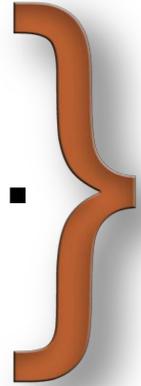


YES, AND...



THE VALUE OF IMPROV IN A WORLD OF ACCELERATING CHANGE

For years, actors and drama professionals have understood that the practice of improv was helpful to their craft. It has helped an untold number of actors learn how to get out of their heads, be in the moment, be present in the scene and highly attuned to the subtle nuances of the language, physicality, and emotion of their scene mates. It has helped them learn to trust their instincts and make choices that serve the purpose and quality of the scene, as opposed to stealing the spotlight or overshadowing others.

More recently, the principles and practice of improv have been recognized for their value in increasing personal and organizational effectiveness. Why? Because practicing improv fosters the same a creative, open, collaborative, and flexible mindset which correlates highly with the adaptable, problem-solving orientation that is needed to succeed in a fast-moving, rapidly changing environment. In other words, the principles and practice of improv better positions us to successfully deal with the 21st century reality of an accelerating pace of change.

Specifically, improv helps us grow and improve in these areas:

- Value teamwork and mutual support
- Accept shared accountability for results
- Risk-taking
- Creativity
- Exploration and open-mindedness
- Listening and observing
- Deeper trust of self and others
- Reframe mistakes as opportunities to learn and try again
- Relationship building
- Bias for action; especially clear, committed choices

In short, practicing improv builds a skill set and mindset that will help us respond, thrive in, and quickly adapt to the new world of continuous, disruptive change.

Every interpersonal situation has a solution in which everyone wins.

Del Close

NINE PRINCIPLES OF IMPROV (PLUS ONE)

2

yes, and...

- 1. Be fully present:** When doing improv we practice being fully present in the moment. We are not focused on the past, reviewing, evaluating, or judging what just happened. Nor are we not focused on the future, thinking about the end game and figuring out how to control the flow, or deciding what to say or do next. We remain attuned to the present moment. We are relaxed, yet alert, and observant and responsive to others.
- 2. Listen:** It is widely recognized that the best improvisers are not necessarily more clever, funnier, or more quick-witted. The best improvisers are the ones who simply listen better... Improv is about hearing what others – or the situation-- are offering, and building off of it. To paraphrase one of our great American philosophers, Yogi Berra, “You can hear a lot just by listening.”
- 3. Trust:** Improv teaches us to trust ourselves and others. We trust our creative impulses and our choices, knowing that others can help to refine and improve them. Improv helps us to remember that ideas are an infinite resource, so no matter what strange hole it seems we've dug ourselves into, there are literally an infinite number of ideas or approaches that can help dig us out.
- 4. Teamwork: We're all in this together:** Whether you're building an improv scene, or building a library, no single person is responsible for the success or failure of the enterprise. We succeed, or not, based on our ability to work effectively together. Through improv we learn that as a group we can create solutions and next steps that none of us could have created alone. We learn to jump in to help and make each other better, offering what is needed without ego or judgment.
- 5. Serve the scene, not yourself:** In improv we learn to make choices that move the scene forward by paying attention and continually building off of the reality in the current moment. We learn that making choices designed to get attention, or otherwise draw the spotlight to oneself, generally fail and disrupt the collaborative flow. In our organizations, the “scene” can be understood as the organizational mission, the objective, the project goal, or a shared core value. When we collectively direct our energies in service of something bigger than ourselves we experience a fluid sense of teamwork and success.
- 6. Bias for action:** A bias for action is not a prescription for recklessness; it is a call to try things, to make offers, to iterate, and to build off of the new reality. It is no coincidence that management guru Tom Peters lists “bias for action” as a distinguishing feature of agile organizations with an orientation towards learning.

The invitation to improvise is not a prescription for a carelessness approach to life. True improvisation is always an act of responsibility; it implies a conscious morality.

Patricia Ryan
Madson

- 7. Honesty:** In improv we are taught to share truthful expression in the moment. This type of honesty requires a willingness to not censor or judge our own thoughts and trust that all ideas have potential value. Everyone has a unique perspective and viewpoint in the world, and sharing that viewpoint honestly is one of the most important things we have to offer.
- 8. Let go of control:** The only thing we can ever really control is our own choices. Realizing that we are not in control of anything else is the key to de-stressing and getting into the flow. And the flow is where we are creative. The flow is where we are productive. The flow is where we are connected to others. The flow is where we are happy. Interestingly, when we stop focusing energy on things that we cannot control we have more energy to focus on things that we can control, and, paradoxically, we end up exerting more influence.
- 9. There are no mistakes.** In improv, there are no mistakes or bad ideas; there are only interesting choices, learnings and experiences. In improv, we respect all the choices or "offers" made by others, and find ways to build off of them, no matter how challenging this may be. There are no mistakes because everything can be built upon. Everything that happens is an opportunity to learn and move forward.

THE UBER PRINCIPLE: "YES, AND..."

There is one final improv principle. It is a principle that runs through all of the others and serves as the core unifying value to all improv. This is the principle of "Yes, and". "Yes, and" means that we accept everything that happens as an offer, as a gift. It is our job to bring our unique perspective to bear and build off of whatever is given to us. "Yes, and" implies acceptance, but not acquiescence. "Yes, and" acknowledges the reality of the moment, but also inspires us to create the future together.

"Yes, and" is a powerful attitude of affirmation. It is an attitude that affirms ourselves, and therefore builds courage. It is an attitude that affirms others, and therefore inspires trust. And it is an attitude that affirms what is and what can be, and therefore inspires hope and excitement for the possibilities of joining together to creating our shared future.

Say "yes" as often as you can... Cynics always say no. But saying "yes" begins things. Saying "yes" is how things grow. Saying "yes" leads to knowledge... So for as long as you have the strength to, say "yes."

Stephen Colbert

**There's no such thing as a wrong note;
it all depends on how you resolve it.**

-Art Tatum, jazz pianist

“YES, AND” SUGGESTS BOTH WAYS OF BEING AND WAYS OF DOING

Consider the following:

Yes, (Way of Being)

- I am present in this moment without judgment
- I am open to possibilities and perspectives
- I am tuned in. I am open to sensory data
- I am appreciative of what others offer

And... (Way of Doing)

- I actively contribute
- I build off of the current reality, situation, or suggestion
- I invite others to contribute and build off of my offerings
- I support the involvement of everyone

SAY YES TO EVERYTHING?

You might be wondering if “yes, and...” is an appropriate or useful approach to all situations. While it clearly is not appropriate to *literally* say “yes” to everything and anything, adopting a fundamental orientation of “yes, and” can be a useful mindset that helps you become aware of any automatic negative reaction you may experience.

If you engage all new ideas or situations with an initial thought of “yes, and...” you will create space to explore possibilities with an open mind. After thinking things through you can decide whether or not “yes” is the appropriate answer. Conversely, if your automatic immediate response is “but” or “no”, then your creative thought processes are shut down and you will be less likely to perceive creative ways forward.

Using a mindset of “yes, and...” can also help you be a better active listener. We are less willing to listen to each other until we feel that we have been heard. You can use “yes, and...” to remember to affirm what the other person has said. **You can affirm both the literal and emotional content of their message.** (i.e. “Y you sound upset that the report is late.”) When others feel heard and affirmed they are then able to hear you, which opens the door to deeper understanding and a mutual opportunity to effectively influence each other towards acceptable, jointly created solutions.

i imagine that yes
is the only living
thing.

E.E. Cummings

action planning

5

yes, and...

KEY CONCEPTS, INSIGHTS, AND TAKEAWAYS

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

To succeed,
planning alone is
insufficient. One
must improvise as
well.

Isaac Asimov

action planning

ACTIONS I CAN TAKE TO APPLY WHAT I'VE LEARNED

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.

Plato