



## E-Newsletters

# Jazz Up Your Diversity Conversation

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August 21, 2008

A professional jazz musician has found a way to connect the jazz art form with diversity and inclusion in the corporate world.

Michael Gold — founder and principal of Jazz Impact, an organization that uses music to provide an interactive arts-based training experience — said there is a need for an innovative way to engage an audience when training on diversity topics.

“When you set up the context of a musical environment, it opens the right side of people’s brain [to] a whole [new way] of thinking that allows them to experience things in a different way than talking heads, PowerPoint, [etc., that often put] people to sleep,” Gold said.

“If you’re dealing with strategies or Wall Street, that is really important. But when you’re dealing with this kind of behavioral dynamic that is such an important and deep part of corporate culture, you have to engage [employees] in a different way. Otherwise, they walk out and [what they learned] doesn’t stick.”

Gold uses jazz as a model to demonstrate the evolution of corporate culture and change in organizational thinking.

Jazz evolved out of the paradigm of the symphony that traditionally represents a structured approach to music, Gold explained. Everyone is siloed into separate departments, such as brass, strings and woodwinds, and interprets verbatim someone else’s ideas — the composer’s.

“That paradigm doesn’t reflect the reality of the world anymore,” Gold said. “That’s why jazz evolved so rapidly out of this very static structural paradigm of classical music because classical music no longer really spoke to what was really happening in the world.”

Similarly, this represents the way corporations are evolving from being rooted in rigid structures — in which everything was dictated and determined by management — into a much more flexible environment in which the ideas and competencies of a diverse workforce are taken into account and nurtured, according to Gold.

Gold said the way each musician in a jazz quartet provides a unique contribution to the overall harmony is analogous to the need for companies to leverage the variety of backgrounds and perspectives of its employees to impact the bottom line.

“When people are exposed to art or they’re asked to participate in it, it opens them to a super-lingual way of communicating,” he explained.

In other words, the language of art transcends language and cultural barriers. For example, in the Brazilian culture, where the majority of people don’t speak English, music has the ability to communicate deep concepts that relate to people as a whole, Gold said.

“The use of art in general, especially jazz, works off of a need for structure, a need for the freedom and flexibility to improvise,” he said. “These dynamics embrace a much broader realm of diversity when it comes to differences in thinking, acting and so forth.”

When the imperative for diversity and inclusion began to gain ground and corporations started to hire people of different ethnicities, backgrounds and genders, it did not specify how companies should manage the different lines of thinking, levels of energy and global perspectives that come with a diverse workforce, Gold said.

“How are [companies] going to manage at the mid level and at the top levels to really use the diversity they have?” Gold said. “This is the challenge most corporations are facing right now. [Employers] fully complied with the imperatives to diversify, and yet, the management structures at the core of most organizations are not designed to listen to, understand or integrate all these differences.

“One has to really have a sense of the challenges that face people coming from different perspectives, and in a sense, see the world through their eyes in order to understand how to really leverage what they have to offer,” he said.