

THE ART OF POSSIBILITY

By Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander
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- We perceive only the sensations we are programmed to receive, and our awareness is further restricted by the fact that we recognize only those for which we have mental maps or categories.
- Einstein himself in 1926 told Heisenberg it was nonsense to found a theory on observable facts alone: “In reality the very opposite happens. It is theory which decides what we can observe.”
- It is all invented anyway, so we might as well invent a story or a framework of meaning that enhances our quality of life the life of those around us.
- No matter how objective we try to be, it is still through the structure of the brain that we perceive the world. So, if there are absolutes, we have no direct access to their existence. He mind constructs.
- Every story you tell is founded on a network of hidden assumptions. If you learn to notice and distinguish these stories, you will be able to break through the barriers of any “box” that contains unwanted conditions and create other conditions or narratives that support the life you envision for yourself and those around you.
- A simple way to practice “it’s all invented” is to ask:
 - What assumption am I making, that I am not aware I am making, that gives me what I see?
 - What might I now invent, that I have not yet invented, and that would give me other choices?
- Most believe that competition is the vehicle to success; metaphors based on competitive sports are applied to almost any situation. On the whole, you are more likely to extend your business and have a fulfilled life if you have the attitude that there are always new customers out there waiting to be enrolled rather than that money, customers and ideas are in short supply. On a whole, resources are likely to come to you in greater abundance when you are generous and inclusive and engage people in your passion for life.
- How are my thoughts and actions, in this moment, reflections of the measurement world?
- “Giving an A” is an enlivening way of approaching people that promises to transform you as well as them. The practice of “giving an A” transports your relationships from the world of measurement into the universe of possibility.
- Write a letter that tells in as much detail as you can, the story of what will have happened to you by next May that is in line with this extraordinary grade. Phrases such as “I hope,” “I intend,” or “I will” must not appear. I am especially interested in the person you will have become by next May.
- I actively train my students that when they make a mistake, they are to lift their arms in the air, smile and say, “How fascinating!”
- The Number 68 (student’s rank in class) and the A are invented, so we might as well choose to invent something that brightens our life and the lives of the people around us.
- It is not in the context of measuring people’s performance against standards that we propose giving the A, despite the reference to measurement the A implies. We give the A to finesse the stranglehold of judgment that grades have over our consciousness from our earliest days. The practice of giving the A allows the teacher to line up with her students in their efforts to produce the outcome, rather than lining up with the standards against these students. The freely granted "A" expresses a vision of partnership, teamwork, and relationship.

- The lesson I learned is that the player who looks least engaged may be the most committed member of the group. A cynic, after all, is a passionate person who does not want to be disappointed again. Speak to a person's passion, not to their cynicism.
- In the absence of a purpose greater than themselves, adolescents retreat to the sidelines as though their existence were inconsequential.
- The adage, "you can't change people", is true in the world of measurement, where people and things are fixed in character. However, in the universe of possibility, you certainly can change people. They change as you speak. You may ask, "Who, actually, is doing the changing?" The answer is the relationship. Because in the arena of possibility, everything occurs in that context.
- The only grace that you can have is the grace that you can imagine.
- When you play the contribution game, it is never a single individual who is transformed. Transformation overrides the divisions of identity and possession that are the architecture of the measurement model, recasting the tight pattern of scarcity into a widespread array of abundance.
- Rule #6: DO not take your self so seriously. (There are no other rules.)
- Rule #6 can help us distinguish and hold at some remove the part of ourselves that developed in the competitive environment of the "measurement world." For the sake of discussion, we will call it our calculating self. The calculating self is concerned for its survival in a world of scarcity.
- We portray the calculating self as a ladder with a downward spiral. The ladder refers to the worldview that life is about making progress, striving for success, and positioning oneself in the hierarchy. The downward spiral represents, among other things, the slippage that occurs when we try to control people and circumstances to give ourselves a boost. When this leads to conflict, we are likely to think that we have run up against difficult people and have learned an important lesson. We become more hardheaded and practical. Inevitably, our relationships spiral downward. As the calculating self tumbles out of control, it intensifies its efforts to climb back up and get in charge, and the cycle goes round and round. How do we learn to recognize the often-charming, always-scheming, sometimes-anxious, frequently conniving calculating self? One good way is to ask ourselves, "What would have to change for me to be completely fulfilled?"
- Whenever somebody gives up their pride to reveal a truth to others, we find it incredibly moving.
- Since the calculating self is designed to look out for Number One, we are apt to find it in the driver's seat wherever people are at an impasse.
- The role of the facilitator is to promote human development and transformation rather than to find a solution that satisfies the demands of the ever-present calculating selves.
- The central self smiles at the calculating self's perceptions, understanding that they are the relics of our ancestry, the necessary illusions of childhood. The central self knows that not belonging and being insufficient are thoughts both as native to us and as illusory as Santa Claus. It understands that the threatening aspects of what we encounter are often illusions that do not bear taking seriously.
- The antidote to hopeless resignation and spluttering resistance is to be present to the way things are, including our feelings about the way things are. This practice can help us clarify the next step that will take us in the direction we say we want to go.
- Ask, "What is here now" and "What else is here now"?
- Be present without resistance to what is happening and to your reactions, no matter how intense. It creates possibility in the same way that, if you are far-sighted, finding your glasses revives your ability to read or remove a splinter from a child's finger. At last you can see. You can leave behind the struggle to come to terms with what is in front of you, and move on.

- Be with the way things are by clearing the “shoulds”. When our attention is primarily directed to how wrong things are, we lose our power to act effectively.
- Closing the exits means staying with the feelings, whatever they are.
- Abstractions that we unwittingly treat as physical reality tend to block us from seeing the way things are, and therefore reduce our power to accomplish what we say we want.
- The more attention you shine on a particular subject, the more evidence of it will grow.
- Every industry or profession has its own version of downward spiral talk, as does every relationship. Focusing on the abstraction of scarcity, downward spiral talk creates an unassailable story about the limits to what is possible, and tells us compellingly how things are going from bad to worse.
- Often, the person in the group who articulates the possible is dismissed as a dreamer or as a Pollyanna persisting in a simplistic glass half-full kind of optimism. The naysayers pride themselves on their supposed realism. However, it is actually the people who see the glass as “half-empty” who are the ones wedded to a fiction, for emptiness and lack, like the wall, are abstractions of the mind, whereas half-full is a measure of the physical reality.
- Being with the way things are calls for an expansion of ourselves. We start from what is, not from what should be; we encompass contradictions, painful feelings, fears and imaginings and without fleeing blaming, or attempting correction, we learn to soar, like the far-seeing hawk, over the whole landscape.
- Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. Kierkegaard
- Enrolling is not about forcing, cajoling, tricking, bargaining, pressuring, or guilt-tripping someone into doing something your way. Enrollment is the art and practice of generating a spark of possibility for others to share.
- Inasmuch as I blame you for a miserable vacation or a wall of silence – to that degree, in exactly that proportion, I lose my power. I lose my ability to steer the situation in another direction, to learn from it, or to put us in good relationship with each other. Indeed, I lose any leverage I may have had, because there is nothing I can do about your mistakes – only about mine.
- Choosing “Being the board” approach opens the possibility of a graceful journey, one that quickly reinstates us on the path we chose before the fateful collision intervened.
- Gracing yourself with responsibility for everything that happens in your life leaves your spirit whole, and leaves you free to choose again.
- When you identify yourself as a single chess piece – and by analogy, as an individual in a particular role – you can only react to, complain about, or resist the moves that interrupted your plans. But if you name yourself as the “board itself” you can turn all your attention to what you want to see happen, with none paid to what you need to win or fight or fix.
- Don’t ask “Why me”, ask How did *that* event get on the board that I am?
- In the world of measurement, we live in the illusion that we have only ourselves to rely on, our need for control is simplified. The “shoulds” and “oughts” form the blame game give us the illusion that we can gain control over what just went wrong, and that is an illusion of language again.
- The practice of Being the board is about making a difference.
- In the practice of Being the board, you are not concerned that the other person examine her own assumptions. You see that the stumbling blocks that stand in your way are part of you, not her, and only you can remove them.
- When you are being the board, you present no obstacles to others.

- You do not find compassion simply by listening to people; you open the channel by removing the barriers to tenderness within you. Among the rewards are self-respect, connection of the deepest and most vital kind, and a straight road to making a difference.
- It is the framework of fear and scarcity, not scarcity itself, that promotes divisions between people.
- A vision is a powerful framework to take the operations of an organization of any size from the downward spiral into the arena of possibility.
- The term mission statement is often used interchangeably with the word vision in business and political arenas, but, by and large, mission statements are expressions of competition and scarcity.
- A vision articulates a possibility. A vision is stated as picture for all time, using no numbers, measures, or comparatives. It contains no specifics of time, place, audience or product.
- Under a vision, goals are treated as markers thrown out ahead to define the territory. If you miss the mark...”How fascinating!”
- A vision is an open invitation and an inspiration for people to create ideas and events that correlate with its definitional framework.
- Often the experience of a personal crisis or a failure will constitute a basis for the creation of a personal vision, which in turn becomes the framework for a life of possibility.
- The practice of framing possibility calls upon us to use our minds in a manner that is counterintuitive: to think in terms of the contexts that govern us rather than the evidence we see before our eyes. It trains us to be alert to a new danger that threatens modern life the danger that unseen definitions, assumptions and frameworks may be covertly chaining us to the downward spiral and shaping the conditions we want to change.
- Ask yourself, “What is the Creature (revenge, etc.) doing now?” If we describe revenge, greed, pride, fear and self-righteousness as the villains – and people as the hope – we will come together to create possibility. With our inventive powers, we can be passionately for each other and for the whole living world round us. We need never name a human being s the enemy.
- The enemy to conquer is never a human being.

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate,
 Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
 It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
 We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous –
 Actually, who are you not to be?*

*You are a child of God.
 Your playing small does not serve the world.
 There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
 so that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.
 It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.
 And as we let our own light shine,
 we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
 Marianne Williamson*

- The Practices
 1. It's All Invented
 2. Stepping into a Universe of Possibility
 3. Giving an A
 4. Being a Contribution
 5. Leading from Any Chair
 6. Rule Number 6
 7. The Way Things Are
 8. Giving Way to Passion
 9. Lighting a Spark
 10. Being the Board
 11. Creating Frameworks for Possibility
 12. Telling the WE Story