



CHRISTINNE MUSCHI/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Marie-Josée Desrochers: ‘Studying music has shaped me in all senses’

Montreal Symphony Orchestra COO says her background helps with creative problem-solving

KARL MOORE
GENEVIÈVE CÔTÉ

THE LADDER

Marie-Josée Desrochers is chief operating officer of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. She has more than 20 years of management experience in the cultural field, holds a master of music degree from University of Montreal and graduated from the McGill-HEC EMBA in 2014.

I spent a great deal of my childhood in a garage, as both my parents worked in a garage they owned. They showed me the ropes of the business, but most importantly, they showed me how to work and deal with customers, as well as develop a sense of leadership. My earliest leadership experience was in fact to go on my own to fuel a car that was waiting for service, as well as help my parents within different areas of the business.

I never thought I wanted to make a career as a professional musician, but because music was a part of the culture in the city I grew up in, I started taking violin and piano lessons as a young girl. A few years down the line, it became a way for me to move away from Joliette, my hometown, and to go into a field other than law, which is where most of my relatives saw me. My parents supported me through my musical edu-

cation. Even though I trained for over 20 years, I was not a traditional pianist, and already at the time I was gravitating around music as a professional administrator.

I created my own job, teaching piano and accompanying soloists, but later realized that what I really wanted was to work in marketing, communications and management. This is when I had a breakthrough moment and decided it was time for me to study arts administration.

Young people nowadays are more aware of all the opportunities surrounding them, whereas in the eighties, the clear path for most of us was to go into a liberal profession. One of my daughters moved to Sydney for four months, while the other went volunteering in Africa for a few weeks – something I could have never done back then. Today, there are so many more possibilities when it comes to finding your path and accomplishing yourself.

To choose a career is to choose a lifestyle. I chose to go into music because I wanted to do something creative and innovative. Studying music has shaped me in all senses, as you must be extremely structured, while also being able to analyze concerns that may arise and solve them with creativity.

Collaborating with stars and high-profile leaders is simultaneously rewarding, challenging and inspiring. You must be prepared and ready to push your limits. Yet I truly believe that working for a world-class organization is extremely rewarding, as you get to see the impact your work has

on everybody involved, including an audience of over 300,000 a year for live performances.

An institution should never forget where it came from. An institution that is built by leaders who respect and connect with its values and history has better chances of developing an inspiring vision and surviving in the long run. It's always a question of respecting the past and looking towards the future, so that it remains relevant in the 21st century.

There is a similarity between the music industry and other industries affected by technology in the 21st century. It is no longer only about the quality, but also about the convenience. Adaptability is a must, as the clientele is seemingly diversifying by the hour. On the other hand, in this world of technology, you need to make people want to leave their homes to live a more profound experience. I believe people need to pause from their everyday life to connect with others in the community that the music world has to offer.

My passion is life. Both my parents have the feeling they could have done more with their own lives. This pushed me to live my life to its fullest potential.

Music is an essential art to society, but one can only achieve great results in classical music through discipline, continuous learning and hard work. Talent is only a part of it. This can be transferred to any and every career!

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This interview has been edited and condensed.

How Gen Zers differ from millennials in the workplace

MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

OPINION

Leadership speaker and consultant, founder of Turning Managers Into Leaders

Generation Z started turning 23 this year, which means that increasing numbers of them are working in more than just fast food and retail. Just as millennials changed the face of work, so will these young entrants to the work force. Despite similarities between Gen Zers and millennials, there are more differences than not. Don't make assumptions about who they are, what motivates them and how they operate to get things done. Above all, don't presume that they are just millennials magnified.

THEY ARE MORE ENTREPRENEURIAL THAN MILLENNIALS

As the first truly global generation, their entrepreneurial spirit is driven by the need to make an impact. Globally connected and well-travelled for their ages, they are aware of world events and business opportunities. They recognize that the planet has significant problems and they want to help. And many of them believe that the best way to have an impact is at a grassroots level by starting their own companies. It's worth remembering that entrepreneurial thinking isn't just about startups and venture capital. It's also about taking initiative, solving problems creatively, being resourceful and dealing with roadblocks, all traits that are critical in any organization. As a leader, capitalize on these entrepreneurial aspirations in your workplace by encouraging ownership and autonomy.

THEY'RE MORE PRACTICAL, REALISTIC THAN YOU MAY EXPECT

Rightly or wrongly, millennials carry a stigma of self-entitlement, much of it coming from their relatively charmed childhoods. But Generation Z grew up in uncertain times. Global recessions and a variety of economic crises, dramatically changing industries, the deep need for science and technology skills, the war on terror; all these have made them more pragmatic than the generation before them. As a result, they tend to be more goal-oriented, and thoughtful about seeking out sensible stable careers. If you are an employer, there are opportunities here to motivate and reward using traditional approaches such as growth, advancement, economic security and improved benefits.

TOLERANCE HAS SHIFTED TO TOGETHERNESS

The topic of diversity in the workplace isn't new – boomers and Gen Xers have been talking about it for a while. But millennials were the first generation to go beyond dialogue and truly embrace different lifestyles, ethnicities and backgrounds. Generation Z has taken it one step further. Most of them have lifetimes of interaction with others of different backgrounds and circumstances; they've connected through social media to people around the world; they gravitate toward cities where populations are more ethnically and culturally diverse. As a result, they overwhelmingly expect diversity at work. This level of inclusiveness bodes well; it means that your organization will not only attract the best and the brightest from around the world, but also keep them.

NOT JUST DIGITAL NATIVE, BUT MOBILE NATIVE

Having grown up around technology all their lives, millennials are certainly tech-savvy. But Gen Zers are tech-innate. As the first generation to grow up with high-speed mobile internet access, they have moved from a two-screen, 3-D world to a five-screen, 4-D planet. Gen Z's constant connectivity means that not only do they consume and share content with ease, but they are also comfortable interacting online with others. This fluency in adapting to new technologies and implementing them into their workflow promises significant payback to your workplace, but only if you create an environment that promotes collaboration.

THEIR COMMUNICATION PREFERENCE IS 'OLD-SCHOOL'

Given the constant connectivity of Generation Z, you'd expect that they'd appreciate digital modes of communication, right? According to the latest research, you would be wrong. In a 2016 Randstad and Future Workplace survey, while both millennials and Gen Zers recognize the importance of communication in the workplace, Gen Zers define it differently. They want more face-to-face communication, either in person, or virtually by using technology such as Skype, Zoom or FaceTime. Like millennials, they don't just want to be talked at – your conversations need to be two-way streets where you're also soliciting and valuing their input. So engage your Gen Zers by talking to them instead of e-mailing. Have regular one-on-one performance chats. Take the time to get to know them and how they feel about the work they're doing.

Your top performer is resigning. What now?

JANET CANDIDO

OPINION

LEADERSHIP LAB

Principal, Candido Consulting

An owner or manager may feel the practical and psychological void left by the departure of someone whom they relied on – and even thought of as an ally or friend. But while losing a great employee is hard, acting irrationally could hurt future relationships and make the transition more difficult. Here are five tips for when a business's best person gives their notice:

■ **Stay calm:** Especially in smaller business environments, it's not uncommon to develop familial-style relationships, and a business leader or manager may feel personally slighted or resentful when a trusted employee resigns. Avoid the urge to get emotional or unleash a barrage

It's not easy to see someone walk away, but offering more money is usually not the answer, even if that is what the employee was angling for.

of questions. It's okay to talk about the person's future plans, but keep the tone warm and friendly. While the adage “don't burn your bridges” is most often applied to departing employees, the same holds true for the employers seeing them go. You never know where that person will end up or, for that matter, where you'll end up, so it's advisable to maintain good relationships whenever possible.

■ **Never counteroffer:** Although often considered as a knee-jerk reaction, a counteroffer is not recommended. It's not easy to see someone walk away, but offering more money is usually not the answer, even if that is what the employee was angling for. By the time they've made the decision to go, psychologically they already have one foot out the door. And even if more money works temporarily, it's only a short-term fix. If the issue wasn't monetary but, say, growth potential or workload, it will continue to pose a problem regardless of salary. Plus, they

were ready to walk, and they know that the company didn't value them until they had another offer on the table.

■ **Do an exit interview:** Understanding why someone is leaving might help a company keep the next person. But make sure the process is useful and doesn't turn into a venting exercise for the employee. Ask questions such as, what did you like most and least about working here? What would you change? If you could offer advice to the executives, what would it be?

■ **Know your obligation:** Now is not the time to try to short-change an employee. Pay them for the entire notice period. If you feel that having the person work during that period might have a negative effect on staff or clients, opt to send them home instead. Even if the parting is amicable, a company has to protect its data, so remove security access appropriately and remind the employee that their obligations regarding confidentiality are still in effect. Unless the em-

ployee is antagonistic, handle this process as cordially as possible. Regardless of whether they initiated it, remember that this is a separation for them as well.

■ **Be proactive the next time:** Identify top performers and value creators and make sure they are adequately compensated, challenged and experiencing high job satisfaction. Check in with them on a regular basis. A manager or executive should use this situation to take an honest look at their own leadership styles and performance management systems. Do you coach for the future, getting employees excited? Do you allow for open and honest dialogue and feedback?

Even in the best situations, resignations happen. When they do, having a proactive plan in place can help minimize the impact on your business.

Executives, educators and human-resources experts contribute to the Leadership Lab series. Find more stories at tgam.ca/careers.