

BY ANDY KANEFIELD AND MARK POWERS

**C**lark Davis, vice chairman of HOK, one of the world's largest architecture and design firms, likes organizations. "Contrary to many people in the creative professions, I've always liked large organizations. HOK itself is an ongoing design challenge as we evolve to serve our clients in new ways."

Davis says he enjoys working "to draw the best out of people and help them be successful."

Isn't that a significant challenge in a design firm? "Yes, our challenge is to lead effectively among a lot of really bright people who don't want to be managed. They want to be led. We espouse a servant-leadership model around HOK, which is helping empower talented people to contribute and be successful wherever they are."

"The quality that impressed me 20 years ago when I came to HOK, and still impresses me every day when I come to work, is the depth and diversity of our talent."

"When I think about managing talent, I like to use the orchestra leader metaphor. We have a lot of first-chair talent — people who are the best at what they do and want to do the right thing collectively. The conductor's job is to draw out the best from them. That's what I'm trying to do."

"The most valuable asset we have

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## Advice for "orchestra leaders?"

- Stay close to your people. Take their aspirations and ideas seriously, and you'll earn their commitment.
- Make those ideas and aspirations part of the way you do business. For example, our sustainable design initiative grew out of a common interest among people throughout the firm.
- Apply structure that builds on people's aspirations rather than runs over them. For example, we just launched a "Blue Ocean" process for recognizing and advancing great new business ideas.



BRIAN CASSIDY

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— Clark Davis

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at HOK is a very creative, collaborative culture. One of our main responsibilities as leaders is to preserve and promote it — to be stewards of that culture. This is one of our core competencies — collaboration across a global network.”

### Hitting the high notes

Clark Davis' ability to play piano and organ may be one reason he is drawn to musical metaphors to describe leadership principles. One of the business leaders who has influenced his leadership approach is Max DePree, former chairman of the board of Herman Miller Inc. In his book, "Leadership Jazz," DePree paints a picture of leadership this way:

A jazz band is an expression of servant leadership. The leader of a jazz band has the beautiful opportunity to draw the best out of the other musicians. We have much to learn from jazz-band leaders, for jazz, like leadership, combines the unpredictability of the future with the gifts of individuals.



How do you promote that kind of culture in a worldwide organization? “We believe the most important step is to maintain personal relationships among as many people in the firm as we can. That starts with having personal relationships among our leaders.

“We encourage these relationships in several ways. We have “core boards” that aren't part of the governance of the firm but address different topics such as design, business development, project management, and project delivery. We have 200 to 250 people who are part of these and other ad hoc groups.

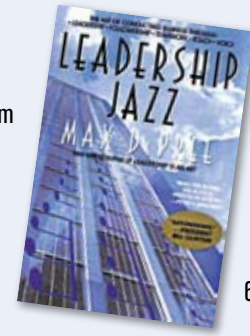
“Every few years we have a leadership conference for the firm. The point of having these firmwide leadership events and boards is this: People generally don't work with people they don't trust; people generally don't trust people they don't know. It's hard to know people you haven't met or worked with in some capacity.

“Our clients and projects offer very practical reasons for us to promote these personal relationships. For example, the largest single project in the history of HOK is a new research university, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, now under construction near Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It's a project of unprecedented scale and speed for HOK.

### Jazzy leadership

What follows are a few of the guidelines DePree offers to those who ask the question, “What do creative people need to be fruitful in the worlds of organizations?”

1. Access to (even intimacy with) senior leadership. Creative people on the team do not contribute from the fringes.
2. Creative work needs the ethos of jazz. A leader will pick the tune, set the tempo, and start the music, define a “style.” After that it's up to the band to be disciplined and free, wild and restrained, leaders and followers... playing the music for the audience.
3. Creative people, like the rest of us, need constraints. Like facts, constraints become the friends of creative people.



4. A leader needs to give creative people license to be contrary. Leaders should welcome the committed skeptic, who wants to be held accountable and demands a share of the risk.
5. Leaders give odds to creative people that their work will get to market. Creative people need to know that they will have help in making the results of their work real.
6. Creative people need a fundamental level of trust from leaders. True leaders will not hover over every detail.
7. Creative people need to work with others of equal competence. We improve only when we are challenged and stretched.

SOURCE: “LEADERSHIP JAZZ” BY MAX DEPREE.

It is a 5 million square foot development that was designed in less than one year and involves HOK people in 7 different locations, across multiple time zones and continents.”

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HOK