

Speaking Personally (part three)

One of the books that has guided me in my Westminster years, besides the Bible, is one that I was introduced to by Revd Liz Caswell who used to be our Chaplain and, before that, Moderator of the URC's Eastern Synod within which Westminster sits. It's *The Art of Possibility* by Rosamund and Benjamin Zander (2000). I love it in part because it has a bright yellow cover, announcing itself in a fun way. But mostly, I love its wisdom.

One of their reflections is about "being a contribution." They recognise that we are often pressed into looking inwards and thinking firstly about our own needs, our own hopes, our own mistakes and disasters. That can mean that working with and alongside others can make us feel even worse because there are all those fearful comparisons: I'm not

as good as she is; he's sharper than I will ever be; they are just better than me.

Contribution changes that. It reshapes my sense of myself in and with everyone else. If, day upon day, I settle into the activities that await me and see myself as a contributor amongst other contributors, then I have a freedom to try. Contributors don't have to judge and be judged. We can celebrate the unique gifts we each bring. We can live and learn, pray and work together. We each contribute and we all matter. Which, for me, amplifies the deep truth I hear Jesus speak when he says we need to love God and love our neighbours as much as we love ourselves (Mark 12: 28-31).

Last month I celebrated Westminster as buildings. This time I'm honouring all of you; the incredible team of people who are Westminster.



I see all of us being able to contribute to the good of the college. I wanted my time as Principal to be a time in which contributions were celebrated, found, relished, expanded, blessed and shared. We have, to make the place work, to divide up responsibilities into different teams and sets of colleagues. Rightly, we recruit people to different jobs and look for different skills and experience. But, crucially, we only really flourish when we are one team rather than a vaguely collaborating collection of teams. My flourishing only ever becomes possible when my contribution, and all of yours, genuinely matter.

“Naming oneself and others as a contribution produces a shift away from self-concern and engages us in a relationship with others that is an arena for making a difference.”

Rosamund Stone Zander & Benjamin Zander

The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life,

2000, Harvard Business Review Press
p. 63

The Power of Mistakes



There are many mistakes that I know I've made as Principal. There will be some I've forgotten or hidden even from myself. There will be others I never even noticed.

The dictionary tells me a mistake is: "an act or judgement that is misguided or wrong." That hides the true power. Mistakes can so crush me that I can't even go on. They can so label me that others stop trusting me. Everything collapses.

But, discovering how to be a Principal, and sharing in Westminster's slow journey towards being a Resource Centre for Learning Serving the URC (our strapline), I notice other powers in mistakes. If we dare, they can be places for some of our greatest learning about ourselves, about others, about the college and about the world. For me, they become places of grace and mercy where I have found myself loved by God in ways I never thought possible. In our mistakes are the seeds of our fruitfulness every bit as much as in our successes; maybe more so. Mistakes matter because they need not be the end of things. Better can begin.

