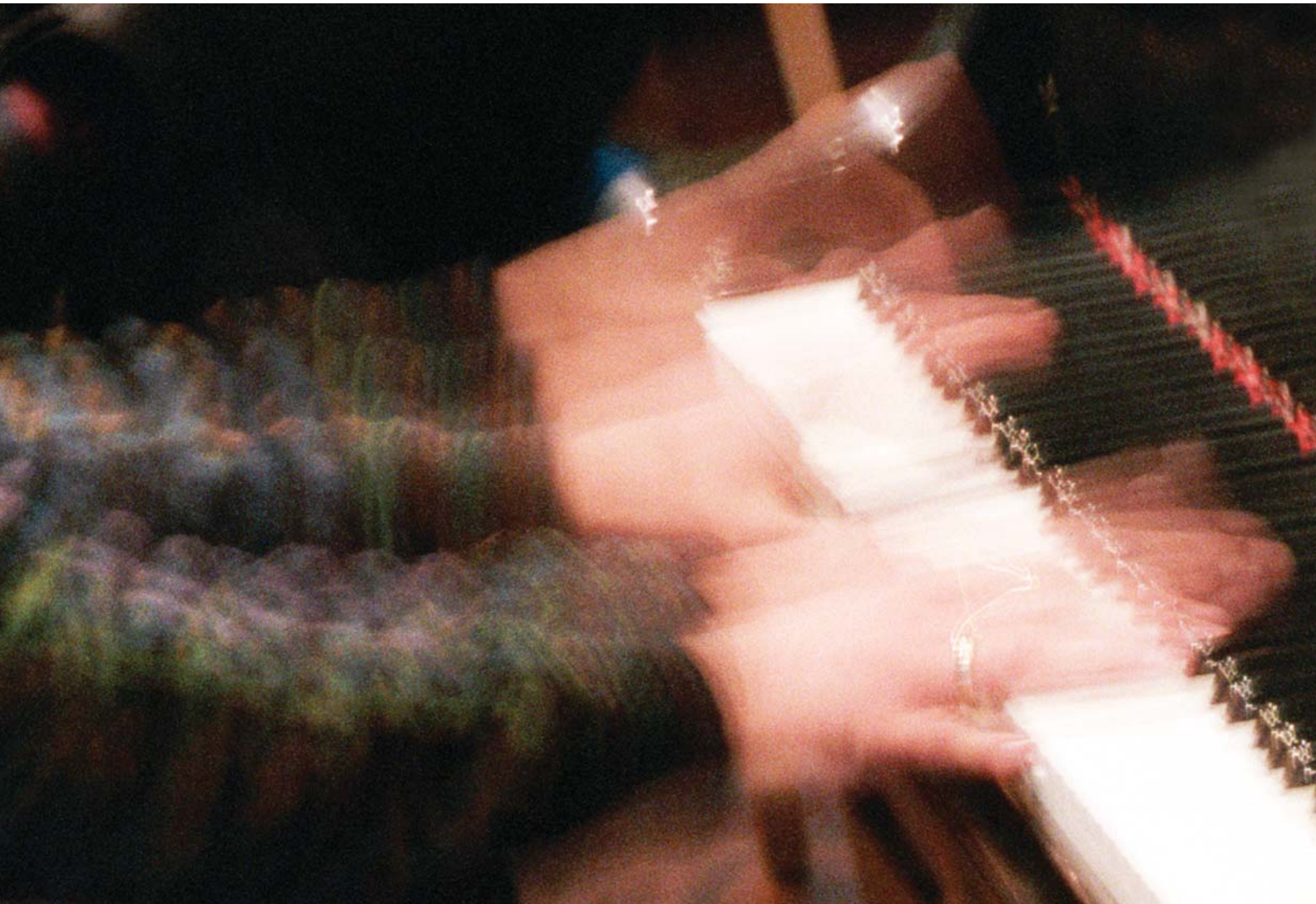


# THE ART OF COMMUNICATION: **CHANNELLING YOUR INNER ARTIST**

BY **STEVE COPPOLA**

“Like artists who draw on their capacity for self-awareness, creative expression, imagining, and empathy, leaders can also access these innate but often dormant competencies to create meaningful connections...”



Have you ever heard someone respond to a work of art by saying, "It speaks to me?" That is the power of the artist to connect with people at a deep and meaningful level. Leaders possess the same potential each time they communicate with a constituent, whether it's an employee, board member, stockholder, or strategic partner. Yet how can leaders go beyond merely communicating with people and connect with them in a way that inspires? The answer? Channel your inner artist.

Like artists who draw on their capacity for self-awareness, creative expression, imagining, and empathy, leaders can also access these innate but often dormant competencies to create meaningful connections with individuals, groups, and even entire organizations. This is the essence of inspired leadership, says Kevin Asbjörnson, MIM, a composer/pianist, and Artist-in-Residence/Creative Faculty for the Inspiring Creative Leadership program at The Banff Centre.

Asbjörnson offers a set of principles he calls the Eight Keys to Inspired Leadership. These principles find parallels in the process of artistic expression and provide leaders with a framework for communication that inspires unprecedented creativity, collaboration, and productivity:

#### **Reach and Influence of Audience (RIA).**

Artists create purposefully to connect with others. Effective leaders understand that this "Reach and Influence of Audience" is not achieved through PowerPoint presentations, memos or meetings, but rather through consistent and deliberate efforts to understand and effectively connect with constituents.

#### **Recognize the actual vs. the intended impact of your voice.**

Artful leaders come out from behind job titles and desks to find out whether their "audience" heard what they intended to say. Just as concert pianists must tune and tone their instruments, leaders can learn to tune and tone their voices and to anticipate their impact on others.

#### **Listen with intention vs. hear with filters.**

Listening is itself an art that requires attentiveness, openness to new perspectives, and the ability to draw connections among disparate elements. Rather than hearing with filters, inspired leaders engage in intentional listening.

#### **Facilitate solutions with the right questions vs. dictate the right answers.**

Artists derive their inspiration by asking what, what if, how, and why. Leaders typically ask only what and how because they believe they have to have all the answers. However, the art of asking good questions and listening perceptively to others' questions creates better followership – and better solutions – than habitually dictating answers.

#### **Recognize and acknowledge the talents of others.**

Many leaders fail to engage the talents of others because they neglect the critical first step of recognizing and acknowledging their gifts. Just as successful artists embrace their own gifts, artful leaders tap into and leverage all of the talent in the workplace.



KEVIN ASBJÖRNSON, MIM

#### **Balance action with reflection.**

Profound works of art are the product of contemplation, reflection, and introspection. But "do, do, do, act, act, act" is the mantra of many organizations. Action without reflection results in premature decisions, wasted effort, and mediocre results. Balancing action with reflection ensures individual and organizational learning.

#### **A leader who doesn't practice is like a performing artist who doesn't rehearse – they both lose their audience.**

Leadership is not a right or entitlement; it must be consistently demonstrated, refined, and earned. Creating and sustaining meaningful connections reinforces credibility and integrity with all of your constituents.

#### **Leaders inspire people; people motivate themselves.**

Artists create from deep internal motives. Likewise, individuals in organizations bring intrinsic motivation to their work as well. Rather than trying to manufacture motivation, an artful leader inspires exceptional work by calling upon others' innate desire to make a difference. This inspiration inevitably fires people's imaginations which in turn triggers innovation.

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