

## **Personal and Professional Development: Dr. Waters' Corner December 2012**

### *The Art of Possibility*

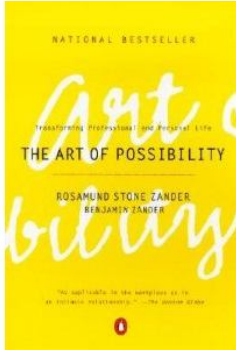
Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander (2000)

In *The Art of Possibility*, Zander and Zander begin: "This is a how-to book of an unusual kind." The authors then commence to sharing their ideas on how all of us can learn to build fresh frameworks around old circumstances. Their main thesis: We can provoke productive change if we master the art of re-framing the situations we encounter each day. As a conductor with the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, Benjamin Zander knows a thing or two about performance. As a family therapist, Rosamund Stone Zander is experienced in implementing new paradigms for personal fulfillment. And in their book they contend that the cumulative effect of such implementation can be nothing less than transformative – opening each of us to a whole universe of possibility. I agree with the Zanders that so much of what we experience is "invented" – what the physicist-philosopher David Bohm referred to as "net presentation". We react to Nature (the world) filtered through us. Filtered through our previous thoughts, our presuppositions, and biased expectations encultured within us from our previous experiences. I also appreciated this book's emphasis on question quality. In the classroom, I instruct my students that scientific progress is benchmarked not so much by the "facts" we generate, but rather by the quality of the new questions we ask. The Zanders' focus is not on the questions we ask our neighbors or professional colleagues, but on the quality of the questions we ask ourselves: "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?" Their book also emphasizes the importance of adopting an attitude of generative abundance. Instead of positioning ourselves to struggle to survive to get ahead in a world of limited resources, we need to orient ourselves to abundance. "In the measurement world, you set a goal and strive for it. In the universe of possibility, you set the context and let life unfold." This contextual re-shaping strategy really resonates with me. I developed a skills course for Dual Title PhD students in Purdue's Center on Aging and the Life Course to coax these students to step down from the success/failure ladder of their specialized discipline to broaden their thinking – becoming multi-angled, imagino-analytical discoverers who feel quite comfortable venturing outside of their safe silos. I would say I'm attempting to move them away from the Zanders' "world of measurement" and into the universe of possibilities. If you are openminded to new ideas, I believe this book can be valuable to you. The best art rearranges us. Rest assured that *The Art of Possibility* will re-arrange you in meaningful ways.

– *David J. Waters*

Description from front flap of *The Art of Possibility*

The Art of Possibility offers a set of breakthrough practices for creativity in all human



enterprises. This inspirational book is a synthesis of Rosamund Stone Zander's knowledge of cutting-edge psychology and Benjamin Zander's experiences as the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. Infused with the energy of their dynamic partnership, the book joins together Ben's extraordinary talent as a mover and shaker, teacher, and communicator with Rosamund's genius for creating innovative paradigms for personal and professional fulfillment. In lively counterpoint, 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.

The Zanders' deceptively simple practices are based on two premises: that life is composed as a story ("it's all invented") and that, with new definitions, much more is possible than people ordinarily think. The authors' harmoniously interwoven perspectives provide a deep sense of the powerful role that the notion of possibility can play in every aspect of life. Through uplifting stories, parables, and personal anecdotes, the Zanders invite us to become passionate communicators, leaders, and performers whose lives radiate possibility into the world.