Director’s Corner: The Best Medicine

The flu season and harsh weather of January, with the resulting changes in plans, delays and inconveniences, coupled with the new year’s transitions, set the perfect context for considering the sixth and seventh practices advocated by Zander and Zander in *The Art of Possibility*. “Rule #6”, which is actually the only “rule” in the book, is to lighten up rather than taking ourselves so seriously. The authors explain that replacing our calculating, exacting, demanding selves with ones who acknowledge the power of humor, laughter, and play will reveal our more compassionate, creative and expressive sides. For most of us, that means being willing to laugh at ourselves when the best-laid plans fail, when nature trumps our control of the schedule, and when perfection eludes us. Some say, “Laughter is the best medicine.”

Miss Mangan introduced the staff to a children’s book that highlights this practice from a child’s point of view. In “The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes”, by Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein, 9-year-old Beatrice is perfect. She never makes the mistakes other children make, and she always wins the town talent contest with her juggling act. As the authors introduce us to Beatrice’s day, we see her avoiding her friends’ activities because of the risk of making mistakes. We also begin to understand that Beatrice spends much time worrying about her performance and that the anxiety builds as more people affirm her for never making mistakes. Beatrice and her community learn an important lesson about Rule #6 when she makes a very public mistake and experiences the freedom that comes from being able to laugh at herself and with her friends about it.

In a similar way, the practice of being present to “*The Way Things Are*”, including your reactions to the situations you encounter, prevents you from becoming paralyzed. “The capacity to be present to everything that is happening, without resistance, creates possibility… you can leave behind the struggle to come to terms with what is in front of you, and move on (p. 101). This kind of thinking is especially important when we make mistakes. If we first follow Rule #6, then we can take the next step to own mistakes as part of the learning process and attend fully to the possibilities ahead. When situations happen to us or are in other ways out of our control, Zander and Zander emphasize eliminating our focus on what “should be”, as well as avoiding the common responses of avoidance, denial, and blame. While it may be that the reality of the bad situation cannot change, the way that we view the situation – as a glass half empty or one half full, for example – will determine whether our thinking spirals in a negative direction or radiates with possibility.

When raising or teaching young children, we gradually realize that much of who they are and will become is out of our control. How will we react when they, or we as their caregivers, do not meet “the standard”? In the children’s book “Ish”, Peter H. Reynolds explores this question as Ramon, whose passion is drawing, encounters an older brother who tells him that his pictures are no good. Ramon struggles to meet his brother’s standard but gives up drawing when he continually feels inferior. His younger sister offers a new possibility by suggesting that Ramon’s drawings may not look exactly like a flower, house, sun, etc. but that they look flower-ish, house-ish, sun-ish. Her perspective frees Ramon to think “ish-ly” about his drawing and other aspects of life so that he can fully engage once more. Let’s encourage each other and our children to adopt such playful and positive attitudes as we continue to learn and grow.