Improv

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Hello & ... Pass the Clap
Session Evaluations Contest

- Download and open OLC Conferences mobile app
- Navigate to specific session to evaluate
- Click “Evaluate Session” at the bottom of session details screen
- Complete session evaluation*

*Each session evaluation completed (limited to one per session) = one contest entry

Five (5) $25 gift cards will be awarded to five (5) individuals
Must submit evals using the OLC Conferences mobile app or website
How this came about

• Basdadur Creative Problem Solving (2008-09)
  • Ideation, Convergence/Divergence, & Building Challenge Maps
• Design Thinking Cincy meetup – Oct 12, 2016
  • Ideation through an Improv Lens -- Bobby Moran (OTRimprov)
• Intro Improv Class – Oct 29, 2016 @ ImprovCincinnati
• Mike Gorgone – MidwestUX (Improv afterhours)
• Andrew Tarvin – SWOH PMI Summit
• Improv Festival Cincinnati
  • Red Pill Players
  • Two Sketching Girls
  • Lady Parts Detroit
  • Matt Damon Improv – Women of Color Slaying Improv
What is improv (improvisation or impro)

• In its purest form, the dialogue, action, story, and characters are created collaboratively by the players as the improvisation unfolds in present time, without use of an already prepared, written script

• It is about
  • Creativity
  • Relationships
  • Cooperation

• It’s a bit like tap dancing on jello
  • You’re not sure where to begin
  • You’re not sure where it will lead you
  • It will take you new places
  • You will likely fall (fail)
    • And that’s OK
    • Friends are always there to lend a helping hand

• Shake 8s exercise
A brief history of improv

• Atellan Farce ~ 391 BC (north of Naples and south of Rome)
• Commedia dell’Arte – early 1500s
• Viola Spolin - *Improvisation For The Theater* (1906 — 1994)
• Dudley Riggs – “instant theatre”, “word jazz”, Brave New Workshop
• Paul Sils – Spolin was his mother, The Compass Players ➔ The Second City
  • Stephen Colbert & Tina Fey
• Keith Johnstone - *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (1979)
  • Theatresports (1977), Toronto
  • Inspiration for *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*
  • Improv for Storytellers (1999)
• Del Close – *Truth in Comedy* with Charna Halpern, -- the “Harold”
  • If we treat each other as if we are geniuses, poets and artists, we have a better chance of becoming that on stage.
• Dick Chudnow (Kentucky Fried Theater) founded ComedySportz (1984)
Viola Spolin quotes

• **Creativity is not the clever rearranging of the known.**
• That which is not yet known comes out of that which is not yet here.
• It stands to reason that if we direct all our efforts towards reaching a goal, we stand in grave danger of losing everything on which we have based our daily activities.
  • For when a goal is superimposed on an activity instead of evolving out of it, we often feel cheated when we reach it.
• If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever one chooses to learn, and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach them everything it has to teach.
• **First teach a person to develop to the point of their limitation and then-pfft!-break the limitation.**
• **Give a Gift exercise**
Rules of improv
(Lessons from The 2nd City)

• Listening
• Yes, And
• Creating an ensemble
• Co-creation
• Having a willingness to change
• Using failure to be become better
• Follow the “Follower (who becomes the leader)”

LARA method (Bonnie Tinker – 1992) – Constructive Conflict Resolution
  • Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add
  • Love Makes a Family
Listening Is a Muscle

• Listen at every level
  • Words
  • Emotion
  • Intent
  • Be in the moment (present)

• Listen and then speak to only what you heard
• John Wayne – don’t be “short on ears and long on mouth”
• Gift – when partner says something to you
  • Build on what’s being offered

• Active listening - repeat or paraphrase what was said
• Make mistakes work for you
  • Last Word exercise
  • Ba Da Da exercise
  • Double-Link List exercise
Yes, And: How to Make Something Out of Nothing

- Building an idea brick-by-brick
- Can take one to unexpected places and make one a bit ill at ease
- Develop better interpersonal and team communication
- Affirm and build upon an idea
- Be non-judgemental – slows you down
- Brainstorming/ideation sessions
- Taking off filters at an early stage of a brainstorm session allows ideas to go to new places
- In praise of slow thinking in the internet age
  - Ephrat Livni in Quartz Media
- Yes, let’s … exercise
How to Build an Ensemble

• Business of building an ensemble

• Why use the term ENSEMBLE
  • Ensemble is a thing unto itself
  • Ensembles preserve talent
  • Team implies competition

• Successful solo acts are rarely, in fact, solo

• Collaborations can create synergy

• Tight-knit, high-functioning ensembles can create things that no individual could do on his own

• In order for ensembles to be successful they must:
  • Be in the moment
  • Give and take
  • Surrender the need to be right
Co-Creation

• Find THE idea, not your idea
• Be willing to cede control
• Avoid asking questions: this can be seen as
  • a blocking mechanism
  • an attempt to lead/justify the story
  • avoidance or not wanting to participate
    • one of the games played is called Questioning where one can only converse in questions
• Aggression is not improvisation
  • Need a code of behavior along with expectations
  • Share the stage and co-create with respect
• Rapid prototyping
• Some words are funny, until they are not
• In the beginning stick to the rules
• 2-3 Headed Expert exercise
Change

• Changing behaviors requires changing attitudes which requires listening and people paying attention
• Respect, reverence, and authenticity
• Recognition, Pain, Distance
• Calling out the elephant
  • Can Elephants Collaborate
  • The Elephant in the Room is Wearing Red (6 thinking hats)
• Who put my ethics in your compliance?
  • The higher the stakes, the more you can benefit from comedy
• Improv: a way to build change skills
• Refractor exercise
Using Failure & Taking Risks

- Improvisation for the Spirit, Katie Goodman
  - Bad risks
    - Betting on the Chicago Cubs (Nov 7, 2016; 8-7 scoring 2 runs in the 10th)
    - Small risks can lead to huge gains

- Risk taking needs to become a regular part of a one’s life
- You need to feel safe to take risks
- Expect the unexpected
- Rushing creates tension
- Have to be committed
- Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm (Winston Churchill)
- Ahougá (Oscan)
Using Failure

• Thomas Edison – You fail in order to learn (create)

• In Improv - failure can be celebrated & used to become better
  • Fail in public
    • Fail together – fast or incrementally
    • Fail free of judgement - with confidence
    • Fail often - better

• Fail Festival (since 2011, Wash DC)
  • 10 Levels of Failure

• IDEO – failure and risk taking go hand-in-hand

• We Are Failing at Failing by Bill Fischer (Forbes)

• Productive Failure (Dr. Manu Kapur – Lightning talk at ACM SIGCSE)

• The greatest teacher, failure is (Yoda, The Last Jedi)
Follow the Follower

• Ensemble first approach
• Spolin created this exercise
  • Sounds and movement mimicry
  • No leaders and no followers
  • Constant shifting of movement
• Peter Drucker (Leadership effectiveness)
  • Treat workers (students) as assets
• Andrew Alexander (CEO Second City)
  • Build the right sandbox, hire the right people, and get out of the way
• Bossypants (Tina Fey) – improv-based leadership approach
• Follow the Follower exercise
“We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” - Albert Einstein
Improv: a way to build change skills

• Team agility
• Trust and support
• Open communication
  • Cool Hand Luke problem
• Steve Ducker, Microsoft Research Podcast (Dec 20, 2017)
  • Visual Interaction in Business and Entertainment (VIBE)
  • Improvisation
  • A skill that’s really important there that’s surprising is stand-up comedy.
Companies

• Twitter
  • Former Twitter CEO Dick Costolo is an improv veteran (UMich Comp + Comm Sciences)
  • Life is an improvisation. We don’t always know where we’re headed or how we’re gonna get there.
  • You just need to learn the “rules” of improv to help guide the way.
  • He worked with one of my improv classmates
  • He worked at Google for a couple of years

• Google
  • Patricia Ryan Madson: "Improv Wisdom: Don't Prepare, Just Show Up"
  • Dick Costolo worked here for a couple of years

• IDEO
  • 1. To create a happy group atmosphere... Hello & High Five
  • 2. To get people into an agreement mindset... Yes, Let’s!
  • 3. To stretch capacity for attention and focus... Red Ball (Knife)
  • 4. To free people of their inner censor... Ba Da Da
  • 5. To get everyone making eye contact and collaborating... Pass the Clap
Literature review

• **Improv For Effective Collaborative Innovation**, Jeannie Kristufek, IBM Corporation, 2008 WEPAN Conference Proceedings

• **Improvisational Computational Storytelling** in Open Worlds, Lara J. Martin, Brent Harrison, and Mark O. Riedl, School of Interactive Computing, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, Lecture Notes in Computer Science · November 2016


• **Improvisation: Yes and Psychotherapy!**, Christine Lee Mannella, MA, Adler Graduate School, 2010

• An Examination of the **Connection Between Genuine Dialogue and Improv**, Kathleen P. O’Neal, MA, U of Central Florida, 1993

• **Using Improvisation to Enhance the Effectiveness of Brainstorming**, Elizabeth Gerber, Northwestern University, CHI 2009

• A Study of the **Experiential Service Design Process** at a Luxury Hotel, Natalie Weathers Nixon, PhD, Harrow Business School, 2010

• **Education in Professionalism: Improvisation**, Richard B. Gunderman, MD, PhD, Dept of Radiology, Indiana University, Academic Radiology, May 2016
Literature review (cont)


• **Improvisation as a tool for Improving the Teachers Knowledge** In Basic Technology, Dr. ADU F. O, Adu E .I (M.Ed), Postgraduate School College Of Education Ikere Ekiti, Journal of Research & Method in Education, Jan. 2014

• **How Improv Acting Makes Better Technologists** (CMU’s Entertainment Technology Center), Jessica Trybus, [techonomy.com](http://techonomy.com), March 13, 2013

• **Beyond Productivity**: Information, Technology, Innovation, and Creativity, William J. Mitchell, Alan S. Inouye, and Marjory S. Blumenthal, Editors, Committee on Information Technology and Creativity, National Research Council, 2003

• **Strategic Change** and the **Jazz Mindset**: Exploring Practices That Enhance Dynamic Capabilities for **Organizational Improvisation**, Ethan S. Bernstein and Frank J. Barrett, Research in Organizational Change and Development, Volume 19, 2011

• Planning **Human-Computer Improvisation**, Jerome Nika, Jose Echeveste, Marc Chemillier, Jean-Louis Giavitto, International **Computer Music** Conference, Sep 2014
Improv and Autism

• Susan Faja, PhD
  • Autism researcher, but likens her job to improv
  • Boston Children’s Hospital’s Laboratories of Cognitive Neuroscience
  • She is examining whether computer training can change brain responses and behavior in children with autism spectrum disorder.
  • “yes, and...” philosophy

• Rachel Magin
  • A doctoral student (Feb 13, 2017) at Psychology Lab at Indiana State
  • If children improvise different situations, think about their emotions and how they show them, then they'll be able to communicate more clearly in life
  • "What improv really does is create a safe and fun and authentic environment in which to practice, where mistakes really don't matter," - Jim Ansaldo, a research scholar at Indiana University

• Robin Fox and Barbara Huges (Acting Social)
  • Autism, Life and Learning Improv
  • Social Emotional Learning
Urban Improv, Boston

• Created in 1992 as a response to Boston’s escalating youth violence.

• The Freelance Players, Inc., in collaboration with the Boston Public Schools, launched Urban Improv after a year of research, evaluation, and fund raising.
  • An initiative of the Boston Foundation for students 4-8 in Boston city schools

• To catalyze positive youth development with a focus on violence prevention: a rehearsal for life.

• Directed to children at risk, the program was initially modeled on the Living Stage, a successful community outreach program in Washington D.C.

• A professional acting ensemble with experience in education, psychology, and theater for young people now runs the program.
TEDx Talks

1. Dave Morris - The Way of Improvisation
2. Vicky Saye Henderson - Improvisation exercises
3. Steve Matuszak - The art of improvisation
4. Paul Z Jackson - The Power of 'Yes...And’
5. Karen Tilstra - 2 words that can change the world
6. Zach Beattie - The art of improvisation
7. Natalie Nixon - 7 rules for improvising at work
8. Keith Johnstone - Don’t Do Your Best
9. Charles Limb - Your Brain on Improv
10. Uri Alon - Scientific research and ... improv?
11. Andrew Tarvin - Humor at Work
12. Jennifer Hunter - Be an improvisor, change the world
13. Mark Zmarzly - How Saying Yes Can Change Your Life
14. Avish Parashar - Why the world needs improv
15. Galen Emanuele - Improv to be a better human being
16. Rachel Stromberg - What improv has taught me about leadership
17. Rapid Fire Theatre (RFT)
TEDx Speakers Key TakeAways

• Dave Morris
  • Improvisation is a process
  • Life is improvised

• Vicky Saye Henderson - 3 part series on improv exercises
  • Make your partner look good and insanely smart
  • Create an environment of safety and trust

• Steve Matuszak
  • Improvisation is the ability and the willingness to start from nothing.
  • If, however, one starts from nothing, anything is possible

• Paul Z. Jackson
  • Augusto Boal -- Games for Actors and Non-actors
  • Applied Improvisation Network (AIN) 2018 Conference - Paris
  • 58-1/2 ways to Improvise
  • The Solutions Focus

• Karen Tilstra, PhD, Florida Hospital's Innovation Lab
  • Yes – I am suspending judgement
  • And – I will help move the idea forward
  • Best memories can come from bad ideas - provide you survive
TEDx Speakers Key TakeAways (cont)

• Zach Beattie
  • It's time for the world to stop dividing people into the "creatives" and the "non-creatives"
  • Improv is a process – it is not about being funny
  • It's about spontaneity, imagination, and taking the unexpected and then doing something unexpected with it

• Natalie Nixon, PhD
  • Prof in Fashion Merchandising & Management at Philadelphia University
  • “Yes to the Mess: Surprising Leadership Lessons from Jazz” - Frank Barrett
  • Chaordic system – Dee Ward Hock (founder VISA)

• Keith Johnstone
  • Those who say ‘yes’ are rewarded by the adventures they have. Those who say ‘no’ are rewarded by the safety they attain.
  • Improvisors need to be taught to think inside the box, if they are truly going to be successful.

• Charles Limb – Doctor and musician
  • He put jazz musicians and rappers in an fMRI to find out during musical improvisation
  • Their brains turn off areas linked to self-censoring and inhibition—and turn on those that let self-expression flow

• Uri Alon - Prof and Systems Biologist - Weizmann Institute of Science
  • Science is never a simple equation. There’s a big fuzzy area in the middle and entirely unexpected result.
  • Scientists are prone to shutting down ideas, saying “yes, and” helps them to bypass fear and skepticism, and in so doing unlock creativity
TEDx Speakers Key TakeAways (cont)

• Andrew Tarvin
  • While at P&G taught his team how to use improv
  • Keynote speaker at 2018 SWOH PMI in March
  • HumorThatWorks.org

• Jennifer Hunter
  • Lake Superior State University
  • Using improvisation to achieve a greater sense of self

• Mark Zmarzly
  • English major -- University of Nebraska-Lincoln
  • CEO & founder of Hip Pocket (Hip Money app)
  • That serendipitous moment

• Avish Parashar
  • Performs, directs and teaches improv comedy
  • Ding happens – Be a ding maker

• Galen Emanuele
  • “Yes, And” Manifesto
  • Shift Yes: Creating Exceptional Team Culture

• Rachel Stromberg
  • Girl scouts and how improv became a part of her life
  • Training & Development Professional for Allstate
Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science

- Stony Brook University
- Empower scientists and health professionals to communicate complex topics in clear, vivid, and engaging ways
- Alda-Kavli Learning Center
- Theme
  - Using Improv with Scientists
  - Memo to science nerds: Learn improv
- Exercises drawn from Stanislavski and Augusto Boal
- UC Journalism Professor Meets MASH Star, Learns to Communicate Science
  - Elissa Yancey (2011)
- Created partnership with SUNY under former Chancellor Nancy Zimpher
Resources (books and other)

- Yes, And – Lessons from The Second City – Kelly Leonard and Tom Yorton
- Getting to “Yes And” The Art of Business Improv – Bob Kulhan
- Comedy Improvisation Manual – M. Besser, I. Roberts, & M. Walsh (The Upright Citizens Brigade)
- Improv Wisdom -- Patricia Ryan Madson; 13 improv-inspired life-maxims
- Business Improv – Val Gee and Sarah Gee (75 improv activities)
- The Improv Handbook -- Deborah Frances-White and Tom Salinsky
- Improvisation at the Speed of Light -- David Pasquesi, Pamela Victor, and T. J. Jagodowski
- Improv Wins -- Chris Trew and Tami Nelson
- Group Improvisation -- Charna Halpern and Peter Gwinn
- Free Play: Improvisation -- Stephen Nachmanovitch
- Improvising Better -- Jimmy Carrane and Liz Allen
- Improv For Everyone -- Greg Tavares
Web Resources

- Improv for Everyone
- Upright Comedy Brigade
- YesAnd.com (Jimmy Carrane, podcasts)
- Improv Encyclopedia
- Creative Problem Solving Institute
- International Center for Studies in Creativity – Buffalo State University
- ImprovEdge -- Karen Hough (Columbus, OH)
- All Things Improv (AgileImprov.com)
- Applied Improvisation Network (AIN)
- Improv Resource Center – podcasts
- LearnImprov.com
- Comedy in the Classroom
- Improvised Life
The Periodic Table of Improvisation

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www.thewayofimprovisation.com/periodictable/

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