The purpose of these notes is to provide an in-depth overview of the content of this important book. *The Art of Possibility* can be purchased online from Penguin [here](http://www.PenguinPutnam.com/Search/QuickSearchFrame?id=Art%20of%20Possibility) or Chapters [here](http://www.chapters.indigo.ca/) or Amazon [here](http://www.amazon.com).


**Launching the Journey**

Active, ongoing practices that shift an individual’s or culture’s perception of reality is the basis of transformation.

Practices presented in this book are designed to cause “a shift of posture, perceptions, beliefs, and thought processes” (p. 4).

**Practice #1: It’s All Invented**

Life is a story we tell.

We understand the world by:

- Our senses bringing us selective information about what is out in the world.
- Our brains construct its own simulation of the sensations.
- 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’” (p. 10).
“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” (p. 10).

“It is theory which decides what we can observe” (p. 11) – Einstein.

Our stories are founded on “networks of hidden assumptions” (p. 14).

The Practice of “its all invented begins with asking the following questions:

   What assumptions am I making, that I’m not aware I’m making, that give me what I see?

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

Practice #2: Stepping into a Universe of Possibility

We call are everyday world the “world of measurement” (p. 17).
   Assume a world of scarcity and peril – survivalist mentality
   Assume the reality is fixed
   Assume “people, ideas, and situations can be fully known and measured” (p. 18).
   We know people and things by measuring them.

“In the measurement world, you set a goal and strive for it. In the universe of possibility, you set a context and let life unfold” (p. 21).

To move into the world of possibility, ask the following questions:

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

   How are my thoughts and actions, in this new moment, a reflection of the measurement world?

Practice #3: Giving an A

An “A is not an expectation to live up to, but a possibility to live into” (p. 26).

Each student in the class receives an A and, within two weeks of the start of classes, writes a letter dated after the end of the class sessions to the teacher that begins with

   I got my A because . . .
Inside each block of marble lies a beautiful statue, so says Michelangelo. And such is the case for people. Our job as educators is to assist others in realizing this potential for themselves.

Mistakes, remind us of what needs attention. When making a mistake, smile and say “How fascinating” (p. 31).

Giving an A “invites and recognizes a universal desire in people to contribute to others, no matter how many barriers there are to its expression” (p. 39).

Giving an A can be done metaphorically to audiences, large or small, in the same way as it is given to students. This allows you the speaker to relax and connect with them from the perspective of possibilities rather than from judgment.

Giving an A shifts the focus from measurement to possibility.

**Practice #4: Being a Contribution**

Contribution is non-comparative unlike success and failure.

The joyful question:
   “How will I be a contribution today?”
replaces the fearful questions:
   “Is it enough?”
   “Am I loved for who I am or for what I have accomplished?”

Steps to the practice (p. 59):
   Declare yourself to be a contribution.
   Throw yourself into life as someone who makes a difference, accepting that you may not understand how or why.

Redefine your work as a place of contribution rather than an arena for success.
   Rename yourself and others as contributions rather than liabilities.

**Practice #5: Leading from Any Chair**

As leader of the orchestra, the conductor is the only one who doesn’t make a sound.
How much greatest are you willing to grant other people?

“Leadership is not a responsibility – nobody has to lead. It’s a gift.” Amanda Burr (p. 74).

**Practice #6: Rule Number 6**

**Rule #6: lighten up.**

*Calculating Self:* concern for its survival in a world of scarcity.
- The personality one gets recognition for.
- The scheming self; the unfulfilled self.

> What would have to change for me to be completely fulfilled?

*Central Self:* generative, prolific, creative self living in a rich, free, compassionate and expressive world.
- It “appraises the truth of the whole situation without guile or agenda” (p. 93)
- It “is neither a pattern of action nor a set of strategies” (p. 95).

**Practice #7: The Way Things Are**

Being present to the way things are without resistance creates possibilities.

The question to ask:

> “What do we want to do from here?”

Cosmic Laughter: “the laughter that comes from the surprise and delight of seeing the obvious” (p. 101).

To be with the way things are we must be able to distinguish between:
- Our assumptions
- Our feelings
- The facts, i.e. what happened and what is happening.

“It is important to realize that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are categories we impose on the world – they are not of the world itself” (p. 105).
The practice of being with the way things are means separating “our conclusions about events from our description of the events themselves” (p. 106). Abstractions of physical reality obscure seeing the way things are.

*Downward spiral talk:* “a resigned way of speaking that excludes possibility” (p. 108). It focuses on the abstraction of scarcity.

**Practice #8: Giving Way to Passion**

Steps to “giving way to passion:”
- Notice where you are holding back and let go, release and connect with all beyond yourself.
- Participate wholly.

**Practice #9: Lighting a Spark**

Enrollment: “the art and practice of generating a spark of possibility for others to share” (p. 125).

Steps for practicing “lighting a spark:”
- Imagine that people are an invitation to enrollment.
- Stand ready to participate, willing to be moved and inspired.
- Offer that which lights you up.
- Have no doubt that others are eager to catch the spark.

**Practice #10: Being the Board**

Blame is a concept from the world of measurement.

The amount to which you blame others is the amount to which you lose your power.

“There is nothing I can do about your mistakes – only about mine” (p. 142).

The practice begins with declaring: “I am the framework for everything that happens in my life” (p. 142).

Then ask, “How did this get on the board that I am?”
“The purpose of naming yourself as the board, or as the context in which life occurs to you, is to give yourself the power to transform your experience of any unwanted condition into one with which you care to live” (p. 146).

Being on the board is about making a difference.

Being on the board, or being present is about lack of attachment to the outcome.

**Practice #11: Frameworks for Possibility**

“The ‘leader of possibility’ invigorates the lines of affiliation and compassion from person to person in the face of the tyranny of fear” (p. 162).

Steps to the practice of framing possibility:
  
  Live in the realm of possibility.
  
  Embody this realm.
  
  Distinguish between what is “on the track” and what is “off the track” of your framework of possibility.

Vision: the framework from moving people from downward spiral talk to the arena of possibility.

A vision articulates a possibility.
A vision fulfills a desire fundamental to humankind, a desire with which any human being can resonate. It is an idea to which no one could logically respond, “what about me?”
A vision makes no reference to morality or ethics, it is not about a right way of doing things. It cannot imply that anyone is wrong.
A vision is stated as a picture for all time, using no numbers, measures, or comparatives. It contains no specifics of time, place, audience, or product.
A vision is free-standing – it points neither to a rosier future, nor to a past in need of improvement. It gives over to its bounty now. If the vision is “peace on earth,” peace comes with its utterance. When “the possibility of ideas making a difference” is spoken, at that moment ideas do make a difference.
Speaking a vision transforms the speaker. For the moment the “real world” becomes a universe of possibility and the barriers to the realization of the vision disappear. (pp. 169-170)
A personal vision is the framework for a life of possibility – something to live into not live up to.

**Practice #12: Telling the WE Story**

History is often the story of conflict between an us and a them.

The WE story “points to relationship rather than to individuals, to communication patterns, gestures, and movement rather than to discrete objects and identities. It attests to the *in-between*” (p. 183).

Steps to the WE Story practice:

1. Tell the WE story – the story of the unseen threads that connect us all, the story of possibility.
2. Listen and look for the emerging entity.
3. Ask: “What do WE want to have happen here?”
   - “What is best for US?” – all of each of us, and all of all of us.
   - “What is OUR next step?”

The in-between is ever evolving, ever moving.