

ISSUE 007



fireworks

The magazine for the BBB community





3
Welcome

4
BBB News
What's happening at BBB
HQ

7
Musings from Anita
From Musician to Tour
Guide to CEO of Multi
Billion Dollar business

11
Community Success Story
From Beats to Books

13
Advocacy in Action
Why do people break up
with music learning?

16
Community Highlights
BBB Community
Snapshots

17
What's new in BBB+
See the latest tools
designed for YOU

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FROM MUSICIAN TO TOUR GUIDE TO CEO OF MULTI BILLION DOLLAR BUSINESS

written by Dr Anita Collins

Imagine a CEO

As I was scrolling through my news alerts a headline caught my eye; "He wanted to be a trombone player, but ended up the CEO of a major airline".

The article profiles Johan Lundgren who has been the CEO of European airline easyJet for the past six years.

He wanted to be a trombone player. Instead, he ended up as CEO of one of the world's biggest airlines.

Chris Johnston Nov 26, 2023, 8:21 PM GMT+1

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Johan Lundgren became CEO of easyJet in late 2017. Christoph Soeder/Getty Images

The article has a catchy title, and stopped me from scrolling because of the word trombone, but it is also a masterful title because it can be incongruent to our world view – how could playing trombone be related to leading a multibillion-dollar business? Or, if you view it in another light – while he wanted an artistic career, he (sensibly) chose business and was more successful.

I read this article and then Googled many more articles and podcasts about Johan Lundgren. In a nutshell, Johan Lundgren wanted to be a musician but turned to the travel industry when that didn't pan out.

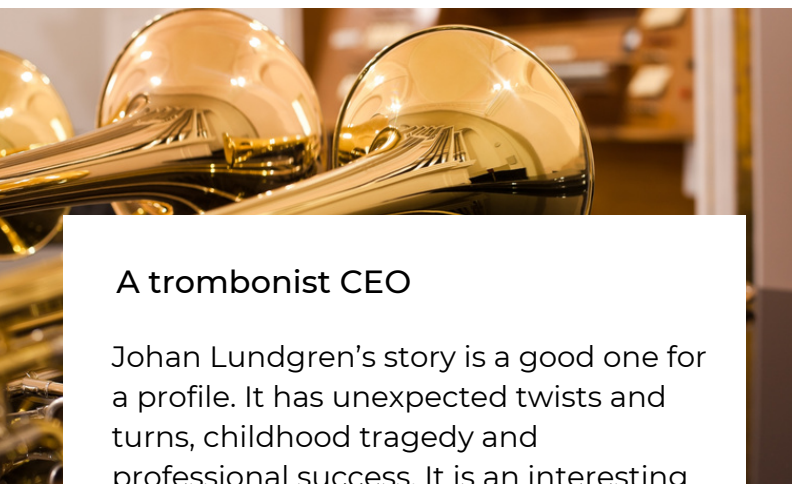
He is now CEO of easyJet, a British multinational low-cost airline group known as one of the largest airlines in the world, with 336 aircraft, operating 1,024 routes across 36 countries and 155 airports.

MUSINGS FROM ANITA

In one article, Lundgren says he never planned his career and has focused more on the journey than the destination. In his teenage years, he was a dedicated classical musician. While he received scholarships to study in England and the US, he did not gain entry into the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden, his home country.

It was after this event that his life started to take some further twists and turns. He gave up music at this time and moved into the travel industry to make money to support himself.

From the grassroots level he moved into travel management, played a pivotal role in evacuating Swedes from the Tsunami event in South Asia in 2004, and in 2017 he moved to a CEO role at easyJet.



A trombonist CEO

Johan Lundgren's story is a good one for a profile. It has unexpected twists and turns, childhood tragedy and professional success. It is an interesting 4-minute read.

But it didn't tell me what I wanted to know – did learning trombone mould Johan's cognitive development in a way that influenced his choices as he progressed through the crossroads of his career? Does his music learning still influence him as the CEO of one of the largest airlines in the world?

Lundgren says he never planned his career and has focused more on the

journey than the destination. This comment reminded me of research that has found that music learning has been found to enhance one of the Big Five personality traits known as openness to experience.

Openness to experience refers to a sense of curiosity, open-mindedness, and acceptance of novel experiences.

I have always found this idea intriguing because music learning is a discipline that requires an incredible level of dedication and focus and includes spending hours upon hours with an instrument, immersed in scales, chords, and compositions.

It is easy to think of such an activity as restrictive and rigid. And yet the research points to the fact that music learning, with all its rules and demands, enhances our ability to appreciate and search for new experiences and challenges.

Openness to experience is a personality trait that is closely connected with creativity and conscientiousness. In the description I gave of music learning above, it is easy to see where conscientiousness would be developed. But it may be harder to locate creativity inside the hours and hours of musical practice.

Is music learning creative?

Creativity is one of my least favourite words. In education, I hear statements like "the arts is where students learn to be creative" which restricts creativity to artistic creation and doesn't allow students to apply creative thinking to a mathematical problem or a recipe in food tech class.

In business, I hear teams being directed to “be more creative” which isn’t always followed up by what creative thinking can look and feel like in their field, or what a creative output would even look like. When I go searching for definitions of creativity the same issues emerge.

Britannica defines creativity as “the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form.” This is focused on the new and leans towards the original creation.

Robert E. Franken in his book *Human Motivation* defines creativity as “the tendency to generate or recognise ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others.” This twists the definition a little to include the recognition of creative ideas.

Both definitions point to creativity as a specific type of problem-solving. One is finding a new solution. This could be a new solution to a mathematical problem or a food recipe when you are missing an ingredient. The other is the importance of creativity not just in producing something entirely new but also in appreciating and adapting existing ideas in ways that are unique and beneficial.

Therefore, the personality trait that supports creativity is about being open to finding a new solution to an

established, entrenched or stubborn problem.

The CEO trombonist

Music learning is a process of trial and error, success and challenge. From the very beginning students are solving problems – how do I hold the instrument comfortably, how do I get this note to sound when I want it to, how do I synchronise my movement to make the rhythm or melody reflect the notes on the page?

When students are learning music, they are working to fit their part into the larger ensemble, while simultaneously solving individual problems to master how they make music through an instrument or with their voice.

When a student is practising music they are countering issues of frustration, motivation, success and consistency.

When a student is performing they are managing the predictable and sometimes unpredictable influence of nervousness, excitement, environmental factors and unexpected events.



MUSINGS FROM ANITA

Music learning is an act of creativity in itself. Yet instead of creative processes that are taught and copied, music learning requires creativity that is individualised and intuitive.

Johan Lundgren's may have been given a foundation to cope successfully with his unanticipated career path by the process of learning trombone in his youth.

His ability to lead through crisis could have been supported by his openness to experience and acceptance of novel experiences and solutions.

His ability to manage one of the largest airline companies in the world could be supported by the way he can creatively problem-solve the issues of an evolving and interdependent entity.

Johan Lundgren may never have even asked himself how learning trombone shaped his cognitive development, and at this point, I cannot find a journalist who has asked him those questions.

But wouldn't it be an interesting question to explore with him and other musically trained people operating at the top of their non-musical fields?

imagine a CEO.

Many people think that learning music is only for students who are talented and interested.

It turns out that music learning can benefit every students' brain development and performance.

To give every student the opportunity to thrive, they need music education.

did they learn a musical instrument?

Adult musicians compared to non-musicians showed enhanced performance on measures of cognitive flexibility, working memory, and verbal fluency.



[See the latest BBB 'Imagine a...'](#) **campaign here**

The more you know

The stronger your voice

