

Leading Means Letting Go

YOU WOULDN'T THINK IT,
BUT EMBRACING THE RULES
OF IMPROV IS THE QUICKEST
WAY TO BUILDING TRUST.



Remembering to say yes is the hardest part. That small word should be on the top of my tongue, eager to be heard. But here I am saying no again, and the scene crumbles like a collapsible toy.

Improv's first rule is to say yes. It is the foundation for all that happens in a scene. Saying no kills the scene and stymies the creative process. There's more than yes, though; you have to add "and" to it—show that you're really listening and help build on what was said.

"The concept of 'yes, and' is very effective and easily implemented," said Izzy Gesell, CSP, a presentation coach, professional facilitator and

workshop leader. "It highlights the differences between acceptance of another person's point of view and agreement with that perspective; it allows folks to disagree without becoming disagreeable; it helps people become more active listeners and it diffuses tensions caused by 'Yes...But.'"

LISTENING IS AN EQUALLY important Improv rule, and some-

thing that great leaders do the most. The art of listening, though, means that you have to give up control. If you walk out on stage with a preconceived idea, trying to steer the scene a certain way, you're not really listening. You have to be comfortable giving up a certain amount of control in order to reach the scene's fullest potential.

"There are many reasons why leaders tend to like to have control. Comfort and assurance it will be done as they planned are probably the most prominent," said Clay Barton, an improv instructor and co-owner of the Dallas Comedy

House. "In improv, if you do not trust, you will not be trusted and you will fail. It's as simple as that. We are making things up as we go, together. Unless you listen and trust your scene partners, you will be alone while they stand there confused. It is paramount that you trust and support your partners and believe that they will help you through this process. You cannot plan what is happening, because you cannot control the other people. You have no choice but to let go."

Effective leaders know how and when to act on things they can control and let go of things they cannot, says Gesell, who will be presenting "Practiced Spontaneity: Cultivating the Leader Within Through Improv Theater Skills" at MPI's World Education Congress next month.

"Because improv games involve more than one person, and because it is impossible to predict or direct the exact direction

Improv @ WEC

**Don't miss Izzy Gesell, CSP,
presenting "Practiced Spontaneity:
Cultivating the Leader Within
Through Improv Theater Skills"
at MPI's World Education
Congress in July!**



ONE WAY TO RELINQUISH CONTROL IS TO TREAT EVERYONE LIKE THEY'RE GENIUSES.

BY JASON HENSEL

of any game, a leader who tries to control the game will soon find that it is futile,” Gesell said. “By recognizing when, in the games, she or he is trying to control things that are not controllable, the person learns about how to recognize when to go with the flow and let go of the control illusion. So first, improv is about realizing that you are trying to control something that is not controllable, and then improv offers ways to relinquish that control.”

ONE WAY TO RELINQUISH that control is to treat everyone like they’re geniuses. Consider how great the world would be if everyone was treated like they were the world’s smartest people. Treat everyone like they’re geniuses and they may start to become them. No one wants to do an improv scene where one partner is treating the others like they’re stupid, just like no one wants to work with anyone who treats them the same

way.

“You are taught in improv to support each other no matter what and learn that you will be supported no matter what,” Barton said. “That group support creates an environment where confidence is bestowed upon you.”

And with confidence comes innovation and engagement, two qualities that great leaders need in order to succeed.

“Improv training fosters a climate of connection, creation and ability to work through problems,” Gesell said. “Company employees are more creative and involved, which helps in recruitment, retention, stress management and change management. They also are able to work through challenges with less blame.”

Great improvisers all exhibit qualities that great leaders have, too: willingness to experience new

things, self awareness, openness to other viewpoints, willing to take risks, presence and trust.

AND BARTON SAYS GROUPS that play to each others’ strengths, as opposed to looking out for themselves, always have better end results.

“Those that are successful are those that let improv and its principles affect their lives outside of the theater,” he said. “Improv teaches you to listen and react honestly and allows you, in a safe environment, to remove all of the filters that have

been developed over time—filters that hide your true responses. Once those filters are removed, your true self is revealed. Once the discomfort of that has passed, you come out a more confident individual knowing that your reactions to what life brings you are truly yours and not what outside influences have made you believe.”

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