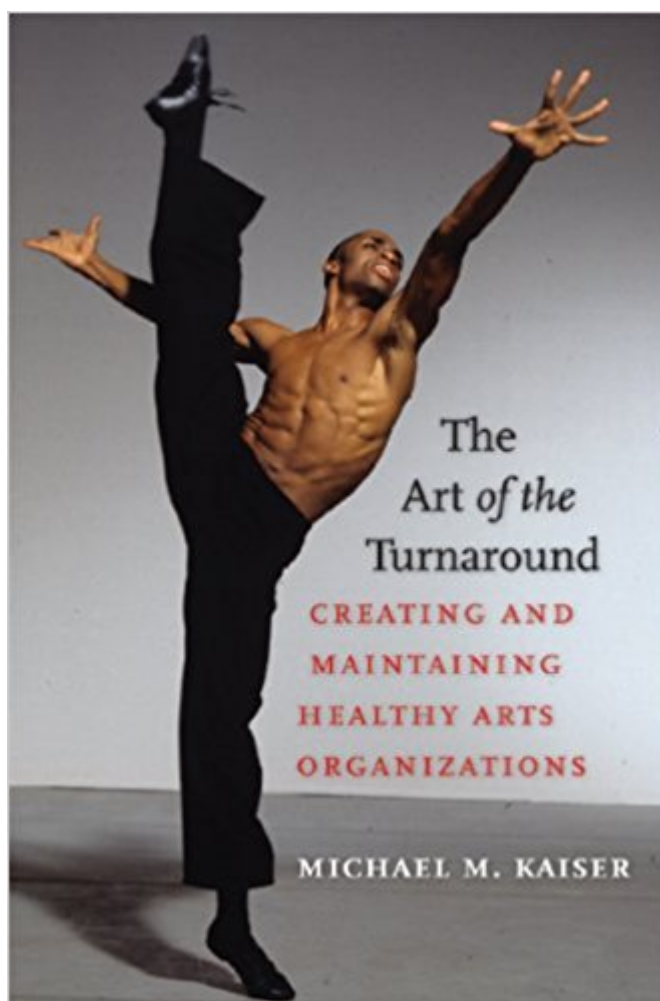


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# The Art Of The Turnaround: Creating And Maintaining Healthy Arts Organizations



## Synopsis

Many arts organizations today find themselves in financial difficulties because of economic constraints inherent in the industry. While other companies can improve productivity through the use of new technologies or better systems, these approaches are not available in the arts. Hamlet requires the same number of performers today as it did in Shakespeare's time. The New York Philharmonic requires the same number of musicians now as it did when Tchaikovsky conducted it over one hundred years ago. Costs go up, but the size of theaters and the price resistance of patrons limit what can be earned from ticket sales. Therefore, the performing arts industry faces a severe gap between earnings and expenses. Typical approaches to closing the gap—raising ticket prices or cutting artistic or marketing expenses—don't work. What, then, does it take to create and maintain a healthy arts organization? Michael M. Kaiser has revived four major arts organizations: the Kansas City Ballet, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, and London's Royal Opera House. In *The Art of the Turnaround* he shares with readers his ten basic rules for bringing financially distressed arts organizations back to life and keeping them strong. These rules cover the requirements for successful leadership, the pitfalls of cost cutting, the necessity of extending the programming calendar, the centrality of effective marketing and fund raising, and the importance of focusing on the present with a positive public message. In chapters organized chronologically, Kaiser brings his ten rules vividly to life in discussions of the four arts organizations he is credited with saving. The book concludes with a chapter on his experiences at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, an arts organization that needed an artistic turnaround when he became the president in 2001 and that today exemplifies in practice many of the ten rules he discusses throughout his book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“This book is a valuable management resource; arts administrators could do worse than emulate Kaiser’s work ethic, boldness of vision and ability to learn from mistakes. Those interested in keeping America’s arts institutions vital ignore his insights at their peril.” • Opera News “To some, there may be a touch of irony: the man who presided over some of the Royal Opera House’s darkest hours has produced a self-help book aimed at pulling failing arts organisations out of trouble. Michael Kaiser’s The Art of the Turnaround offers 10 basic rules on how to save failing arts organisations, some of which were learned the hard way in London.” • The Guardian (London) “Kaiser presents a ten-step . . . program to save or revive struggling arts organizations. The author’s program is . . . practical, and he follows it with a series of case studies in which he works his magic over and over again. . . . He offers . . . interesting anecdotes, and the portrayal of the logistics of traveling shows deserves particular mention.” • Choice “[An] extraordinary book that serves as both cautionary tale and practical primer in crisis response. . . . Whether you are serving in an entry level or executive leadership position, from crew chief to executive director, there is much to be learned from in Michael Kaiser’s The Art of the Turnaround.” • Theatre Design & Technology

“Michael Kaiser has a unique combination of artistic vision and executive talent that makes him one of the most capable leaders in the performing arts. This book tells the story of his impressive leadership. As my brother said in 1960, "The New Frontier for which I campaign in public life can also be a New Frontier for American art," and he'd be very proud of all that Michael Kaiser has accomplished." (Senator Edward M. Kennedy) “There can be no one who has had the experience of the expertise of Michael Kaiser in taking world class performing arts companies and reinventing them for the 21st century. This is a goldmine.” (Harold Prince)

It is a well written book with incredible social implications. Kaiser is a man of risk and he takes this ability with him into all of the organizational crises. I, however, tired of the name calling, and the people with whom he came contact were helpful to him I suppose, but it certainly got very social. One thesis which did arise from the book is that most arts organizations which flourish do so with

the help of governmental support, without which they would probably fail. Kaiser has a big personal ego and it helps him cope with what must have been a very traumatic existence during his battles of organizational survival. I recommend this book to anyone who is involved with an arts organization Board.

The Arts, especially the performing arts are a passion of mine and my family. Kaiser's work as described in his book serves as a guide that can be generalized to challenges and opportunities facing the arts in America and elsewhere. Many join Boards unclear of their role or the role of the CEO. And many likely have little grasp of the funding cycles and sources of funds and deficits. Arts operate on a model so different from the for profit sector. Organizational management often fails in their fundamental roles of understanding their numbers and Boards often fail in their governance, such that turnarounds and failures to achieve turnarounds are all too common. The individual stories Kaiser shares and the group in aggregate serve as both good reading as well as a useful set of pointers that spell out the challenges and how he attacked them. As interesting as what was said, I was amused by what was left out and what lay between the lines on the human side. Also his own journey of self-discovery was clearly laid out. Those who criticize the book for lack of depth or being too personal miss the point. This is a 180 page or so personal narrative about one man's journey to the highest ranks of arts management. It is not a course, though he teaches one at the Kennedy Center. It presents a number of contexts and challenges and helps frame the work of arts management in a most readable and entertaining way. Anybody joining a non-profit board, especially in the arts would do well to read this book. Likewise anyone managing such organizations.

As I work on helping to turn around two small performing arts non-profits, I keep referring to this book. It's a great place to start and points one in the right direction. I've passed it around to Board Members and others involved, some have purchased their own copies (my copy is highlighted and heavily sticky noted). Michael Kaiser has turned around some of the great performing arts organizations when they were down on their heels. Artists often don't know anything about operating a business, so they fail. Large or small organization, you will learn something from this book. You will need to supplement with other material, but begin here. Mr Kaiser is a businessman who loves the arts. If that's not who serves on your Board and Management, get rid of them and learn who should be on those Boards and Management. I highly recommend this book for your performing arts organization.

Hearing Michael Kaiser in person is what prompted me to explore this very interesting book. Kaiser has had remarkable success in nurturing several professional arts organizations to good fiscal and organizational success. I was part of a group of several hundred patrons and representatives of the arts to hear Mr. Kaiser interviewed by Maestro Michael Stern of the Kansas City Symphony. Honestly, I had no idea what to expect. It quickly became apparent that Kaiser is very smart, has an abundance of common sense accompanied by great instincts, and provides leadership that keeps people focused on the mission. The bulk of the interview was his "off-the-cuff" review of ten principles that have guided him in turning around struggling organizations. Also obvious, was that these ten principles apply not just to the arts but to many organizations, especially NPO's that rely on donors for their existence. Kaiser's principles are profoundly simple, yet powerful if diligently and faithfully applied. Immediately, I ordered copies of his book for key people on a number of NPO boards on which I serve. The principles are found right up front and the rest of the book illustrates them by recounting Kaiser's personal experiences of turnarounds. I highly recommend this book.

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