

Improv and

Acting **T**echniques

**FOR USE BY:
DI TEAMS AND TEAM MANAGERS**

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FORWARD

My goal for this document is to provide a step-by-step “insiders” approach to teaching DI Teams and Team Managers about the exciting world of Improv and the value of learning various acting techniques. This guide has not been written to “interfere” or hinder the many learning opportunities that Teams have available to them. Rather, this document has been written to fill the void that is currently found in the area of Improv reference materials. There are many, many wonderful books, resources, and links that list hundreds of intriguing and entertaining Improv games. But unfortunately, few of these resources really explain the techniques behind the games presented (or how they can specifically benefit our Teams). To truly understand and enjoy such Improv games, one must first understand the necessary techniques and skills that these games require. This document has not been written with any particular DI Challenge in mind. In fact, this information will be of some benefit no matter what DI Challenge your Team has chosen to solve. Bear in mind that your Team must thoroughly read all DI Challenge-related materials to successfully solve any DI Challenge. Enjoy!

WARM UP ACTIVITIES/GAMES

Warm up activities/games can clear the mind, unleash creativity, and work on important fundamental Improv skills. They can also allow you to start releasing your fears and help you “let go” in front of other people. By spending a few minutes with warm up activities/games, you will be able to jump right into Improv or other types of acting. Be sure and warm up both your mind and your body. Both are equally important in Improv!

ABC/123

Game: Spell out all of the letters of the Alphabet by using only your body. What letters are the most difficult? How else might you make those same letters? Now try counting to 10 by using only your body. Try it standing up and then by sitting or lying down. Now try it with a partner. Which is easier? By sitting/lying down or working with a partner. Were you able to come up with a different way to spell out some of the letters or numbers?

Technique Learned: When you are attempting to “be” an inanimate object, think about the different ways in which you can portray it (standing up, sitting/lying down, working with a partner, etc.).

Sweeping the Floor

Game: Pick an everyday activity (like sweeping the floor) and think about everything you would need to do. What would you do first? Would it be funny if the broom kept

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falling onto the floor? What if the broom suddenly started to fly around the room and you couldn't let go? Think about all of the different steps that are involved in sweeping a floor as well as any crazy things that might happen. Practice sweeping the floor from start to finish and use as many details as possible. See if others in your group can guess each step. How can you make what you are doing even more obvious, more humorous, or more entertaining to your group? (You might want to try this with a real broom first.)

Technique Learned: By providing accurate details for the imagination, even the act of sweeping a floor, can become “real” to an audience. The more detail you provide for the imagination, the more believable and entertaining an action will become.

VolleyBall

Game: Divide your group into two parts and play VolleyBall with an imaginary ball and net. Serve the ball and call out the name of the person you want to have receive the ball on the opposite team. Make sure that everyone is participating. Try setting the ball for another player on your team, spiking the ball over the net, diving for the ball, missing the ball, etc. Try playing the game as fast as you can or in slow motion. Imagine that the ball is covered in pancake syrup or that your feet are glued to the floor. How might that affect your body movement?

Technique Learned: This will help you learn to focus “in the moment” and to support or “accept” what your fellow actors are doing on stage.

Association Chain

Game: Have your Team stand in a circle. Have everyone lightly slap their hands on their thighs twice, clap their hands together twice, and then snap their fingers twice. Repeat this rhythmic pattern while attempting to link a chain of words or phrases together. For example, Player 1 starts by naming a word (such as “car”). Player 2 must then name another word that starts with the last letter of the first word used (such as “radio”). Player 3 must then name a word that starts with the last letter of the second word (such as “orange”). Continue around the circle until a player loses rhythm, repeats a word that has already been used, calls out a word that is “unacceptable” by the group, or just gets “stuck.” Once this happens, start a new chain. There are countless variations you can experiment with. You might try limiting responses to animal or pet names, cartoons, etc. To increase the complexity of this game, try using the second letter of each word as the link, using the letter that comes AFTER the letter in the link, etc. You can also pick topics that are a little more difficult to work with (such as proper nouns, world leaders, etc.).

Technique Learned: Avoiding repeat answers and active listening, while keeping a steady rhythm, requires intense focus. This game also helps to increase speed and wit or association while on stage. This is also a great “anywhere” game to play.

IMPROV TECHNIQUES AND GAMES

Introduction: Improv games can be fun to play. But you will get more out of playing them if you first understand the techniques behind the games. Take some time to talk about these techniques and how you can better understand them through playing Improv games. This will make the games more effective AND MORE FUN!

Yes! And...(Acceptance)

Technique: “Acceptance” is the MOST IMPORTANT Improv skill that you can learn. This skill will help you in all other aspects of Improv or other forms of acting. Acceptance requires active listening and a willingness to allow another Team member to change the direction of the scene, including your character. Good Improv actors take turns supporting each other by acknowledging and then accepting what the other person has said.

*"We shouldn't tell actors to listen, it's confusing and they don't know what to do. We should tell them, **Be altered by what's said.**" -Keith Johnstone*

Game: Player 1 will start/lead the scene by asking a series of Yes/No questions. Player 2 will ALWAYS respond with “Yes! And...” and then finish each sentence in a way that supports what Player 1 has asked. For Example:

Player 1: “Would you like your haircut, Mr. Smith?”
Player 2: “Yes! And I'd also like a shave.”
Player 1: “Shall I take an inch off the top?”
Player 2: “Yes! And trim an inch off my nose hair too!
I'm getting my picture taken today.”

If Player 2 had said, “No, I don't want a haircut.” the scene would be over. Where is the fun in that? Note that Player 2 also supported Player 1 by “accepting” what Player 1 had suggested for the scene. Player 2 added “I'm getting my picture taken today.” This gave Player 1 a suggestion. Player 1 should then support Player 2's suggestion by “accepting” the new information into the scene. For Example:

Player 2: “I'm getting my picture taken today.”
Player 1: “Have you ever had your picture taken before?”
Player 2: “Yes! And I can't wait to do it again. My agent says I'm going to be the next big star.”
Player 1: “Oh, no! I shaved off half your hair! Will you still be able to go?”
Player 2: “Yes! And don't worry. I'll just wear my other monkey suit. “

Since Player 2 “accepted” Player 1's suggestion, and then added additional information to support Player 1, both Players were able to contribute to the scene. By “accepting” and then adding additional information, both players help one another to advance the

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scene. Even though Player 1 started the scene, both Players allowed “give and take” and neither Player was really in control of the scene.

Hint for Team Manager: If you ever notice that a Team member is NOT accepting a prompt/suggestion from another player, stop the Improv scene immediately and remind the group that they must always, ALWAYS practice “acceptance.” You may even want the Team to play a quick game of “Yes! And...” and then go back to the scene you were working on.

Top of the Food Chain (Status)

Technique: Everything in life, be it the fish in the sea or workers in an office, follow a “food chain” when dealing with others. When on stage, good Improv performers take turns being the “top of the food chain” to help advance the scene and support their fellow actors. If two Improv actors were to play a game of tug-of-war, one actor would have to eventually “give in” or lose, otherwise the game would last forever. This would be very boring for an audience to watch. By allowing your “status” to change from important to less important, you can help to advance the scene.

Game: Draw different sizes/types of fish on cards (there should be one for each Player) and assign a value (a number) to each card. The largest fish should be #1, second largest fish should be #2, and so on. Mix the cards up and have Players select a card. The fish/number you have selected tells you what your “status” is for the scene. If you are #1, you will be in charge, win the race, etc. If you are #2, you will take directions from #1, come in second place or lose the race, etc. Play a scene (could be a day at the office, group of goldfish, group of race car drivers, a family in the middle of a dispute, kids playing in a sand box at school, etc.). Pay close attention to your “status” as you interact with the other Players. Once the scene has been allowed to develop, “freeze” and switch cards with someone else. Continue playing the same scene, only this time, pay close attention to your new “status” as you interact with the other Players.

Hint for Team Manager: This game is great for teaching your most experienced Team Members to “pull back” and allow less experienced Team Members to shine. If you ever notice that a Team Member is abusing “status” within a scene, stop the Improv scene immediately and remind the group that they must always, ALWAYS practice “give and take” and pay close attention to their “status.” You may even want the team to play a quick game of “Top of the Food Chain” and then go back to the scene you were working on.

This game can also be used for character development as this can help Teams to break down predictable stereotypes and move beyond obvious character traits. (For example, a shark doesn’t have to always be aggressive or scary and a puppy doesn’t always have to be submissive or cute and cuddly.)

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Where Am I? (Group Mime)

Technique: Mime is an important part of Improv acting since Improv actors rarely use real props. Instead, Improv actors rely mostly on the art of “Mime” to invent props and/or scenery that isn’t really there. To perform well as a group, Improv actors must pay close attention to one another and move together towards the same goal.

Game: Have a Player start a scene by using only Mime (no talking) to invent a prop and/or scenery. Have the remaining Players jump in, one at a time, when they think they 1) know what the first Player is doing, and 2) have something to add to the scene. You might consider starting a scene in any number of ways, such as:

- Milking a cow
- Washing an elephant
- Taking off in a rocket
- Sailing a boat

When all Players have entered the scene, stop the scene and have each person answer the question, “Where am I?” Did everyone agree?

Hint for Team Manager: A more advanced version of this game is to have each new Player purposefully take the scene in a different direction. Encourage the Players to “accept” the change and to follow each new direction.

Three Little Kittens (Performance/Acting out a Story)

Technique: Good Improv Actors can “tell” a story without even speaking. Use this game to practice telling a story without using any spoken words.

Game: Have one person read the “Three Little Kittens” while everyone else acts out the story. Be sure and pause after every phrase or sentence so the Players have a chance to act out the scene.

*Three little kittens, they lost their mittens, and they began to cry.
What! Lost your mittens, you naughty kittens. Then you shall have no pie!
The three little kittens, they found their mittens, and they began to smile.
Put on your mittens, you silly kittens, and you shall have some pie.*

For an unexpected twist, try changing elements of a known story. The story of the “Three Little Kittens” might be changed to something like this:

*Three little kangaroos, they lost their kazoos, and they began to pout.
What! Lost your kazoos, you naughty kangaroos. Then we shall have no picnic!
The three little kangaroos, they found their kazoos, and they began to shout!
Play your kazoos, you funny kangaroos, and let’s go on a picnic.*

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Hint for Team Manager: Look for books that have vague action sequences within the story line (this will encourage the Team Members to use their imagination). For example, if the book says that kittens lost the mittens, encourage the Team to “establish” the location of the kittens when they lost their mittens. Were the kittens at the park? In the mall? At home in the dirty laundry hamper? You might want to try books like:

“Mr. Brown Can Moo, Can You?” by Dr. Seuss

(This book will get the Team moving like animals!)

“A Giraffe and a Half” by Shel Silverstein

(Start reading slowly and then speed up...the Team will love it!).

“The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales” by Scieszka & Smith

(One of the silliest books that I’ve ever come across!)

One Word at a Time (Group Storytelling)

Technique: A good story must have a situation/conflict, as well as a beginning, a middle, and an end. A group of Improv actors must work as a team to add to the story and move it forward. Pure fun! Another great “anywhere” game.

Game: Have Players all stand in a circle. Ask the Team to create a story based on a suggested title (such as My Favorite Adventure, During Summer Vacation, If I were a Super Hero, etc.) Each Player must take turns adding to the story ONE – WORD – AT – A – TIME. Take care to not have “run on” sentences (use voice inflection to signal the end of a sentence).

Hint for Team Manager: You will have Team Members that are more comfortable and/or experienced than others. Obviously, they will tend to play a more dominant role in your Team’s Improv performances. By having the Team play this type of game, you will enable ALL of your Team Members to actively participate, and in doing so, help to build their confidence.

Freeze (Establishing/Justifying a Scene)

Technique: This game encourages fast thinking and decision making as well as “acceptance.”

Game: Start a scene with two Players. Once the scene has been established, call “Freeze.” The Players must then start a new scene based on their body positions. Repeat this several times.

A variation on this game allows more Players to participate. In “Freeze Tag,” you again start a scene with two Players. Once the scene has been established, another Player will

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call “Freeze” and tag out one of the initial two Players, assuming their body position. The newest Player starts the new scene based on their body positions.

Hint for Team Manager: Have the Team Members focus on quickly establishing a completely different who, what and where for each new scene. The scenes do not need to be related in any way, but it can be very exciting for Players, and audience members alike, when an “association” or link between two unrelated scenes does occur.

Six Steps (Storytelling)

Technique: Storytelling is the fundamental purpose of all Improv performances. If you are not telling a story, the audience will have a hard time following, or even enjoying, your performance. Storytelling requires all performers to act as a Team. Everyone should contribute to the story by acting, reacting, supporting fellow actors, etc.

Game: You must portray an event in six steps (or scenes). This could be the launch of the space shuttle, inventing a new toy, playing a football game, moving to a new town, winning a talent show, etc. You will have one minute to briefly discuss your event and what you should do in the six steps. You must then portray your chosen event (preferably with no further discussion) in only six steps.

This game can be altered to more or less than six steps. This is a great game to play when you are writing a script, wanting to become more “familiar” with your character, etc. When you Improv a scene, you may “find” more aspects of your story line, deeper character traits, etc.

Hint for Team Manager: Try asking your Team to incorporate basic elements of their solution into guidelines for an Improv scene (have the video camera ready). Then have them watch themselves as a group and talk about what they liked/disliked about their performance. They can then use this insight to improve upon their script or story line, further develop their characters, etc.

Every Other Line (Performance/Justifying the Scene)

Technique: When you put limitations in your Improv skit, you force yourself to really work on certain aspects of your performance, support other actors in the scene, or help to justify what is happening on stage. For example, when you have to make sense of a pre-written nonsense script, you are forced to use dialog, body language, and acting ability to tell a believable story and/or fill in holes in the developing story.

Game: Player 1 is limited to using a pre-written script (usually commonly found written materials containing dialog) and must read every other line as their only dialog. (Player 1 can only use voice inflection and body language to elaborate on their dialog.) Player 2 will focus on filling in the holes and assist in making the scene work. Try using nursery

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rhymes, children's stories, song lyrics, newspaper or magazine articles (ensure they are age appropriate), scenes from well known plays/movies, etc.

You can allow the first line of dialog to help set the scene OR you can increase the difficulty by assigning a scene and roles/characters for the two Players. For example, Player 1 could be reading from a Dr. Seuss book (Player 1 would read every other complete sentence of dialog) while Player 2 is interviewing Player 1 for a job, making a new friend on the playground, asking for directions to their favorite restaurant, etc.

For added fun, try having one Team Member start with Player 1 and have two other Team Members out of earshot. Have Player 1 interact with one and then the other (while reading the exact same dialog). This can show your Team how different Players will affect the same set of limitations within a scene.

Hint for Team Manager: You will have some Team members that are more comfortable and/or experienced than others. Obviously, Player 1 would be easier to portray than Player 2. Try having your less experienced Team members start with the Player 1 role. Then you can switch them over to the Player 2 role after they are a little more comfortable with this game. Also, having your experienced Team members in the Player 1 role will force them to "pull back" and allow less experienced Team Members to shine.

CREATING SELECTIONS

Good Improv performers learn to quickly establish their environment, become a character, define a situation, and create a conflict "in the moment" as their Improv performance is taking place. BUT, sometimes it is necessary or helpful to have some or all of these selections prepared ahead of time.

When creating selections, you can choose simple elements OR you can use the selection process as an opportunity to also work on other acting techniques. For Example:

To practice "acceptance":

- You say "YES!" and elaborate whenever someone asks a question or makes a statement.
- You mimic/act out what everyone else is saying
- You narrate what everyone else is doing.

To practice stage presence/body movement:

- Your limbs are becoming octopus tentacles
- Your knees are made out of springs
- You are slowly filling up with helium
- You are trapped in a box/bubble/cloud of smoke
- You can't walk in a straight line
- You feel a strong urge to fly south for the winter, curl up into a ball, etc.
- You want to constantly clean up the room, pick bugs off others, etc.
- You are a door, tree, river, clock, etc. (or other movable inanimate object)

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To practice creating well defined characters:

- You are ALL of the Winnie the Pooh Characters (this helps with REALLY defining a character in a short amount of time)
- You are slowly turning into a pig (this is more difficult than just “being a pig”)
- You are a dust bunny, the boogey man, father time, etc. (The idea here is to suggest a generic character that has not already been well defined by cartoons, movies, etc.)

To practice listening skills: (Do these all at the same time...it’s a hoot!)

- You laugh every time someone takes a step
- You sneeze/cough every time someone laughs
- You bark every time someone sneezes/coughs
- You take a step every time someone makes a loud noise.

To practice “abstract” thinking:

- You think your arm is a space alien, is bugged by a spy, etc.
- You can only turn to the left
- You want your imaginary friend to be included in the scene

By using selections, like those listed above, you can add additional practice and learning opportunities to warm up games/activities and simple/easy Improv games. You may wish to start out with simpler selections and then add complexity as you become more comfortable with Improv. Here are some examples of simple selections:

Character:	Setting/Scene:	Situation/Conflict:
Family Member	Cleaning the House	Vacuum sucks up everything
Movie Star	Auditioning for a Movie	Mouth full of Peanut Butter
Alien	Landing on Earth	Can’t find a parking space
Super Hero	Saving the day	Can’t remember how to fly
Animal	Feeding time at the Zoo	Hates food, starts hunger strike

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question: What do I NEED to do Improv with a Team?

Answer: Nothing more than a little imagination, the willingness to “let go,” and the desire to have FUN! A 10x10 foot area (plenty of room to move around) and MAYBE a few chairs for everyone to sit on would be helpful. A classroom, living room (with the Coffee Table shoved to one side), or a fairly empty garage will work great for Improv. While it may limit some character/scene development, many Improv Games can even be played while traveling in a car!

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Question: **What kind of props or costumes are required?**

Answer: You really don't need a thing! Although for younger or more inexperienced Teams, you MAY want to have a few common props and costume items lying around. These will help Teams initially with character and scene development. You should expect your Team to eventually play all Improv games without ANY props or costumes. (Be cautious of any repeat characters/scenes that may crop up. If you notice any repeats, "ban" them for your Team. This will force them to stay fresh. Once you see repeats happening, you can assume that your Team has come to rely on props and costumes, at which point you should start taking them away for some games/activities.) You might start off with:

Common Props:

1-2 Chairs
Broom/Mop
Baton or Cane
Sheet or Tablecloth
Jump Rope

Costume Items:

Variety of hats/wigs
Cape or Trench Coat
Apron/Basic "Uniform"
Variety of Masks (*Can be Team created!*)
"Status" Identifiers

Question: **How do I go about conducting an Improv "workshop" for my Team?**

Answer: Start with familiarizing yourself with a few of the basics. Read this document and check out some of the suggested resources/links. Pick out some Warm Ups and Games/Activities that 1) make sense to you, 2) seem easy for YOU to explain, and 3) would benefit YOUR Team. Then, it's just a matter of putting together a schedule and diving in with both feet. Believe me, the Teams will pick it up faster than you will. It'll be fine!

Team Meeting (Improv Only): If your meeting will focus only on teaching Improv/Acting Techniques, you should plan on at least a 2-hour session. Don't panic...the time will go by really fast. You'll need this much time to 1) get the Team really warmed up, 2) spend some time discussing the techniques to be practiced and the Games to be played, and 3) get the Team's creative juices flowing so they can experience the "magic" that can only happen during an Improv performance. You'll want to make sure that all Team Members get plenty of participation time "on stage." In Improv, you learn by doing! Consider a schedule such as:

20 minutes	Warm Ups (try 2-3 different Warm Up Games/Activities)
10 minutes	Fun/Easy Games (Ask the Team if they have any favorites)
10 minutes	Group Discussion: Introduce Improv/Acting Technique
20 minutes	Game 1: Repeat same Game several times, using different Players (and different combinations of Players) each time. Continue to reinforce the new Technique with side

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	coaching. Don't hesitate to "break" the scene to reinforce Technique. Allow discussion between Games.
10 minutes	<i>BREAK!</i> (Just be sure you end on a good note!)
10 minutes	Group Discussion: Introduce Improv/Acting Technique
20 minutes	Game 2: Repeat same Game several times, using different Players (and different combinations of Players) each time. Continue to reinforce the new Technique with side coaching. Don't hesitate to "break" scene to reinforce Technique. Allow discussion between Games.
10 minutes	Group Discussion: What worked/didn't work. Take notes!
10 minutes	Fun/Easy Games (Ask the Team if they have any favorites)

Team Meeting (Regular Meeting): If you want to incorporate Improv/Acting Techniques into your schedule for a regular Team meeting, you should probably plan on at least a 1-hour time slot to be used for strictly Improv/Acting Techniques. Anything less would prevent the Team from 1) having adequate time to warm up, and 2) having enough time for all Team Members to fully participate "on stage." Consider a schedule such as:

20 minutes	Warm Ups (try 2-3 different Warm Up Games/Activities)
10 minutes	Group Discussion: Introduce Improv/Acting Technique
20 minutes	Game 1: Repeat same Game several times, using different Players (and different combinations of Players) each time. Continue to reinforce the new Technique with side coaching. Don't hesitate to "break" the scene to reinforce Technique. Allow discussion between Games.
10 minutes	Group Discussion: What worked/didn't work. Take notes!

As you can see, I am suggesting in both Team Meeting scenarios that you allow for 20 minutes for Warm Up Games/Activities. This is a **MUST!** If you do not spend enough time warming up your Team, they will spend their performance time warming up. You do not want a Team to perform if they have not spent adequate time warming up. As an Improv actor, I know this from first hand experience!

Also, to properly introduce an Improv/Acting Technique, you really need to spend about 20 minutes on the same Game/Activity. This will allow the Team to have adequate time to 1) interact with one another on stage, and 2) understand the Technique you are trying to teach them. Play the same Improv Game repeatedly until ALL Team Members have had a chance to participate. Those that often "struggle" need to practice a little more (or need more time to warm up). Have those that often "struggle" participate in the first round and then again in one of the last rounds. Also, be sure and have them perform with a different combination of Players (this may make all the difference in the world!).

GENERAL ACTING TECHNIQUES

Voice Projection

Understanding Volume: Place 3 beanbags on the floor, each about 10 feet apart in a straight line. Have a friend stand at each beanbag (all with their backs to you). At one end of the line, stand about 10 feet from your friend and whisper a sentence or phrase over and over (slowly getting louder each time). Have each friend raise their hand when they can hear and understand what you are saying. Have them lower their hand when they think you are getting too loud. Do this until you are comfortable with voice projection and can “hit your mark” for all three bean bags the first time you say your sentence or phrase. You should also practice while wearing masks or standing behind scenery to understand how costumes/props/backdrops can affect your voice projection.

Understanding Pitch/Tone: Some sounds are easy to listen to, while others can actually “hurt” an audience member’s ears. Practice talking in different voices (such as low and deep, high and squeaky, accents, silly, loud whisper, yelling, robot or other strange voices, animal sounds, etc.). Which ones can you understand easily? Which ones are the hardest to understand? Try these different voices with the beanbags and see if they project the same as your normal speaking voice.

Understanding Speed: Sometimes we talk faster when we are excited or scared of something. Sometimes we talk slow if we want to really explain something. If you talk too fast, your audience may have a hard time understanding you. If you talk too slow, you may take up too much time. Practice talking at different speeds. Which speeds are easiest to understand? Try different speeds of talking with the beanbags to see if different speeds of conversation project the same as your normal speaking voice.

Understanding Lyrics: Have you ever heard a song that you liked, but you couldn’t understand the lyrics? Your audience may have a harder time understanding what you “say” when you sing. Practice singing at various pitches, speeds, and volumes so that you know how singing affects what you say.

Whispering “on stage” or Talking to the Audience: Whispering “on stage” is not like REAL whispering. You should act like you are whispering but still project your voice to the audience.

Making Background Noise (Knowing when NOT to Talk or Make Noise): It can be hard for an audience to understand what is going on if everyone is talking at one time or if there are many different sound effects happening at the same time. But sometimes, that is exactly what you want to happen. Practice talking or making noise as part of a group. Pretend that you and a friend are standing at a noisy street corner. Ask your other friends to “drive” or walk by while making various sounds (car noises, talking, etc.). Does this make it harder for the audience to hear what you and your friend are saying? Sometimes

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it's a good idea to have extra noise, but it should be a little softer, or stop after a few seconds so the audience can easily follow the primary action of the scene.

Stage Presence

Body Position: Your story line is only as good as what the audience can see and hear. If your back is to the audience, then you are not sharing your facial expressions, most of your voice projection, etc. Concentrate on keeping your body at least 1/4-1/2 turn towards the audience. Practice using the beanbags with different body turns. How does a 1/4 or 1/2 turn affect your voice projection?

Acting or Re-Acting: If you are not acting, you should be re-acting to what is happening on stage. If you are not acting or re-acting while on stage, you are taking away from the scene. Every actor that is on stage should be participating in the scene. If you are not in the scene, you should be out of sight.

-If someone is talking to the audience or whispering, you might want to "Freeze" or act like you don't know what is going on.

-If other actors are speaking to each other, you can be actively "listening" or act like you can't hear them, don't know they are there yet, etc. (For example, you could be sweeping the floor or reading a book until another actor speaks directly to you.)

-If you are unable to be part of the scene, what can you do to help the scene? How can you help the other actors make the scene more real? Try becoming an inanimate object or prop (such as a chair or a squeaky door) or a sound effect (such as a howling wind or a telephone ring).

Staying in Character: You should focus on fully acting like your character whenever you are on stage. This is more than just wearing a costume or talking with a silly voice. Think about how your character might feel, walk, talk, eat, drink, interact with other characters, sing, dance, etc. Every word you speak and every move you make should be done as your character would do it.

Using the Stage: Your stage is more than just the space you are given to work with. You can use your imagination, and the imagination of your audience, to increase the size of your stage. Imagine looking beyond the audience and seeing a rainbow, or looking straight up to yell at a giant! Your audience may actually look around to see what you are looking at. When you use the power of imagination, you can make your stage as big as you want it to be.

Props and Costumes on Stage: All props and costumes should have a purpose and should help to support the scene. If your props and/or costumes (or even actors) are not essential to the scene then they should be out of sight. You want your audience to focus

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as much as possible on the current scene. Don't give your audience any distractions. Think about where you are standing while on stage. Are you blocking an important prop or piece of scenery? Are you blocking other Actor's? Realize that your costume may take up more space than you think.

TERMS/CONCEPTS TO DISCUSS

Acceptance: Allowing your team members to alter your character. Listening to your team members and agreeing to what they suggest should happen next. Adding on to what another team member might say to move the scene forward.

Association: How things relate to one-another.

Endowment: Attributing other players with physical, emotional or other characteristics, or getting other players to do something or to behave in a particular way. Can also be a way to increase the overall size of the "Stage."

Environment: See "Platform."

Improv: Made up on the spot. No pre-written script or story line. PURE FUN!

In the Moment: Focusing on what is happening RIGHT NOW. Not worrying about the next sentence or the next scene. Making every second count.

Inanimate Object: A thing. Something that has no "life" without the help of someone's imagination (such as a lamp, paper cup, hammer, etc.)

Letting Go: Being a risk taker. Fearless. Not carrying about what anyone else thinks. Not worrying if what you are doing is "cool" to anyone else.

Limitations: Players or the scene is defined or limited (similar to having to incorporate DI scoring items into a solution).

Platform: Defining where we are, either by our actions or by placing (mimed) props in our location.

Status: How important we are in relation to others. Determines winners and losers.

Storytelling: Building the who/what/when/where and ultimately adding a situation or "conflict" to set the scene and then move a story forward.

Supporting your Fellow Actor: Listening to your Team Members and agreeing to what they suggest should happen next. Offering suggestions on what should happen next, ESPECIALLY if you think your Team Member is "stuck" in a scene. Accepting all offers to advance the scene.

Improv and Acting Techniques

Trust: Becoming comfortable with one another. Knowing that your fellow actors “support” you.

WANT MORE?

Resources/Links

Disclaimer: Improv is for everyone and many resource materials may refer to games or examples that are inappropriate for DI participants. I would encourage Team Managers to preview all resource materials (including the resources/links listed here) to ensure that they are age appropriate. In many cases, it may be beneficial for the Team Manager to review resource materials and then share only the appropriate information with their Team.

On the Web: One of the BEST resources can be found at www.humanpingpongball.com. Here you will find an online, and more importantly FREE printable version, Improv Encyclopedia that contains valuable information on Improv categories, games, keywords and definitions, and additional references. It’s absolutely priceless and I would encourage you to start with this resource.

Other Links for Improv and Acting Techniques:

www.improvtoronto.com resource for improv games/instructions

www.voylesfamily.ws/improv.html lists Improv games for training and performance

www.accessone.com/~up/playbook lists over 300 Improv games

www.spolin.com Viola Spolin is considered a “master” of Improv and has a few books

<http://kinderart.com/drama> KinderART—Simple drama lessons for K-12

<http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/erachi/> Drama Teachers’s Resource—Drama lesson plans

<http://www.byu.edu/tma/art-ed/> National Standards for Theatre Education—Drama info

Message Boards: Visit these Message Boards to go right to the source when you need quick access to accurate information. Post a question and within hours you’ll have several answers from experienced Improv actors. You can also read old discussion threads to gain valuable insight into the world of Improv. Let the real experts give you tips and tricks, suggestions on which books to purchase, and even tried and true games and variations. These message boards also contain lists of games, shows playing in your area, suggested reading materials, etc.

Improv and Acting Techniques

www.YesAnd.com

www.Improvland.com

Books: If you spend just a couple of hours searching the web, you should find more than enough information to get you started. I would caution you to spend more time interacting with your Team and less time reading up on the theory/history of Improv. The goal should be to understand basic Improv concepts and then to refine and practice your technique. Most Improv books are nothing more than a list of games with the history/theory of Improv thrown in (which you can easily find for free on the Web). If you spend some time looking at the above links, and asking for clarification or details on the Message Boards, you really don't need to buy any books. But for those of you that simply MUST have a book in your hand, here are a few suggestions:

“Improv! A handbook for the Actor”

written by Greg Atkins

"Improvisation Starters: A Collection of 900 Improvisation Situations"

written by Philip Bernardi

"Impro for Storytellers"

written by Keith Johnstone

“Theatre Games for Young Performers”

written by M. Novelly

A couple of exceptions to the “no books needed” might be:

(Written with DI Teams in mind!) Contact mlobser@hotmail.com for these!

“Over the Edge Improv”

written by M. Lobser and D. [Tipton](#)

“A Team Guide to Improvisation with Sound Effects”

written by T. Goldman and M. Lobser

(Not a book...a cool game!) Contact debitipton@aol.com for this one!

“Improv Bingo: A new Twist on Improvisation!”

authored by M. Lobser and D. [Tipton](#)

(Written with student Improv Performers in mind! Broken into Lessons!)

"The Ultimate Improv Book: A Complete Guide to Comedy Improvisation"

written by E. Nevraumont, N.P. Hanson, and k. Smeaton