



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

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Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

In today's fast-paced competitive environment, we are called upon to be creative, think on our feet, take on the unexpected in good stride, and work effectively in teams. Sound similar to the art of improv - the ability to make things up as you go along? There are many lessons that we can take from the world of improv that we can apply in the workplace towards building innovative capacity.

Lessons Learned From The World of Improv

"We all go through life every day without a script, responding to our environment, making it up as we go along."

- Kim "Howard" Johnson, Truth in Comedy

Many of us, when we think of improv, we think of "Who's Line Is It, Anyway?" - we link improv to improvisational comedy. However, more and more people are bringing improvisation to business as an important skill in today's highly competitive marketplace. So what is improv, and what lessons can we learn from the world of improv to help build innovative capacity in organizations?

To improvise is "to make use of the tools and resources at hand without reference to expected results; to improvise, to deal in the unforeseen, to take part in the act of creation (Robert Lowe, *Improvisation, Inc.*, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2000)." Improvisation is seen as "a course of action taken when normal procedures aren't working or as alternative systems to which we turn when regular systems aren't generating the intended results (Joseph Keefe, *Improv Yourself*, John Wiley & Sons, 2003)." Since creativity and innovation is born of ambiguity, complexity, and improvisation, its quest requires leaders with the ability to improvise.

There are several principles of improv that can be used to foster a creative and team driven environment. For example, in the world of improv:

- Anything can happen. The only rule that can never be broken is the rule of agreement. All players must be in agreement to forward the action of the scene.

- Many advocate the use of "Yes, and..." as a standard response to all incoming messages. Accept and build. Many creative processes fail because of a judgment system that is applied incorrectly or too soon.
- There are no bad ideas. There is no such thing as a mistake. Everything is justified.
- Treat others as if they are poets, geniuses and artists and they will be.
- The best way to look good is to make your fellow players look good.
- Listening is a very, very important skill. Good improvisers are those that can:
 - Listen and remember what other players have said.
 - Listen to the whole idea in a statement, and avoid preconceptions.
 - Listen with their heart
 - Listen to their inner voice. Intuition is seen as a powerful source of knowledge and inspiration.
- What is happening now will be the key to discovery. The key is to stay in the moment.
- Nothing is ignored. Follow the unexpected twist. Take the unusual choice.
- Silences are welcomed. There is action in thought.
- The KISS principle applies - keep it simple, sweetie. Less is more.
- Find your function or role in every game. Identify how best to leverage your strength within the team/project.

If you incorporate these lessons into your day-to-day practice, you will become a great improviser of creativity and innovation in your organization. Since improv doesn't really end, I encourage you to continue to improvise, add and move forward some of the ideas highlighted above - and don't forget to have fun and laugh along the way.

What's the Bottom line

Stuck in the same old/same old? Can't see the forest from the trees? **Improvise!**

Note: Many of the lessons learned were adapted from: Halern, C., Close, D. and Johnson, K., Truth in Comedy, Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 1993.



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 If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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