

**D**o you know what your greatest asset is as a CEO, CFO, or partner in an accounting firm? If you answered your employees, you would be correct. Leveraging your greatest asset means multiplying the productivity of that resource without a significant input. Each one of your employees can be leveraged by incorporating improvisation to create positive results in a business economy that favors the innovative.

## **Creativity is the Foundation of Innovation**

When I hold creativity workshops, the common theme I run into is that people think they have bad ideas. I say, bad ideas lead to good ideas and that having no ideas leads to nothing. In order for creativity to flow, the inner critic inside of all of us has to be silenced. The inner critic is that voice that says you will fail. It is the voice that says they will think your idea is stupid or that, if your suggestion is not used, you are a failure.

When you get a whole office being dictated by a collective force of inner critics, you end up dead in the water because today's market is based on the current of innovation running all around the world.

You get stuck doing the same thing as last year and the year before. It has become a race to see who will meet the shifting needs of the rising generations in both your external and internal customers.

Many times, when we leverage sales, we will upsell or upgrade, throw in a bonus right before the sale. It yields a greater profit. To leverage the profitability of your employees, you are looking for a way to silence their inner critics and release a collective flow of creativity so innovation can lead the way.

## **Improv Silences the Inner Critic**

There are unlimited team building workshops and activities we send our employees on. But most people will attend because they are required and as soon as Monday rolls back around, it is back to counting beans and pushing papers. There was no real connection made between the employees and the events have become more of an excuse to have fun, as a type of paid for bonus rather than applying real team building principles. The inner critics remain alive and creativity dead.

What if you brought in a completely new approach? What if the organizational status is left out of the room when brainstorming ways to innovate the processes and what if everyone's ideas are respected? What if you began to approach employees using the skills of improv?

# **Improvisation is the Fulcrum to Leveraging Your Greatest Asset**

By: Peter A. Margaritis, CPA





The concept of improv is more popular now off stage. Business schools are rapidly adding improvisational acting classes to their curriculum. Kip Kelly is the Director of Marketing and Business Development at UNC Executive Development. He wrote a paper on leadership agility and how to use improvisation to build the critical skills needed in our rapidly evolving business climate. In response to how to develop agile business leaders, he hit the nail on the head, "While knowledge and experience remain critical, it is becoming increasingly important to develop leaders with the ability to deal with ambiguity and change, to lead and foster innovation and creativity, and to make and implement decisions quickly."

Improv is the fulcrum to leveraging your greatest asset.

### **The Principle of "Yes, And..." Promotes Creativity**

Focus on creating a culture that encourages bad ideas! Better yet, throw out a bad idea on purpose to see what your team does with it. Lead by example. Bad ideas lead to good ideas and though it may be intimidating for a first year analyst to be tossing ideas around with the CFO, try to start incorporating regular brainstorming sessions.

Their inner critic will probably go crazy. But when that one person speaks up and throws an idea in the hat that doesn't fit in the budget right now, how you respond will make or break the climate you are trying to cultivate. "Yes, that is a good idea, but... that won't work right now. Anyone else?" Saying "yes... but..." shuts things down. Listen to the difference when you use the "yes, and..." approach.

"Yes, that is a good idea, and I think that is worth looking into more. How can we make this something we can jump on even quicker?" Maybe the event can be scaled down. Maybe it can be planned for in the future. "Yes, and..." is about being agreeable and continuing the conversation. When the conversation is continued, you are promoting an atmosphere of acceptance and possibilities, not one of rejection and defeat.

Every effective leader knows how to leverage their greatest asset. It may be by implementing regular brainstorming sessions, mind mapping, and even bringing in improv educators to improve communication within the workplace. When employees communicate better, get along better, and have a more open line of communication all the way up the chain, productivity goes up because innovation is flowing through a strong current of acceptance.

**Focus on creating a culture that encourages bad ideas. Bad ideas lead to good ideas.**

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