

Being The Board

The Zanders call this tenth practice the post-graduate course because it takes a certain amount of maturity. You are asked to rename yourself as *the board on which the whole game is played*. In other words, you are no longer a player using the play-board but the board itself; you no longer see yourself as being in the game where you win from others or lose to others.

You might probably reach this stage after you have tried seeing *the way things are* and no fresh possibility arises; *enrolment* so that you can *light the spark* doesn't work and you are at your wit's end.

An extreme example given was of you being the law-abiding driver who has stopped at a traffic light only to be rear-ended by a drunk driver from behind, thereby landing you in hospital with injuries. Without obstructing the course of justice which will surely put the offending driver at risk of his licence and all that, the Zanders propose that you go beyond the world of fault and blame and, while not reducing the culpability of the offending driver, accept that this was a risk you took when you started driving. "When I drive, I take that statistical risk; I own that what happens on the road happens in my sphere of consciousness and choice."

This tenth practice starts with your saying "I am the framework for everything that happens in my life. Some assumption I have made is the source of my difficulty."

"It is not that this practice offers the right choice or the only choice. We may want to make sure the intoxicated driver gets his due. We may want sympathy, and we may want revenge. Being derailed from our larger purpose, for a length of time, may be an acceptable option. However choosing the *being the board* approach opens the possibility of a graceful journey, one that quickly reinstates us on the path we chose before the fateful collision intervened. It allows us to keep on track.

"Grace comes from owning the risks we take in a world by and large immune to our control" (even though we think floods are the fault of the PUB and the SMRT breakdown a stain on our record of efficiency).

"Gracing yourself with responsibility for everything that happens in your life leaves your spirit whole, and leaves you free to choose again."

Let's take a less death-defying example but one that I know is common enough for school principals and that has brought stress into your life sometime or another : the parent who comes to complain about his child being unfairly treated in your school. In the world of win-and-lose, of accountability-and-blame, a principal might be tempted to see this as the parent is right and the school loses or the parent is wrong and the school wins (and let's not kid ourselves, we all want the latter.) But whether we win or lose, the story in our heads may well be that we are so unlucky to get this kind of parent, it is the teacher's fault that he did not say things clearly, it is the student's fault for not having heard things right. There is no graceful journey here, just a very messy state of mutual recrimination.

But if we take the *be the board* approach, we might tell ourselves that misunderstandings of this sort are part of the territory and part of the several risks we took when we became principals; it won't stop the complaints but it would make you feel less of a victim and free you to understand the whole process of communication and how it works in your school. It might even show you how to assist the parent to a better understanding.

Are you game to try?