

The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life

Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander

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Review by Tricia Lustig

I was driving down the motorway and listening to Radio 4 (as you do when you live in the UK) when I heard Benjamin Zander interviewed as he had been running some workshops at The World Economics Forum at Davos. I was so excited by what he was discussing – The Art of Possibility – that I ordered his book.

This is the book I wish I had written. This is a wonderful, abundant book, full of how to generate possibility in your life. I think it is the antidote to all the doom and gloom we hear in the media these days. It is easy to read, it is fun, it is full of stories to illustrate the 12 practices that are suggested and it touches my soul.

It comes from the same background as appreciative methodologies and SF: the belief that our language – that is the language we use in our interactions with others – creates our realities. In fact the first practice is called “It’s All Invented” about how our words create our reality and how it is just a story we tell ... so we can step outside of our box if we can figure out how. The first step (of course) is recognising that the box is there.

The next is ‘Stepping into a Universe of Possibility’ to which I respond with a big YES! This is about moving from a life of scarcity – where you believe that there isn’t enough to go around – to a life of many possibilities. Scare City (sic) isn’t a nice place to be and limits us. It highlights the relationship *between* people and things, not the people and things

themselves (doesn't this sound like in-between, the action being in the interaction?).

I love number 3 which is about "Giving an A" – in my lexicon this is about helping people to find the hero within them and to recognise it in everyone (see above). If you give others an 'A', the top mark, how will you treat them? And if you give *yourself* an 'A', how might you treat yourself? Wouldn't you be seeing yourself as someone who has many solutions? These last two practises build up a great set of counters for us by a different method than we may have used before. Zander gives each of his students an 'A' at the beginning of the course. He asks them to write a letter to him which he will open at the end of the course to tell him what they have done to deserve the 'A'. If they do what they said they would, he gives them the promised 'A'.

The fourth practice is "Being a Contribution". It boils down to living in possibility – stop playing the scarcity game (is it enough?) and start playing the Contribution Game: "How will I be a contribution today?" This also moves you away from thinking of yourself and into thinking about your relationship with others – the 'in-between' where the biggest changes can take place.

The fifth practice is "Leading from any Chair" – which means taking responsibility of leadership from anywhere you are. You could even call it Guerilla SF. If we don't take responsibility, who will?

The sixth is my favourite – "Rule No. 6" – Don't take yourself so darn seriously! Dissociate yourself from your calculating, judging self and have fun, relax, let go ... this WORKS, it really does. We certainly use it in our house when someone is getting on their 'high horse' to put the conversation back into the realms of something one can work with. Personally, I need reminding of this quite often!

The seventh practice "The Way Things Are" is very SF – it is at looking at where we are NOW and moving on from here. If we don't resist what is, we are empowered to move on from where we are now. This creates possibility – which

is what we are after. If we look at the facts (not the description) then “radiating possibility begins with things as they are and highlights open spaces, the pathways leading out from here.” (p. 109).

The eighth practice is “Giving Way to Passion.” When we allow our passion into our work (i.e. work in the area that gives us passion) we can ignite this passion in others. It gives us energy and momentum to go forward.

The ninth practice is “Lighting a Spark.” This is the art of enrolment – generating a spark of possibility for others to share. Passion is the igniting force. When we enrol others we can – in turn – be ready to catch their spark. It is an amazingly generative way to work.

The tenth practice is “Being the Board.” This means the board on which the game is played. This is the practice I find most difficult. When I blame someone else, I lose my power and become a victim. I can’t do something about someone else’s mistakes, only my own. Taking responsibility for things (and not blaming others) keeps the choice of what to do firmly in my own hands. It is about making a difference and moving into a position to be able to DO something – keeping us open to possibility.

The eleventh practice is “Creating Frameworks for Possibility” – be a leader of possibility. By standing in possibility, you enable an environment which encourages conversations for possibility and allows people the opportunity to become ‘unstuck’ if they are stuck.

The final practice is “Telling the WE Story,” the story of the threads that connect us which encourages possibility. Let the WE emerge.

How does this book relate to SF? I think it provides some additional tools that are a good fit with the SF framework of finding what works and doing more of it. The authors have clearly identified practices (=tools) which help us to generate possibility – and isn’t that what SF is about? Helping “stuck” people to become unstuck and help them move forward with what works for them? This is a well written, uplifting book which gets my vote as the best book I’ve read

in the last year. Read it, enjoy, and multiply your possibilities!

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