



Ben Zander

The Art of Possibility

There are two worlds, and it is our choice which one we choose to live in. The first is “downward spiral” and the normal life we live consisting of competition, pressure and limits. The second world is expansive and “radiates possibilities.”

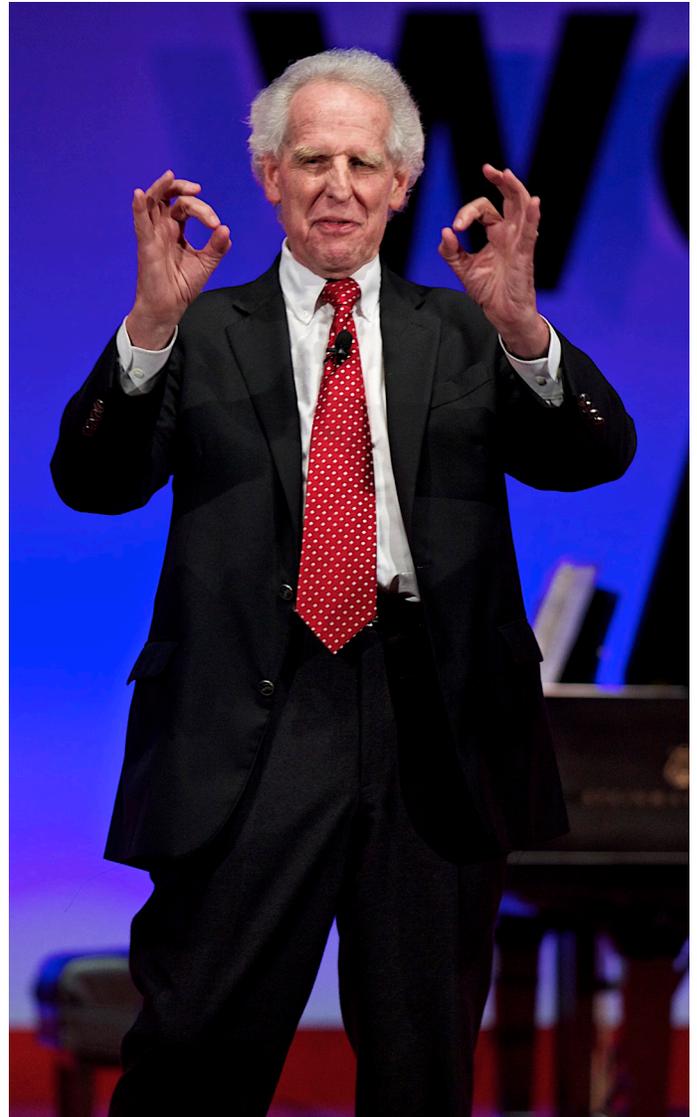
Ben Zander, an acclaimed teacher, visionary and the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra brought this message to the Radio City Music Hall’s stage at the World Business Forum in New York City.

Zander, author of *The Art of Possibility*, believes that we often find ourselves in the “downward spiral” but can open the world of possibilities with a change of language and a new viewpoint.

Even as a conductor (the last bastion of totalitarianism), Zander challenges the “old style” of top down, hierarchical management with the need for a “new style” of engaging people and teams in a vision and direction while encouraging them forward. Your job as a leader is “to awaken the possibilities in others” and “to remind the players of what the rhythm of transformation is.” It is not to tell them what to do or think.

You will know that you are succeeding “if their eyes are shining,” said Zander. Teams that are exploring the possibilities are positive, challenging and engaging. Team members will exhibit energy and openness to challenge their limits and open the possibilities. As a leader, if you are not “seeing their shining eyes,” ask yourself “who am I being that is limiting them from the possibilities?”

The language of the downward spiral is one of the limits to action. Zander said, “barriers are the things we create.” The world of possibilities is about asking questions and reinforcing positive feelings so that the “internal voices of the downward spiral,” which are present in every one of us, don’t limit us in our thinking or acting.



Keeping focus on a vision, not just a mission also breaks the downward spiral. Zander believes many organizations get lost in “the doing” and not reinforcing enough “where they are going.” Vision has to be something “you live into.” Mission is what can be achieved. Vision does not get distracted by the day-to-day. It should shape what we do every day.

Zander counsels that one way to break out of the "downward spiral" is to ask "what would be" and "what could be" in ourselves and our businesses. Write it down and see how it changes your perspectives. Don't start with where you are now.

One way to break the "downward spiral" with individuals is to practice "giving an 'A' to somebody" said Zander. It is amazing what happens when people, even "C"-people, get an "A" for something they did. Reframe their experience and you open the "possibilities."

The "secret to life," according to Zander, is to recognize "that it is all invented." It is your choice, and you can reshape your world if you get out of old ways of acting and out of the "downward spiral."

It is your choice – to live a life of "resignation" to how things are – to live a life of "anger" at the way things are – or, to live a life of possibilities.

Just remember, "possibility" is ALWAYS only one sentence away, and a vibrant authentic community driving toward possibilities will unleash the energy and creativity you need for success. ■