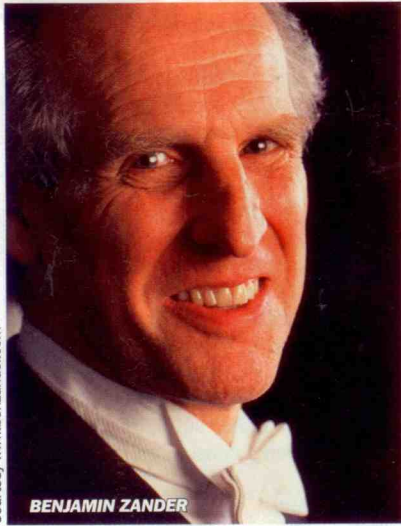


6215001-Benjamin Zander - conduct, speaker, author

Maestro unlocks corporate minds

World-famous conductor Ben Zander preaches his "art of possibility"



Courtesy www.benzander.com

BY LAURA FRANZ-KAMISSOKO

FEW OF US with a job in the world of ICT have, I would imagine, any knowledge of the phenomenon that is Benjamin Zander. I know I hadn't, until recently when I attended one of the many talks he was to give on this, his fifth trip to SA.

Zander's full-time job is conductor of the Boston Philharmonic (one of the last places in the world where an autocratic management style still works, he says with his trademark beaming smile), but he's also a teacher and a world-renowned speaker with, even for a man even half his age (he's nearing 70), a killer schedule.

Zander has appeared four times as a keynote speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos. His book, *The Art of Possibility*, co-authored with his partner, psychotherapist Rosamund Zander, has been translated into 17 languages.

Zander uses the metaphor of the orchestra and a lifetime of experience conducting, coaching and teaching musicians to overcome barriers to corporate productivity.

His philosophy can be crystallised into three main tenets: everything is invented, see greatness in others, and relish your 'mistakes'.

The world-famous conductor says that with simple shifts in our view of life, we can open ourselves up to our own excellence.

To illustrate his point, he tells the story of Jackie DuPre, the greatest cellist of her generation, who went in for her first competition when she was five years old.

She was seen running through the corridor with her cello and a broad grin on her face. The porter at the door, says "Well I can see that you have just played". "No!" Jackie shoots back, "I am just about to!"

It's a simple story, but full of lessons, says Zander. The frightened performer cannot get access to her full capacities. And he often tells the story to students performing for an audience. "Telling a story about a five-year-old child unlocks that side of our nature which is playful, uncompetitive and expressive. The assumption that a child who is beaming from ear to ear must have completed the task and is expressing relief, is replaced by a much more powerful idea that we human beings are brought into the world to contribute and give joy and that it is thrilling and enlivening to do so. The audience, in turn, has changed from sitting in judgment (arms folded), to embracing the gift that is being offered. That in turn diminishes the pressure on the performer and the whole spirit in the room has changed."

"The process I have just described is called transformation. It is partly intellectual, but just as importantly, it is molecular. The posture of the body is actually changed, from heaviness, tension and anxiety to joy and lightness. Endorphins, and with them our creative juices, are released. Barriers break down and we feel free to take risks. It doesn't mean that mistakes won't be made, but it gives us a more powerful relationship to failure. A mistake is not a judgment of worth, but a momentary lapse from which we can learn: 'How fascinating!' we shout as we toss our hands in the air and smile.

"To say 'How fascinating!' when you make a mistake is a possibility practice," says Zander.

"It shifts the attention away from blame (of self and others) and the paralysis which follows, onto: 'What went wrong? What is next? What can I learn, so that I can avoid doing it again?' This practice, like all possibility practices, works at the molecular level. Try it next time you are out on the golf course! You make a lousy shot and instead of your body pulling down, accompanied by the usual swearing and cursing, you counter intuitively raise your hands and shout 'How Fascinating!' You will find to your amazement that there is a lightness, a buoyancy that comes into your being that sets you up beautifully to make the next shot."