

## **The Power of Improvisation**

### **What is improvisation?**

In life, we have no set dialogue or script we use as a roadmap for our everyday lives. Improvisation is something we do organically and spontaneously every day so it is nothing new to us. It means creating something in the spur of the moment without any preparation. We improvise in our everyday interactions with people, what we are going to wear that day, what we're going to eat, what route we're going to take to work and so on.

Performance-wise improvisers create scenes in the moment without a script. They get suggestions from the audience and they're off. The story, characters, environment are created on the spot.

But improvisation is not only an acting skill, the longer you practice it, it becomes a life skill anyone can benefit from.

### **Benefits of Improvisation:**

- Teaches you how to listen
- Forces you to be in the present
- Increases awareness
- Teaches you to think fast on your feet
- Teaches you to trust your intuition (your first instinct is always the best!)
- Trains you how to communicate using eye contact and body language
- By using some of its principles such as "agreement", it allows you to be open, to find solutions, to explore possibilities instead of resisting
- Allows you to breathe and process which avoids panic and impulsive decision making
- Encourages teamwork through group effort (brainstorming)
- If you encounter an obstacle, you'll be able to process without panicking; you will simply try another way to find a solution
- It allows your authentic self to come through. When your external dialogue (what you are expressing on the surface) and subtext (what you are truly thinking, your inner monologue) merge, you are able to have authentic communication.
- If you take an improv class, it's fun!

## **Acting in the Workplace**

Acting is believing. Remember when you were a child? If you played fireman or someone whose best friend was a talking unicorn, you never questioned it. You didn't think, you assumed the role without hesitation, you didn't over intellectualize. You just were. You were in the moment and totally present. You listened, you responded spontaneously. As you grew older society dictated social behavior, what was and wasn't socially acceptable and so our sense of play acting rode into the sunset.

The good news is that it's not too late to revisit the feeling of what it was like to abandon your inhibitions and learn how to act again. Let me say it again, acting is believing. One of the first things an actor does when reading a play is to break it down. Dissecting a play is very much like being a detective; the actor has to determine what each scene is about, who the characters are in relationship to herself/himself, what they want (objective) from the other characters in the scene and how (tactic/action) are they going to get it. How is this any different than you defining who the players are at your workplace, what your objective is, and how you are going to achieve your goal?

The actors process is a practical one and one you can apply to your own objectives. Knowing who the players are (your colleagues, business associates), knowing what your goal is and then using strategy and tactics to get what you want. Ofcourse there are differences, you're not onstage performing for an audience or in front of a camera but in a sense you are acting. You've done your research, you've written an outline for a script (remember - don't get married to the words, learn to be flexible, your tactic may change!). Now it's time to put it into action. The execution.

Acting is about creating a character (in this case you), and it all begins with image and perception. If you tiptoe into a room, shoulders hunched, eyes towards the floor, people are going to dismiss you. How you project yourself determines how people perceive you. This becomes even more critical if people don't know you.

### **Things to think about:**

- How do you enter a room? High or low status? Low status people are fidgety, they don't look people in the eye. High status people are in control of their body, there is a physical awareness, they look people in the eye.
- How is your posture? Do you walk with purpose, do you gesture excessively. Gesturing excessively diminishes your power.
- Where does your voice emanate from? Is it light? Does it resonate, is your voice grounded?
- If you want to be perceived as having power, you have to project power.
- Dress the part. If you are interviewing for a job in Silicon Valley don't wear a suit., not that it means you won't get the job. It's just that the culture is much more casual.
- Everything you need to know is right in front of you. Learn to read peoples behavior.

- How much space do you command?
- Do you make eye contact?
- Are you focussed on what your goal is?
- Do you have a plan of action? What do you want and how are you going to get it?
- If something isn't working...end it when it's ended! There's nothing as painful as watching someone self destruct. Just switch gears and try another tactic!
- If you want to be taken seriously (depending on the culture of the organization) dress the part.
- Be committed to the choices you make. Be committed to the tactic you've chosen.
- And remember...acting is believing. If you haven't don't your homework, if you're unprepared, if you don't believe what you're communicating, they won't believe what you're trying to communicate.

### **When strategizing your game plan, determine:**

- What the situation is
- Who key players are
- What key relationships are
- What is their power/influence in the organization
- What is your objective? What do you want?
- What action do you take? How do you get want you want?

### **Checklist:**

After you have carefully crafted what your goal or objective is, ask yourself:

- Did I warm up? Warm up your body, your voice.
- Am I communicating in an authentic manner or do I come across as fake?
- Am I physically aware of myself?
- Am I filtering myself?
- Am I listening before speaking?
- Am I making eye contact?
- Am I flexible enough to use a different tactic if I need to change my strategy
- Did I accomplish my goal?
- How did you feel taking on a specific role? Comfortable, uncomfortable? Anxious? Exhilarated? Calculating?