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Maybe it's Excellent... But is it Good?

Diane Ragsdale · Thursday, June 23rd, 2011



A few years back I heard Howard Gardner speak in a lecture series at MOMA in NYC called *The True, the Beautiful and the Good, Reconsiderations in a Postmodern, Digital Era*. I attended the lecture on 'the Good' in which Gardner described 'good work' (in the sense of one's vocation/job) as work that is excellent, engaging, and ethical (for more on this idea, check out Gardner's Goodwork Toolkit). As soon as I heard the description my mind began working on a question: By-and-large, are nonprofit arts organizations doing 'good' (i.e., excellent, engaging, and ethical) work? While there are many arts organizations that are beloved by the artists and staffers that work there, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that (at least at some institutions) one or more legs of the 'goodwork' stool may need shoring up.

If I had a dime for every time a nonprofit arts admin staffer said to me, "our organization is filled with people under 35 who have great ideas but the artistic and managing directors have no interest in what we have to say" I'd be able to buy a round-trip ticket Amsterdam to NYC.

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