imagination with left-brain logic and analysis increases the capacity for breakthrough ideas.

Companies also are increasingly using the arts to address employee disengagement. Arts-inspired employees become creative team members who experiment with new thinking, which leads to innovative products, imaginative marketing, better performance and new reasons to stay.

Local professionals are embracing the synergy between the arts and creativity. Chris Johnson, a product director at McNeil Consumer Healthcare in Fort Washington, uses the brainstorming and teambuilding he learned eight years ago at a Duke University workshop with Second City.

Just last June, the University of the Arts opened its Center for the Creative Economy to research creativity and innovation. The goal is to illustrate how the creative process can yield better systems, methods, designs and products.

On June 12, the Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia will take a look at this new business frontier when we partner with Creativity Connection for an interactive seminar with Second City. It's our next MetLife Foundation National Arts Forum, "Powering Corporate Performance Through Arts-Based Learning," and details are at **[www.artsandbusinessphila.org](http://www.artsandbusinessphila.org)**. Be sure to join us.

*Karen B. Davis is president and CEO of the Arts and Business Council of Greater Philadelphia, an affiliate of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce.*