

What is Improvisation?

Improvisation is the art of performing without the aid of a script; everything is made up on the spot! In an improv scene, teammates work together to tell stories, create characters, and play within the reality they've built together. Improv is an art form that asks us to resist the urge to say "no;" we must agree with whatever our teammates present to us.

How can the skills developed in an improv workshop benefit teams offstage?

Improv is about agreement. By saying, "yes, and," participants create an environment of positivity, where every choice is a gift and there are no mistakes or failures. How many times have you been in a meeting where you or a colleague present an idea, and instead of agreeing to explore it, the rest of the group pushes back on the idea or questions it? As humans, we often see problems or barriers. Improv trains teams to approach ideas with an open mind and an attitude of "yes." Secondly, it trains participants to build on and support each other's ideas (that's where the "and" comes in in "yes, and"). This helps foster creative ideas and out-of-the-box thinking.

Improv is also about active listening. Rather than think or plan choices ahead of time, the best improvisers react to the last thing their teammates say. They live in the moment.

Finally, in an improv workshop, everyone has fun and feels silly together. There is no corporate hierarchy. Improv is an effective bonding tool that acts as an equalizer and creates trust.

How should you run an improv workshop?

Start with warm-ups to help the participants loosen up. Then, move into introductory games, where teams have fun and practice the fundamentals of improv (saying "yes, and," trusting teammates, etc.). Ideally, participants will build on skills throughout the session, and by the end, they'll be able to do a performance activity together.

Tools for Improv:

A chair for each person, a bell, and an open mind!

THE RULES OF IMPROV

+ Say "yes, and"

Saying "yes" creates agreement in scenes. You are agreeing to your scene partner's reality. The "and" is your contribution, and how you move the scene along.

For example:

AMY: *Megan, I'm so excited to go to your birthday party!*

MEGAN: *Yes, and I invited my sister Kate. It has been ages since we've all been together.*

The "yes, and" approach in this example puts the players on a path with a clear direction: Megan is having a birthday party. Amy and Kate will be attending. They all like each other, and it has been a while since they've seen each other.

Saying "no" in a scene stops it in its tracks. For example:

AMY: *Megan, I'm so excited to go to your birthday party!*

MEGAN: *I'm not having a party.*

While this may get a chuckle from the audience, Megan has put Amy in a tough spot. Now, Amy has to justify why she thought Megan was having a party. Taking that few seconds to think puts Amy in her head. She's no longer actively listening, and the two players are stuck.

+ Don't think; React to the last thing said

Improv can be intimidating because we all want to do well, be funny, and not let our teammates down.

Sometimes, the desire to do all those things puts us in our heads. But, rather than brainstorm how to get your funny robot character in the scene or that clever joke you've been working on, just listen. What you say in response to the last thing your partner says will always be the most relevant – and funny.

THE RULES OF IMPROV CONT'D

+ Don't Judge, Make Your Partner Look Good

This means don't judge yourself or your teammates. You're all in this together. All choices are good choices. There are no mistakes. Just trust yourself and your team. Have each other's backs. If you make it your mission to make your partner look good and they do the same, you can't go wrong.

+ Follow The Fear

A little nervous energy can be a good thing; it keeps you on your toes and present in the moment. If you trust your teammates and say "yes, and," you can't go wrong.

+ HAVE FUN!

Warm-Up Exercises

CLOVER

(Listening, Developing Group Mind, Developing Themes)

This is a word association game. Think of the shape of a clover plant. Imagine that the first leaf represents a word, i.e. "ice." The next leaf represents the next word that comes to mind after hearing "ice", i.e. "cream." The third leaf represents the next word that comes to mind after hearing "cream," i.e. "coffee." Each participant represents a leaf of the clover.

Here's how it's played: Players stand in a circle. Player A says a word. Player B, next to him, says the first word that comes to her mind after hearing Player A's word. Player C says the first word that comes to his mind after hearing Player B's word. Players must react to the last word said, not the initial word.

The object of the game is to get back to the first word said. Any player in the circle can make the connection if the opportunity presents itself. Here's an example:



Player A: *Ice* Player E: *Hot*
Player B: *Cream* Player F: *Cold*
Player C: *Coffee* Player B: *Ice!*
Player D: *Cup*

GREETINGS

(Ice Breaker, Exploring Communication Styles)

Players walk around the room, greeting each other as themselves. They say hello and one or two other things to each other – just checking in. Then, the coach will tell the players to greet each other in different ways:



Greet your partners as if you're long-lost friends.

Greet your partners as if they owe you money (but don't talk about the money; just let it inform how you approach the other people.)

Greet your partners as if they are very smelly (but don't talk about the odor; just let it inform how you approach the other people.)

Warm-Up Exercises Cont'd

YES, LET'S

(Agreement, Teamwork, Heightening and Supporting Ideas, Developing Group Mind)

Players work together to build stage pictures and mini scenes. The instructor suggests an activity, i.e. having a picnic. The players contribute ideas and then act them out after saying in unison, "Yes, let's." The goal of this game is to not only affirm each other's ideas, but also to heighten them. The entire team must act out each idea before moving onto the next. For example:



AMY: *Let's go to the beach!*
EVERYONE: *Yes, let's!*
MEGAN: *Let's build a sandcastle!*
EVERYONE: *Yes, let's!*
KATE: *Let's pour water into the moat!*
EVERYONE: *Yes, let's!*
DAN: *Let's jump in the ocean!*
EVERYONE: *Yes, let's!*

PRESENTS

(Agreement, Heightening and Supporting Ideas, Responding in the Moment)

These are two-person scenes, in which Player A mimes giving Player B a gift. Player B must specify what the gift is. Player A must justify the gift. For example:



PLAYER A: *I got you a gift.*
PLAYER B: *Yes, and it's paper towels.*
PLAYER A: *Yes, and now you can clean up that wine you spilled on my kitchen floor.*



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Amy Lafko

amy@cairnncs.com

cairnncs.com

570-617-7836



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