

Improv Is No Joke - Episode 19 - Judy Carter

Peter: Hey everybody I'm almost speechless that I'm so excited to have a guest today on my podcast, Judy Carter. I'll let her tell you about her background and stuff, but first and foremost I know how busy she is, and for her to carve out this time to be part of this podcast, I'm so grateful for you doing this. I thank you so very much and I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Judy: Oh yeah well we are having the conversation right now. Thank you, Peter. I gotta say to you listening, when I met Peter, he came to me and he said, you know Judy, I really want to speak. I'm already speaking, but I don't know, people seem to use my trainings to take a little nap, and he said, can I be funnier? And I went, so you're an accountant, I'm not sure about that. You know, and with all due respect, I love accountants. I love my accountant, they keep things organized, but they've never had me rolling on the floor in laughter, okay. Mostly rolling on the floor in pain when I see their bill. [laughs]

Peter: [laughs]

Judy: But then, Peter, you were such a delight to work with, just an absolute delight, and from working with Peter I developed these formulas and now I know that they work. Because Peter you went out there, you got laughs, and I also showed you how to tell stories, and now when you speak I know things have been going on with you. What's been going on?

Peter: Things have been great. Judy was a coach of mine for a while, actually I met her at the NSA Laugh Lab. I went up to her, and I have her Comedy Bible and I've referred to it many times, but I was having a hard time making accountants laugh, and I remember I said that to you after I introduced myself, and you just looked at me and said, "maybe like a movie trailer. I tell you, why don't tonight you go write a movie trailer about accountants and we'll talk about it tomorrow," so I did go do my homework and the next day we're sitting, and there's like 100 people, and there's a guy in there that's got like 27 Emmys. I mean there's some hitters in this room. Judy gets up to start her session and she stops and says, "Hey, where's my accountant?" and I raise my hand and she says, "Did you do your homework?" and I went yes, and she says, "Get up here and let's try it out." I almost wet myself.

Judy: [laughs]

Peter: I was I was so intimidated, and I get up there and I was shaking crazily but I don't think anybody saw it and delivered and I got some laughs from it, but from that we were able to start really developing it. Now if she was able to get me to do that, I gotta have this lady to help me, and she did. She knocked it out the park. I can't begin to thank her enough for all that she's done for my career and helping develop stories, and like I said I've had the comedy Bible forever and I refer to it often. I have it in hardback and have it on my iPad.

Judy: Oh my goodness. You know I'm trying to get my Bible and put it in all the hotel rooms. What do you think?

Peter: I think it's a great idea. Yeah, right next to the the big Bible.

Judy: Right, now how fun would that be, like I need a little inspiration, you know, and then you open it up and there's the comedy Bible. Okay, maybe I'll just get some laughs.

Peter: Okay, you know what, sometimes crazy ideas lead into something bigger, and I bet you could get a hotel chain to be a little edgy, maybe.

Judy: No, I don't think so.

Peter: [laughs]

Judy: I don't think so. Probably shouldn't even go here. [laughs]

Peter: That's that's why I like not really have any questions and just improving a whole interview, but the one question I do have is, can you give the audience a little bit about Judy Carter? A little about your background, what you're currently doing.

Judy: Well, like most comics of course, I had a difficult childhood. I don't think you can find any comic who hasn't had a difficult childhood, and one thing we comics all have in common is that we see things that are problematic, we see things that are messes, we look at someone yelling at us and, like normal people who just go oh my god this is horrible, we comics in some part of ourselves go, "this is material."

Peter: Right.

Judy: And I built that into a career as a stand-up comic. I was the opening act, you know mostly comics open for a star, and I got to travel with Prince who was incredible, and open for him. I traveled the world performing. I did my shows for the Israeli army in Hebrew, although I didn't know Hebrew, I just memorize it, so they were screaming, I'm sure, insults, or the Hebrew equivalent of, "You suck," and I'm going thank you, because it's really good you don't understand the language. Yeah that was a disaster. Anyway, I did that for 17 years and then I had an episode where I just didn't want to do it anymore. You know these things happen in life where you just maybe realize that working for drunks and coming home and feeling like, you know, I just smoked two packs of cigarettes because in those days they didn't have no smoking, and I just want to do something else, and that's when I wrote a book called Stand-Up Comedy: The Book. I wrote it and I was so excited and then was rejected by 59 agents. It was finally accepted – You only have to find one person, people, those of you who write a book –

Peter: Right

Judy: Anyway, I found one, my one person, and it got published by Random House. One other woman, like, really liked the book. Maybe you've heard of her, Peter? I don't know, Oprah?

Peter: Oh like the big O

Judy: Let me give you her last name, Winfrey.

Peter: Oh, got it. Got it.

Judy: Alright, yeah, because nobody knows Oprah. So how many Oprahs are there, right? So she had my book next to her bosom, and like everything else he'll next to her bosom and it just like took off. And then I started to teach comedy and so many people went through my workshop. Seth Rogen started his career at my workshop. So many people. Like, every time I go to comedy club: Oh I used your book, I read many since then, and then I started getting calls from the corporations. Corporations started coming and going, hey can you help us lighten up the workplace and help us to decrease stress, and then I became a stress reduction speaker.

Peter: [laughs]

Judy: I figure I'm not a nurse, although sometimes at night when I like to dress like one but that's another story, so anyway I became a stress reduction speaker and I am speaking for FedEx and Johnson & Johnson and Procter & Gamble, and and then again traveling the world doing comedy workshops, and now my latest book came out called The Message of You because all these comics started hearing me speak, and they're going like, wait a second, you get out there and you just speak for an hour and they pay you all that money, really? Really you're not staying like a cockroach infested company condo? Really? You're staying at the Four Seasons? What? So I wrote this book called The Message of You because I really realized that everyone, even accountants, are doing what they do in life – people think like I just fell into this or I just fell into my job or, you know, I'm a comic just because, I don't know, it just kind of happened. We all have this attitude that our life is absolute, random and chaotic, and in reading my book The Message of You people find that it's not random, it's not chaotic. That you actually have a message in your life and everyday you're living that message, and you have something in your stories and what you've gone through that, if you share, can really help other people and create a ripple effect of inspiration, and so I wrote this book and then I created university and online – I don't use the word university anymore –

Peter: I wonder why [laughs]

Judy: I wonder why [laughs]. So I have an online workshop, we launched at the beginning of the year, we've had the winter quarter and the spring quarter and it's been wildly successful. Matter of fact, one person just went through and got her first five-thousand-dollar gig, and that's TheMessageOfYou.com. There I'm done with my spiel about who I am and I'm totally caught up.

Peter: Great, and I will be a testament for both of her books, and I don't know if I shared this story with you or not, but in February I did some stand-up for a friend of mine in Detroit and he does a lot of theater, a little sketch comedy, with this theater group that he has, but he was going to do stand up that night with me. When I got to Michigan we were talking about it, and I didn't realize she'd never done stand-up before, so I asked him, so what are you using to write? He said I bought this book called The Comedy Bible, he said I read it inside and out and upside down.

Judy: [laughs]

Peter: I told him to be careful, because you know the difference between stand-up comedy and heroin is? He goes, what? I said you can't quit stand up when you start getting those laughs.

Judy: [laughs]

Peter: You could always quit heroin.

Judy: Oh that is great, I haven't heard that. Where did you hear that all?

Peter: Oh, I heard that years ago. I use it all the time.

Judy: Oh, okay.

Peter: Because a person like myself, who is a frustrated comic, that I still want to do stand-up, I still try to do stand-up, and I guess I can't quit because, especially when you get that belly laugh. When you really get that belly laugh. But that second book, The Message of You, when we met in Las Vegas you hadn't published the book and it was still in process, but the coaching that we went through at the time basically mirrors the book, because I ended up buy the book once it was released, and read it, and I was like, okay, this is everything she's teaching me. Now if you're looking for a coach that will give it to you straight, will not fluff it up and be nice and just hit you right between the eyes, get Judy to coach you because that was our agreement through the period of time that we worked. I want the feedback. I want constructive criticism. Don't sugarcoat it, and she goes, are you sure, because I can be kind of blunt. [laughs]

Judy: You know you're making me sound sort of like a comedy dominatrix, I don't know if I like this.

Peter: [laughs] No, no, I just I just really appreciated that you gave it to me straight. You're an excellent, excellent teacher. I guess from my perspective, you know, I don't want to sugarcoat it, especially from somebody who's got the experience that you have and all the things that you've done, the people that you've coached over the years, and you did it. Do you remember teaching me how to tell a story? Mr. Chronological you kept calling me.

Judy: Oh yes yes yes. Well here, let's talk about storytelling a little bit. I mean, most people tell a story as a data dump: this happened then this happened then this happened then this happened then this happened, and even if the things that are happening are interesting they don't finesse the story in such a way to make a dramatic or funny or set it up, draw people in, and all of that.

Peter: Right.

Judy: I remember the issue you had, which was that you know you didn't want to reveal anything particularly personal about your life, your family, and certainly anything that makes us look less attractive is the messes in our life, and yet as I say in my courses, you can't spell message without your mess. M-E-S-S, the first four letters, and you can't see the mess in your life without age, A-G-E. So that's hard. A lot of people just want to say, "and then I got really successful," but they don't want to like go into the point of when they were struggling and when, perhaps, they didn't feel hopeful and they didn't know what to do and they were in a real mess, and that's what makes people interesting. And I remember that revealed a story about your family and when things weren't going so right and and how there was a time in your life where you realized something, and I call that your Eureka moment, and when we go through our life and in *The Message of You* I show you how to go through your life and find that Eureka moment where things change, and then you know what you've gone through, really, is something that has value for other people.

Peter: And all transparency, when you were telling me about this, I was going, "okay, okay," but honestly I didn't believe it. I really didn't. I followed your formula, and at times it was like a therapy session, you know. I talked about the time and a hole in my heart and talked about my son with the ADHD and whatever, but you taught me how to tell that story, how to bring people in, have it up and down, and you said you will change lives by doing this, and I gave it lip service. I went, Yes, And okay, but I can tell you that that keynote address that you helped me write, *Embrace your Inner Superhero*, I've had more people come up to me afterwards to say, yeah, I wish I had listened more to what my kid was saying vs shoving my agenda on him, because, you know, I had a cousin like this, or actually that speech inspired me to write the book, and one participant who got my book wrote to me two or three days afterwards and said, when you talk about your son and ADHD, we had the same issue with our son but we've dismissed the idea that he could have ADHD. However after reading your book, we're going to explore it, and I followed up with this person about two months later, and yeah his world has changed dramatically, and I owe all of that to you.

Judy: Wow, well thank you. I should have charged you more.

Peter: [laughs] Yeah, I'm glad I'm talking about this now then. The CPA part of me does come out at times – think we, we talked about storytelling, and we think about CEOs or our controllers or whatever, we live in a very fact-driven world, and when you're telling a story with just data nobody's paying attention.

Judy: Yes

Peter: But if you can weave a story in with the data it becomes much more powerful, and the tools that you taught me I still use to this day. And when I'm talking to people in my courses I'm crafting a story around it, around the data, if it is data driven, in order to make that impact, and I know I was not that successful prior to spending that time with you.

Judy: Well thank you Peter.

Peter: You're welcome. Checks in the mail. [laughs]

Judy: [laughs]

Peter: So the the online workshop is a success. You're taking on students a lot. The book has been a success, and I went up to your website today and you have The Message of You journal. Can you talk about what the journal piece is?

Judy: Yeah, well the subtitle a title that is Finding Extraordinary Stories in an Ordinary Day. You know I very often get calls from politicians, their agents, going, oh god can you help this candidate, they're telling the same old story all the time, and we get to a certain age where we we have these stories, and we're not even living our life anymore because we go to tell the story, it's always back to some dramatic event, and I wrote The Message of You journal because I started to keep a journal and it was really boring and I lost interest in it. Look what I ate today, I gained another pound, oh gosh. Anyway, so it was boring, and so I wanted to create a journal way that I could capture what happens in a day and find the essential story of that day and find the message of that day, so I created this journal. It's just a simple download from my website. If you go to JudyCarter.com you can download that, and it's just a very simple way to go, what happened today, and find one moment in the day where something upset you, because we find that when things upset you they kind of hook into something that happened before, usually in your childhood, and from that we can glean a message, and we don't have to wait for dramatic things to happen to us, because extraordinary events are happening every day, and when we can capture that it helps find exactly what is our legacy. Because if you lead an unexamined life, you're going to end up on your deathbed going, "what the hell was all of that about?" and I want people to know what the hell that was all about now, before you die, because your message is going to be spoken, and it's going to be spoken at your funeral. And you know, at your funeral, people are going to get up and tell stories about you, and then everybody will get this wonderful idea the kind of person you are, or you weren't, and they're not going to get it right so why not take command of your life. Take command of your life story. Take command of The Message of You and find your message now. Find that message now. Find it, and use it to become an influencer in the world. That sounded pretty good.

Peter: That sounded wonderful, actually. You got me really thinking about that. So it's a daily journal but you're looking for those areas of frustration, of being upset. So I flew out of O'hare yesterday,

Judy: Uh-huh.

Peter: There were a couple of areas that I was trying not to get upset about, TSA being one and, two, having to wait 45 minutes before we could actually take off, which set us behind getting here. So it's looking at that, and then what do we do? Say that again, what do we do with that information once we've identified those events? We try to trace it back?

Judy: Well it's a process, it's a formula, where you ask yourself, anytime you get angry, when did I feel like this before? And we try and find the time in our life that happened to us, and that actually shows us what we're committed to, and once you understand yourself a bit better – so perhaps you call it therapy.

Peter: [laughs]

Judy: What is therapy except knowledge about yourself? Understanding what motivates you, what rules you, because that's power. I mean people go to therapy, I guess some of them, to be a narcissist and just be self involved. But a lot of people want self-knowledge so they can use it to be an influencer in the world and understand, so they're able to answer that question, what do I want to do? You know, what I want to be when I grow up, really, and what kind of difference who I want to make in other people's lives?

Peter: And I think as we get more seasoned in the workplace, and have some more experiences behind us, I think we do go into that point of, is it paying it forward, is it sharing the experiences or whatever, our mindset begins to change. I know has, that I want to try to, you know, help. It is part of the reason for the podcast: giving the information to those who are in the audience, and hopefully that helps them in their daily work, life, whatever, and I could see this helping my audience, in a sense of how many times do business leaders have to get into a presentation? and it doesn't matter what the topic is—

Judy: Yeah

Peter: And if you can become more vulnerable ,and share as it relates to the topic at hand, I think that you gain a lot of respect or you're seen in a completely different light, and you become human, I guess is the word. You're seen as human. When we're done I'm downloading the journal, and I'm gonna I'm gonna try it out because, as you said, trace it back. When was the last time you felt like this, I said in my mind, the Philadelphia airport, then let's go back even further. LaGuardia, so but that's – I mean seriously Judy, that's pretty powerful stuff.

Judy: Thank you, thank you. Yeah, that's why I did it.

Peter: Wow, so you went from a stand-up comic to really having a major impact on people's lives. Did you ever think twenty-some-odd years ago that that would be your ultimate legacy?

Judy: No, I always am re-defining my life, because I actually did start as a magician.

Peter: That's right.

Judy: You know, as the first woman ever to work The Magic Castle. It was kind of like all these guys, and what I found out was that I had to keep thinking of new magic tricks and oh and schlepping all those props, and one day when the airline didn't bring my luggage I had to go on I started doing comedy, but then I found I really wanted to do some stories that weren't particularly funny. That more had a heartfelt resonance, and comedy club wasn't the place for that.

Peter: Right.

Judy: I mean I'm following a guy who's just been spending, you know, pretty much the last half hour talking about, you know, herpes, and other lower chakra things, and you know something smelled like fish, and it's like I'm following this and I just started to go, I think I've done this and now I want to expand, so now I started to bring comedy to unusual places like the corporate market, and they love me. They drank me like they were thirsty, you know, really, seriously, they had so many speakers who are just boring and data and and people don't – they respond to emotion not data.

Peter: Right.

Judy: I really enjoy coaching people who are sort of what I call techies, you know people who have the death by PowerPoint slideshow with all the bullet points on them, and their information is good. I'm not saying it's not good. People have great information. But it's truly how you deliver your information that's important, and if you can deliver it in a way that touches people, it makes people laugh, they'll retain it better and they'll stay awake, and they'll so appreciate you.

Peter: You hit all three of them right on the head. Yeah, as you know I'm the Chief Edutainment Officer of my business, because I believe to educate you need to entertain in order to retain, and the more that we can engage that audience, the more that we can make them laugh, the more that we can communicate. It's not a presentation, it's a conversation.

Judy: Absolutely.

Peter: So the whole change in the mindset, the more response you get from your audience positive, and just the ability because to speak to an audience of CPAs, whether it's an hour or eight, and to keep them awake the whole time is magical. [laughs]

Judy: Right.

Peter: Before I let you go, first, thank you very much and I'll thank you again. But what I'm doing with my audience, as we close out the the episode, I'm doing 10 quick questions, just so we get to know you just a little bit better. You haven't seen these questions and it's from what I do know about you, albeit a little bit about you, but just to help the audience get to know you just a little bit better. So are you up for this?

Judy: Yeah, go ahead.

Peter: LA or New York City?

Judy: LA

Peter: Kevin Hart or Kevin Nealon?

Judy: Well I have to Kevin Nealon because I personally am friends with him.

Peter: [laughs] What's your favorite movie?

Judy: Groundhog Day, I can watch a movie over and over again.

Peter: [laughs] What's your favorite restaurant?

Judy: Ah gosh, well any restaurant who makes a good dirty martini is good, as far as I'm concerned. But a really good dirty martini – really cold in a big glass and just the right amount of dirt in it.

Peter: Just the right amount of dirt in it. Not mud, just dirt.

Judy: Mhm.

Peter: The Comedy Store or the Gotham Comedy Club?

Judy: Oh boy, you're putting me in an awkward position. [laughs]

Peter: You can claim the fifth if you like.

Judy: Claiming the fifth on that one.

Peter: [laughs] Favorite actor or actress?

Judy: Oh my goodness favorite actor or actress. Well, you know what, I'm going to go back – way, way back – because when I was a little – like really, really, really, really, really young – and the first person I saw on TV that I fell in love with that made me realize that a woman could be on TV and be funny was Gracie Allen.

Peter: Oh wow. While you described it I thought it was Lucille Ball.

Judy: No, it wasn't Lucille Ball, it was Gracie Allen, because she just stood with George Burns and and it was a dynamic where she was the star and he was the second banana, so unlike life. And I like that it was a husband-wife team where she was getting all the attention, the laughs, which is very different than my family, and I just loved her instantly.

Peter: That's great. What's your favorite joke that you've created?

Judy: Oh, that's a hard one. I mean, what's my fav– Oh, I got one! My favorite joke that I created was a joke that actually got used by Senator Barbara Boxer, our senator in our state of California, and it was a joke about compassionate conservatism, and they're trying to find a way to knock it but you know it's hard to make funny, so I wrote, “yeah I think compassionate conservatism means that just as many people are going to the electric chair but now it's going to have lumbar support,”

Peter: [laughs] That's funny.

Judy: Yeah, yeah, it's supposed to be funny. But I'm proud of that joke because it was used for a cause.

Peter: That's great. Okay, I have to quit laughing. Jimmy Fallon or Johnny Carson?

Judy: Jimmy Fallon, because Johnny Carson – I won't even go into it.

Peter: Alright, number 9: Do you prefer dogs or six-toed cats?

Judy: Oh my god, in front of my dog and my cats, you're gonna make me answer that? I don't think I can because there's going to be revenge, there's going to be pee in some kind of place that it shouldn't be.

Peter: [laughs] Right, I didn't realize that the kids were behind you, but I did my research and you do own six-toed cats, correct?

Judy: Yes, although I get a lose one of the toes in a divorce, but that's another story.

Peter: Last question. What's one thing that you haven't checked off your bucket list that you would like to check off?

Judy: Well, and maybe somebody's listening can help me with this, you know those planes that land on an aircraft carrier and they take off.

Peter: Yeah

Judy: With no runway? They just, I guess there's this huge rubber man and just flings them into the air?

Peter: Yeah.

Judy: That's on my bucket list.

Peter: You want to fly with or be a passenger in one of those?

Judy: Passenger, oh no I definitely don't want to buy one. Absolutely not. That's on my bucket list, but so many of the other things I've already done.

Peter: Okay well I know one of my audience members will be my uncle, a retired Colonel from the United States Air Force based out of San Antonio. We may be able to knock that one off for you.

Judy: Huh, oh my god, I wouldn't put out because I'm not doing that anymore.

Peter: [laughs]

Judy: But I have performed, I will do a free show for the military, and I have done a lot of talks for the Air Force. They actually let me drive a simulator where it was like I was driving a plane and kept crashing it, but there were no consequences because it was just simulated, but yeah I love doing – especially if I'm coming down to an aircraft carrier where everybody's cramped, there's so much stress, they could use my talk, right?

Peter: Exactly.

Judy: I'll get myself there. I just wanna ride on one of those. Okay, bucket list, can die now.

Peter: We can see if we can make that work for you. Judy, I can't begin to thank you enough for everything. One, for taking time to be part of this. Two, for everything that you've helped me with in my career. I greatly appreciate it. I'm glad that we still stay in touch and you know if I can ever help you in any which way shape or form, all you gotta do is ask.

Judy: Well, you know what I want now. I just want to say I'm proud of you, because to be funny like you did you took risk, and if any of your listeners want to know some comedy formulas that I

taught you I'll give it to your listeners, three of them at least, for a free download. Just email Free@JudyCarter.com and you'll get that, so you can just put that out there.

Peter: Wow, thank you so much. That's very generous of you to have a giveaway to my audience, and I will make sure that information is also in the show notes and in the transcripts, so thank you again, Judy, for taking time. I always enjoy our conversations.

Judy: Alright Peter, take care. Bye-bye!

Peter: Bye, thank you.

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