THE Art of Possibility

Transforming Professional and Personal Life

Rosamund Stone Zander

Benjamin Zander

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PRESS

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An Invitation to Possibility

BEN: "Waiter," I said, in an exuberant mood, "I have a perfect life, but I don't have a knife."

I was having breakfast with a friend on one of my periodic visits to London to conduct the Philharmonia Orchestra. I heard giggles behind me and, turning around, caught the eye of a girl of about twelve with a typically English pudding-bowl haircut. We exchanged smiles, and then I went back to my conversation and to my breakfast.

The next day, I passed the young lady again in the breakfast room and stopped to speak with her.

"Good morning. How are you today?"

She drew herself up ever so slightly and, with a tilt to her chin and a sparkle in her eye, answered me.

"Perfect," she said.

Later, when she was leaving with her parents, I called out mischievously, "Have a perfect day!"

"I will!" she responded, as though it were the easiest, most obvious choice in the world.

And with that, she sailed out into a universe of possibility.

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Launching the Journey

THIS IS A HOW-TO BOOK of an unusual kind. Unlike the genre of how-to books that offer strategies to surmount the hurdles of a competitive world and move out ahead, the objective of this book is to provide the reader the means to lift off from that world of struggle and sail into a vast universe of possibility. Our premise is that many of the circumstances that seem to block us in our daily lives may only appear to do so based on a framework of assumptions we carry with us. Draw a different frame around the same set of circumstances and new pathways come into view. Find the right framework and extraordinary accomplishment becomes an everyday experience. Each chapter of this book presents a different facet of this approach and describes a new practice for bringing possibility to life.

THE PARTNERSHIP

We, the authors, Ben and Roz, have developed this outlook from two different, though mutually enhancing, perspectives. Ben is the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, a teacher and a communicator of rare ability who engages passionately with orchestras, audiences, and the public at large. He has unbounded energy to entice people to accomplish the extraordinary and to see

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each venture through. He finds the tempo in music, in speaking, and in action that throws us into motion. If there is a tempo of transformation, Ben moves on its pulse. To help us all along, he plays persuasively on our minds and heartstrings through storytelling, humor, and music. His is the exuberant public voice of this partnership.

Roz functions in an intimate arena. She has a private practice in family therapy, runs accomplishment groups, and works with people in many settings to transform issues and conflicts. She pays close attention to the stories people tell about who they are and how their world works, and she gives them tools to rename themselves and their circumstances in a way that generally leads to an outcome that is more than they hoped for or even imagined. She listens for the desire in people for something new, for conditions that do not exist, and she helps them create a framework that would make these conditions possible. Roz practices the art of possibility also from the perspective of a landscape painter and writer. In this book, she frames the issues, while the stories pass from voice to voice.

Together, we work as a team. Ben's public presence often brings him face to face with challenging situations that call for new kinds of leadership and new conceptual frameworks. When the questions he brings to Roz appear to have broad application, she goes to the drawing board to sketch out an approach. He then takes the new designs into the public arena to try them out. This is the essence of our enlivening, constantly moving partnership. Our joint conviction is that much, much more is possible than people ordinarily think.

The Design

The initial offer from the Harvard Business School Press that we write this book for a business as well as a lay audience was a rare opportunity, and one that has not often been available to people

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working in the arts. Historically, artists have been employed by leading institutions to bring emotional truth to established principles. Yet in our new global society, no institution has the wide acceptance to create values and direction for the majority of people. Markets in free societies are rapidly replacing governments and religious institutions as regulators of the highest authority, and markets perform without values; they do not converse in a human tongue. The arts can break new ground here, bringing human consciousness to bear on these flows of product and capital, energizing our interpersonal connections, and opening new doors for invention and practice.

Revolutionary shifts in the operational structures of our world seem to call for new definitions of who we are and what we are here for. That a vote taken in Europe, a financial decision made in Tokyo, or an unusually warm flow in the South Pacific can directly affect lives a world apart calls into question our assumption that we are self-activated and self-managed. Our customary mind-set about who we are may even undermine our ability to have a say in the way things go from here. So this is a book with suggestions for novel ways of defining ourselves, others, and the world we live in—ways that may be more apt for the challenges of our time. It uses the metaphor of music, and relies on all the arts. Art, after all, is about *rearranging* us, creating surprising juxtapositions, emotional openings, startling presences, flight paths to the eternal.

The Vision

Like a piece of music, this book has a long song line, a theme upon which each chapter is a variation. The long line portrays a world where the conflict between the individual and the collective that is intrinsic to our everyday reality resolves. In this vision, an individual's unique expression plays an integral and constructive part in setting a direction for the group—in fact, for all of humankind. The long line is the possibility of seeing deeply into what is best for

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all of us, seeing the next step. Each chapter of the book offers a separate practice for realizing that vision. Each practice provides an opportunity for personal evolution that promises to enhance not only the reader's life but also the organizations and relationships in which he or she participates. These practices are as relevant to corporate management as they are to a marriage; as relevant to acts of diplomacy as to the settlement of family disputes.

Practices

Standard social and business practices are built on certain assumptions—shared understandings that have evolved from older beliefs and conditions. And while circumstances may have changed since the start of these practices, their continued use tends to reconfirm the old beliefs. For this reason our daily practices feel right and true to us, regardless of whether they have evolved to keep up with the pace of change. In just such a way a business culture arises and perpetuates itself, perhaps long after its usefulness has passed.

This book offers practices that are transformational—practices that may "feel" illogical or counterintuitive to our normal understanding of how things operate. Their purpose is to initiate a new approach to current conditions, based on uncommon assumptions about the nature of the world. The history of transformational phenomena—the Internet, for example, or paradigm shifts in science, or the spread of a new religion—suggests that transformation happens less by arguing cogently for something new than by generating active, ongoing practices that shift a culture's experience of the basis for reality.

So 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.

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Notes on Practicing

BEN: Although the practices we offer here are simple, they are not easy. I am reminded of a dispiriting moment in a cello lesson with my teacher, Mr. Herbert Withers. He was eighty-three years old, and I was eleven. I had tried to play a passage, but I couldn't make it work. I tried again, and it didn't work, and a third time, and I was no more successful. I remember making a frustrated grimace and putting down my bow. The elderly Mr. Withers leaned over me and whispered, "What? You've been practicing it for three minutes, and you *still* can't play it?"

Our practices will take a good deal more than three minutes to master. Additionally, everything you think and feel and see around you will argue against them. So it takes dedication, a leap of faith, and, yes, *practicing* to get them into your repertoire.

ROZ: A dozen summers ago, I signed up for my first white-water rafting trip, on Maine's Kennebec River. Traveling overland in a rickety bus to reach the launch point, I paid close attention to the guide standing in the aisle, as she undertook our education about this popular sport.

"If you fall out of the boat," she said, "it is very important that you pull your feet up so that you don't get a foot caught in the rocks below. Think *toes to nose*," she stressed, and gave us a precarious demonstration, bracing herself and hoisting one foot toward her nose, "*then look for the boat and reach for the oar or the rope*."

Our guide chattered on as we bumped our way toward the river. Most of us had been on the road since 4 A.M. and were feeling sleepy and mesmerized by the vibrations of the bus. "*Toes to nose*," I heard again. And then, "*look for the boat*."

By the time we arrived at the river's edge, I had heard the two phrases so many times I felt slightly crazed. We put on our wet suits, gathered our equipment, and stood in a circle for our final instructions.

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"If you fall out of the boat what do you say to yourself?"

"Toes to nose and look for the boat," we chimed.

Someone here is mentally challenged, I thought, as we climbed into the boat and started downstream.

Surging into the only class 5 rapids of the journey, I vanished into a wall of water that rose up at the stern of the raft, as into a black hole. Roiling about underwater, there was no up and down, neither water nor air nor land. There had never been a boat. There was no anywhere, there was nothing at all.

Toes to nose . . . the words emerged from a void. I pulled together into a ball. Air. Sounds. *Look for the boat* . . . did that come from my head or was someone calling? The boat appeared, and an oar. *Reach for the oar* . . . I did, and found myself in a world, inside the boat, on the water, traveling down the Kennebec in a spew of foam.

Since this experience, I have used the metaphor "out of the boat" with many people in different situations. It signifies more than being off track—it means you don't know where the track is anymore. "Out of the boat" could refer to something as simple as losing all memory of ever having been on an exercise program, or it could refer to floundering in the wake of a management shake-up. When you are out of the boat, you cannot *think* your way back in; you have no point of reference. You must call on something that has been established in advance, a catch phrase, like "*toes to nose.*"

In the chapters that follow, you will be introduced to a set of practices that each has its own catchphrase, such as *it's all invented*, or *giving an* A, or *Rule Number* 6. By the time you have read the stories, parables, and first-person accounts that illuminate each of these practices, you will be better able to recall them with the use of the catch phrases, just as I was able to get back in the boat by remembering *toes to nose*. Once you are in the habit of using them, these practices will reliably land you back in the boat, reoriented in a universe of possibility.

Now, on to the river . . .

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PRACTICES IN POSSIBILITY

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THE FIRST PRACTICE

It's All

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A shoe factory sends two marketing scouts to a region of Africa to study the prospects for expanding business. One sends back a telegram saying,

SITUATION HOPELESS STOP NO ONE WEARS SHOES

The other writes back triumphantly,

GLORIOUS BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY STOP THEY HAVE NO SHOES

TO THE MARKETING EXPERT who sees no shoes, all the evidence points to hopelessness. To his colleague, the same conditions point to abundance and possibility. Each scout comes to the scene with his own perspective; each returns telling a different tale. Indeed, all of life comes to us in narrative form; it's a story we tell.

The roots of this phenomenon go much deeper than just attitude or personality. Experiments in neuroscience have demonstrated that we reach an understanding of the world in roughly this

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sequence: first, our senses bring us selective information about what is out there; second, the brain constructs its own simulation of the sensations; and only then, third, do we have our first conscious experience of our milieu. The world comes into our consciousness in the form of a map already drawn, a story already told, a hypothesis, a construction of our own making.

A now-classic 1953 experiment revealed to stunned researchers that a frog's eye is capable of perceiving only four types of phenomena[1]:

- Clear lines of contrast
- Sudden changes in illumination
- Outlines in motion
- Curves of outlines of small, dark objects

A frog does not "see" its mother's face, it cannot appreciate a sunset, nor even the nuances of color. It "sees" only what it needs to see in order to eat and to avoid being eaten: small tasty bugs, or the sudden movement of a stork coming in its direction. The frog's eye delivers extremely selective information to the frog's brain. The frog perceives only that which fits into its hardwired categories of perception.

Human eyes are selective, too, though magnitudes more complex than those of the frog. We think we can see "everything," until we remember that bees make out patterns written in ultraviolet light on flowers, and owls see in the dark. The senses of every species are fine-tuned to perceive information critical to their survival—dogs hear sounds above our range of hearing, insects pick up molecular traces emitted from potential mates acres away.

We *perceive* only the sensations we are programmed to receive, and our awareness is further restricted by the fact that we *recognize* only those for which we have mental maps or categories.

The British neuropsychologist Richard Gregory wrote, "The senses do not give us a picture of the world directly; rather they provide evidence for the checking of hypotheses about what lies

[1] J. Y. Lettvin, H. R. Maturana, W. S. McCulloch, and W. H. Pitts, "What the Frog's Eye Tells the Frog's Brain," *Proceedings of the IRE* 47 (1940–1951), 1959, cited by Tor Nørretranders, *The User Illusion,* trans. Jonathan Syndenham (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 192–193.

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before us."[2] And neurophysiologist Donald O. Hebb says, "The 'real world' is a construct, and some of the peculiarities of scientific thought become more intelligible when this fact is recognized . . . Einstein himself in 1926 told Heisenberg it was nonsense to found a theory on observable facts alone: 'In reality the very opposite happens. It is theory which decides what we can observe.'"[3]

We see a map of the world, not the world itself. But what kind of map is the brain inclined to draw? The answer comes from one of the dictates of evolution, the survival of the fittest. Fundamentally, it is a map that has to do with our very survival; it evolved to provide, as a priority, information on immediate dangers to life and limb, the ability to distinguish friends and foes, the wherewithal to find food and resources and opportunities for procreation. The world appears to us sorted and packaged in this way, substantially enriched by the categories of culture we live in, by learning, and by the meanings we form out of the unique journey each of us travels.

See how thoroughly the map and its categories govern our perception. In a famous experiment, the Me'en people of Ethiopia were presented for the first time with photographs of people and animals, but were unable to "read" the two-dimensional image. "They felt the paper, sniffed it, crumpled it, and listened to the crackling noise it made; they nipped off little bits and chewed them to taste it."[4] Yet people in our modern world easily equate the photographic image with the object photographed—even though the two resemble each other only in a very abstract sense. Recognizing Pablo Picasso in a train compartment, a man inquired of the artist why he did not paint people "the way they really are." Picasso asked what he meant by that expression. The man opened his wallet and took out a snapshot of his wife, saying, "That's my wife." Picasso responded, "Isn't she rather small and flat?"[5]

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[2] Richard L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing*, 4th ed. (Princeton University Press, 1990), 21–22, cited by Nørretranders, *The User Illusion*, 186.

[3] D. O. Hebb, "Science and the World of Imagination," *Canadian Psychology* 16 (1975), 4–11.

[4] J. B. Deregowski, "Real Space and Represented Space: Cross-Cultural Perspectives," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 12 (1989), 57, cited by Nørretranders, *The User Illusion*, 187.

[5] Heinz R. Pagels, *The Dreams of Reason* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 163, cited by Nørretranders, *The User Illusion*, 188.

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For the Me'en people there were no "photographs," although they lay in their hands as plain as day. They saw nothing but shiny paper. Only through the conventions of modern life do we see the image in a photograph. As for Picasso, he was able to see the snapshot as an artifact, distinct from what it represented.

Our minds are also designed to string events into story lines, whether or not there is any connection between the parts. In dreams, we regularly weave sensations gathered from disparate parts of our lives into narratives. In full wakefulness, we produce reasons for our actions that are rational, plausible, and guided by the logic of cause and effect, whether or not these "reasons" accurately portray any of the real motivational forces at work. Experiments with people who have suffered a lesion between the two halves of the brain have shown that when the right side is prompted, say, to close a door, the left side, unaware of the experimenter's instruction, will produce a "reason" as to why he has just performed the action, such as, "Oh, I felt a draft."[6]

It is these sorts of phenomena that we are referring to when we use the catchphrase for this chapter *it's all invented.* What we mean is, "It's all invented anyway, so we might as well invent a story or a framework of meaning that enhances our quality of life and the life of those around us."

Most people already understand that, as with cultural differences, interpretations of the world vary from individual to individual and from group to group. This understanding may persuade us that by factoring out our own interpretations of reality, we can reach a solid truth. However, the term *it's all invented* points to a more fundamental notion—that it is through the evolved structures of the brain that we perceive the world. And the mind *constructs.* The meanings our minds construct may be widely shared and sustaining for us, but they may have little to do with the world itself. Furthermore, how would we know?

Even science—which is often too simply described as an orderly process of accumulating knowledge based on previously

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[6] Michael Gazzaniga, *The Social Brain* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 70–72 .

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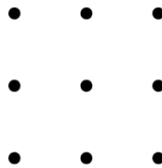
acquired truths—even *science* relies on our capacity to adapt to new facts by radically shifting the theoretical constructions we previously accepted as truth. When we lived in a Newtonian world, we saw straight lines and forces; in an Einsteinian universe, we noticed curved space/time and relativity. The Newtonian view is still as valid—only now we see it as a special case, valid within a particular set of conditions. Each new paradigm gives us the opportunity to "see" phenomena that were before as invisible to us as the colors of the sunset to the frog.

To gain greater insight into what we mean by a map, a framework, or a paradigm, let's revisit the famous nine-dot puzzle, which will be familiar to many readers. As you may or may not know, the puzzle asks us to *join all nine dots with four straight lines, without taking pen from paper.* If you have never seen this puzzle before, go ahead and try it . . . before you turn the page!



If you have never played this game before, you will most likely find yourself struggling to solve the puzzle inside the space of the dots, as though the outer dots constituted the outer limit of the puzzle. The puzzle illustrates a universal phenomenon of the human mind, the necessity to sort data into categories in order to perceive it. Your brain instantly classifies the nine dots as a two-dimensional square. And there they rest, like nails in the coffin of any further possibility, establishing a box with a dot in each of the four corners, even though no box in fact exists on the page.

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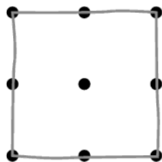
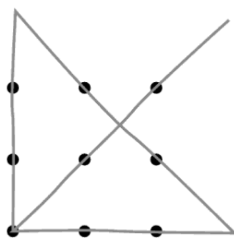


Nearly everybody adds that context to the instructions, nearly everybody *hears*: "Connect the dots with four straight lines without taking pen from paper, *within the square formed by the outer dots*." And within that framework, there is no solution. If, however, we were to amend the original set of instructions by adding the phase, "*Feel free to use the whole sheet of paper*," it is likely that a new possibility would suddenly appear to you.

It might seem that the space outside the dots was crying out, "*Hey, bring some lines out here!*"



The frames our minds create define—and *con*fine—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.

This practice we refer to by the catchphrase, *it's all invented*, is the most fundamental of all the practices we present in this book. When you bring to mind *it's all invented*, you remember that it's all a story you tell—not just some of it, but all of it. And remember, too, that every story you tell is founded on a network of hidden assumptions. If you learn to notice and distinguish these stories, you will be able to break through the barriers of any "box" that

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contains unwanted conditions and create other conditions or narratives that support the life you envision for yourself and those around you. We do not mean that you can just make anything up and have it magically appear. We mean that you can shift the framework to one whose underlying assumptions allow for the conditions you desire. Let your thoughts and actions spring from the new framework and see what happens.

The Practice

A simple way to practice *it's all invented* is to ask yourself this question:

What assumption am I making,
That I'm not aware I'm making,
That gives me what I see?

And when you have an answer to that question, ask yourself this one:

What might I now invent,
That I haven't yet invented,
That would give me other choices?

And then you can invent spaces, like the paper surrounding the nine dots, where four lines can do the work of five.

We now move on to the second practice, which entails inventing a new universe to live in, a universe of possibility.

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THE SECOND PRACTICE

STEPPING INTO A Universe of

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Possibility

ONCE YOU HAVE BEGUN to distinguish that *it's all invented*, you can create a place to dwell where new inventions are the order of the day. Such a place we call "the universe of possibility," and stepping into it is our second practice. This universe—like the page that holds the nine dots—extends beyond the borders that confine us to our everyday reality.

You may ask, "What are these borders, and what is this everyday reality?"

The World of Measurement

We propose to call our familiar everyday world the "world of measurement" in order to highlight the central position held by assessments, scales, standards, grades, and comparisons. In this story of the everyday, each of us strives for success, hoping to arrive at a

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better place than where we are. On our path to achieving a goal we inevitably encounter obstacles. Some of the more familiar ones, aside from other people, are scarcities of time, money, power, love, resources, and inner strength.

All the manifestations of the world of measurement—the winning and losing, the gaining of acceptance and the threatened rejection, the raised hopes and the dash into despair—all are based on a single assumption that is hidden from our awareness. The assumption is that life is about staying alive and making it through—*surviving* in a world of scarcity and peril. Even when life is at its best in the measurement world, this assumption is the backdrop for the play, and, like the invisible box around the nine dots, it keeps the universe of possibility out of view.

Certain responses are better suited than others to an environment where survival is the issue, all of which are prevalent in the world of measurement. Alertness to danger, a clever strategic mind, an eye for assessing friend and foe, a knack for judging strength and weakness, the know-how to take possession of resources, a measure of mistrust, and a good dollop of fear are some of the qualities that will safeguard us. Keeping our armor intact is of critical importance as well, which means resisting any challenge to our personal viewpoint.

We also feel more secure when we can identify objects and determine their location. An indication of this is that the term *mine*field stands as a universally appreciated metaphor for danger. It feels safer to deal with reality as though it were fixed, as though people, ideas, and situations can be fully known and measured.

We grow up in a world of measurement, and in this world, we get to know each other and things by measuring them, and by comparing and contrasting them. We know a child as compared to other children, a performance of a Puccini aria by a local tenor as contrasted to one sung by Pavarotti, or a company's year-end statement as it stacks up to earlier projections. In order to be in a position to assess, judge, and report on circumstances, the individual stands back, identifying himself, and by extension his group, as

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separate from others. That opinionated "little voice in the head" is almost always speaking from Measurement Central. Life in the measurement world seems to be arranged in hierarchies: some groups, people, bodies, places, and ideas seem better or more powerful than others. Lines appear, dividing an inside from an outside: some people, races, and organizations are safer and more desirable to belong to than others. There are only so many pieces of the pie.

The dramatic action in this world of success and failure has to do with overcoming odds and prevailing, or being acknowledged and included. Virtually every children's book, every made-for-television special follows the pattern. Competition is the vehicle to success, and metaphors based on competitive sports and war are applied to almost any situation. Conversations among friends chronicle personal trials and triumphs. Certain feelings mirror the ups and downs of fortune in the world of measurement: love for our own, for instance, and sympathy for those weaker than we are; fear, anger, and despair at losing; and, of course, the exhilaration of having come out on top.

Just as virtually everybody adds the clause *within the square formed by the outer dots* to the instructions for the nine-dot puzzle; virtually everybody, whether living in the lap of luxury or in diminished circumstances, wakes up in the morning with the unseen assumption that life is about the struggle to survive and get ahead in a world of limited resources.

"Hey, bring some lines out here!"

A Universe of Possibility

Let us suppose, now, that a universe of possibility stretches beyond the world of measurement to include all worlds: infinite, generative, and abundant. Unimpeded on a daily basis by the concern for survival, free from the generalized assumption of scarcity, a person stands in the great space of possibility in a posture of openness, with an unfettered imagination for what can be.

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In the realm of possibility, we gain our knowledge by invention. We decide that the essence of a child is joy, and joy she is. Our small business attracts the label, "The Can-Do Company," and that is exactly who we are. We speak with the awareness that language creates categories of meaning that open up new worlds to explore. Life appears as variety, pattern, and shimmering movement, inviting us in every moment to engage. The pie is enormous, and if you take a slice, the pie is whole again.

The action in a universe of possibility may be characterized as generative, or giving, in all senses of that word—producing new life, creating new ideas, consciously endowing with meaning, contributing, yielding to the power of contexts. The relationship *between* people and environments is highlighted, not the people and things themselves. Emotions that are often relegated to the special category of spirituality are abundant here: joy, grace, awe, wholeness, passion, and compassion.

There are moments in everyone's life when an experience of integration with the world transcends the business of survival—like seeing a grandchild for the first time, witnessing an Olympic record broken or the uncommon bravery of an ordinary citizen. For many, the experience of attending the dismantling of the Berlin Wall or of witnessing the emergence of Nelson Mandela from twenty-seven years of imprisonment may have been such a moment. Some find admission to the realm of possibility at a religious gathering, some in meditation, some by listening to great music. Often people enter this state in the presence of natural beauty or at the sight of something of infinite magnitude, an expanse of ocean or a towering sky. These are moments when we forget our*selves* and seem to become part of all being.

Down to Earth in a Universe of Possibility

It may seem that this chapter sets up a simplistic dichotomy between being successful and living a kind-hearted, feel-good life.

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Nothing could be further from our conviction. In fact, we are saying that, *on the whole*, you are more likely to extend your business *and* have a fulfilled life if you have the attitude that there are always new customers out there waiting to be enrolled rather than that money, customers, and ideas are in short supply. You are more likely to be successful, *overall*, if you participate joyfully with projects and goals and do not think your life depends on achieving the mark because then you will be better able to connect to people all around you. On the whole, resources are likely to come to you in greater abundance when you are generous and inclusive and engage people in your passion for life. There aren't any guarantees, of course. When you are oriented to abundance, you care less about being in control, and you take more risks. You may give away short-term profits in pursuit of a bigger dream; you may take a long view without being able to predict the outcome. 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.

Survival and Survival-Thinking

Many people's lives are in daily jeopardy, and they must and do concentrate on staying alive, as any one of us would if held up on the street or lost at sea. That is not the same as survival-*thinking*, which is the undiscriminating, ongoing attitude that life is dangerous and that one must put one's energy into looking out for Number One.

True scarcity and scarcity-*thinking* are different phenomena as well. There are regions of the world where resources are locally scarce, where people lack for their most fundamental needs. However, scarcity-*thinking* is an attitude as prevalent among the well-heeled as among the down-at-heel, and remains unaltered by a change in circumstances. It is a fatalistic outlook, as profiled by the English economist Thomas Malthus in his 1798 "Essay on the Principle of Population" that predicts that supplies—which appear

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fixed and limited—will eventually run out. This attitude prompts us to seek to acquire more for ourselves no matter how much we have and to treat others as competitors no matter how little they have. Scarcity-thinking and real scarcity are interactive in the simple sense that the frenzied accumulation of resources by some leaves others without enough, in a world that has the means to supply the basic needs of everyone. They are correlated in that the indiscriminate use of the earth's resources, at a rate faster than the earth can regenerate, leaves the next generation with shrinking reserves.

How to Step There

Now we come to the heart of the matter. What is the practice that orients you to a universe of possibility? It is a practice for revealing the hidden framework from which the world of measurement springs. When you see how thoroughly that framework, like the box around the nine dots, rules your life, you will have located yourself in the realm of possibility beyond it. So, first, ask yourself:

> *How are my thoughts and actions, in this moment, reflections of the measurement world?*

You look for thoughts and actions that reflect survival and scarcity, comparison and competition, attachment and anxiety. Notice that the question is not, "*Are* my thoughts . . ." which is a question of assessment, but, "*How* are my thoughts . . ." which is a true inquiry. See how easy it is to argue that you are an exception, that you personally are not governed by any such set of assumptions. This, of course, is another example of the measurement world at work.

So when you notice yourself thinking, for instance, that this line of inquiry must apply to men more than to women because men are so competitive, and you recognize *that* thought as your

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first bit of evidence that your measurement mind is at work, you ask yourself again:

> *How are my thoughts and actions, in this new moment, a reflection of the measurement world?*
>
> *And how now?*

You keep asking the question until you finally appreciate how hopeless it is to escape being shaped by the assumptions that underlie all of life. And then you may begin to laugh. And when someone asks, "How are you?" it may appear to you utterly ridiculous to try to assess yourself, or to express life as a struggle and a burden, and before you know it, the word "perfect" may just pop out. And you will be smiling. For you will have stepped into a universe of possibility.

Of course, you won't have *arrived*.

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THE THIRD PRACTICE

Giving

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an A

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF Southern California, a leadership course was taught each year to fifty of the most outstanding students out of twenty-seven thousand in the school, hand-picked by each department. At the end of the semester, the grader for the course was instructed to give one-third of the students A's, one-third B's and one-third C's—even though the work of any member of this class was likely to surpass that of any other student in the university. Imagine the blow to the morale of the eager and hard-working student who received the requisite C.

Not just in this case, but in most cases, grades say little about the work done. When you reflect to a student that he has misconstrued a concept or has taken a false step in a math problem, you are indicating something real about his performance, but when you give him a B+, you are saying nothing at all about his mastery of the material, you are only matching him up against other students. Most would recognize at core that the main purpose of grades is to compare one student against another. Most people are

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also aware that competition puts a strain on friendships and too often consigns students to a solitary journey.

Michelangelo is often quoted as having said that inside every block of stone or marble dwells a beautiful statue; one need only remove the excess material to reveal the work of art within. If we were to apply this visionary concept to education, it would be pointless to compare one child to another. Instead, all the energy would be focused on chipping away at the stone, getting rid of whatever is in the way of each child's developing skills, mastery, and self-expression.

We call this practice *giving an* A. It is an enlivening way of approaching people that promises to transform you as well as them. It is a shift in attitude that makes it possible for you to speak freely about your own thoughts and feelings while, at the same time, you support others to be all they dream of being. The practice of *giving an* A transports your relationships from the world of measurement into the universe of possibility.

An A can be given to anyone in any walk of life—to a waitress, to your employer, to your mother-in-law, to the members of the opposite team, and to the other drivers in traffic. When you give an A, you find yourself speaking to people not from a place of measuring how they stack up against your standards, but from a place of respect that gives them room to realize themselves. Your eye is on the statue within the roughness of the uncut stone.

This A is not an expectation to live up to, but a possibility to live into.

Bright Futures

BEN: Thirty graduate students are gathered at the New England Conservatory for the first class of the year on a Friday afternoon in September. The students, all instrumentalists and singers, are about to undertake a two-semester exploration into the art of musical performance, including the psychological and emotional factors that can stand in the way of great music-making. I promise

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them that if they attend my Interpretation class regularly and apply themselves to mastering the distinctions that are put forward in the course, they will make major breakthroughs both in their music-making and in their lives.

Yet, after twenty-five years of teaching, I still came up against the same obstacle. Class after class, the students would be in such a chronic state of anxiety over the measurement of their performance that they would be reluctant to take risks with their playing. One evening I settled down with Roz to see if we could think of something that would dispel their anticipation of failure.

What would happen if one were to hand an A to every student from the start?

Roz and I predicted that abolishing grades altogether would only make matters worse, even if the Conservatory could be persuaded to support such a plan. The students would feel cheated of the opportunity for stardom and would still be focused on their place in the lineup. So we came up with the idea of giving them all the only grade that would put them at ease, not as a measurement tool, but as an instrument to open them up to possibility.

"Each student in this class will get an A for the course," I announce. "However, there is one requirement that you must fulfill to earn this grade: Sometime during the next two weeks, you must write me a letter dated next May, which begins with the words, 'Dear Mr. Zander, I got my A because . . . ,' and in this letter you are to tell, in as much detail as you can, the story of what will have happened to you by next May that is in line with this extraordinary grade."

In writing their letters, I say to them, they are to place themselves in the future, looking back, and to report on all the insights they acquired and milestones they attained during the year as if those accomplishments were already in the past. Everything must be written in the past tense. Phrases such as "I hope," "I intend," or "I will" must not appear. The students may, if they wish, mention specific goals reached or competitions won. "But, " I tell them, "I am especially interested in the *person* you will have become by next May. I am interested in the attitude, feelings, and worldview

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of that person who will have done all she wished to do or become everything he wanted to be." I tell them I want them to fall passionately in love with the person they are describing in their letter.

Here is one letter from a young trombonist who took that instruction to heart and discovered the poetry of self-invention.

Thursday 15 May, nighttime

Dear Mr. Z

Today the world knows me. That drive of energy and intense emotion that you saw twisting and dormant inside me, yet, alas, I could not show in performance or conversation, was freed tonight in a program of new music composed for me. . . . The concert ended and no one stirred. A pregnant quiet. Sighs: and then applause that drowned my heart's throbbing.

I might have bowed—I cannot remember now. The clapping sustained such that I thought I might make my debut complete and celebrate the shedding of

the mask and skin
that I had constructed
to hide within,
by improvising on my own melody as an
encore—unaccompanied. What followed is
something of a blur. I forgot technique,
pretension, tradition, schooling, history—
truly even the audience.
What came from my trombone
I wholly believe, was my own
Voice.
Laughter, smiles,
a frown, weeping
Tuckerspirit
did sing.

Tucker Dulin

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And here is another one of the A letters written by a young Korean flute player who entered wholeheartedly into the game, capturing perfectly its playfulness, while addressing in the process some of the most serious issues facing performers in a culture of measurement and competition.

Next May

Dearest Teacher Mr. Zander;

I received my grade A because I worked hard and thought hard about myself taking your class, and the result was absolutely tremendous. I became a new person. I used to be so negative person for almost everything even before trying. Now I find myself happier person than before. I couldn't accept my mistakes about a year ago, and after every mistake I blamed myself, but now, I enjoy making mistakes and I really learn from these mistakes. In my playing I have more depth than before. I used to play just notes, but, now, I found out about the real meaning of every pieces, and I could play with more imagination. Also I found out my value. I found myself so special person, because I found out that if I believe myself I can do everything. Thank you for all the lessons and lectures because that made me realize how important person I am and also the clear reason why I play music. Thank you,

Sincerely,
Esther Lee

In this letter, the young performer focuses her gaze on the person she wants to be, momentarily silencing the voice in her head that tells her that she will fail. She emerges like the graceful statue from within Michelangelo's marble block. The person that I teach each Friday afternoon is the person described in the letter. The student reveals her true self and also identifies much of the stone that blocks her expression. Chipping away at the stone that encases her

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becomes our task in the class. Our job is to remove the extraneous debris that stands between her and her expression in the world.

Next May

Dear Mr. Zander,

I got my A because I had the courage to examine my fears and I realized that they have no place in my life. I changed from someone who was scared to make a mistake in case she was noticed to someone who knows that she has a contribution to make to other people, musically and personally. . . . Thus all diffidence and lack of belief in myself are gone. So too is the belief that I only exist as a reflection in other people's eyes and the resulting desire to please everyone. . . . I understand that trying and achieving are the same thing when you are your own master—and I am.

I have found a desire to convey music to other people, which is stronger than the worries I had about myself. I have changed from desiring inconsequentiality and anonymity to accepting the joy that comes from knowing that my music changes the world.

—Giselle Hillyer

Small wonder that I approach each class with the greatest eagerness, for this is a class consisting entirely of A students and what is more delightful than spending an afternoon among the stars? Most members of the class share this experience, and some even report that as they walk down the corridor toward the classroom each Friday afternoon, the clouds of anxiety and despair that frequently shadow a hothouse American music academy perceptibly lift.

When I come to your class, Ben, I feel the glow coming as I walk down the corridor, and by the time I've arrived—I've arrived happy and excited and ready to go.

—Carina

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We in the music profession train young musicians with utmost care from early childhood, urging them to achieve extraordinary technical mastery and encouraging them to develop good practice habits and performance values. We support them to attend fine summer programs and travel abroad to gain firsthand experience of different cultures, and then, after all this, we throw them into a maelstrom of competition, survival, backbiting, subservience, and status seeking. And from this arena we expect them to perform the great works of the musical literature that call upon, among other things, warmth, nobility, playfulness, generosity, reverence, sensitivity, and love!

It is dangerous to have our musicians so obsessed with competition because they will find it difficult to take the necessary risks with themselves to be great performers. The art of music, since it can only be conveyed through its interpreters, depends on expressive performance for its lifeblood. Yet it is only when we make mistakes in performance that we can really begin to notice what needs attention. In fact, I actively train my students that when they make a mistake, they are to lift their arms in the air, smile, and say, "How fascinating!" I recommend that everyone try this.

Not only mistakes, but even those experiences we ordinarily define as "negative" can be treated in this way. For instance, I once had a distraught young tenor ask to speak to me after class. He told me he'd lost his girlfriend and was in such despair that he was almost unable to function. I consoled him, but the teacher in me was secretly delighted. Now he would be able to fully express the heartrending passion of the song in Schubert's *Die Winterreise* about the loss of the beloved. That song had completely eluded him the previous week because up to then, the only object of affection he had ever lost was a pet goldfish.

My teacher, the great cellist Gaspar Cassado, used to say to us as students, "I'm so sorry for you; your lives have been so easy. You can't play great music unless your heart's been broken."

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Dear Mr. Zander,

I got my "A" because I became a great gardener to build my own garden of life. Till last year I was intimidated, judgmental, negative, lonely, lost, no energy to do what-so-ever, loveless, spiritless, hopeless, emotionless . . . endless. What I thought so miserably was actually what really made me to become what I am today, who loves myself, therefore music, life, people, my work, and even miseries. I love my weeds as much as my unblossomed roses. I can't wait for tomorrow because I'm in love with today, hard work, and reward . . . what can be better?

Sincerely,
Soyan Kim

The Secret of Life

A few weeks into the first year of the *giving the* A experiment, I asked the class how it had felt to them to start the semester off with an A, before they had had to prove themselves in any way. To my surprise, a Taiwanese student put up his hand. Apart from a natural diffidence to speak up in a foreign language, it is rare for students from Asia, often among our most accomplished performers, to volunteer to speak in class. A few of the Asian students have tried to explain to me why this is so. In some Asian cultures, a high premium is traditionally put on being right. The teacher is always right, and the best way for students to avoid being wrong is not to say anything at all. So when this young student raised up his hand quite enthusiastically, of course I called on him.

"In Taiwan," he explained,

I was Number 68 out of 70 student. I come to Boston and Mr. Zander says I am an A. Very confusing. I walk about, three weeks, very confused. I am Number 68, but Mr. Zander says I am an A student . . . I am Number 68, but Mr. Zander says I

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am an A. One day I discover much happier A than Number 68. So I decide I am an A.

This student, in a brilliant flash, had hit upon the "secret of life." He had realized that *it's all invented,* it's all a game. The Number 68 is invented and the A is invented, so we might as well choose to invent something that brightens our life and the lives of the people around us.

Often people are quite uncomfortable with the idea of granting the unearned A because it seems to deny the actual differences between one person's accomplishments and another's. We are not suggesting that people be blind to accomplishment. Nobody wants to hear a violinist who cannot play the notes or to be treated by a doctor who has not passed the course. Standards can help us by defining the range of knowledge a student must master to be competent in his field.

It is not in the context of measuring people's performance against standards that we propose giving the A, despite the reference to measurement the A implies. We give the A to finesse the stranglehold of judgment that grades have over our consciousness from our earliest days. The A is an invention that creates possibility for both mentor and student, manager and employee, or for any human interaction.

The practice of *giving the* A allows the teacher to line up with her students in their efforts to produce the outcome, rather than lining up with the standards against these students. In the first instance, the instructor and the student, or the manager and the employee, become a team for accomplishing the possible; in the second, the disparity in power between them can become a distraction and an inhibitor, drawing energy away from productivity and development.

One of the complications of working with standards is that those in charge—be they teachers, school systems, CEOs, or

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management teams—often fall into the trap of identifying their own agendas with the standards. How often in a business situation does a manager find himself at his wit's end when he discovers that work has not been done by others the way he would have done it himself? A common response is to deliver the ultimatum, whether explicitly or implicitly, "Do it the right way—my way."

Not only does this latter message tend to squelch innovation and creativity, but it also trains students and employees to focus solely on what they need to do to please their teachers or their bosses, and on how much they can get away with. The mentor's disappointment with a student whose style and interests vary from her own is often what is measured in the grade she gives. Instead of providing real information to a student on his learning, it tells him by how much, in the eyes of the authority, he has fallen short.

The Senior Paper

ROZ: As a high school student I clashed with my English Literature teacher in just this way over our senior project, a semester-long comprehensive study of one author's work. I was notorious for leaving papers and assignments until the very last minute, and this one was no exception. I had decided to write about Nathaniel Hawthorne; then, after reading most of his work, I changed my mind. It was only two or three weeks before the paper was due that I decided firmly on Thomas Hardy. I worked through the whole of the final night under what was for me a happy mixture of intense pressure and focused interest, and at school the next day I spent every free moment typing feverishly in the senior room. Predictably, at ten minutes to five, I submitted the completed draft to our teacher, receiving, like water off a duck's back, the requisite lecture on the folly of my organizational methods. The papers were to be graded by an outside reader, a teacher from another school who was unfamiliar with the students in our class.

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For two weeks, the class awaited the results of our efforts with trepidation. Finally, the papers came back. Our teacher handed them out one by one, smiling at each student encouragingly. But when she came to me her expression was strained and unhappy. My anxiety shot up. In dread, I turned the paper over to see the comments on the back, but there, in soft dark pencil at the top of the page was a bold A. The reader praised the composition's ideas, organization, writing style, and grammar.

Our classroom teacher had a different agenda, presumably that students must learn to do their work at a certain pace, with certain preparatory documents. She said to me later, "I was very disappointed that you got such a high grade. I was hoping you would do badly so that you would learn a lesson about preparation." I felt as though I were being exiled from the sunny schoolyard where I had long played so enthusiastically. I began to defend my last-minute work style and to attach pride to habits that up to that point I had felt were simply a matter of personal style.

In retrospect, I am sure that my English teacher had my best interests at heart. She was probably worried that when things became tougher I would lack the skills to succeed. And she must have predicted that the A would validate my style, keeping me from ever trying a different approach. Yet, imagine if she had reacted to my A by giving me a "high five," and had invited me into a game: to try my hand at an outline well in advance of the due date of the next assignment, just to see if it would help me do an even better job. I know I would have agreed to play. By stepping down and meeting me in such an engaging and imaginative way, my teacher would have recovered the leadership role in my education. In our vocabulary, she would have given me an A, and, in the process, gained one for herself.

IN THE REALM of possibility, the literal or figurative giving of the A aligns teacher with student, manager with employee, and makes striving for a goal an enlivening game. Within the game, a

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standard becomes a marker that gives the pair direction. If the student hits the mark, the team is on course; if not, well, "How fascinating!" The instructor does not personally identify with the standard; nor does the student identify personally with the results of the game. Since the teacher's job is to help her students chip away at the barriers that block their abilities and expression, she aligns herself with the students to whom she has given an A, and lets the standards maintain themselves.

The A Brings People Together under a Common Purpose

Even in a symphony orchestra, where the conductor and the hundred players have something collective at stake—namely a great performance—standards can wreak havoc. Not every conductor is capable of moving beyond his own agenda and his own prejudices to see how he supports or undermines the players' performance. Just before the oboist puts her reed to her lips for her big solo, she looks up at the conductor, and along with information about tempo, phrasing, shape, rhythm, color, and the character of the music, comes a message that includes a grade—and that, as much as anything else, will determine how she plays.

The freely granted A expresses a vision of partnership, teamwork, and relationship. It is for wholeness and functionality, in the awareness that for each of us, excess stone may still hide the graceful form within.

In the absence of a vision, we are each driven by our own agenda, finding people whose interests match ours, and inattentive to those with whom we appear to have little in common. We automatically judge our players, workers, and loved ones against our standards, inadvertently pulling the wind from their sails. But with our new practice of granting an ongoing A in all our relationships, we can align ourselves with others, because that A declares and sustains a life-enhancing partnership.

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Tanya's Bow

BEN: Throughout the rehearsal process of Mahler's Ninth Symphony with the Philharmonia Orchestra of London, I had been aware that one of the violinists had been sitting in an overly relaxed, almost slouched position. By the time of the dress rehearsal, her posture, still unchanged, was in noticeable contrast to the other players, who were now fired up and physically demonstrative. Although her playing was completely professional, the gut-wrenching intensity of Mahler's final testament made her indifferent manner, dispiriting in any performance, seem particularly incongruous in this one.

At the end of the rehearsal, I went up to her and asked whether anything was amiss. Her response surprised me. "Are these your bowings?" she inquired. When I told her that these were the bowings we had used in our last performance in Boston, she commented, "The music goes too fast for all these bow changes. I just cannot get into the string." Since I know how difficult it is to apply a fast-moving bow to the string with enough pressure to make a big sound, I suggested that perhaps we should take a slower tempo. But she was taken aback. "Don't be ridiculous," she remonstrated, "you should perform it the way you feel it. But you did ask."

This was a revelation to me. A player's outward demeanor, her whole physical appearance, even her mood, were connected to her comfort with the bowings! One should remember that the conductor of the orchestra is not actually playing the music, however attuned he or she is to each instrument—and as a string player, I consider myself particularly sensitive to the physical motions of the bow. However, in my eternal quest to find the right tempo for the music, in my desire to reveal the aching, arching long lines and the turbulent frenzy of Mahler's expression, I had probably been led to move the tempo somewhat faster, thereby sacrificing the player's vital kinesthetic relationship of bow to string. The cost was the discomfort and finally the resignation of a

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valued member of the violin section of one of the world's greatest orchestras. That was too high a price.

My usual routine on the day of a concert is to go to my room after the morning's rehearsal and take a long sleep, then shower, eat two English muffins and a scrambled egg with some nice strong English tea, and return to the hall to give my customary preconcert talk. This time, however, it all changed. I went back to my hotel room and spent the afternoon with Mahler's score, imagining how it would feel to play each passage on the violin. It was obviously not *all* too fast. Maybe this passage? Maybe that one? At the concert that evening, I slightly broadened each of the passages that I had decided might have presented a problem for Tanya's bow.

During the performance, I frequently glanced in her direction, and there in her seat was an impassioned, unabashedly demonstrative player totally enraptured by the music. Although we would have played a more than respectable performance without the full participation of Tanya, the engagement of that extra 1 percent caused a disproportionate breakthrough because once she and I were in relationship, I too could be fully present. When I had been viewing her as an unimportant casualty, I had to pretend it did not matter that for some reason she was not engaged. Meanwhile, I wasted energy both watching and ignoring her.

After the concert Tanya was nowhere to be found, but a few weeks later I decided to track her down to thank her for the last-minute coaching that had helped us give such a stirring and satisfying performance. I obtained her phone number from the Philharmonia office and called one morning from Boston to the London suburb where she lived.

Tanya seemed audibly shaken when I identified myself. She confessed that she had never received a call from a conductor at home before. She responded with delight as I expressed my deep gratitude for her contribution to our performance of Mahler's Ninth. It emerged that Mahler was her favorite composer, that she was passionate about all his work, and that the performance we had done together was one of the high points of her musical life.

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The lesson I learned is that *the player who looks least engaged may be the most committed member of the group*. A cynic, after all, is a passionate person who does not want to be disappointed again. Tanya, the Mahlerian par excellence, had decided to "sit out" that performance because it was going to disappoint her again. I learned from Tanya that the secret is not to speak to a person's cynicism, but to speak to her passion.

When I initially approached Tanya—not to reprimand a recalcitrant member of the team for not pulling her weight, but rather with the attitude, the certain knowledge, that she loved the music, that she wanted the concert to be a success, that she wanted to "get into the string" with her bow—I gave her an A. My question to her, "Is there anything amiss?" was a question to someone I imagined to be completely committed to the project we were engaged in together, someone who, for whatever reason, was having a hard time.

When I returned to the Philharmonia the next season, Tanya greeted me enthusiastically. As a result of my experience with this violinist, it seemed that I had a warmer relationship with all the players there. During the break at one of the rehearsals of Mahler's Second, after we had been working on the subtly lilting, Viennese-waltz–like second movement, I slipped into the chair beside my new friend. "A tiny bit slow, don't you think?" she murmured.

THE PRACTICE OF *giving the* A both invents and recognizes a universal desire in people to contribute to others, no matter how many barriers there are to its expression. We can choose to validate the apathy of a boss, a player, or a high school student and become resigned ourselves, or we can choose to honor in them an unfulfilled yearning to make a difference. How often, for instance, do we see teenagers slumped into that same resigned position in which Tanya sat through those rehearsals? How differently would we understand and speak with them were we to hand them permanent, unqualified *A's*, without denying anything that happens in our dealings with them? Starting from the conviction that

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adolescents are looking for an arena in which to make an authentic contribution to the family and to the community, the first thing we would notice is how few meaningful roles are available for young people to fill. Then we might see how, in the absence of a purpose greater than themselves, adolescents retreat to the sidelines as though their existence were inconsequential.

Second Fiddle-itis: The Habit of Thinking You Make No Difference

BEN: After the initial discussion and excitement over the A subsides, I predict to the students in my Friday class that it will not be long before a voice in their heads will whisper something along these lines:

> *Why should I bother to go to class today? I already have my A. And I've got so much to do; I really need to practice on my own. Anyway, it's such a large class, he probably won't even notice.*

I tell the students that this is the first symptom of a widespread disease called "second fiddle-itis," popularly known as "playing second fiddle." People who perceive their role in a group to be of little significance (second violins for example) are particularly vulnerable to its ravages. The string players in an orchestra often see themselves as redundant foot soldiers, virtual cannon fodder for the egotistical whim of the conductor. Many other players, after all, duplicate their part. This is not true for the lead trumpet or the main wind players, who are soloists within the orchestra.

A string player just entering a new position in an orchestra will often start off with great enthusiasm, take his part home at night, and continue to do careful and regular practice in his spare time. However, when it begins to dawn on him that his stand partner stopped practicing years ago and that the conductor does not seem to care or even to hear when players are out of tune, he too quickly begins to show signs of the onset of the disease.

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A first oboist, on the other hand, is unlikely to give up making reeds or to miss a rehearsal. It is simply too noticeable. In all my years of conducting, I do not believe I have ever known a first oboe to be late for a rehearsal. Is it because the oboe has to be there at the beginning to tune everyone to the A?

"So," I tell the class, "the next time you hear the little second-violin melody in your head that says, '*I'm not going to class because I'm too tired,*' or '*I have too much to do, and I know it won't make any difference anyway*'—remember that you are an A student. An A student is a leading player in any class, an integral voice, and the class cannot make its music without that voice."

Once, in Spain, I saw a big sign outside a little shop. It read:

ALVAREZ
Shoemaker
and
Lessons in
Second Violin

I found myself hoping that Alvarez's great humility did not irrevocably limit the aspirations of his students.

However, when I myself had the privilege of playing string quartets with Robert Koff, the founding second violinist of the Julliard String Quartet, I came away convinced that the real leader of the string quartet *is* the second violin. Not because Koff dominated the rest of us, but because in his part he had all the inner rhythms and harmonies, and he gave them such clarity and authority that we were all tremendously influenced by his playing. He was leading us from the "seconds." In a truly great string quartet, all four players are doing that simultaneously.

ROZ: One year, part way into the second semester, Ben asked me to teach his graduate class at the Conservatory while he was conducting in Europe. The students were always interested in

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learning new techniques for dealing with stage nerves, and he felt I had something important to offer them on that subject.

However, as I was driving to the Conservatory, I was dismayed to find that *I* was the one who was unaccountably nervous. My thoughts flew with horror to the next two hours: I pictured myself in front of the class, white-faced and shaken, while we discussed the students' performance anxiety. This was likely to be completely humiliating.

The first thing I did was attempt to manage the fear: I instructed myself to "stay with the emotion," an idea that proved singularly unhelpful. Then I berated myself for not being able to handle my own anxiety.

It did not occur to me to look to see what grade I was giving the graduate students I was about to address.

When I stepped in front of the class, I was still intensely anxious and self-absorbed, but as I started to speak, things shifted. "I'm thrilled to be here," I said (a lie in transition toward the truth), "because . . . (I didn't yet know what I was going to say) . . . because you are a group of artists . . . and I couldn't possibly have a better audience for a discussion of a subject in which I have a passionate interest: creativity."

And suddenly it was all true. Once I had given my audience an A and invented them as colleagues, they were *precisely* the people with whom I wanted to converse, and I was *exactly* where I wanted to be. If we really do have the choice of saying who is in the class we are teaching, or the orchestra we are conducting, or the group we are managing, why would we ever define them as people we cannot effectively and enjoyably work with?

Time flew as this A class invented stories to live and work by, stories that enhanced their passion and creativity. The answer to the mystery of stage nerves turned out to be the same as the secret of life: it's all a matter of invention.

GIVING AN A is a fundamental, paradigmatic shift toward the realization that it is all invented—the A is invented and the Num-

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performances with the Philharmonia Orchestra of London, with whom he is recording the complete cycles of Beethoven and Mahler symphonies for Telarc Records. He has taught at the New England Conservatory in Boston for more than thirty years, runs a music program for young performing artists at the Walnut Hill School, and conducts and tours with the New England Conservatory Youth Philharmonic Orchestra. Born in England, Zander began composing at age nine, studied under Benjamin Britten and Imogen Holst, and trained as a cellist in Italy and Germany with cello virtuoso Gaspar Cassado. He received a degree from University College, London, and pursued postgraduate studies at Harvard and in New York on a Harkness Fellowship. Over the past ten years, Zander has become a sought-after speaker to major organizations for his presentations on leadership and creativity. In 1999, he received the Crystal Award at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, for his outstanding contribution to cross-cultural understanding.

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