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# HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

## **Brava Joan Weill!**

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I often teach that arts organizations should design their 'ideal board' and then work to build that board over time. By 'ideal,' I do not mean a group of the richest, most powerful people in the country; most arts organizations do not have the ability to attract these people. I mean a board of engaged, passionate supporters who can give and get reasonable levels of donations, who can oversee strategic plans, who can understand and approve budgets and who can serve as ambassadors for the institution. Instead of incrementally adding one new board member every so often, designing the ideal board creates a strategy for building a potent governing body. An ideal board, of course, requires an ideal chair: someone who has the wisdom and passion and collaborative spirit and leadership skills to run the board and coordinate with the artistic and administrative staff. For the past 14 years, the Alvin Ailey organization has had that ideal board chair: Joan Weill. Joan's contributions to the Ailey organization are astonishing. Most notably, she spearheaded the creation of the first permanent home of the Ailey Company, named the Joan Weill Center for Dance, in 2005. Anyone who has visited the Center knows what an amazing hive of activity it has become, filled with energy and electricity generated by professional and avocational dancers alike. It is New York's largest building dedicated to dance and the vibrant home for all people that Alvin Ailey would have dreamed of. But Joan has done much more. She led the organization through two leadership transitions in which legendary leaders departed: Judith Jamison retired as Artistic Director and was replaced by Robert Battle, and Sharon Luckman retired as Executive Director and was replaced by Bennett Rink. Through each of these transitions, the Ailey organization scarcely missed a beat. The remarkably smooth transitions from one leader to another are testimony to Joan Weill's leadership skills.

Now the organization will endure another leadership transition. Joan has announced that she will retire as Board Chair at the end of this year. But the Ailey Company will live on without her for Joan ensured that the Ailey family grew large and engaged. This is not a Company that relies solely on one or two angels; the Ailey organization now has an annual budget far in excess of \$30 million! Just 20 years ago the budget was less than \$7 million.

Anyone who cares about the Ailey organization, and these number in the millions, knows how much she will be missed.

Yes, Joan Weill has been the ideal board chair for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, someone all board chairs should study and emulate. Her unusual mix of passion and intelligence, generosity and modesty, strength of vision and ability to collaborate are hallmarks of an exemplary leader.

I am certain that when the Mount Rushmore of Board Chairs is sculpted, Joan Weill will be front and center. She will be the person I think about when I teach about the ideal chair for the ideal board.

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