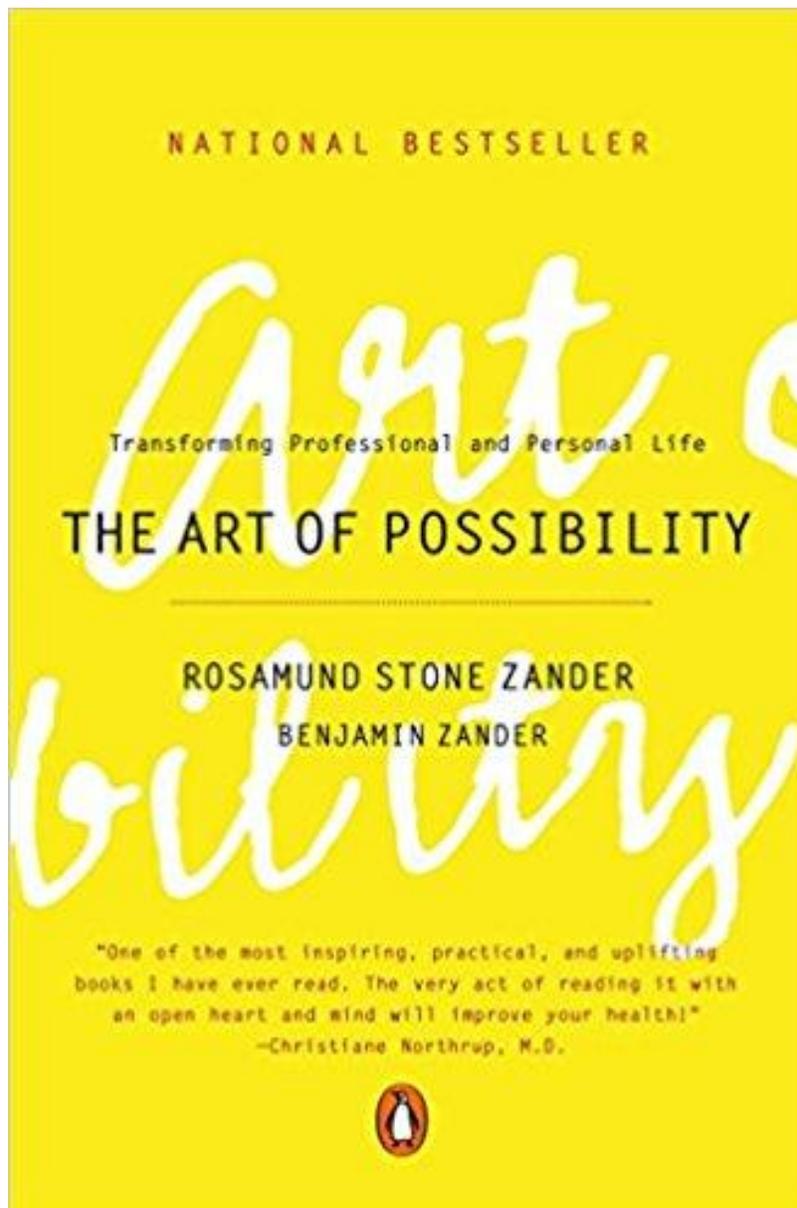


The
Art of Possibility
Reading Guide



Created for the members of the Thrive Within Virtual Book Circle

An Invitation to Possibility

The book starts with a story from Ben Zander, where he described an interaction with a young girl around the word “Perfect” and the possibility it brings.

He ends with the line, “And with that, she sailed out into the universe of possibility.”

Questions:

- What do you think of this story? What do you take away from it?
- What is the universe of possibility that he refers to?

Launching the Journey

Our struggles in life come from the framework of assumptions that we carry with us, and if we can find a different frame, we can find a new way to see the same circumstances.

THE PARTNERSHIP: Ben and Roz, are the two co-authors of this book. Ben is an orchestra conductor and Roz has a private practice in therapy. Together, they bring two different, yet mutually enhancing perspectives to how we can live our lives.

THE DESIGN: Everything in this complex world is connected, so when something happens in one part of the world, it affects people and situations in the other part of the world. This book is about finding new ways of defining ourselves, others, and the world as a whole, using music as the thread that connects it all.

THE VISION: The book is divided into 12 practices that can support the reader’s personal evolution and enhance not only their life, but the lives of all the people they interact with.

PRACTICES: The practices in this book are meant to completely shift how you relate to your circumstances, not incrementally, but with a total shift which will transform your entire world.

NOTES ON PRACTICING:

BEN: The practices in this book are simple, though not easy and they will take more than just a few minutes to master. They will take dedication, faith, and practice to bring them to fruition in your life.

ROZ: *“Toes to nose and look for the boat”*. Roz’s story of her white-water rafting trip reminds us of the importance of hearing and experiencing things over and over again until they become second nature. When you “fall out of the boat” it’s important to have a easy to remember phrase to help you get back in the boat and back to safety. The practices within this book are all connected to a simple catch phrase for you to remember them easily and quickly.

The First Practice: It’s ALL Invented

Summary:

We all see the world from our own unique perspective, which means two people can see the same thing and have completely different experiences because the world we see comes in the form of a map already drawn, a story already told, a hypothesis, and a construction of our own making.

Our eyes, like the eyes of a frog, and the sense of all the other animals are programmed to receive and interpret information for our protection. We think we can see everything, until we realize that other animals can see things that we cannot. Instead, what we see is really what corresponds with the hypothesis or stories that we have already learned or created.

There are two stories to illustrate this point. 1) The Me’en people of Ethiopia given photos and crumpling it up because they could not “see” or “read” the images on the paper. Pablo Picasso’s interaction with the man on the train asking him why he didn’t paint people “the way they really are.”

We perceive the world through what our brain constructs, and though we believe it is THE TRUTH, it isn't always so. Our brain categorizes information based on what we know, which limits our ability to see possibilities outside of those categories.

Everything is a story, and if we can recognize our stories, we can create new ones that will break open the "box" which we find ourselves in.

Other Key Ideas:

- We see a map of the world, not the world itself.
- It's all invented, so we might as well invent a story or framework that enhances your life and the lives of those around you.
- The frames our minds create define and confine what we perceive to be possible.
- Every challenge we face is directly tied to our point of view. If we enlarge the box or frame around the information, new opportunities appear.
- IT'S ALL INVENTED—it's all a story that we create.

Questions:

- What are some of the things that you "see" that others might not? Where is your focus?
- Why do you think that Roz and Ben use the story of the Me'en people seeing photos for the first time, as well as the story of Picasso and the train rider? What do these stories demonstrate? How is that important for YOU?
- What are some of the challenging situations that you find yourself in right now? What is it that you are seeing, which might not in fact be there at all?
- Did you try the 9 dot puzzle? How did it go? For those who turned the page for the answer, how long did you try the puzzle, before doing so? How can you apply that learning to your life and to how you see the world?
- What stories are you currently telling yourself about yourself, or about the people you interact with? What others stories might you invent that would bring you more peace?
- **FROM THE AUTHORS:** What assumption am I making, that I'm not aware I'm making, that gives me what I see?

- **FROM THE AUTHORS:** What might I now invent, that I haven't yet invented, that would give me other choices?

The Second Practice: Stepping Into A Universe of Possibility

Summary:

We live in a world of measurement, where our survival is created and secured based on how we measure ourselves against other people and circumstances. People, ideas, and situations fall along a hierarchy from good to bad, safe to risky, trustful to distrustful, etc. and we feel better and safer when we can pinpoint where people or things fall along that hierarchy.

We wake up in the morning believing that life is a struggle to survive and get ahead with limited, or even diminishing resources.

The world of possibility, by contrast, does not assume that resources are limited. Everything and anything is possible and can be invented. We all experience moments like this in our lives, when awe-inspiring events happen, though they are not how we regularly live.

With that said, though, the world of success and the world of possibility are not dichotomous, and the authors believe that the more you participate joyfully and generously in your life projects and work, the more success you will have.

There is a difference between true scarcity and scarcity-thinking. When we take on the latter, we compete for the scarce resources, rather than living in abundance.

You will have stepped into the world of possibility, when you answer, "perfect" to someone's question about how you are.

Other Key Ideas:

- "In the world of measurement you set a goal and strive for it. In the universe of possibility, you set the context and let life unfold."

- When we live in the world of measurement, we are constantly comparing, competing, judging, feeling anxious, attached to outcomes, etc.
- Scarcity and scarcity thinking are not one and the same. People can live in an materially abundant world and still have a scarcity mindset.

Questions:

- What is your “world of measurement” consisting of? How were you brought up or raised within the “world of measurement.”
- What does it mean to “set the context and let life unfold” rather than set goals?
- Does your thinking and/or attitude fall in line with scarcity thinking? If so, how so?
- Is there anyone in your life that you are currently “competing” with? Family member? Friend? Work colleague? Stranger on the internet? Yourself? What would change if you moved away from competition and into possibility?
- **FROM THE AUTHORS:** How are your thoughts and actions, in this moment, reflections of the world of measurement? And how now?

The Third Practice: Giving an A

Summary:

Letter grades don’t mean anything about a person’s performance, as they are mostly used as a way to compare students against one another, and are applied with a curve.

Instead, the authors promote *giving an A* as a way of shifting the way you see people, and their possibility, instead of seeing them as a measurement. It is a way of giving someone respect, no matter how they match up to your standards. You are seeing the beautiful statue within the rough marble, rather than the rough marble itself.

When we focus so heavily on the measurement, we tend to become so overly anxious that we are no longer willing to take risks.

Giving an A does not mean NOT paying attention to standards, as competencies matter when choosing to work with people. Rather it brings two people together, instead of creating a differential of power that can hinder growth.

Standards also can have more to do with the person doing the evaluating than the person being evaluated, and tend not to provide much information for improvement.

When you give yourself an A, it does not mean slacking off, because you already have the A. It's about playing as if you are the A, not because you HAVE the A.

The practice of *Giving an A* is also about honoring the fact that people want to be a contribution.

Giving an A is about doing your best with what you have. It's about taking yourself away from the ideas of success and failure, and instead living into possibility.

If want to to re-look at our past and mend hurts, we can look at the grades we are giving them. You may not be able to change people in the world of measurement, but you can **change the relationship** in the world of possibility.

There are several stories shared to make these points.

- Ben's shares how he gave his students the assignment to write their own letter about how they earned their "A" and how it changed their experience for the better
- Roz's tells about her senior paper how there is often much more to a grade than simply the work itself.
- Tanya and her bow. Ben tries to ignore the non-enthusiastic Tanya, and finally asks her for input, and takes heed to it. Both of their experiences are changed.
- Roz fills in for Ben while he was away and struggled with anxiety until she saw the students as colleagues
- Roz shifts the grade that she had been giving her deceased father for years, and her bitterness drops away

- The letter shared by John Imhof about his relationship with his own dad and he desire to be told he was loved, only to see later that his father had SHOWN it all along.

The Monk's Story

When five monk's believe that one of them is the messiah, they all start to treat each other, and themselves with more respect because they don't know whom of them is the messiah. As a result, their nearly in-ruin monastery creates a new life for itself.

Other Key Ideas:

- Giving in A isn't about a measurement, it's about giving someone an opportunity to live into a new possibility.
- Only when we make mistakes, can we learn what may need attention.
- It's all invented, so we might as well invent something that brightens our life and the lives of the people around us. (THIS is the second time this idea has come up..)
- We are often unable to move beyond our own agenda and prejudices to see how we support or undermine our relationships with others.
- The person who appears least engaged, may in fact be the person who is most committed.
- It is more important to speak to someone's passion than to their cynicism.
- "We keep looking so hard in life for the 'specific message,' and yet we are blinded to the fact that the message is all around us, and within us all the time." ~John Imhof
- When you see everyone has the possibility of an A, including yourself, it opens you all up to thrive.

Questions:

- Which sample "A Letter" resonated with you most? Why?
- What about writing your own A letter to yourself, dated sometime in the future?
- What do you think of the idea of celebrating your mistakes and negative circumstances, as Ben offers? Raising your hands in the air and saying, "How fascinating!"

- Have you ever avoided being “wrong” by not raising your hand? (Either in reality, or metaphorically.) What was the cost?
- Is there anyone in your life right now who could benefit from receiving your “A”? (Maybe yourself?)
- What do you think of John Imhof’s letter? Are there any “specific messages” that you are waiting to hear or see, that you might be missing because you are overly attached to hearing or seeing them in a specific way?
- How can you take the lessons of the Monk Story and incorporate it into your own life? Where might be the best place to start?

The Fourth Practice: Being a Contribution

Summary:

This chapter starts off with the story of the girl dancing along the beach, throwing stranded starfish in the ocean. When a man comes along and chides her for her efforts. She smiles, verbally disagrees and continues her contributions. The authors share this as an example of NOT living in the world of measurement, but instead being a contribution, no matter what.

The concept of “games” used throughout this book, is not used to make a mockery of what we are doing, but to shift us to see things in a new way. By seeing life and aspect of our life as a game, we can focus on growth and fun, rather than survival. We can also change the game if we don’t like the rules because, as we already learned...IT’S ALL INVENTED.

THE PRACTICE: 1) Declare yourself a contribution and 2) Throw yourself into life as someone who makes a difference, even if you don’t know how or why.

Being a contribution isn’t just about you--it’s about everyone whose life is touched by your life. Being a contribution takes you out of the world of self, and into the world of relationships, where your focus is on making a difference.

Some of the stories told to highlight this practice are:

- Ben’s story of the dinner table and the questions of “What did you do today?” really being “What did you achieve today?” and how it brought upon anxiety for most of his life.
- Roz’s story of her patient/client asking her mother for a contribution to her and her family, rather than for a handout.
- Ben reluctantly going to the senior center and leaving on a cloud of air.

Other Key Ideas:

- “In the game of contribution you wake up each day and bask in the notion that you are a gift to others.”
- When you look at life as a game and you aren’t enjoying yourself, you can always close the box and open up a new game. It’s always your choice.
- People want to be a contribution to others.
- All of our actions ripple out into the world beyond.
- Rewards for being a contribution can be great and unpredictable, even if not monetary.
- Being a contribution takes you out of the world of self, and into the world of relationships, where your focus is on making a difference.
- “Who knows...if you change your seat maybe something new will happen today.”

Questions:

- Many of us have heard or read the story of the girl and the starfish before. Do you remember when you first heard it? In what context? What does this story mean for you?
- How is reading this book and participating in this book circle contributing to you, and to the lives of everyone else in your life?
- Please consider doing the assignment that Ben gave to his students. How have you been a contribution already? How can you continue to be a contribution and be mindful of it? How do those contributions ripple out beyond you?
- What seat are you currently residing in, that you feel compelled to stay in? Where else might you move to gain a different perspective and potentially experience something new?

- Ben shares a quote from his dad, “I discovered a person cannot live a full life under the shadow of bitterness.” Are you holding on to any bitterness? What fullness could be added to your life if you let it go?
- What do you make of the parable that Ben shares at the end? What might this have to do with your life?

The Fifth Practice: Leading from Any Chair

Summary:

About 20 years into his career, Ben realized that although his picture may have graced the covers of CDs, he, in fact, didn’t make a sound. What makes a conductor great, is his ability to make other people great. Part of being great is being engaged. So how can you measure engagement?

Ben introduced “white sheets” as a way for the musicians and orchestra to be able to give him feedback during rehearsals, as communicating directly with so many musicians was unheard of before.

All leaders (and you are a leader) can see the people in their world however they choose to see them, and can grant them the opportunity to shine or not. Can hand them the baton or not. (As shown by the story about the young musicians going to Cuba)

“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 up the baton.

Other Key Ideas:

- Leadership isn’t about being great, it’s about helping others be great.
- We can see people however we choose to see them.
- “Who am I being that they are not shining?”
- The leader can be any one of us.

Questions:

- Have you ever experienced a tyrannical leader (at home, at work, in your community or government)? How did you respond?
- How are you handing over the baton to the people in your life? (to your colleagues, your partner, your children, etc.) If you are not, do you know why not?
- What is your take-away from the story about the trip to Cuba? Why did Ben share this particular story?
- What does this chapter on leading from any chair have to do with the previous chapter about being a contribution? How can you combine the two moving forward?
- How are you currently leading? What new actions could you take to increase or shift your leadership, so that you are leading even from the 11th chair?

The Sixth Practice: Rule Number 6

Summary:

Rule number 6 is don't take yourself so god-damn seriously. Rule number 6, combined with humor is a great antidote when we find ourselves sucked into the world of measurement.

Frank Sulloway, a brain researcher, suggests that our "personality" is nothing more than our attempt to "get out of childhood alive." Thus, our calculating self is the self we became accustomed to because it gave us the most reward, and the least amount of pain.

The image of a ladder and a downward spiral represents how we can approach life. We are conditioned to climb up the ladder for greater opportunities, only to find our defense mechanisms getting in the way, and putting us in a downward spiral. When this happens, we intensify our efforts to climb back up, only to fall again. The cycle continues.

On the flip side of the calculating self, is the central self. A self that is playing the game of wholeness and sufficiency, rather than scarcity and deficiency.

When we find ourselves in conflict, it is often a battle between two people's calculating selves, rather than a conversation between their central selves.

The central self does not understand the meaning of "not belonging" or "being unworthy." To the central self that is like believing in Santa Claus. The central self understands that the river flows where it wants, and that there is no point in trying to control the water, as it is futile. Instead it dances with the movement.

Some of the stories used to highlight this practice are:

- The story of June and the game to "Have the Best SEX Ever"
- Jeffrey the extraordinary singer, who touched more people when he sang from vulnerability instead
- The two business partners who were unable to agree on a contract, each holding onto their own "stuff"
- The man being treated to dinner by a homeless person.

Other Key Ideas:

- When we light up, we can lighten up those around us.
- Humor can diffuse tense situations and bring us together.
- The world of measurement, combined with the calculating self, is primarily concerned with our own survival in a world of scarcity.
- There is a difference between standing up for what you believe, and responding because you are hurt.
- When we give up our pride and are willing to embrace our vulnerability, we can touch others and truly connect.
- The central self is playing the game of wholeness and sufficiency. The calculating self is playing the game of scarcity and deficiency

Questions:

- Is there anyone in your world who has a great sense of humor and uses it to help diffuse tense situations? Is there anything you can learn from them?

- Are there any areas of your life, where you think *Rule Number 6* may be more helpful than others? How might you remember to apply it?
- Have you had any experiences similar to the ladder/downward spiral that the authors share? What were you climbing to or for? How did you respond once you realized you were on a downward spiral?
- **FROM THE AUTHORS:** What would have to change for me to be completely fulfilled?
- Are you aware of the fears, opinions, and positions your calculating self has adopted that stand in the way of simple fulfillment?
- Is there anyone in your life that you have “diagnosed”? What experience might you have if you stopped taking yourself and your story so seriously?
- Are there any situations in your life right now that are being run by your calculating self, rather than your central self? How can you let your central self shine through instead? What difference would it make? What possibilities would it open up?

The Seventh Practice: The Way Things Are

Summary:

In sharing the brief excerpt from the film “Babe”, Roz and Ben are explaining that there are other options than hopeless resignation and spluttering resistance. You can be present to the way things are and how you feel about them, without accepting them.

Be present without being resistant.

Rather than looking at how things “should be,” what if you look at how they are, and take action to make changes.

Emotions are not meant to be avoided, denied, or off-loaded to someone else. When we sit with our unpleasant emotions, we develop our strength to be with them.

There is no good/bad. That is our own opinion imposed on people and circumstances.

Language offers us the ability to intermingle our descriptions of events with our conclusion of events, but they are not one and the same.

Downward spiral talk is resigned way of talking, with the use of metaphors like “roadblocks” and “barriers.” It is focused on the “problems” and what needs fixing, rather than focusing on the possibilities. It increases the feeling of hopelessness due to the spotlight effect. The more light shined on it, the more the evidence appears to grow.

We can choose to participate in downward spiral talk, or in possibility talk.

Stories to highlight this practice:

- Roz’s ski trip in New England where she was skiing on ice and resisting it.
- The musician focused on one missed note, rather than the whole of his performance.
- The “wall” that the father had put between him and his son, which only lead to deeper and more prolonged silence.
- Jane Goodall being able to call attention to the realities while also speaking to the possibilities

Other Key Ideas:

- You can be present to how things are, without resisting how things are.
- “What do we do from here?”
- Mistakes can be like ice. If we resist them, we may keep slipping.
- There is a distinction between the events themselves, and our thoughts and feelings about the events.
- When we focus on how wrong things are, we lose our capacity to act effectively to change anything.
- Nature makes no judgment on what is good or bad. Humans do.
- There is a difference between the way things are, and our interpretation of the way things are. One is fact. The other is story.

- Being with the way things are is about starting with what is, not from what “should be.”

Questions:

- Do you normally take the point of view of the cow, or the duck? Do you simply resign yourself to what is, or do you complain about it? Or potentially, another possibility....?
- What is the difference between “being present to the way things are”, versus “accepting the way things are?”
- Is there anyone or anything in your life that you are currently resisting, or avoiding? What would it look like for you to move to a point of presence that this is what is, and then look at what options you have moving forward?
- What are all the things (people, circumstances, etc) that are currently “wrong” in your world? How “should” they be instead? What would happen if you let go of the fact that they are “wrong” and “should be” different? What different actions might you take?
- Pay attention to your use of the words “good” and “bad.” How often do you use them? In what context? What if you looked at life not through the terms of “good” or “bad” but rather what is and what isn’t? What feels good to you and what doesn’t?
- How do you handle unpleasant emotions? Do you avoid them? Deny them? Blame them on someone else? What if you sat with them instead?
- If you move out of your downward spiral talk, what possibilities can you open up for yourself, your relationships, your world?

The Eighth Practice: Giving Way to Passion

Summary:

A vital energy is surging all around us, and many of us are not tapped into it.

Giving way to passion means to 1) notice where you are holding back and let go, and 2) participate wholly.

Just as musicians must focus on the entire piece they are playing, rather than the individual notes, life is also a long line with a long flow. When we can transcend our focus on personal survival life can take on a greater meaning. When we can rise above and take an aerial view of things, we can have a very different experience than we would from the ground.

When we can lean into our passions and know what we are truly doing things for, a whole new sense of movement can arise. We can move beyond our fears of what other people think, our fear of making mistakes, and let our true emotion flow.

Stories to highlight practice eight:

- Roz shared two experiences where she is either watching water churn, or rode on it in her canoe, and later painted the momentum and passion of the water, rather than the objects and lines.
- Ben urged one of his musicians to move out of being a two-buttock player and into a one-buttock player, to allow for more movement.
- Marius failed his audition with one company because he played to uptight, and then landing an ever bigger and better position because he played with emotion.

Other Key Ideas:

- Speak and act from your passions, not from the box that others have created for you.
- Let go. Go with the flow.
- Live Beyond The Fuck It.

Questions:

- Where are you currently holding back in your life? In your work? In your personal life? In your relationships? What is POSSIBLE if you were to let go?
- Are you living your life with both butt cheeks firmly planted, or are you allowing yourself to flow with only one butt cheek planted? If you are firmly planted, are you willing to shift a little to bring more flow?
- How can you embody some of Jackie's excitement and passion?

- How can you bring the “beyond the fuck it” idea to your life, and truly let things out?

The Ninth Practice: Lighting Spark

Summary:

Lighting a spark is about enrollment, but with enrollment is NOT about convincing, cajoling, forcing, tricking, or pressuring people. It is about opening up the possibilities that could be, and generating passion in the other.

Enrollment is about carrying a spark with you where you go and using that spark to light a spark in others. It’s a dance of light.

Step By Step Process:

1. Imagine that people are an invitation for enrollment (don’t assume they won’t be open to the idea)
2. Stand ready to participate, willing to be moved and inspired (keep yourself open to possibility yourself)
3. Offer that which lights you up (speak from your passions, and let it flow)
4. Have no doubt that the others are eager to catch the spark (put your fears and doubts aside and step into possibility)

When we hear the word “no” we usually see it is a door slammed. If we look beyond no, and don’t take it personally, we might see that it is a sign that we haven’t spoken to the others passions YET.

Persuasion works when people have mutual interests. Enrollment speaks to possibility, even when there is no equality or mutual exchange.

When we get caught in the downward spiral talk, it is more challenging to speak to possibility and light people’s sparks.

“The life force for humanity is, perhaps, nothing more or less than the passionate energy to connect, express, and communicate. Enrollment is that life force at work...”

Stories shared to highlight practice:

- Ben shared the story of his father going to Glasgow to meet a man because “Certain things are better done in person.” He then uses the same approach in order to best touch on someone’s passion.
- En route to a museum on her bicycle, Roz realized she has a flat tire. No change for the air pump, she must open up possibility in the two men at the service station.
- Ben shared his failed attempt to enrolled Arthur Andersen as a sponsor for his concert, and his subsequent success in supporting their own project AND getting sponsorship at the same time. It changed the lives of many inner city children, and adult too.

Other Key Ideas:

- Enrollment is about speaking to people’s passions. Lighting a spark.
- Enrollment is not persuading or convincing others.
- A “no” merely means we haven’t lit the spark yet.
- People WANT to be a contribution (as we have already learned.)

Questions:

- How do you differential enrollment from persuading or convincing people?
- How were you taught to “get people to join your side”? How affective has that been for you? How might enrollment work differently?
- Have you ever been caught up and truly enrolled in someone else’s passions, so much that it changed your life for the better?
- How can you use the practice of enrollment in your life? With whom? For what? What difference will it make?

The Tenth Practice: Being the Board

Summary:

Being the board is the approach that you can take when all the other practices don't seem to be working, and you are "at your wit's end."

Being the board is a new way to look at responsibility and fault-finding. Blame and blamelessness come from the world of measurement, which many of us know. Unfortunately, when we blame we give away our power to shift situations to a new direction, learn from them, and deepen a relationship.

In the car accident example, *being the board* means acknowledging that driving a car has risks and that when you choose to get in a car, you choose to take those risks, knowing you have no control of people and circumstances outside of that car.

Being the board offers the opportunity for a graceful journey. It's about acknowledging you may be a victim, but there was a known risk all along. Instead of being a piece on the chess board, or the person moving the pieces (the strategist), you can choose to be the board in which the game is being played. In this way, you open yourself up to ALL things.

It's also not about blaming yourself, instead of blaming others. It's about the relationship as a whole, rather than the actions of individuals.

Stories to highlight practice:

- Ben was conducting with 1000 audience members, and a violinist came in early. He stopped the entire piece and started again. Someone asked later if he wanted to know who it was. He said, "No, I did it."
- Ben lashed out at a musician after she missed a rehearsal and then wrote a letter in the format of *Giving an A*, while also *being the board* and taking responsibility. Despite having initially quit, she came back.
- The story of the man whose wife cheats on him, and the examples of what it looks like for each one of them to be the board and take complete responsibility.

Other Key Ideas:

- *Being the board* is about owning the risks we take in a world where we don't have much control.
- When we take responsibility for EVERYTHING that happens in our life, we keep our power and have the freedom to choose again.
- There is often no gain in blaming people, but a cost to the relationship.
- Apportioning blame doesn't work when there isn't shared values or community.
- *Being the board* is moving away from being the judge and jury and handing out punishments (even in your own mind.)
- Apologies are often a "restorative balm" when a relationship is deteriorating or has already.
- Authenticity comes when you are not attached to an outcome.

Questions:

- What do you make of this whole idea of *being the board*? How can you apply it to some of the current situations you find yourself in?
- Was blame used as a way to correct behavior in your family? What effect did it have on you?
- Do you use blame as a means of correcting people's behavior? (Including your own?) How could you move away from blame and into being the board?
- What risks is Ben referring to when he says that we live in a world with inherent risks that we often cannot control? What risks are you currently facing each day? Are there any risks you are avoiding?
- What do you think of the idea of taking responsibility for EVERYTHING?
- **FROM THE AUTHORS:** How did this thing got on the board that I am? How is it that I have become a context for that to occur?
- How does *being the board* relate to the second agreement of not taking things personally, from "The Four Agreements."
- Is there anyone in your life who might benefit from a letter like the one that Ben wrote to Cora? When will you write it?

The Eleventh Practice: Creating Frameworks for Possibility

Summary:

Leaders today have the challenge of holding space for reality, while not getting drawn into a downward spiral, and remaining open to the realm of possibility. Especially, because our brains are wired to focus on real and imagined dangers.

Anyone of us can decide to open the window to possibility, no matter where we sit or stand at the table, or even if we are not invited to the table. It starts by seeing the world outside of the framework of fear and scarcity, which is what leads to divisions among and between people.

So how do we escape the gravitational pull of the downward spiral?

The steps:

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. (Re-committing to the vision and possibility.)

True leaders are those who BECOME their vision. They walk their talk. Many businesses may have a “vision statement” or a “mission statement”, yet they are often an expression of fear and scarcity, rather than possibility. They promote competition and exclusion.

A vision, according to Roz and Ben, is one that focuses on possibility. It fulfills a desire of humans, and is inclusive of EVERYONE. It does not live in the world of measurement.

Within the framework of a vision, you can create goals and objectives, though they can be seen as a game to play, that incites creativity. It's about playing the game, not winning the game.

“A vision is an open invitation and an inspiration for people...”

We, as humans, have the ability to focus our conscious mind and use our words to create new frameworks of possibility.

Stories to highlight the practice:

- A young girl goes to school after undergoing chemo, and is greeted with titters from her classmates due to her lack of hair. The next day her teacher comes to school with a shaved head, opening up the class to possibility that a shaved head isn't something to snicker at, but something to be proud of. Leadership.
- In 1904, when told by a Nazi officer that any soldier that tried to take down the Nazi flag would be shot, the Danish King offered himself as the soldier to take it down. The flag came down.
- When a number of students “broke the rules” on a trip to Brazil, Ben realized that he hadn't opening up possibility with the students before the trip. They had no purpose, commitment, or vision.
- Ben's interaction with a Hong Kong business man about contribution, and the man asks, “What about money? What about the stockholders?” To which his wife says, “You mean the children?”
- Alice Kahana remembers riding to Auschwitz with her brother. Her last words to him were about how stupid he was and why he couldn't keep track of things. Now, she works to never say anything to anyone that could be their last words.
- Ben invites his students to write about the shared visions of NASA and music.

Other Key Ideas:

- We can steer people back to possibility without making them wrong.
- A vision is your NORTH STAR. (Your toes to nose.)
- Visions are not standards to live up to, but visions to life in to.
- Visions connect to our emotional side more so than our rational side.

Questions:

- Are there any people, circumstances, situations that tend to pull you into a downward spiral? Without avoiding those situations or people, how can you instead create possibility within those contexts?
- **FROM THE AUTHORS:** What distinction can you make that will bring possibility to the situation?
- If you were to create a vision for your life, what would it be? What about creating sub-visions for the different aspects of your life? What vision do you want to create for your participation in this book circle, or for your personal growth reading in general?
- What does Marianne Williamson's poem mean to you?

The Twelfth Practice: Telling the WE Story

Summary:

We seem to live in a world of US/THEM thinking--in politics, between nations, in organizations, and even in our intimate relationships. Ben and Roz want to introduce us instead the WE STORY. A story of togetherness, like a long line of music, or an impressionist painting.

The WE story is about relationship, not individuals. It's about what is best for US, not just what is best for me.

The steps of the WE practice are:

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

The WE story is not about compromise, but about opening ourselves up to the possibility of various wants and desires, rather than ultimatums. It's about broadening the desires of everyone. It's about connecting over a SHARED vision.

When we have the WE story, we need to include everyone in the conversation. It is how trust is built and a community is created--together.

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee of South Africa allowed people amnesty if they were willing to publicly tell the whole story, and if not people were tried in conventional ways. The focus was on understanding, reparation, and brotherhood, instead of vengeance, retaliation and victimization.

Stories to highlight the practice:

- Ben shares about when his father came to speak to some American students who were studying in England, and about how he spoke of the histories of both the Jews and Arabs with equal amounts of enthusiasm--enthusiasm that isn't highlighted today....
- Roz shares her story about her patient Victoria and the game she invented, and how the focus on WE and US connected them over a can of Dinty Moore beef stew.
- Roz shares the connection that was created between her and her sister after their mother died.
- Roz describes a session with a husband and wife, where the wife goes off on the husband and Roz interjects from her own limbic brain. She recovers quickly and turns to the REVENGE THING that is sitting on the woman's shoulder. It wasn't her that was fighting her husband, she was actually fighting the creature lurking on her shoulder.
- On a trip to South Africa, Ben and Roz see that in the wake of Apartheid, South Africa has embodied a We story. The problems are not hidden, nor are they pinned on a specific person. They are the problems of the whole, not individuals.
- Ben shares of his trip to Chile, where he asked his musicians to sit next to a different instrument, and with eyes closed to focus on listening and play from the HEART. The result was astounding.

Other Key Ideas:

- No matter what happens we can choose to tell the WE story or the OTHER story.
- The issues are often not what they seem.
- Human beings aren't the enemy--things like greed, fear, revent, pride and self-righteousness are.
- When we focus on the truth, rather than justice, the outcome can be very different.

Questions:

- **From the authors:** What can we invent that will take us from an entrenched posture of hostility to one of enthusiasm and deep regard?
- Do you ever find yourself arguing your case to an empty courtroom within the confines of your head? Who are you arguing with and what for?
- What current I/YOU or US/THEM contexts exist in your life right now? How can you transition them to a WE story instead?
- **From the authors:** How might the practice of the WE proceed in a community violated by the acts of terrorists?

CODA

This book is meant to give you tools of transformation--from someone who meets challenges, to someone who designs her life, from someone who lives fully expressed within a context of WE. All through practice.

FINAL Questions:

- What was your favorite part of this book? Your favorite practice?
- Are there any concepts or practices that still seem out of reach?
- How do you plan to implement these practices in your life and step into possibility on a DAILY basis?