

Business book summaries by Dr. Frumi Rachel Barr

The Art of Possibility

Notes by Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA PhD

Title: The Art of Possibility

Authors: Rosamund Stone Zander & Benjamin Zander

Publisher: Harvard Business School Press

Copyright year: 2000

Library of Congress or ISBN: 0-87584-770-6

Author bio and credits: Rosamund Stone Zander is a family therapist and a landscape painter. Benjamin Zander is the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and a professor at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Noteworthy info regarding contents and chapter titles:

The Art of Possibility offers a set of breakthrough practices for creativity in all human enterprises. Infused with the energy of their dynamic partnership, the book joins together Ben's extraordinary talent as a mover and shaker, teacher, and communicator and Rosamund's genius for creating innovative paradigms for personal and professional fulfillment. Through a series of practices and supporting stories from their life experiences, the authors provide us with a deep sense of the powerful role that the notion of possibility can play in every aspect of our lives.

Author's main point (what will you remember about this book?)

The practices presented in this book are not about making incremental changes that lead to new ways of doing things based on old beliefs, and they are not about self-improvement. They are geared instead toward causing a total shift of posture, perceptions, beliefs and thought processes. They are about transforming your entire world. Each practice has its own catchphrase. Once you are in the habit of using them, the practices will reliably land you "back in the boat", reoriented in a universe of possibility.

A few supporting ideas (ideas which support the main point):

#1 *"It's all invented anyway"*. We might as well invent a story or framework of meaning that enhances our quality of life and the life of those around us. The framework our minds create define and confine what we perceive to be possible. Every problem, every dilemma, every dead end we find ourselves facing in life, only appears unsolvable inside a particular frame or point of view. Enlarge the box, or create another frame around the data, and problems vanish, while new opportunities appear.

Ask: What assumption am I making, that I'm not aware I'm making, that gives me what I see? What might I now invent, that I haven't yet invented, that would give me other choices?

#2 Stepping into a universe of possibility. A universe of possibility stretches beyond the world of measurement to include all worlds: infinite, generative, and abundant. In the measurement world you set a goal and strive for it. In the universe of possibilities, you set the context and let life unfold. Ask: How are my thoughts and actions, in this moment, reflections of the measurement world? And how now?

#3 Giving an "A". This practice transports your relationships from the world of measurement to the world of possibilities. You speak to people from a place of respect that gives them room to realize themselves. This A is not an expectation to live up to, but a possibility to live in to. The freely granted A expresses a vision of partnership, teamwork, and relationship. The practice of giving an A both invents and recognizes a universal desire in people to contribute to others, no matter how many barriers there are to its expression.

#4 Being a contribution. Unlike success and failure, contribution has no other side. How will I be a contribution today? In the game of contribution you wake up each day and bask in the notion that you are a gift to others. Declare yourself to be a contribution. Throw yourself into life as someone who makes a difference, accepting that you may not understand how or why. Rewards in the contribution game are of a deep and rewarding kind.

#5 Leading from any chair. A leader does not need a podium; she can be sitting quietly on the edge of any chair, listening passionately and with commitment, fully prepared to take the baton.

#6 Rule number 6. The practice is to lighten up, which may well light up those around you. When we practice rule number 6, we coax the calculating self to lighten up, and by doing so, we break its hold on us. The calculating self is concerned with its survival. It is portrayed as a ladder with a downward spiral. As it tumbles out of control, it intensifies its efforts to climb back up and get in charge, and the cycle goes round and round. With the calculating self revealed and humored, the central self shines through. The central self is a term used to embrace the remarkably generative, prolific, and creative nature of the world and ourselves.

#7 The way things are. This practice 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 want to go. Being present to the way things are is not the same as accepting things as they are. The capacity to be present to everything that is happening, without resistance, creates possibility. The practice of being with the way things are calls upon us to distinguish between our assumptions, our feelings, and the facts - that is, what has happened or what is happening.

- ◆ Being with the way things are by clearing shoulds.
- ◆ Being with the way things are by closing the exits - staying with the feelings, whatever they are and letting them run their course.

- ◆ Being with the way things are by clearing judgements - good and bad are categories we impose on the world - they are not of the world itself.

Being with the way things are by distinguishing physical from conceptual realities. This means to separate our conclusions about events from our description of the events themselves, until possibility opens up.

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.

#8 Giving way to passion. The first step is to notice where you are holding back, and let go. Release those barriers of self that keep you separate and in control, and let the vital energy of passion surge through you, connecting you to all beyond. The second step is to participate wholly. Lean our bodies into the wind, dare to let go and participate.

#9 Lighting a spark. This practice is about enrollment which is the art and practice of generating a spark of possibility for others to share. You give yourself as a possibility to others and being ready, in turn, to catch their spark. It is about playing together as partners in a field of light. The steps are 1. Imagine that people are an invitation to enrolment. 2. Stand ready to participate. 3. Offer that which lights you up. 4. Have no doubt that others are eager to catch the spark.

We may hear within the word "no" an invitation for enrollment.

The life force for humankind is, perhaps, nothing more or less than the passionate energy to connect, express, and communicate. Enrollment is that life force at work, lighting sparks from person to person, scattering light in all directions.

#10 being the board. When the way things are seems to offer no possibility and when even enrollment doesn't work and you are at your wits end- you can rename yourself as the board on which the whole game is being played. With this act you can transform the whole world.

The first part of the practice is to declare: " I am the framework for everything that happens in my life." Or - "If I cannot be present without resistance to the way things are and act effectively, if I feel myself to be wronged, a loser, or a victim, I will tell myself that some assumption I have made is the source of my difficulty".

The second part of this practice is to ask yourself in regard to the unwanted circumstances: "Well, how did this get on the board that I am?"

Being the board is not about turning the blame on yourself. It is about making a difference and designing conversations to repair breakdowns in relationship. You name yourself as the instrument to make all your relationships into effective partnerships. You open the channel by removing the barriers to tenderness within you. Among the rewards are self-respect, connection at the deepest and most vital kind, and a straight road to making a difference.

#11 Frameworks for Possibility. The practice of this chapter is to invent and sustain frameworks which bring forth possibility. It is about restructuring meanings, creating visions, and establishing environments where possibility is spoken - where the buoyant force of possibility overcomes the pull of the downward spiral.

1. Make a new distinction in the realm of possibility: One that is a powerful substitute for the current framework of meaning that is generating the downward spiral.
2. Enter the territory. Embody the new distinction in such a way that it becomes the framework for life around you.
3. Keep distinguishing what is "on the track" and what is "off the track" of your framework for possibility.

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. Yet, while most organizations use the term "vision" liberally, we have found that few have articulated a vision in a way that serves its purpose.

- ◆ A Vision articulates a possibility
- ◆ A vision fulfills a desire fundamental to humankind, a desire with which any human being can resonate.
- ◆ A vision makes no reference to morality or ethics, it is not about a right way of doing anything.
- ◆ A vision is stated as a picture for all time, using no numbers, measures, or comparatives. It contains no specifics of time, place, audience, or product.
- ◆ A vision is free-standing
- ◆ A vision is a long line of possibility radiating outward. It invites infinite expression, development, and proliferation within its definitional framework.
- ◆ Speaking a vision transforms the speaker.

Inside of the framework of a vision, goals and objectives spring from an outlook of abundance. Under a vision, goals are treated as markers thrown ahead to define the territory. In the pursuit of objectives under a vision, playing is relevant to the manifestation of the possibility, winning is not.

A vision is an open invitation and an inspiration for people to create ideas and events that correlate with its definitional framework.

#12 telling the WE story. This practice points the way to a kind of leadership based not on qualifications earned in the field of battle, but on the courage to speak on behalf of all people and for the long line of human possibility.

1. Tell the WE story - the story of the unseen threads that connect us all, the story of possibility.
2. Listen and look for the emerging reality.
3. Ask: "what do WE want to have happen here?" What's best for US? What's OUR next step.

The practice of WE offers an approach to conflict based on a different premise. It assumes there are no fixed wants nor static desires, while everything each of us thinks and feels has a place in the dialogue. Transformation from the "I" to the WE is the last practice and the long line of this book: the intentional, ongoing dissolution of the barriers that divide us, so that we may be reshaped as a unique voice in the ever-evolving chorus of the WE.

Reviewer's recommendation: I enjoyed this book as much for reading the practices as for the musical metaphors.

Get 100 business book summaries just like this one at 100mustreads.com



Dr. Frumi Rachel Barr

Dr. Frumi Rachel Barr is Founder and CEO of eVirtual Roundtables, a CEO coach, confidante, and mentor. Dr. Barr is the author of *A CEO's Secret Weapon: How to Accelerate Success*. The book was ranked top business book of 2012 by ExecRank and includes a forward by Simon Sinek, best-selling author of *Start with Why*.

www.linkedin.com/in/frumirachelbarr