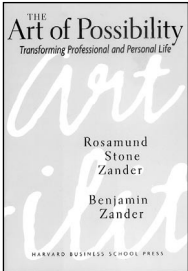




## WORKING AND LIVING IN A WORLD OF POSSIBILITY

BY ELIZABETH KOCH



**The Art of  
Possibility:  
Transforming  
Professional and  
Personal Life**

**T**he *Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life* (Harvard Business School Press, 2000), by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, serves as a guide to revolutionizing the self and breathing life back into business. Benjamin Zander is the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, a professor at the New England Conservatory of Music, and an innovative strategist. Roz Zander is a family therapist and consultant who employs therapeutic approaches to help others change both life and business obstacles into creative answers. In this guide to conducting business effectively and living life to its fullest, the husband-and-wife pair write intimately about personal conquests that they accomplished in their daily lives by engaging in what they call the “art of possibility”—that is, stepping away from the muddled details of a problem or conflict, letting go of their assumptions, and exploring the possibilities that the situation presents.

To help others develop these skills, the authors offer 12 “transformational” practices for breaking free from old ways of thinking and being and redefining ourselves, others, and the world we live in. Through rich examples from the fields of music, family therapy, education, and busi-

ness, Roz and Benjamin illustrate each of the practices—new ways of acting that require concerted effort, commitment, and repetition in order to cause “a total shift of posture, perceptions, beliefs, and thought processes.” By engaging in these practices, they argue convincingly, we will find that we can achieve much more than we ever imagined while trapped in our rigid old mindsets.

### Practicing Possibility

The Zanders have coined catchy phrases to capture the essence of the different practices (see “The 12 Practices of the Art of Possibility” on page 11). For instance, “Giving an ‘A’”

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refers to a practice that Benjamin uses with his students—he gives each a top grade at the beginning of the semester, asking only that they write a letter about who they will be a year from the present. By automatically receiving an “A,” most students raise their expectations of their own abilities and perform at a higher level.

Another practice involves letting go of assumptions that act as restrictions to the problem-solving process, something the authors focus on in the early part of the book. “Leading from Any Chair,” a phrase the Zanders took from the orchestral setting, helps us break down the assumption that leaders are at the top of the organiza-

tion and discover that a person can lead no matter what his or her position in life or work.

The seventh practice, “The Way Things Are,” grounds the problem-solving process by considering “what is and not what should be.” The Zanders strongly believe that, by altering the language we use to describe a situation, we can change the situation itself. Roz describes this approach through an encounter in her professional life. A family had asked for her advice when the son had trouble communicating with his parents. In fact, the boy was the one who had suggested the three of them seek third-party help. During the session, the father repeatedly referred to a “wall” between the boy and his parents. As Roz points out, the wall only existed because the father relentlessly spoke of it. By changing his language, the father was able to make the wall disappear and change “the way things are” for the family.

### Possibility As a Lifestyle

Through stories from Roz’s practice and Benjamin’s tours with the symphony, the two describe an amalgam of circumstances that seem to have no easy answers, ranging from marital spats to the challenges facing underprivileged children in London. Nevertheless, they work through each situation—and help others do the same—with astounding peace of mind and creativity. By using the practices as a framework for handling problems—and working with the people attached to them—the Zanders present each issue as a chance, an opportunity, a possibility that can lead to something better and often unexpected.

So, own your problems, relax, and let a new universe change your view of life and business. This book makes “thinking outside the box” not quite as square as it has become to many people jaded by years of creativity workshops. The authors show that, in order to practice leadership, we must cease fighting ourselves and embrace others. As life itself works its way back into the world of business, take a deep breath and give yourself an “A.” ■

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## THE 12 PRACTICES OF THE ART OF POSSIBILITY

1. **It's All Invented:** Assumptions are restrictions.
2. **Step into a Universe of Possibility:** Step away from the edge, in fact go right over it.
3. **Giving an “A”:** Overcome the restrictions of labels.
4. **Be a Contribution:** Shift away from self-concern.
5. **Lead from Any Chair:** Leaders are *not* just at the top.
6. **Rule #6:** Don't take yourself so seriously.
7. **The Way Things Are:** Changing your language can change reality.
8. **Giving Way to Passion:** Continue where you normally quit.
9. **Lighting a Spark:** Certain things are better done in person.
10. **Being the Board:** Own your problems.
11. **Creating Frameworks:** Mission statements are simply constraints.
12. **Telling the WE Story:** Focus on relationships rather than on yourself.