

## IF I KNEW THEN...

In this ongoing series, we ask executives, entrepreneurs and business leaders about mistakes that have shaped their business philosophy.

# Ryan Taylor

**PRESIDENT AND GENERAL DIRECTOR, MINNESOTA OPERA**

By **Alyssa Ford**

MEDIA



## About the company:

The [Minnesota Opera](#) is a 53-year-old opera company that performs five full-lengths operas each year, with five to eight performances of each production. It is the 13th largest opera company in the U.S.

## The Mistake:

I have struggled with the same sudoku puzzle that plagues so many artist-executives: the tendency to focus on the art at the expense of the big picture.

The odd thing is, I have made the same mistake twice. As an opera singer in my younger days, I believed that if I really zeroed in on my acting, my singing, my understanding of text and storytelling, that I would be recognized by the right people.

It wasn't until I was halfway through my performance career that I realized that you also need very good luck, good connections, and business acumen. You need all of it because the market is so competitive for artists.

Then, when I retired as a performer and made my transition into administration and production, I fell into the same mental sinkhole: I believed that if I just focused on the artistic quality of the work, then all the rest would take care of itself. I reasoned that if our work was exceptional, we would capture the imagination of the community and they, in turn, would support us and solve all our financial woes.

The second time I lost my way, I was the new general director of the Arizona Opera, and the whole situation began to feel untenable. But there's a sunny side to this tale: The episode forced me to seek out help from Opera America, our industry's service organization, as well from the board and community leaders. That helped me get my brain in shape, and it also lifted up the organization.



**There's no reason for any of us to lead alone.**



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## The Lesson:

Because I am an artist first and foremost, I have a tendency to favor that side. Intellectually, I know that neither the business side nor the artistic side exists in a vacuum.

But still, my bias exists. The key, I think, is to work always on self-awareness. That, and seek out other people. There's no reason for any of us to lead alone.

Follow the Minnesota Opera on Twitter at [@mnopera](#).

Photo courtesy of Ryan Taylor

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DEAD NEXT





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The Mistake: I came to ESPN to help found what was then called the Data Group. About two years in,...

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## Tanya Hall

The Mistake: Bashing our competitors while I worked at E! to try to get an exclusive from a...

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## Eric Grilly

Mistake: I was arrogant about the digital news business. I thought that the old guard just didn't "...

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