



IMPROV Your Way To SUCCESS In The Workplace With These 5 SIMPLE TIPS

By Peter A. Margaritis, CPA

Improvisation isn't about being funny.

That's a surprising statement for many, but it's true. Improvisation provides a set of guiding principles that you can follow to help you overcome natural reluctance and self-consciousness in everyday interactions and conversations – funny or not. Overcoming those barriers to meaningful conversations – conversations that lead to better relationships and increased trust with coworkers, clients, and customers– is a challenge many in the workforce face. As an accountant, I know that networking can be a chore and small talk can seem draining. That's where an understanding of improvisation can help.

The principles of improvisation, are respect, trust, support, listening, focus, and adaptability. And the glue that holds those together is the principle of “yes, and...” Ultimately, these principles allow you to navigate the flow, accept inevitable change, and adapt quickly all while perpetuating a positive intelligent outlook. You have a wealth of knowledge already that allows you to adapt to a variety of situations. Without that knowledge, you have nothing. It's the same in the business world. You have to have knowledge and experiences in order to improvise your way to success.

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1. REPLACE NEGATIVE “YES, BUT” WITH SUCCESSFUL “YES, AND”
 2. LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND
 3. FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS
 4. MAKE MISTAKES
 5. COMMIT
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Here's how:

⇒ REPLACE NEGATIVE “YES, BUT” WITH SUCCESSFUL “YES, AND”

“Yes, and...” are words that keep conversations going. They inspire people and spur creativity. They help to overcome resistance and lead to a meeting of minds, and as such they are valuable words to use during negotiations. “Yes, and...” is about being agreeable. It's not about agreeing, rather finding a point of agreement and then moving onward from there. For example, if a colleague suggests an idea, you might say, “Yes, and we could explore that idea and see if we could get it in the budget next year,” rather than “Yes, but there's just no

money to do that.” With that one small word, you have shifted the conversation from halting creativity and ideas to supporting them and building a positive atmosphere amongst your team.

⇒ LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

Think about the difference between listening to respond and listening to understand. (There is a difference, I promise.) Listening to understand requires you to park your agenda and really hear your client, coworker or customer. This practice demonstrates respect and genuine interest, which cultivates deeper more trusting relationships. This is both about listening with your ears and also with your eyes. Look for details that can become points of connection or visual signals and cues from the person with whom you are engaged in conversation.

⇒ FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

This applies to both new relationship opportunities and growing established ones. For current coworkers, clients, or customers, build relationships beyond numbers to build rapport, comfort and trust. For new relationships, you need to step out there into new territory and get to know people. Train your inner critic to say, “Yes And...” And don’t forget to smile.

⇒ MAKE MISTAKES

If you expect perfection, you are likely to be disappointed. “Yes, and,” you will make a mistake; probably more than one, and most of the time, unless it’s a real blooper, the only person who knows about it is you. It boils down to what you have probably heard many times since childhood – every mistake is an opportunity to learn and do even better next time. Once again, train your inner critic to say “Yes And...” and allow yourself the confidence to try with less fear of making a mistake.



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⇒ COMMIT

In the world of improvisation, people talk a lot about commitment. You need to be fully committed to your character. If you’re going to be the tree, be the best tree that you can be. If you’re going to be a crazy game show host, be the craziest. Be fully committed to that character. That’s a lesson for businesses, too. If you don’t have the passion for what you’re selling, then you’re not going to sell it.

Every single one of these actions takes practice. By embracing this outlook you will sharpen your creativity and communication skills, the business success skills that accountants often consider secondary. You will find that opportunities will start to arise that wouldn’t have before, you may notice reduced stress at work and a more positive, collaborative, and creative work environment.

So even if you don’t think you’re funny, remember comedians aren’t the only ones mastering improvisation to elevate their success. When applied in any business setting it’s a valuable training tool that can make you a more effective accounting professional. Employ improvisational techniques in your every day experiences until it becomes second nature and you will be amazed at the positive results that will follow in both your leadership and life.

