

Tapping into the Art of Possibility

SUBMITTED BY: Kamaila A. Sanders, The University of Pennsylvania

SUBJECT(S): Communication, Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

Students will begin this lesson by watching a video or listening to audio of an orchestra performance. Then they will be asked to describe the leadership style that is employed by conductors of symphony orchestras. Next they will listen to a podcast about how one conductor chose to do things differently and got rid of the top-down traditional leadership style that is usually employed by music conductors in favor of encouraging his music students to choose the art of possibility. Students will write responses to questions that will display their comprehension of the podcast and discuss Benjamin Zander’s concept of the art of possibility. Finally, students will develop their own mission and vision statements that incorporate the decision to choose possibility as a staple of leadership.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Communication, I. Foundations of Communication
- Management, IV. Personal Management Skills

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Venezuela’s Eugenia Carmona on the ‘Complete Chaos’ Afflicting Her Country”](#)
- [“Innovation in the Classroom: Inspiring Creativity”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Jack Abraham on Changing the World through Technological Innovation”](#)

- “5 Leadership Lessons from Israeli Model Titi Aynaw”

Common Core Standard(s): Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Technology and Digital Media

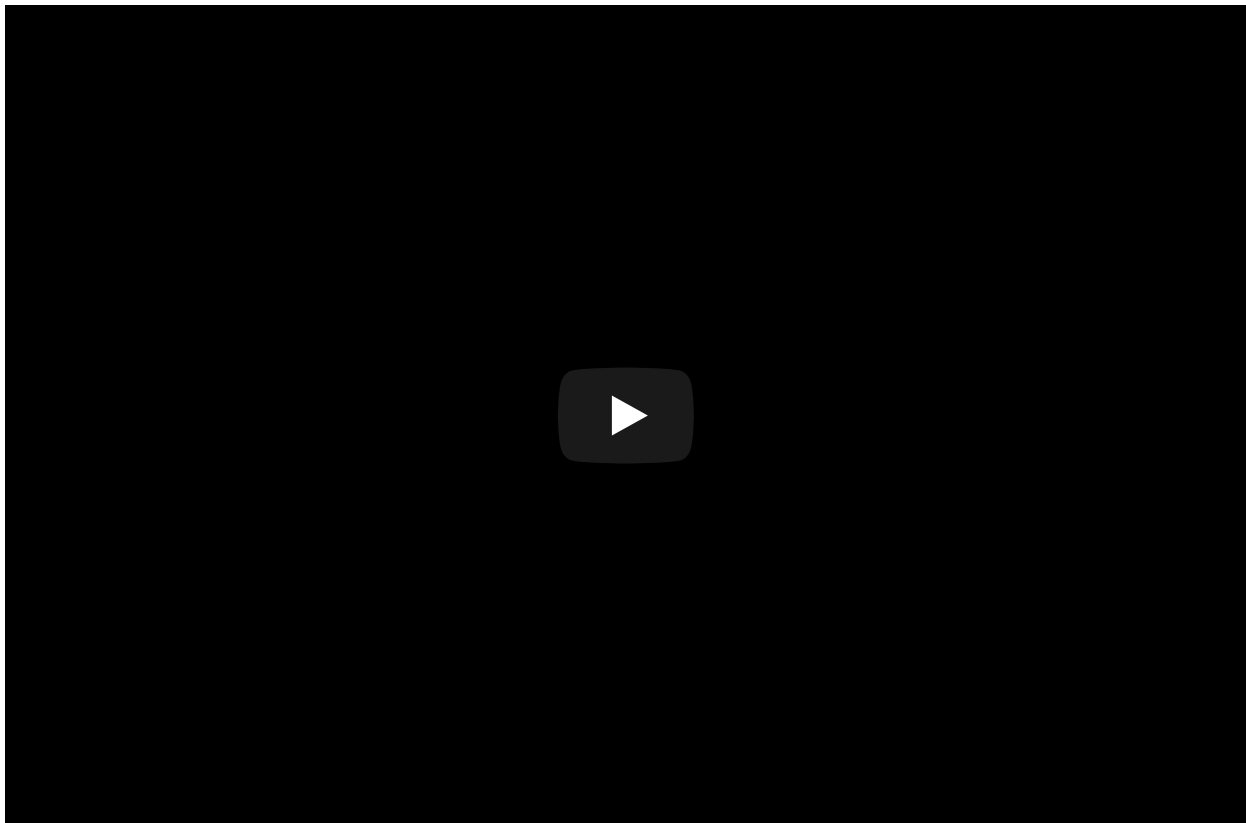
Objectives/Purposes: Students will learn how to incorporate the *art of possibility* into their leadership style.

Knowledge@Wharton Article:

“Boston Philharmonic’s Benjamin Zander: Tapping into ‘The Art of Possibility’” (podcast)

Other Resources/Materials:

Internet Access: You Tube- [Incredible high school musicians from Venezuela! Led by Gustavo Dudamel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amSqQ5XNaGE) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amSqQ5XNaGE>)



Activity:

1. (5-10 mins) Begin the lesson by playing video (or audio will work if video is not an option) of classical music being played by an orchestra that is led by a conductor. Let students listen to the music for a while and then, with the music still playing, ask students if any of them like or listen to

this kind of music? Do any of them play in a symphony or band like this? Also ask students about leadership in an orchestra. Who has the power and control? If no one has an answer, have them discuss what they noticed about the video (if you watched one, answers might be that the persons playing instruments often look at the conductor, etc...).

2. (12 mins) Explain that the day's lesson on leadership comes from a conductor who has become famous for his unique leadership style. Play the podcast of the article, "Boston Philharmonic's Benjamin Zander: Tapping into 'The Art of Possibility.'" If you would like, you can play muted video of an orchestra performance while the audio of the article is playing to enhance the metaphor.

While students are listening to the podcast, project the following questions and have them write their answers on a separate sheet of paper:

- Why are everyday musicians unhappy?
 - A: Leadership; an orchestra is led by a conductor. Musicians are not permitted to speak to the conductor. If they do, it must be in the form of a question.
- What does Zander mean when he says, "conducting is the last bastion of totalitarianism?"
- Why do members of string quartets tend to be much happier in terms of job satisfaction?
 - A: A string quartet is a cooperative group composed of autonomous musicians who each have the power to influence group decisions.
- In what ways does Zander employ a different type of leadership style?
 - A: He sees his job as a way to inspire musicians under his direction and "remind people why they went into music in the first place" not control them. To do this, he helps musicians dwell in a world of possibility and not a world of limitations.
- Zander says this way of thinking can also inspire business leaders. In what ways do you think it can?
- Respond to the quote, "ordinary things in life can be transformed if you challenge your assumptions about them."
- What does it mean to choose possibility?

After the podcast is over, mention the following takeaways from the podcast

Takeaways

- “You can face problems with resignation, anger or possibility. These are all valid responses. You have a choice.” Choosing possibility isn’t always easy, but it will lead to excellence. It will also lead to a challenging of assumptions — and assumptions are often roadblocks to innovation.
- “Everybody wants out-of-the-box thinking; the question is, how do you get it?” “It’s very simple. You ask a question: What assumptions am I making that I don’t know I’m making?”
- The key to success inside an organization has to do with voicing assumptions. “Every organization, every human endeavor, has to have someone whose job it is to notice what assumptions are being made ... and [who] has permission to say so. Anybody from the bottom to the top should be able to speak about assumptions without fearing loss of any kind.”

3. (10 mins) After the podcast, have students work in groups to discuss their answers to the questions as well as the takeaways. Have them think about how this style of leadership applies to their lives and whether they would like to work with a leader who utilized this type of leadership style.

4. (15 mins) Have each student write their own mission and vision statement for an organization, company, orchestra, or other leadership role that outlines their personal leadership style and that builds from the art of possibility as a foundation. Have volunteers share their statements with the class.

- A **mission statement** is a statement of the purpose of a [company](#) and [organization](#). The mission statement should guide the actions of the organization, spell out its overall goal, provide a sense of direction, and guide decision-making. It provides “the framework or context within which the company’s strategies are formulated.”
 - Example: To Write Love on Her Arms is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery.
 - A **Vision statement** outlines what the organization wants to be, or how it wants the world in which it operates to be. It concentrates on the future. It is a source of inspiration. It provides clear decision-making criteria.
 - Example:
 - Nike: To be the number one athletic company in the world
 - Stanford University in the 1940s: Become the Harvard of the West

Tying It All Together: Have students think about whether or not they think the art of possibility is a feasible personal leadership style. Do students buy into this? Why or why not.

Practice Outside of the Classroom: What are some other areas in your life where you could employ the art of possibility?

What worked and What I Would Do Differently: I found that playing the video (muted) of the orchestra during the podcast gave the students something to look at and visualize. It also helped students to see examples of what was being discussed in the podcast. For the last activity, it will be important to explain what a mission and vision statement is to students and to go over the context in which they are usually used and to provide some famous examples.

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