

IMPROV-LA

SECRETS OF IMPROV REVEALED



KEITH SALTOJANES

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*For all those who has wanted to change their life,
and then followed through.*

LET'S BEGIN

The world doesn't need more people who fit in. We need people who will stand out from the crowd and use their unique experiences and personalities to create new ideas. Improv, while it may just seem like a fun and silly thing that actors do on TV or stage, is actually a powerful secret skill known only to some. It's one that, if harnessed for the real world, can bring about great change and fun in your own life.

If you do any research, you can easily discover that many of today's, not only successful actors and writers, but also leaders in business have studied and trained in the skills of improv. There's a reason for this; being able to think quickly on your feet, not letting fear and self-judgment get in your way, and letting your personality shine through, no matter what unknown

situation you find yourself in, are some of the most useful abilities you can harness throughout your life and career.

Within this book, we'll go through the same skills of improv that those in entertainment use, but we'll also explore how to apply those same skills to your everyday life. These are skills that, unless you actively decide to make improv comedy your new path in life, are kept secret from most people in the world. Yet, it's something we all could use.

Think about it. When we wake up in the morning, we don't have a script of how the day is going to go. So really, we are improvising every day anyway! We might think we know how work, a social event, or a dinner with family is going to go based on how it went last time we did those things. However, once something happens that's different—which is sure to happen—

that's when we get caught in our heads, overthink, and freeze, not sure what to say.

But if we approach moments like this from the present moment and trust that we will be able to know how to respond (by using the skills outlined in this handy book), then we can enter situations with less stress, less wasted time preplanning for outcomes that we can't predict, and also enjoy more moments in our life.

But before any of that, let's talk about what even is improv.

WHAT IS IMPROV?

So, what really is improv—or improvisation, as its full name is. You might have seen a stand-up comedian or watched comedic shows or sitcoms and thought, maybe that's improv. Well, not exactly. Improv is all

about being in the moment, with nothing pre-planned, and just going with the flow...sounds like life, right?

Now, stand-up comedy isn't improv because they have an act all thought-out, written down, and practiced to make it seem spontaneous, but it's very much not. Sure, sometimes there is an improvised ad-lib moment off of what someone in the crowd said, but many times even those they have rehearsed and have ready to go in their back pocket.

The same goes for comedic TV shows—they might feel real, but they're fully scripted and memorized. Even a show like *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, which has improvised dialogue, still has an outline of what's going to happen in the scene, and they do many takes and edit together the best parts, so it's not fully improvised.

Think of it like this: in an improv show, performers hit the stage without any script or any ideas at all and create everything on the spot. Characters, scenes, stories... it's all made up—and trust me, it is—I've done and seen thousands of shows, and there is never anything pre-planned. Improv people like improv because of the fact it's created in the moment.

While improv, as most know it, is funny—think of *Whose Line Is It Anyway*—improv itself doesn't mean funny. It's just about embracing the unknown. Everyone might feel nervous in new situations, but that's when our real creativity shines through as we respond in the moment without a script.

So, in a nutshell, improv is all about being spontaneous, going with the flow, and embracing the unpredictable moments that make life interesting. It's not about

following a plan but letting your authentic self react naturally to whatever life throws your way!

Now, the hardest thing to do in improv is come up with that first thing. If I said, “Go give a speech right now...GO!” you wouldn’t even know where to start. Because of this, as modern improv started to be performed and used, there were some helpful guidelines that were created to make coming up with spontaneous thoughts easier to do.

Which brings us to the rules of improv.

IMPROV'S SECRET RULES

RULE #1: LISTENING

The first and most important rule of improvising is listening. Yes, that's right—a thing we do naturally and automatically all the time. But the difference here is fully active, even reactive listening.

Everything we need to know is given to us in what we hear from someone else, in what they say and even what they don't say. But many times we're so in our heads we completely miss these important pieces of information.

Think about when you may have met someone, and they told you their name, but you forgot it only seconds later. That's not because your memory is

fading; it's because we weren't listening in the present moment.

Listening brings us to *right now*, which is a place few of us go about our day from. Most of us are thinking about things they did in the past—maybe having regrets about or feeling depressed about—or we are thinking about the future (which gives us fear and anxiety). Both of those places don't exist right now, and since right now is where we create and respond and everything that happens to us from, that's the place we want to be.

So, going back to listening, if we fully listen, it keeps us present and removes that depression and anxiety—even for a small moment.

Imagine this: you're having a chat with your friends or co-workers, and instead of just waiting for your turn to

Speak, you really tune in to what they're saying. You nod, smile, and show genuine interest in their stories. Boom! Instantly, you'll notice a difference. People love being heard, and they'll feel a deeper connection with you because you're truly present.

When you listen actively, you start picking up on those subtle cues in conversations. You might catch someone dropping hints about what they really want or need, and you can respond with just the right thing at the right time. It's like being a mind-reader, but in a totally cool and not-creepy way!

And listening isn't only about words. Paying attention to body language and emotions is like having a secret decoder. You can sense when someone's feeling down or super excited, and you can adjust your response accordingly, showing empathy and support, which will

connect you to that person more than any pre-planned speech you worked all night on.

And here's the best part—when you truly listen, you'll find yourself in more meaningful and memorable interactions. It's like having those "a-ha" moments, where you discover common interests, goals, and passions with others. You might uncover shared experiences and create inside jokes that only you and your close friends understand!

So, it can't be stressed enough—don't underestimate the secret of listening in everyday life. Embrace the improv rule of being fully present and engaged, and watch as your connections deepen, your business relationships blossom, and your everyday moments become extraordinary! Get ready to level up your social game and make each interaction a fun and

memorable one that you don't have to be so stressed about!

RULE #2: YES, AND

This is the most common rule of improv, but I say you can't "*Yes And*" if you aren't listening.

Again, the hardest part of improv is coming up with that first thing, so once that happens, we want to build off this instead of trying to have to come up with our own stuff.

Yes, And simply means that when something is said, we agree to that as fact and then add your own information or ideas to it. It's the difference between a "Yes But" or a flat-out "No..." Both of those things are when one person is trying to push their own ideas and

not open to anything new. *Yes, And* is really about letting go of control and going into the unknown and building positive collaboration together.

Now, let's apply this rockstar rule to business. Imagine you're brainstorming with your team, and someone suggests a crazy idea—instead of shooting it down, you go all in with *Yes, And!* You say, "Yes, that's a wild idea, and we could take it even further by adding this cool twist!" The more minds working towards a goal, the better ideas you're going to get, and that's where *Yes And* comes in.

Some people ask, "well what if I don't agree with the idea?" *Yes, And* says to agree to it because you don't know where it may lead. The first idea we agree to is not the end result. If you keep agreeing and adding with *Yes And*, you may end up with an idea completely different than where you started—one that may be the

answer or even just another new place to jump off with more *Yes, Anding* to create the answer to your goal.

Plus, the *AND* in *Yes, And* is where you get to add your own opinion and information to the idea. It isn't just a *Yes* with nothing else, but by adding your own thoughts to build forward, you are really creating this idea together.

But wait, it gets better! In social life, *Yes, And* is the key to being the life of the party! When someone invites you to a new adventure or suggests trying something out of your comfort zone, you don't hold back. You go all in with *Yes, And!* You say, "Yes, I'm up for that adventure, and let's invite more friends to join the fun!" Suddenly, you're the social butterfly, spreading good vibes wherever you go!

And here's the secret sauce - *Yes, And* is all about building bridges, not walls. You become a master collaborator, bringing people together, and making everyone feel valued and heard—and all anyone wants is to be heard. It's like being the conductor of a fantastic improv orchestra, where every note plays in harmony, creating a symphony of success and joy!

RULE #3: ASSUME

This might go against everything you've ever been taught in your life, but a very useful rule of improv is to assume...with curiosity.

Many times, when we aren't sure of a situation, we end up asking a bunch of questions and putting all the pressure to keep things moving forward on the other person by having them give a bunch of answers. But in improv, no one knows what's going on better than

anyone else. So instead of—basically—interviewing the other person, it's more useful to build it together.

This rule can also be called "Don't Ask Questions," or better yet, let's call it "Yes, And - Assume Information!" Trust me, it's like a secret sauce for both business and social interactions that'll make you the improv superstar of everyday life!

Say you're chatting with a friend, and they drop a hint or give you some clues about their mood. Instead of being all "I don't know" or asking empty questions like "What's wrong?" or "What should we do?" put on your improv hat and assume with curiosity! Go like, "You sound a bit down, everything going okay?" You've opened a whole new conversation path and showed your friend that you're totally in sync with them!

Now I know you've heard "making assumptions makes an ass out of you and me"—which is fun wordplay, but not useful when we add curiosity to the mix. We aren't acting like we know it all! Make light assumptions that invite more info. It's like saying, "Hey, I got a hunch, but

you can tell me if I'm wrong!" Because here's the magic—people love being right, and if you get it wrong, they'll set you straight, and you get even more juicy details!

So, forget the "Don't Assume" stigma! When you embrace it with curiosity, you're not stating facts—you're igniting conversations, building connections, and diving into exciting new territories of understanding others.

Listen to how someone says something, then make an assumption. Right or wrong, you are going to get more information from them and thus make better connections than a dreaded “Hey, how’s it going?” question.

Remember, the rules of improv are like the coolest recipe for whipping up powerful interactions. Listen, agree, and add, assume, and you'll be the star of the show, even if it's not an actual show but just a business meeting or social gathering! So, learn these rules like the back of your hand, and you'll feel much less

nervous and even more confident when unknown situations come your way.

But... I'm not just going to leave it at that. You may have the information about the rules, but it's putting them into practice where they really can start to be useful for you.

IMPROV EXERCISES

Mastering any new skill is about being able to do it without thinking about how to do it. To do that, you need practice. Listed here are some improv exercises that you can practice completely on your own—or can teach to a friend and do with them.

Remember, the more you do these, and the less you judge yourself about feeling weird or looking like a fool or worrying about being good at them, the quicker they will start to settle in your brain.

Look, a lot of these are silly on purpose. The more you can stretch yourself out of your old routine and push past your comfort zone, the better you'll be when you find yourself in an unknown situation in life. So, sure, you probably won't have to start singing at a

presentation, but because you were able to commit to playing the improv game, having to simply talk in front of people without a song will be that much easier.

Also, for any examples included in these exercises, I will also be improvising them myself while writing them. You'll have to trust that I didn't pre-plan or try to edit them into better examples...but am walking the walk and literally making them up in the moment. Enjoy!

SHAKE & STRETCH

Creativity is best done not only using your brain but your whole body. We want to retrain ourselves for living not only as neck-up creatures, overthinking everything in our heads, but to be within our entire selves.

How to Do It:

1) Stand up and literally *SHAKE IT OUT*—shake your arms, your legs, your neck (carefully), your hands... everything. This will put us in our bodies as we get present with the feeling of everything moving.

2) Next, *STRETCH IT OUT*—slowly bend at your waist and let yourself hang with your arms loose. Let out any sounds or noises you feel within you and take a few deep breaths.

3) Then, slowly, one vertebra at a time, stand back up to the resting position.

4) At the top, take another deep breath in and let it out.

The goal is to make you feel more relaxed and present, ready to face whatever is coming your way.

WORD ASSOCIATION

Most people think they can't do improv because they feel they aren't quick enough to come up with ideas.

But again, the toughest part of improv is inventing that first thing, which is why we learn to listen (there's that word again!) and react off what's right in front of us. By doing this, you will never have to start from nothing, and you'll find that there is always something to react to if we notice the present moment.

Don't worry, this isn't a psychological exam looking at the words you say with having meaning. It's all about letting your mind connect to the last thing you heard.

How to Do It:

- 1) Get one random word (either from a random word generator online, a random page you open to in a book, or the first thing you see when opening social media).
- 2) Now, one word at a time, name the first thing that comes to mind off that word.
- 3) Next, quickly say a new word off the second word, and again off the third, and keep going as fast as you can without overthinking what to say next.
- 4) See if you can do ten words to start.

Don't judge yourself or try to think of the 'right word.' With improv, there is no wrong answer except for no

answer. As long as you make some connection, the game keeps moving. It isn't about saying the best word, but it's freeing up your mind to just keep saying more and more words. Get out of your head, let go, and play.

The goal here is to show you that you have ideas in your head if you get out of your own way and allow your mind to connect to them, and by doing so, you will never run out of stuff to say or think of. Every new idea is inspired by something that came before it. It's the same in science and art, as well as anything we create in our minds.

Tips:

- All the words shouldn't relate to the first word. That first word is only the jumping-off point that can lead to many other unrelated ideas down the line.

- This is a great exercise you can practice throughout the day. Try it next time you are stuck in traffic or bored in a waiting room.
- You can do this out loud to yourself, or write the words down on a sheet of paper, as fast as you can.
- Once you do 10 words, try setting a timer and see how many you can do in a set amount of time, such as 30 seconds. Then try for a minute.

Example:

"Goat...Farm...Milk...Ice...Cream...Summer...Hot...Spicy...Salsa...Cinco De Mayo...Party...Birthday...Hats...Baseball Game...Friends...Family...Holidays...Turkey...Birds...The Jungle...Volcano..."

See? The words "Goat" and "Volcano" aren't directly related, but by using Word Association, we start with

one idea and end up with a totally new idea we wouldn't have reached if we just told ourselves "think of something new." It's all about connecting ideas to reach new ones!

YES, AND STORY

This can either be done with a partner or on your own.

How to do it:

- 1) Say any statement at all to begin.
- 2) Next, say the word "Yes" followed by the previous statement and then say "And" along with adding a new piece of information to the story.

3) Then repeat only the previous statement and continue "*Yes, Anding*" to build a story.

The goal here is to demonstrate that we can use anything as a jumping-off point, and if we agree and add to everything created, it will bring us to an interesting idea that we wouldn't have otherwise reached.

Example:

"I'm going on a trip."

"Yes, I'm going on a trip. And, I'm excited about it."

"Yes, I'm excited about it. And, I'm going to meet an old friend."

"Yes, I'm going to meet an old friend. And, we're going skiing in the Alps."

"Yes, we're going skiing in the Alps. And, we hope to find the Abominable Snowman."

“Yes, we hope to find the Abominable Snowman. And, we’ll all be friends.”

“Yes, we’ll all be friends. And, we’ll all go on another trip together next year.”

“Yes, we’ll all go on another trip together next year. And, we’ll try to befriend the Loch Ness Monster!”

In this story, we started with ‘going on a trip’ that could have been a regular trip, but by *Yes Anding*, it led to a very fantastical trip that is new and creative, without having to sit down and pre-plan an entire story!

Tips:

- You don’t have to remember and repeat every statement that was said before the last turn, but only the one that came right before them. It’s an exercise in building, not memorization.

- It's best to "And" with the next logical thing that can happen in the story. Sure, aliens can show up in big cowboy hats and serve everyone cocktails, but let's stick to the simple, most obvious choices that may come next for right now instead. It's better to focus on building off of the last line than trying to show off how creative you can be. That comes later with more practice of this.

- We say the word "Yes" before repeating the statement because it puts the sentence right in the front of our brains and allows us to react to it specifically. Without this vital part of the exercise, it's easy for your mind to start to think of where you want the story to go next and not fully LISTEN to what was just said.

- Lastly, be sure to say "And" instead of "But." Saying "But" is a slight denial of the statement that was said.

It's meaning that—yes, this statement happened but you wish it hadn't, so you can go with your own idea of where you wanted the story to go. You can only build off of what was last said, so trying to guide the story in a preconceived concept is definitely not improvisation. Go with the flow!

THESE ARE FIVE THINGS

How to Do It:

For this, you're going to make up a list of five things as fast as you can based on a category. Again, use a random word generator (or any of the previous suggestions for finding random words) and name five things that could be in that category.

Here are some examples:

- Five songs you like.
 - Five movies that you've never seen.
 - Five foods you can always eat.
 - Five Disney characters they'll never make.
 - Five cities with the best toilets.
- ... the more creative the category, the more fun you can have naming things.

The goal here is to work on thinking of ideas within a genre or category as fast as you can. And it's improv, so like everything we're doing, they don't have to be real, correct, funny, or anything you actually think is true. Saying "*cheese*" as a food you can always eat won't make you 'lose' if in real life you're a vegan. It's all pretend!

Again, it's about going fast. Having all day to think of answers defeats the purpose here. We want you to get past the judgments in your head that make you always

pre-plan what you want to say. Just let go, and write your answers as fast as you can.

STORY RANT

This original exercise is an excellent one to do on your own. All you will need is a list of random words—however you have been getting them works fine. Look, you're going to be using a lot of "list of random words" throughout improv, so I won't be telling you how to get them every time. That'd be too much, right?

How to do it:

1) Choose one of those words and immediately start telling a real, truthful, personal story based on that word. It doesn't have to be funny, organized, or even that interesting. Just start talking.

2) Then, when you get in a good flow with that story, point to another word and start a new, unrelated story immediately.

3) Do this until all the words are done.

Alternatively, you can do this while driving or walking around your city. Instead of using random words, you can apply whatever things catch your eye and start telling a story about what that item reminds you of.

With more than one person, you can alternate who is saying the stories while the other person throws random words their way. It's best to start a new word when the speaker (or yourself) gets comfortable in the current story. Even if they don't complete the story, once they get locked into telling that one, switch it up so their brain has to refocus on a new idea.

The goal here is to work the mind-muscle of connecting to ideas and memories. Just like Word Association, they give you a jumping-off point and help you think of unique ideas, instead of overthinking and not being able to come up with anything.

Tips:

- You can set a timer for 30 seconds to alert you to switch to the next word and make you think on your feet even more.

- If you don't know what something is or don't think you have a story about that word, you can Word Associate whatever you think the word means. For example, maybe you don't have a story about "*Underground Pop Music*," but that makes you think of "*Underground*," which in turn makes you think of a story about making pillow forts as a kid and pretending

you were living underground. Get it? As long as you can let your mind connect to some story, you are doing it right.

LISTENING PRESENCE

This simple, yet very powerful exercise, brings you into the present moment without needing to do anything... really, this is about doing nothing, yet noticing everything.

How to Do It:

1) Right now, take this moment and really listen. Hear if you can notice all the sounds in the room. Don't try to label them ("oh, that was a car!"), don't judge them ("why are those people so loud?"), you don't even have to question what they are; just hear them. Really try to

hear as many different sounds as you can, as if you were listening to a beautiful piece of music.

2) Now try to hear the silences between the sounds. Maybe some sounds come and go, and there's never complete silence, but there will most likely be moments of somewhat-silence between every sound.

3) Next, while still fully listening, look around the room and look at your hands. You might notice things that you haven't really noticed before. Right now, you are in the present moment.

The goal here is to open up your listening while really being present and not letting your brain get distracted by all the occurrences that happen around us. When we make stories about what we hear and see, it quickly brings us out of the present moment and back into moments of our past or fears of the future. But the

secret of improv is being able to confidently react and be in the now.

What's also a fun experiment here is to look in the mirror, then step away and do this exercise, and then look back in the mirror. If you remain present, you may find out you look a little different than before. Even better!

This is a great exercise you can do any time of the day, whether you are feeling overwhelmed by life or just need a little reset. Improv teaches us to be in the moment and to react from there.

CHARACTER WALK

This is a classic acting exercise, so if you've ever taken an acting class, chances are that you've done this

before. However, our focus here is not about acting but using posture to create an emotion or status.

How to Do It:

1) Get up and simply walk around your space. Whether it's a studio apartment or a conference hall, it doesn't matter; all you have to do is mill about without thinking about anything.

2) Next, you're going to lead with a specific body part to inspire an emotion or adjective. For example, if you lead with your chest—really exaggerating walking with your chest out—it might make you think of someone who is strong, confident, or cocky. Or if you lead with your fingers, you might think of someone who is dainty or upper class.

3) Once you get what emotion or adjective this walk makes you feel like, or how you would describe someone who walks this way, you will go back to walking as yourself.

4) Then repeat the process with another body part and get an emotion for that one.

5) Do this a few times with different body parts and then start to add dialogue as you talk through that emotion.

6) You can do a one-sided conversation as the character, saying something that they might be telling someone else, or you can simply pretend you're walking down the street and passing people. How would this character greet others through this emotion? Again, the idea here is seeing how posture

and changing your physicality can inspire and lead to emotions for different situations.

As usual, there is no wrong answer except for no answer... unless of course you are thinking about a specific idea or person. I don't want you to think about who this person is or something specific like "injured leg", but more of a descriptive word, like: scary, timid, confident, alluring, suave, suspicious, etc.

The goal here is not to think of a premise or a character such as a 'football player' or the 'Prime Minister', but to think of adjectives and emotions while changing your physicality. So, if you do have characters come to mind, think of what descriptive words you can use for them. A 'football player' might be tough and that would work.

We all walk certain ways according to the 'character' we have created of ourselves. Maybe you hold yourself

differently at work than when you are at an event with friends. But many of us aren't aware of this fact. But by noticing how you move, you can change that physicality to add a new emotion to yourself in various situations.

Chances are when you are nervous, you have a nervous posture—such as trying to hide yourself, arms crossed, head down... but instead if you take on a confident posture—one that is open, head up, shoulders back and relaxed—it will make you feel more confident as well.** It's being aware of ourselves to be able to change it and thus change our feelings towards the unknown.

Tips:

- By leading with a different body part, you can think about giving the most energy to that part or as if it's being pulled by a string or if you were to walk into a

wall (please don't), this would be the first thing that would come in contact with the wall.

- If you feel like this isn't working and feels weird, that's okay. Nobody walks with a body part as exaggerated as we want you to do in this exercise, so it should feel awkward and uncomfortable. If no adjectives are coming to mind, that's because you're thinking too much of how strange this feels instead of how you would describe someone who walks like this. Just really commit to it and get rid of all self-judgment and things should work out.

187 WALK INTO A BAR

This game is known by many different numbered titles, but we'll stick with this one. "187" is a fun short-form improv game where you pretend to be a stand-up

comic (without having to hit that grueling open mic circuit).

How to Do It:

1) Make a list of objects.

2) Then use the following setup to start telling a joke that ends with a pun-filled punchline:

"187 [nouns] walk into a bar. The bartender says 'we're full, we can't seat you,' and the [nouns] reply [with a pun]."

A tip for this is to get a bunch of things in your head related to whatever the object is.

For example, if it was a "Car," you might think of: tires, gasoline, oil, seatbelts, windshield, a steering wheel, or

you can think about what cars do (drive, cruise, roll, park), and those can be something related to what your punny punchline is.

So, using "Car" as an example, someone might say:
"187 cars walk into a bar. The bartender says 'we're full, we can't seat you,' and the cars reply 'well, we'll just roll on out of here then.'"

Or *"...we don't care, we're still going to park our butts down."*

Or *"...we just need a quick fill-up."*

Or *"BEEP BEEP WE'RE THIRSTY!"*

Etc. etc.

Do a few rounds with each object before you move on to a new one. The goal with this is quick-thinking and connecting different objects to different things related to them. In improv, someone will say something, and your brain connects the multiple ideas that you can use

throughout the scene. The same muscle is worked here.

Bonus points if you really lean into pretending you're a stand-up comic too. You can do an impression of a famous one or play the character of what you think a standup might have.

Extra bonus points if you start saying the setup of the joke with no punchline in mind and see if you can come up with one by the time you get to the ending. Try it. You may surprise yourself.

Tip:

- Not every joke has to be hilarious... or even humorous. The point here is building ideas off of a subject, so don't worry about saying some that go flat. (Car pun INTENDED!)

OBJECT MONOLOGUE

How to Do It:

- 1) Make a list of random objects.
- 2) Then start telling an improvised story unrelated to any of those words.
- 3) After a few moments, point to one of those random objects you wrote down and incorporate it into what you are already saying, keeping with your original story.
- 4) Next, point to a different word and weave that into the story too.
- 5) Keep doing this until all the words have been used.

The goal is to think on your feet and integrate new ideas while simultaneously doing something else. Improv is a lot like spinning plates or juggling; you have to be able to do multiple things at once so there's no time to stop and think 'am I doing this right?' or 'do I look foolish right now?'—just keep going.

Tips:

- This is different from the Story Rant exercise where the random word would change what you were talking about. Here, you have to include the random thing into what you're saying without changing topics. Also, this exercise is about making up a pretend story, while the previous game was about telling a true memory.

- Like every exercise here, try not to overthink. The more you can let go and just play the game, the better the effect will be at making your mind quicker.

SILENT DIALOGUE

Don't have any access to a group of people to practice your improv with at all? No problem, this exercise is perfect to work on that muscle while using technology as your friend.

How to Do It:

- 1) Put on any TV show or movie and mute the volume—preferably a program you have never seen before.
- 2) Now you're going to improvise the dialogue for all the characters on screen as they talk.
- 3) Keep going for entire scenes if not longer.

This is a great way to keep you on your feet, especially because you don't know when the actors will each be talking or when the scene changes.

It's also fun to do this with another person, and each of you assign yourselves to one of the characters on screen. If you've ever seen "*Mystery Science Theater 3000*" (or any of its offshoots), they sometimes do the same thing and it's always a blast!

Here's the thing, the words you are saying don't have to match what's going on in the scenes at all—only match their mouths that are talking.

For example, if a scene is taking place in a grocery store—even if in the actual movie they are talking about a grocery store— in your improv version, you can talk about anything, even unrelated. In fact, it's usually funnier to talk about things in places where they don't

fit. Like if they were talking about what to name their first child while looking at bags of chips- *“Maybe we name them Backyard BBQ?”*

Focus on the goal of continuing scenes that go on longer than the ideas in your head think they can go. Because you don't know when someone on screen is going to talk, there are going to be mess-ups, but try the best you can to keep the back-and-forth going.

Tips:

- Try getting a suggestion of a word from your random word generator before you put the program on to give you a jumping-off point.

- *It's best to use a program you aren't familiar with so you aren't tempted to say things that exist in that world or the actual lines, but just to use them as puppets that you can speak from.*

- Because the actors on screen obviously aren't listening to what you're saying, you will probably be cut off in each sentence that you're conveying. That's okay, it just works on keeping you quick on your feet even more.

DO SOMETHING EMBARRASSING

This exercise is very useful to get you outside your comfort zone while also building confidence.

How to Do It:

- 1) Out in public where people can see you, do something that is embarrassing to you.
- 2) Don't have it be something that hurts or offends you or other people, but do something that is outside your comfort zone.

3) Do it big or loud enough where people can see or hear you.

4) After you do it, take note of what the other people around you do.

The scariest part of this exercise, you will find, if you are committed and brave enough to follow through and learn the skill, is the leading up to doing the embarrassing thing, not the actual thing.

Our thoughts before getting outside our comfort zone do everything they can to try to stop us from being embarrassed, and they will run wild to try to stop you from doing this exercise.

You may think, "What are people going to say? What if they laugh? What if they call me names forever? What if I'm shunned from society and have to live in a cave!"

But if you push through and do the embarrassing thing, you will find that no one around you cares. In fact, they

will most likely ignore that you even did anything outside the norm for the plain fact that they are too afraid of being caught up in any possibility of embarrassment too.

If anyone does respond, usually it will be something in support such as "*Way to go*" or "Yeah, buddy!" and that's if anyone says anything.

You'll see that it wasn't as scary as your mind made it out to be and now that you did this, it stretched your comfort zone that much bigger. The more you can do things like this, the less you will be a nervous wreck when you have to do something more normal outside your comfort zone—like a presentation or a social event.

See, most people are too in their heads to even think or remember what anyone else is doing. With improv, you are training not to be that way, but to be present and aware so you can create new ideas and thoughts from there. But chances are the people around you have no idea how to use improv for their lives, so they

are only thinking about their past or future, which you already learned not to do.

This exercise might seem scary, but I truly challenge you to give it a try—you'll be pleasantly surprised at how you don't get any reactions and how brave you'll feel afterward.

Some examples students have done in the past:

- Singing loudly at the grocery store.
- Yelling "Yum!" after a bite of food at a restaurant.
- Shouting "Woooo!" after finishing a workout at a crowded gym.
- Or simply playing 'the character' of a more confident version of themselves in a place where normally they would feel shy.

USING THE SECRETS OF IMPROV IN REAL LIFE SITUATIONS

So, these games may have all been... fun and games, but the power of improv is being able to apply those skills to situations you may find yourself in throughout your daily life.

Which is why we're going to go through some common situations and talk about how to use improv in them, so you can be faster, smarter, and more successful when you are there.

JOB INTERVIEW

Ah, the infamous job interview—that nerve-wracking, pressure-packed situation we all know too well. It can

be awkward and uncomfortable, and yeah, there's a lot at stake: getting that dream job and getting paid will make us happy and relieve stress, along with all the other things that go on top of that. But stress not, because we've got some improv tricks up our sleeves that'll turn this interview into a breeze.

Sure, you can prepare all you want—know the job, the company's history, have your materials polished and ready. But truth be told, you can never fully predict what'll happen in that room. And isn't that improv anyway?

Now, the secret here is not just talking and bragging about yourself non-stop. Oh no, that won't do, and you'll look like every other applicant who walked through the door.

Sure, the company wants a qualified candidate, but they also want someone they'll enjoy working with. So, let's sprinkle in some listening and matching skills to ace this interview.

You want to hear what the interviewer is saying and tailor your responses to meet their needs. If they mention they need dependable workers, you don't start talking about that one time your car broke down—that's not the best move, trust me! Instead, be honest, but highlight your positive experiences that match what they're looking for.

Listening will also help you connect with the person you're talking to. Think about their side—all day, if not for weeks, they talk to people who are trying to impress them. They ask the same questions over and over. Sure, resumes look great, but a big part of getting a job is how someone feels about you. If you are just

another applicant and you never connect to them, your chances are much lower of getting the position.

But with listening, you can present and connect to the other person as a fellow person. Maybe you can assume some information and get to know them a little and relate to them on another level besides talking about your work experience. By listening, you will already be setting yourself apart.

And here's a fun personal story to illustrate the usefulness of improv in an interview. Picture this: many years ago, I was applying for a job at a taco place with a cool, hip vibe. They played great music every time I went in there to eat, and while the food was good, I honestly did always enjoy the playlists and thought, 'Hey, at least I'll enjoy the tunes while working.' During the interview, they asked the classic "Why do you want to work here?" question. Instead of giving a

typical response, I decided to spice things up. With a big smile, I said, 'Honestly, I love the music you play! Can I apply for the job of music curator?' They laughed, and the rest of the interview went smoothly.

Now, did my joke seal the deal? Who knows! But it showed I was fun to be around while staying professional. And hey, they offered me the job (though not as a music curator, sadly!).

So, remember this: be present, trust your improv skills, and connect with the person interviewing you. It won't guarantee the job, but it's a secret weapon that'll set you apart from the rest!

A PITCH / PRESENTATION

Picture this: you've got a presentation or pitch coming up, and just imagining this can bring up some very real

nerves! It's like a standard work meeting, but with way more pressure because you are leading it and everyone is watching you. But fear not, my fellow presenters, 'cause we've got some improv tricks to make this a piece of cake... or at least, something easier!

Now, here's why this presentation is easier than actual improv - you get to prepare and rehearse your talk. You know your stuff, and you're ready to dazzle them. But still, those jitters kick in. It's the fear of public speaking - the thing most people fear more than a zombie apocalypse!

But don't let that fear take over. Public speaking is like doing acrobatics with our mouths - totally unnatural, and it's natural that it feels unnatural. If humans were meant for it, our mouths would be shaped like megaphones—imagine that hilarious sight. But hey, you'll find yourself in these presentation moments

anyway, so you might as well be prepared for the nerves.

Here's a fun mind trick - when the nervous butterflies flutter in your stomach, just say you're excited instead of saying you're nervous. Why? Because those feelings are the same. One just has a negative spin while the other has a more positive feel. So instead of focusing on your nervousness, focus on your excitement. This will trick your mind, and suddenly, you're pumped for the presentation, instead of dreading it.

Now, what about this - you're all prepped, but suddenly, bam—someone throws a question at you that you didn't plan for. Panic mode ON, right? Nope! Time to whip out your hip new improv skills!

Instead of freezing, *Yes, And* that unexpected moment, and toss in a quick joke—maybe something that cuts

through the tension of the room. You'll win the audience over while you gather your thoughts. No need to respond in a second - use that joke time to gather your thoughts.

For example, mid-presentation, someone says, "Well, this sounds great, but how are we going to get money for this?"

Instead of panicking, you can *Yes, And* with something like, *"Yes, that's a great point, and I was planning on asking you to dip into your retirement fund. Come on, it's for the greater good!"*

Now obviously you weren't really thinking this, and if you say it with a smile on your face and in a jovial way, everyone will laugh—now buying you time to give your real answer which you probably have some idea of since you are well-prepared about the subject matter.

In the case that you don't have the answer, you can simply say, *"Yes, that's a great question and something I think we all can discuss soon."*

Besides freezing, what you don't want to do is say no to their question - *"No questions!"* or *"That's not what I'm talking about now."* This will isolate this person and you will lose the audience of everyone else watching. Keep it fun, keep it light.

But wait, there's more! Using your posture and voice will give you confidence here. As discussed earlier, when we're nervous, we curl up like shy hedgehogs—arms crossed, shoulders slumped, and a barely audible voice. Not the best look for a presentation.

So, stand tall, head up, arms open, and make that eye contact. Speak up, even if you feel like you're yelling (trust me, you're not!). And hey, if you're soft-spoken,

just amp up the volume a bit, and soon you'll find your perfect speaking groove.

Lastly, here's the thing. Everyone in that room is expecting a presentation. It's like as if you just bust into a random place and start talking (that's for the "Do Something Embarrassing" exercise). Everyone here is expecting you to talk, so they aren't thinking it's weird or bad or strange...until you tell them you aren't confident. Fake it until you make it, and why not have a blast with it? Embrace your improv skills, and you'll rock the speech like a pro!

NETWORKING

Networking kind of feels like a job interview, dating, and talking to a stranger on the street all combined into one thing. The word "networking" often evokes anxiety, a sentiment shared by many. Nevertheless, the

real perception of networking depends on how we approach it.

The reason networking feels awkward and uncomfortable is that we tend to make it so unnatural. When you think of networking, you might envision a slick-talking, suited individual trying to sell you something or thrusting a business card into your face. However, networking doesn't have to be that way. At its core, networking is about connecting with others, and this connection relies heavily on the same principles you've learned about in improv—which is also about connecting with people.

So, imagine you have a networking event coming up or find yourself at a party with a networking opportunity. What do you do? Standing in a corner with a drink, hoping someone will approach you, won't get you far. Instead, step out of your comfort zone and show your personality—that's the key!

Networking encompasses many of the skills we've discussed earlier—so, techniques such as listening, and

Yes, Anding are all helpful here—hear what they are saying and build off of it, instead of pushing your pre-planned networking stories.

However, the trickiest part of networking might be making that first move to bridge the gap between being a wallflower and engaging in conversation with someone new. To accomplish this, while easier said than done, is by being the first to initiate the interaction.

You can do this in any number of ways, and really, it doesn't matter so much what you do, but that you do it and have fun.

As much as pre-planned 'opening lines' might seem like a good idea, it's only the nervousness that is telling you so. Stay present and connect with this other human who is in the same place as you.

Maybe you mention the décor, music, food, or compliment something they're wearing, and ask them if they saw a recent movie or show that you enjoyed

(yes, I know that's a question, but there's information in it, so it's not an empty question, which would be bad), or assume something about them, even if it may be wrong ("Hey, aren't you Tyler's friend?")... really, you can start with anything!

Once you break the ice with your initiation and start conversing with the other person, it's time to let your personality shine. Don't try to be someone you're not just because you think that's how a "networker" should act. Have fun and be yourself.

Most people don't enjoy networking, so the person you're talking to would likely prefer to talk about anything other than work. Find out what excites and inspires you and learn about their passions too. People usually love talking about themselves, so open that door and let them do most of the talking.

Here's an example: Imagine you're at a gala event filled with people trying to "business network"—being fake and boasting about their resumes to get a job in the industry. Instead of playing along, you decide to have

fun. You spot an executive looking a bit lost in the crowd, and you approach them playfully, asking if they're in the right place (assuming). They mention they want to get to the bar for water because the food was salty. You respond by saying, "Sounds like an adventure. Follow me!" (*Yes, Anding*) and lead them through the crowd to the bar. You strike up a conversation and find out she's a high-level executive at a big company (listening) you'd like to work with. After exchanging information, a few months later, she offers you a project.

In this scenario—which is real because it happened to me and that's what I did in it—we didn't go in with the intention of manipulating the situation to get a job offer. Instead, we approached it like an improv scene—being present in the moment, reacting to the other person, and using *Yes, And* to build on the conversation. We showed our true personality, connected well with the person, and that ultimately led to the job.

So, even though networking might feel as unpleasant as a painful cavity filling without anesthesia, you can transform it into an enjoyable experience by adopting these secret improv skills. And who knows, you might land a great job as a result! If that happens, I'd love to hear from you and congratulations!

So, there are a few real-world examples of where your improv skills can come in handy. No matter where you find yourself, the same rules apply: to listen in the moment, build off the other person with *Yes, And*, then assume information to keep building on the situation together.

MOVING FORWARD FROM HERE

With improv, like any skill, we only get better the more we practice it. While we've revealed tons of secrets to improv here, they are only as useful as how much you put them into action.

Some, or maybe all, of the concepts here might go against habits you've had your entire life, so don't expect to become an expert at them after doing an exercise once or twice. You have to keep working at it. Once you can get to the point where you are naturally more present and naturally *Yes, And* instead of disagreeing out of fear of the unknown, and the more you feel joy when you find yourself in a situation that is unknown, then you will know you have harnessed these improv skills.

Everyone can learn improv. You don't have to be born witty or be extraordinarily creative; you just have to practice these new habits.

As we said at the start of this book, we don't need more people conforming to the norm of this world. You have your own individual personality for a reason—why not let it shine? That's what improv has done for me and countless students, so hopefully, it will do the same for you.

You have the secrets; now it's up to you to become an improv master!

LEARN MORE

Now that you've gotten a taste of what improv can do for you, let's take it a step further.

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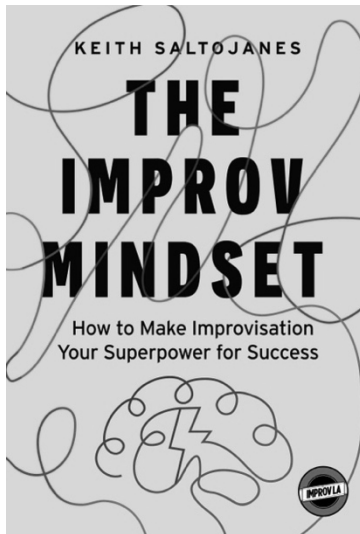
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keith Saltojanes is the founder and head instructor of Improv-LA, the internationally known creative training center based in Los Angeles. He has taught improv techniques in over 10 countries and for executives at some of the largest companies around. He has also studied and performed at every classical improv institution in the country, including Second City, iO West, Upright Citizens Brigade, The Groundlings, and more.

He also holds a Guinness World Record for the Longest Improv Show and has written for National Lampoon as well as for comedians from *SNL*, *MADtv*, *In Living Color*, and *Mr. Show*. You may have seen him on screen in episodes of *Community* alongside Chevy Chase, Alison Brie, and Donald Glover, or on *Curb Your Enthusiasm* opposite Larry David, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Jerry Seinfeld.

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"Keith is a Master Jedi when it comes to improv!"

- Allison, Deloitte Consulting



Keith Saltojanes is a bestselling author and the founder of Improv-LA, the internationally known creative training center based in Los Angeles. He has taught improv techniques to everyday people in over 10 countries and for executives at some of the biggest companies around (including Disney, Netflix, Amazon, IBM). He also has a Guinness World Record for the Longest Improv Show and has written for *National Lampoon* and for comedians from *SNL*, *MADtv*, *In Living Color*, and *Mr. Show*.

