

ARE YOU A

**photographer. artist. designer. dancer.
scientist. educator. writer. computer
programmer. researcher. painter.
performer. product developer. gardener.
educational trainer. film maker. set
designer. fashion designer. artistic
director. choreographer. gallery owner.
producer. actor. singer.**

poet. dee jay.

**cook. small business owner.
entrepreneur. inventor.**

**cultural worker. community based artist.
muralist. graf artist. hip hop maker.**

**animator. architect. union organizer.
community organizer. social worker.
change agent. nonprofit manager.**

**environmental activist. social justice
worker. progressive activist.**

publisher. software designer.

DO YOU LOVE TO
sing. write. create. perform. dance.
design. paint. make stuff.
garden. invent. build.
collaborate. explore. ask questions.
cook. do magic tricks.
organize people to improve things.
work with wood.
teach. research. learn.
Solve problems. Make up jokes.
Produce art. Produce events.
Play with software. Hack technology.
Ask funny questions.
Disobey.
Wonder why.
Seek justice.

THEN

AMERICA NEEDS YOU!

**To RUN FOR LOCAL OFFICE
AS A CREATIVITY CHAMPION.**

AMERICA NEEDS YOU!

Why You Should Become a Creativity Champion

By Tom Tresser, Creativity Champion, Chicago

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1. "IT'S THE CREATIVITY, SMARTY"

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." – Albert Einstein

"Resolved – Innovation will be the single most important factor in determining America's success through the 21st century" – Opening statement from Innovate America – National Innovation Initiative report from the Council on Competitiveness, signed by heads of 8 major universities and 11 major corporations.

"There is an African proverb that says, "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." We need to go far, quickly. We must abandon the conceit that individual, isolated, private actions are the answer. They can and do help. But they will not take us far enough without collective action. At the same time, we must ensure that in mobilizing globally, we do not invite the establishment of ideological conformity and a new lock-step "ism." That means adopting principles, values, laws, and treaties that release creativity and initiative at every level of society in multifold responses originating concurrently and spontaneously." – from Al Gore's Nobel Peace Prize lecture.

Creativity is priority one for America.

Creativity is priority one for the planet.

People who know about creativity, who practice creativity and who have mastered creative work have values and skills that are very much needed in public life.

America is a creative nation.

Creativity and the drive to innovate is part of our national DNA.

America was the first nation invented out of whole cloth – it was "thought" into being. At the beginning, our founders said good riddance to the chains of an oppressive past and welcomed the dawn of an age governed by merit and the robust competition of ideas. As a result, this country has been the home of the frontier and the new since its inception. America has been a fountain of innovation – spawning new business models, new technologies, new art forms and new methods of social change.

This publication is a call to recognize this reality and to act on it.

According to Richard Florida ("The Rise of the Creative Class"), over 38 million people make their living by exercising their creative abilities¹ and this book is primarily directed to anyone who makes their living using their creative abilities.

The book is also relevant to people who are passionate about creativity, regardless of how they earn a living. Elected officials and public sector leaders who want to succeed in governing and growing the Creative Economy will also find this book helpful.

Recent research on the leadership challenges facing business and government have pointed out a startling conclusion. It seems that the qualities and mindset needed to lead our increasingly complex institutions are precisely those qualities and experiences possessed by artists and creative professionals. America's creative worker is a vast untapped reservoir of civic leadership.

This book is relevant to anyone concerned with solving persistent civic and community problems.

The business press is rich with books looking at creativity and innovation and offering analysis on why creativity is the basis for our future economic well being. One author, Daniel Pink, chronicles the global evolution of the creative economy that now places a premium on the ability to design beautiful and novel product features and

¹ "The Rise of the Creative Class And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life," Richard Florida, Basic Books, 2002. His website is <http://www.creativeclass.com>. He breaks this group of full-time employees into two large buckets: The Super-Creative Core and Creative Professionals (p.328).

unique customer experiences to wrap the products. As a result, he declares that “the MFA (Master of Fine Arts) is the new MBA (Master of Business Administration).”²

Every year tens of millions of Americans pursue creative activities and hobbies. And millions pursue what might be called creative or non-traditional lifestyles.

And yet, creativity is a poorly understood dynamic. It hasn't come close to a level of public awareness that could be called top-of-mind that, say, people have when thinking about ecological issues and the environment. Most people have a hazy view of creativity and think they're not creative. Our public understanding of creativity is about where our public understanding of ecology was thirty plus years ago.

We simply have not yet had an adequate public conversation about creativity in America.

Nevertheless, I believe that creativity should be elevated to a national value. By value, I mean a belief or conviction that guides our civic and commercial actions. A national value is a quality that is universally or very broadly recognized as a public good and something to be lived up to - to cherish, celebrate, and propagate. If you accept creativity as a national value, you are saying that America stands for creativity, that creativity is a desired state, that creativity is a central guiding principle for organizing civic agendas.

A civic value of this magnitude becomes a filter, litmus test and roadmap for political participation and governance. If creativity were to become a national value it would also become a national priority.

If creativity were a national value and national priority, then candidates for public office would be offering platforms on how they would advance creativity as part of their campaigns. Once elected, public officials would be judged partially on the basis on how successfully they delivered on their campaign promises of boosting or advancing creativity.

If creativity were a national value, then when a civic leader did something or advocated a policy which degraded creativity or made it harder for people and communities to manifest their creativity - then that civic leader would be criticized for such actions and would be politically vulnerable for doing so.

This publication will lay out the case for this argument for making creativity a national value.

It will also make the claim that creative professionals and people who are passionate about creativity need to get active in the civic sector as leaders and elected officials.

We need creativity champions to come forth in business and civic life.

Creative Americans need to contribute their creative leadership toward celebrating, championing, nourishing and accelerating creativity in America.

You might paraphrase the 1992 Clinton for President strategic admonition, “It's the economy, stupid” to reflect this call – “It's the creativity, smarty.”

Let's get creative!

Tom Tresser
Creativity Champion
September 2008

² “A Whole New Mind – Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the World,” Daniel Pink, Riverhead Books, 2005, p. 54.

2. SUMMARY

If you're in a hurry and need the message of this publication boiled down to a few thought bites, here they are:

Creativity should be a national value and a national priority.

This is because:

- **America is and has historically been a creative nation – it's at the core of our national character.**
- **Creativity is necessary in order to have a rich and evolving democracy**
- **Creativity is a vital and driving force behind American economic prosperity**
- **Creativity is key to solving problems and bringing people together**

Therefore,

- **Creative professionals of all sorts are already leaders whose values and skills can solve problems in the civic arena.**
- **We need creativity champions in public life now!**

So:

Get Ready, Get Set, Lead!

My most basic wish for the creative professionals and all change agents who desire a better world is...

Stop complaining about government, stop petitioning the government and start BEING the government.

Become a creativity champion at the local level.

To paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi... BE the candidate you wish you could vote for.

Since artists, cultural workers and creative professionals tend to be doers and makers...

Stop watching history and start MAKING history.

If not you, who?

That's it.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Tresser is a consultant, producer, educator and trainer works with individuals, companies and communities to use their creative assets to solve problems, create economic value and trigger civic engagement. He recently designed and produced training programs for the provincial government of Saskatchewan on how to use the arts and creativity for local economic development. During the Internet boom Tom served as a marketing director and community affairs manager for OurHouse.com, an e-commerce start-up. He was director of cultural development at Peoples Housing, in north Rogers Park, Chicago, where he created a community arts program that blended the arts, education and micro-enterprise. This work was funded by the MacArthur Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, the Joyce Foundation and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. Tom has acted in some 40 shows and produced over 100 plays, special events, festivals and community programs. He was an arts activist, having organized support for pro-arts candidates and developed a cultural policy think tank at Roosevelt University in the early 1990's, where he taught "Arts & Public Policy." He is an alumni of the Leadership Greater Chicago program. In 2003 he was appointed Visiting Fellow in Arts and Culture at the DePaul University College of Commerce's Ryan Center for Creativity and Innovation. Tom was elected to the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School's Local School Council and served from 2004 to 2006. He is teaching a number of classes on art, creativity and civic engagement for Loyola University, DePaul University and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Tom was a co-founder of protect Our Parks, which is fighting the privatization of public space and corruption in the Chicago Park District. Tom is a regular contributor to the Chicago edition of The Huffington Post. Tom also consults with arts organizations on strategic planning, audience development and peer-to-peer marketing.



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CREATIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

I offer a range of presentations, training programs and entertainment experiences that will delight and amaze your creative constituents!

- **"The Politics of Creativity - A Call to Service"** - 90-minute presentation that lays out the argument for creativity as the basis for a winning politics and makes the case that creatives have leadership skills needed in public life. This is a highly entertaining and interactive presentation that includes elements of lecture, performance, audience participation and concludes with a sing-along!
- **"Creativity At Risk - Threats and Opportunities for the Creative Ecology"** - 90-minute presentation on the basics of the Creative Economy, laying out the metaphor for the ecology of creativity in America and where the threats and stresses are coming from.
- **"Stand Up for Creativity!" One-Day and Two-Day Training Programs** - Turn the artists and creative professionals in your city on to the challenges and tools of organizing, leading and running for local office. This program will inspire and begin to equip creatives interested in translating their personal creative skills and accomplishments into public political campaigning.
- **"Creative America Concerts"** - If you control or have access to an arts space or civic space, you can program an event that mixes performance and political education. It's fun, it's informative and it's creative!
- **"Imagining a Creative America" Town Meeting** - For universities, civic organizations, planning initiatives and economic development programs who want a different way to spark a grassroots planning effort, this experience will do the trick. We can tailor the event to your state or city, e.g., "Imagining a Creative Oregon" or "Imagining a Creative Louisville" - which we have actually run. The result is an evening of unexpected and often moving testimony from participants that can be folded into a policy document or case statement.

For more information, visit: <http://www.tresser.com/training.html> or email Tom Tresser at tom@tresser.com.