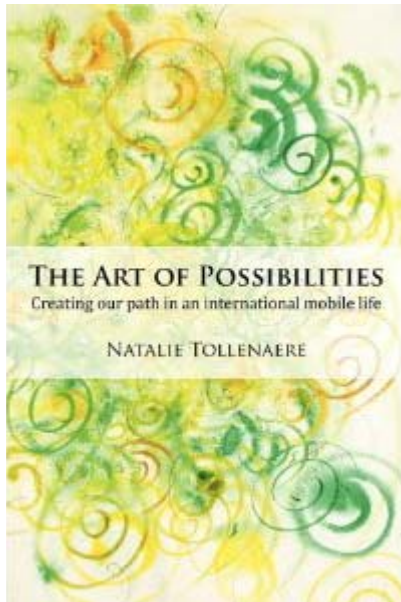


Tollenaere, Natalie, *The Art of Possibilities: creating our path in an international, mobile life.*

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Natalie Tollenaere is a veteran expatriate, artist and art therapist who has turned her efforts into supporting expatriates and their families to turn the expatriation experience into an effective time abroad, one that contributes to both career success and personal enrichment.

The Art of Possibilities is not a theoretical treatise nor a how to checklist or best tips collection. It is in fact the author's attempt to put into print and into a hands-on experience of its users the kind of work that she does in her personally directed workshops with expatriates. Of course one could read its scant 93 pages in an hour or less, but that is not the point. It is an opportunity for self knowledge, awareness and dilemma resolution through artistic, psychological and spiritual engagement. Nor is it meant to be a onetime read and do. Rather numerous exercises are tools to return to or even make a part of one's normal reflection

processes. It can be done alone, or more richly shared with a group of friends and colleagues in a common context of expatriation. Yes, it asks for the willingness to engage in art, but does not demand artistic expertise of any kind.

The Art of Possibilities begins with the expatriate's loss of familiar references and the diminished sense of self esteem that accompanies whom we believe we are and what we assume to be our everyday life competencies when we are thrown into a new environment. There is nothing about the honeymoon stage of culture shock. Perhaps the author's therapeutic stance urges her to start with the conflicts of life and cultures. The author assumes that the honeymoon over or is at least short lived after the plane lands or the boat docks. The reader is asked to image previous life, the unsettling of transition and a desired state. This was a bit problematic for me as I have looked upon each of my significant moves to a new culture with eagerness and curiosity realizing full well that there was a lot to explore and learn, both from mistakes and from the riches of the new environment.

Perhaps this disjoint is addressed in the second stage of allowing the upset of the normal to open the door to new ways to realize old dreams. I.e., being torn from our familiar reality forces us to relook at a deeper level at who we are, what we believe and what we want. Cultural clash can be daunting and the temptations, depending, I suppose, on our personality can be, as the author notes, defensive—shutting down and isolation or hyperactivity. Tollenaere has designed an exercise to visualize and explore the transition from the perspective of activities and values, in fact using the new context for redesigning life on the basis of rediscovered values.

Values influence choices, or at least they should. "Priorities" are what we term the values brought forward into the circumstances of the present situation and the choices it requires of us. To

identify and respond well to priorities we must face the pressures from the environment and those around us to move in certain directions. For the expatriate family these pressures may be generated from within the couple itself or the family's different priorities as well as pressures from work or career opportunity. Fear and anxiety over choices may grow, hence the importance of being able to focus and center oneself, the focus of the next exercise involving the creation of *mandalas*, which have been traditional spiritual tools for producing this centering effect.

This leads, expatriate or not, to the discovery or rediscovery and releasing of one's driving passion and understanding its direction. The author suggests that we do "archeological" work to identify and graphically illustrate its thread in our life. This is much like the work done by groups in appreciative inquiry and similar processes. It allows us to dream and energizes us to realize the dream. As my colleague Walt Hopkins often says, we imagine castles in the air and then set out to put foundations under them—dreams become goals. The trick is keeping the dream alive despite the pooping of others and our own disabling fears. Making the dream graphic is the strategy chosen by the author who offers an exercise in creating a collage that speaks of our dream and keeps it before our eyes.

Resilience and flexibility are needed to connect with the people about us and the environment as we share and build our dream. This means visualizing and developing the external connections and help that we need to live the dream in a new context as well as learn to make it live as circumstances change our expectations.

Finally, celebration and gratitude are key elements in moving forward, particularly when we have faced or are facing challenges and difficulties. "Do all things with thanksgiving," is a line that sticks with me from my religious upbringing and I don't feel that there is anything very sectarian about that attitude. One may thank God, thank the universe, thank those about one, or just think-thank.

The author concludes with a reminder of the ongoing nature of the process of these life transition processes and offers appendices of useful information and tools as well as a list of follow up opportunities that enhance and continue the processes the book promotes.

All in all I found the processes of the book relatively familiar, relatively standard human potential and personal growth exercises, albeit focused on the creation of images in line with the author's propensities. Useful but perhaps a bit thin. What is discussed is in fact worthwhile starting points for dealing with most any time of transition and not necessarily exclusively true of or focused on expatriation, though the brief stories that launch each chapter of the book are taken from such. Perhaps also its simplicity recommends it for the overburdened, the lonely, or those not knowing that they might be more actively engaged in the search for their own meaning.