

I thought this sixth practice was an easy practice to review but I was wrong.

This is because it is explained through many stories and so keeping it short enough to still keep you reading is a challenge.

The Zanders recount a story of how a CEO settled various irate staff by telling them "Remember Rule No 6", how they all calmed down immediately, laughed a little and then left the meeting satisfied. So aren't you intrigued? And what is Rule No 6? Well it is "Don't take yourself so seriously."

"Don't take yourself so seriously" is the practice of lightening up, which may well light up those around you.

"It is not about telling other people not to take themselves so seriously but about understanding that humour and laughter are perhaps the best way we can 'get over ourselves'. Humour can bring us together around our inescapable foibles, confusions and miscommunications, and especially over the ways in which we find ourselves acting entitled and demanding, or putting other people down, or flying at each other's throats."

Apparently in our struggle for survival, we tend to take ourselves and our actions very seriously. That's why we measure ourselves and our performance assiduously. It makes what we do worth it even when what we do does not always make us comfortable with ourselves. Ben Zander calls it our calculating self. "When we practice Rule No 6, we coax this calculating self to lighten up, and by so doing we break its hold on us."

Think how seriously we view someone cutting into our queue. We say he has no values, no courtesy, and does not know how to behave in polite society. We think our right has been trampled on. We are taking ourselves very seriously.

A bunch of students sail paper planes when the teacher's back is turned. She is outraged at the disrespect shown her. A student uses vulgar language in the teacher's presence. Again the latter feels insulted. This is taking ourselves seriously. (And you know just what will happen next. They will come to you, the principal, and ask you what you propose to do about it. As if you do not have enough on your plate.)

Closer to home, a parent complains and criticises a decision you have made in the school. You see another force acting against you. You brace yourself and start strategizing how you must win this fight and not lose ground. This is taking yourself seriously.

What Zander is proposing is not that we accept queue cutting, sailing paper planes during a lesson or uttering vulgarities, or that we let parents walk all over us. What he is saying is that we can prevent ourselves from over reacting by not taking these things personally even though we see the deed as wrong or the criticism to be unwarranted.

One of the stories that really resonated with me was the one when an opera singer had to set aside his confident style of singing which, for him, defined his way of surviving and his ticket to fame. He was called to sing a tender love song with a vulnerability and uncertainty that was 'just not him' but which the songwriter wished to convey. But again, you have to read it to really appreciate what Zander says.

As you review your year with or without your team, don't go on and on about that bad event/decision that might have marred your year. Draw your team's and your own attention instead to the laughter and fun you all had, and the camaraderie, and let that give you a perspective for this one bad moment.