

## Improv Is No Joke - Episode 33 - Greg Kyte

Peter: Hey, welcome everybody. I'm here today with Greg Kyte, and Greg is the founder of Comedy CPE. This is the first time we've met. I've actually heard a lot about Greg over the years. I've heard that there's another person who's a CPA who enjoys comedy, we're very rare in that way, and after a long haul I've been finally able to sit down and have a conversation about... who knows what this is all going to come about! First and foremost, Greg, thank you so very much for taking time out of your busy schedule to sit down and have a conversation.

Greg: Totally. No problem. I don't know if you know this, but I do my own podcast with Jason Blumer called THRIVEal Cast, so I'm a big fan of a of this kind of thing. And, you know, and share knowledge and try to get it out there for people. So, it's my pleasure, is what I'm trying to say.

Peter: Thank you very much, and I will be subscribing to your podcast as soon as we're done with this and pull it down. There's a few of us in the profession who have a podcast: myself, you, John Garrett.

Greg: Yeah, John's Garrett. Yeah, he's a former CPA. He's got a way better resume than I do, in terms of his accounting. He was, I think, a KPMG, for a bunch of years, and then finally he just like... I kinda hate this and I kinda love comedy, so he bailed out. He was doing comedy full time. He's kind of a transitioned towards doing more like corporate. His stand-up was corporate gigs a lot, and now he's doing some almost like motivational speaking through his Green Apple Podcast, another really great one. Have you been on his podcast?

Peter: I have not. I'm trying to get on his podcast, I have invited him on mine. We have met. We're both members of National Speakers Association. We've met online, not face-to-face and had conversation, and our paths keep keep crossing, but I do listen to the Green Apple Podcast. I have enjoyed it and a mutual friend of ours, Kristen Rampe, was on his. I think you were on his podcast. Now, I've got both you on my podcast so we're even now.

Greg: [laughs] That's right, exactly. Full circle. Circle of life.

Peter: So tell me, if they don't know you, a little bit of your background.

Greg: Well, I guess it's that you have to paint with broad strokes. I changed careers, I had a midlife career change, and I do everything slower than most adults do. So I was 26 when by the time I finally earned my bachelor's degree and my teaching certification. I got a bachelor's in math from the University of Washington, got a teaching certification out here in Utah, and started teaching. Well, I did one year at a high school, and I didn't hate it, but I definitely didn't love it so I took about a year off and, in that year, I got married and I realized after getting married how important health insurance is.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: And so I thought maybe I need to get back into teaching. Between teaching, I spent six months as a waiter at a Mexican restaurant – by the way, I was amazing as a waiter. Of all my careers, I may be best suited to be a waiter – and I spent six months at a new and used car lot selling cars. Uh, I'm horrible at that. That's a career that I was not built for, and then a middle school was in a crisis and they were like, do you know anyone who knows anybody who's qualified to teach this unruly group of 8th graders? Get him get him in here and give them a job. So that's how I got back into teaching. But again, just didn't really love it. I mean, the hours were good but the the job was not so good... and, you know, being a public school teacher, the pay is not awesome. And, to go back further in my history, when I was in high school, my mom owns her own drugstore and so I started working for her, actually, even in middle school. I think I was 14 when I first started working for her, and before I could even drive I was starting to do the bookkeeping for the drug store and I really enjoyed that. So when I was in college it was kind of a tossup: do I do math, do I do accounting? I chose math. I chose wrong. So when this math thing was not so much fun, and it was not playing so well, I decided to go back to school to get my accounting degree. So it took me a couple years of doing that, mostly night and online classes. I finished my accounting degree in 2008, finished my MBA with an accounting emphasis in 2010, and I burned my way through the CPA exam. I did one section a month because I was in in the computerized era.

Peter: Okay.

Greg: I did one section a month for four months and somehow passed all four of them. Every section I took, I felt worse about, and somehow I actually got higher scores.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: And every time I was like, there's no way I'm passing this one, and then the scores come back and I'd be like "what the hell." So I did that. I spent a year at a at a local mid-sized CPA firm. I was in the technology department, and I've never opened QuickBooks in my life but I was supposed to be a pro advisor for that.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: And then come busy season I was also supposed to pitch in and help with taxes, which I spent my whole of the last six months learning QuickBooks not learning UltraTax. So I was pretty horrible at both of them, so when an opportunity came for me to get hired away by a client I gladly accepted and, ever since then, I've been a controller for a group of medical office buildings. So, that's how I got to where I am, as a CPA, but then there's my alter ego, which is the comedian. So, back to when I was teaching, my lower-end math classes. Like, Pete, you probably don't remember eighth-grade math like I do. I remember quite well, and back then it's

not hard math. Like, none of my kids who were failing – well, no, there was one kid who was failing because it was too hard for him – all of the other thousands of kids I taught... it wasn't that this math was too hard, it's just that they weren't motivated. So I started doing these things I called Motivation Mondays, which I admit right now sounds super lame. That's like super lame dad thing to do.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: But I was doing that with these kids. Motivation was always like, hey what do you, really want to do, what are you really passionate about? And, you know, kinda making it where it's like, whatever it you want to do, if you're good at math that will make you better. But anyways, you can only ask kids what they really want to do with their life so many times before you look yourself in the mirror and say "I'm a middle school math teacher."

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: "I want to be a professional skateboarder, I want to be a professional footballer, I want to be an actress," and I go, no one's saying middle school math teacher? Not a single one of you? And me neither, but I've always wanted to do stand-up comedy. So it was that year that I was like, you know, I gotta take my medicine. So I went to a comedy club, I cornered the comedians after the shows and was like, how do you get going? And they told me how the open mic thing went and invited me to an open mic that one of them was running. So I started doing that. I also started taking classes at the local improv club, and it took me forever but I finally became one of the cast members of their stage show at Comedysportz. You do improv, right?

Peter: I do improv and I've done stand-up, but primarily improv. There was, way back when, a group that was here that I would just come to sneak in and stuff with, but most of what I was doing as a guy from Second City Cleveland coming down to hold a workshop and spend a lot of time. I've been a student of it for over 25 years.

Greg: Yeah, nice. So he was with Second City? Yeah, he's with Second City. Isn't there a Comedysportz in Columbus?

Peter: There is not.

Greg: I know Comedysportz has a locations across the country, but I know that there's even more locations that do not have a Comedysportz. So that's my brand, that's what I came up with, and I did that regularly for about 5 years or so, but I started transitioning out of that after I became a CPA because it seemed like there was a lot of stuff happening, with me, with my skill set inside the CPA world, inside the accounting profession, and it seemed like it was more my stand-up stuff that was hitting than my improv stuff. But man, I love improv. I love improv. I love them both, but anyways I stepped away so now we do maybe a few improv shows every year. But anyways, that's sort of the the origin story.

Peter: And you do stand-up? Actually, if you go on YouTube, I found a couple clips of your stand-up routine. You do a rant on an A&A update, which is beautiful. Love it! But then you just recently did something I thought was hilarious. You were doing tax comedy, and you were doing 33 years of Jeb Bush's tax returns.

Greg: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Peter: It went all the way back. He was trying to connect with Millennials, so it went all the way back to 1989, which is the title of Taylor Swift's new album, which I thought was hilarious.

Greg: I think that was the year she was born.

Peter: Yeah, something like that. I've heard a lot about you, but when I watch this stuff you're able to take accounting and really put it into stand-up. And I've done that in the past but I've always found it... maybe I was always too close to it and I wasn't seeing some things that others are others are seeing, but from what I've seen you've done an excellent job. Keep up the chops, dude.

Greg: Thanks. Thanks so much. I have found it's weird doing my material, like my accounting and tax material that I do, in clubs. Like, doing that for audiences that are... because it's kind of cool, when you do that stuff in a club, invariably there's like one account there.

Peter: Right.

Greg: And that guy is like, he's on cloud nine, he's going I know every nuance. I get it. This guy's speaking my language. He feels great and he's laughing the hardest, and obviously it's working otherwise they wouldn't book me in clubs. The rest of the audience are having a good time too, but the accountants feel especially clicked in. But then what I found is, if I do my club material that's like accounting and tax stuff, if I do it for an audience of all accountants then all they do is just like shoot holes. They're like, "Well that's actually incomplete. Your premise for that joke wasn't exactly right."

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: Like I have that one joke where I said, so you know charitable giving is a great tool for tax planning, and that was just a segue into a joke. That's not even part of the joke, and I say that in front of a bunch of accountants, and they're like "actually, no it's not. It's actually not at all. No one would say give more money away so that you can keep forty percent of it, at most, in taxes. You're an idiot." And I go, okay, you're right, you're all smarter than me. I'm just the Chuckle monkey here to make your life a little less unbearable, so my apologies.

Peter: [laughs] But that's a stereotypical accountants right there, who can be extremely picky. I did this one thing for a firm in Dayton some years ago. It was bringing how laughter is beneficial to the workplace, and I said something to this fact. I said, when you laugh, it's good for because it releases the endorphins – you know, the endorphins? That crazy fish that swim through your bloodstream fighting stress, anxiety and depression?

Greg: [laughs]

Peter: I got 5 evaluations back that said this: Mr. Margaritis, dolphins are mammals not fish.

Greg: Oh my gosh. Oh my goodness. That's hilarious.

Peter: And I know there's somebody, there's a few people who are listening to this right now that are like, they're right, they're mammals not fish. They can be a little more on the critical side, but I think when you get a couple of cocktails in them...

Greg: Right.

Peter: If you did a Christmas show, you'd rock.

Greg: Oh yeah. Don't get me wrong. I just have to make sure I put on the right hat when I'm performing for the accounts and make sure I'm dotting all my i's and crossing all my t's. It's very different. It's a totally different feel performing for all accountants, rather than just whatever knuckleheads decided to show up for a club show.

Peter: So let me ask you this question: with a background in stand up and the background in improv, and you're a controller. How have you found those skills to help you in your day-to-day world?

Greg: Just in my day job?

Peter: Yeah.

Greg: Well... can you see this environment that I'm working in?

Peter: I think you're in a tool shed.

Greg: Yeah, it looks like a tool shed, possibly a meth lab, possibly a kill room.

Peter: That's why I figure I just go with the tool shed.

Greg: Anyways, I am currently sharing offices with our building maintenance manager. He's only here two days a week, and even with that he's not in the office he's running around fixing stuff.

So I'm pretty isolated, in terms of my job, so I don't have a whole lot of moment by moment human interactions. But I mean that's a lot of my job. Talking with bankers, talking with the owners of the LLC's, talking with vendors, talking with different sources that we might have to go to for financing. Things like this, and by being able to be approachable and having a good sense of humor and being funny, I feel like it's a way that I've been able to develop quicker, stronger bonds with these people that I do rely on to be able to do my job. And the interesting thing is it's not just bonds. It's almost like people are more willing to be transparent with me because of my sense of humor. For instance, even in just the last week, I was joking around with my banker about all the ways that I could get him fired if I were to tell like the upper echelon of his company the different topics of conversation that he initiates with me about religion and politics and all these other things...

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: Even some possible confidentiality violations that he does, but I think it's because of the sense of humor that I have and the humor that I can bring to the job that it does really kind of break down barriers, break down people's defenses, and it makes for some real open and honest communication, which I think, in the long run, really helps me be more effective at what I do, and again that's regardless of what I'm talking about. Whether it's the real estate guy who is trying to lease out are vacant space or whether it's the doctors who are owners in our buildings, or whether it's the CPA firm that we still retain to do our review work and our tax returns, so all that stuff is all very helpful.

Peter: Breaking down barriers, the ability to make someone laugh, or to have that personality, you make friends a lot quicker.

Greg: Yeah, absolutely.

Peter: And. in a business environment, it's all about networking, it's all about connecting with people, but as a gentleman from another podcast, Jamie Richardson, Vice President of government and shareholder relations at White Castle Systems, because when he networks he looks at it as making friends, and by doing it he also just kinda lowers the expectations, and that kind of lowers the nerves where you can just have this conversation with somebody. It can turn into a friendship just just as quickly as it can turn into anything else, but it just opens the door a lot quicker.

Greg: So true. I mean, that's a great way. I mean, so many people just cringe at the idea of networking, but I think if you look at it as I'm not I'm not going to lunch to get business cards and hopefully to get someone to put into my CRM. Think of it as I'm going to lunch to hang out buddies, then that's how you can actually get yourself out of the seat and doing that kind of stuff. So yeah, I think that's awesome.

Peter: You know why a lot of people don't like to network? Because of their mothers in their head. Greg, what did your mother always tell you about when you meet people?

Greg: Clean underpants?

Peter: That was the second one. She said don't talk to...

Greg: to strange women?

Peter: No, to strangers in general.

Greg: Oh, to strangers in general. Okay.

Peter I prefer talking to strange women, but just strangers in general, because their strangers. But a stranger is someone who's in downtown Columbus, Ohio with a bottle of Mogen David looking at a light pole going "you're awful awful awful tall and beautiful too." But to your point, every business gathering is an opportunity.

Greg: Yeah.

Peter: So you get your mother out your head, and always wear clean underwear.

Greg: Yeah, I mean I think that's a given. If there's a CPA where that's not a given, I'd say that's a that's a crime of moral turpitude and they should probably get their license revoked for that.

Peter: Exactly. The other thing about you, as a CPA, that I think will be fascinating to a lot of people is this ability to stand up in front of a group of people and either perform or present, because you are the founder of Comedy CPE, so you are NASBA approved. You're going around the country interacting with a variety of CPAs and you're standing in front of them and you're doing public speaking and you're not petrified.

Greg: Right. I'm not exactly sure how people came to their interests in different things but yeah I mean... the first time I remember getting up in front of people to speak is probably in ninth grade, maybe even before that. You know, I do stupid little things that everybody does in elementary school like plays and things, but I think somewhere in ninth grade I started like doing speeches to be student body vice president and whatever, stuff like that, and even when I first started that I would try to use humor as my way to get to get in. So I was going in that direction a lot anyways. Like I said, I was a teacher. That's one of things you do. I mean, every day when you're a teacher, you're up in front of people all day long. 35 kids at a time trying to convey topics, trying to convey some pretty technical, pretty boring crap. Like the friggin quadratic formula.

Peter: [laughs] Yeah.

Greg: To people who really don't want to be there, to a hostile audience. So I think that was one way that I was able to learn how to have a lot of energy and intensity, and be as engaging as possible. But yeah, I really do love being in front of people. It's actually funny. One of the presentation areas that I like the least is doing webinars. I *have* hated them. I recently figured out how to love them, but the weird thing is in webinars you are presenting to, sometimes, you have no damn clue how many people you're presenting to. It's just you in front of your computer with a webcam. It's like being in your bathroom talking to the mirror and I freaking hate it.

Peter: Yeah I'm with you.

Greg: It's so hard because you have no sense of whether how many people are rifling through their desk for the gun that they keep it working to put themselves out of their misery because you're so horrible, because there's no feedback like that. I really I really get my juice out of the live presentations, when I do have an audience there that I can get the vibe off of, in terms of how I'm doing, and feed off of that. I'll even try to fold that into my presentation. A funny thing with webinars: what I started doing, just recently, is I now I won't do webinar without a co-host. So I'll get a guest, I'll get somebody to be there physically – not just to be on Skype like you and I are right now, but somebody physically present with me – that at least knows something about the topic. We're having a conversation so I can be interesting and engaging, and so that's kind of a trick that I've found. Feel free to use, and any of your listeners can too, but I love it. I tell my guest that my biggest priority here is for you and I to have a great, engaging conversation that we both think is fun. If we do that, first and foremost, that's my performance indicator, whether or not this was a successful webinar. Did you have a good time? Did I have a good time? We both did? That's the main KPI. The second one is did we get through all the bullet points? I put together a few slides to use as my webinar slides. If we get through all the main points, that's the second KPI. If we hit both of those, I'm ecstatic and I know that we nailed it. The other thing with the webinar, this is more technical, is that, with GoToWebinar, you can share your webcam and share your slides at the same time so that people can see me and my guests interacting, but at the same time they can still see whatever slide we got out there so it helps helps with the entertainment. I actually was on some webinar and I remember being really, really interested in it and I can't remember – I wasn't presenting, I was just a participant – I think it was on fraud or something like this and there's a couple guys having this conversation that I remember being engaging, but the whole time they were talking, for over half of the webinar, they had one slide up. They just had their pictures and their names and you couldn't see these guys, they're just talking. I thought this is horrible. I can't handle this. But like, all you need to do is have little pop-up window of your webcam where you can see these guys talking to each other and all the sudden it's like, oh look humans talking now I'm interested because I'm a monkey.

Peter: Yeah yeah yeah. I agree about webinars. I actually did a series of webinars with a guy out of New York and Connecticut, and unfortunately we weren't able to be there, but the way we were able to be engaging is our voices were completely different.

Greg: Oh yeah.

Peter: I think that the dichotomy of the voices helped keep people engaged, because you're right. You're just sitting there looking at your computer screen, and what I can tell from you is you get your energy from others. On Myers-Briggs you're probably an E, as in extrovert, and that's how to get my energy – and that's how I am.

Greg: Yeah

Peter: I do very few webinars these days, and even if I've got a smaller live crowd it helps.

Greg: Yeah.

Peter: But last week I was a Minnesota, for the tax office. I do a piece on ethics and had 850 people in the audience and I just – well I can't say how I was feeling, but man. I just loved it. I told my wife about it and she said she would have crawled up in the corner and died. But she knows me because she said the more the merrier.

Greg: Oh yeah. Totally. Absolutely. Although, the bigger the crowd you flop in front of, that can be rough. My biggest claim to fame in stand up is I got to open for Weird Al Yankovic in 2004 at the Utah State Fair. Sold-out crowd of 3,500 13-year-old boys and their dads who brought them.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: I was only doing stand up for a couple years at that point, so the fact that I even landed that was pretty wild and I was super stoked about it. I was on for 20 minutes and I had a solid 20-minute set but they bill it as Weird Al, and there's no indication that there even is an opening act, and I'm confident that most of these prepubescent kids in the audience didn't even understand the concept of an opening act, and so all I am is I'm delaying their gratification for Weird Al. So biggest audience I've ever had, 3,500 people with Weird Al, but also I was kind of decimated at their uh... their distaste for me that night.

Peter: So was the body language arms crossed over the chest, rolling their eyes, looking at the watches.

Greg: Oh, no. I was heckled from the moment I got out.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: It was miserable. So here's what happens: so I get booked for the show because Weird Al, at that point (I don't know if he still does), but at that point and for many years, because I've met a bunch of other people who would open for him that same way I did and and, fortunately,

they had similar stories to what I had, where it was just like not a great experience. People were not excited to see anything except Weird Al.

Peter: Right.

Greg: So I get books for this, I show up and I kind of wonder because I don't really know even where to go before the show. I'm there maybe 30-45 minutes ahead of time and I end up finding the stage manager and he says, "okay so did they tell you the rules about what we need you to do?" I'm going no.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: Again, like I said, I'm two years in and they want me to do 20 minutes, and so I feel really confident with the material, with my 20 minutes of material, but I do not feel confident about changing a word of it right before this happens. He says, "well here's a few things: first off we don't want anybody doing any song parodies." I say, well good, I don't do that anyways, and he says, "and we want you to be clean and no drug references." And then all of a sudden, because I'm in Utah and in Utah clean means different things. I've been routines at churches, and I say, well I reference people peeing in a joke and I do jokes about people peeing, and you know there's that, and then there's what you can get away with on late-night network television, where it's mostly just language.

Peter: Right.

Greg: So I'm not gonna change anything there because I think I'm relatively clean, and then drug references like... at one point I compare the price of a teacup poodle to the to the street value of drugs. I'm going okay, is that a drug reference? I don't know. It's not about me doing drugs, but again I'm gonna do it. It's too late. I'm doing what I'm doing. And then the kicker was this dude also says, "Hey do you mind doing your own offstage intro?" I should have said yes, I'm absolutely not okay doing my own stage intro, you do my freakin offstage intro and then I'll walk on... but this was like my dream coming true. I'm think I'll be hanging out with Weird Al and he's gonna love me and ask me to tour with him indefinitely, so I'm gonna be the yes man of all yes men, and so I say sure I'm totally cool doing my own offstage intro.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: So it's an outdoor venue. It's at a State Fair. Outdoor venue, I'm doing my own offstage intro, so I'm like hiding behind that the stacks of speakers that they've got in the spare part. I know there's people in the audience that can see me behind the speakers, and I'm using my best radio guy voice like "ladies and gentleman, welcome to We're Al Yankovic, but first you're opening act: please welcome to the stage Greg Kyte!" And then I walk out, holding the same mic that I just did my own offstage intro with, and the first thing I hear anybody say was "Who are you?!" And that began... I mean, up to that point, I'd always dealt with hecklers by just ignoring

them because, if you're in a club and somebody heckles and nobody responds they just feel like idiots and so they shut up, but when you've got 3,500 people you're gonna have enough idiots who are shouting out stuff that they feel okay. It was about maybe 15 minutes in that some people way back in the bleachers just started chanting, while I was doing my set, they start chanting "Weird AI, Weird AI." So my big comeback to the hecklers in the bleachers chanting Weird AI was this, this is a super clever, I said "shut up!"

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: Which, actually, was great. So they did shut up and a bunch of people applauded me telling them to shut up, so that felt good, but I was kind of off balance this whole time so I was like, I'm just gonna wrap it up. So I didn't even do my whole 20 minutes. I should have said, I'm gonna do one last bit before I go. I should have said that. But, instead, I said I'm gonna go now, but first I'm gonna do one last bit. Saying I'm gonna go now got a bigger applause than I when I told the people to shut up.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: So I was decimated. The one thing that saved my self-esteem was that my brother had flown into Salt Lake City from Mississippi to see the show, and my brother's one of those guys who, if I had bombed, he would be like "dude, never do that again, you're bringing disgrace upon me and your family," but afterwards he was like "no dude you're really good," and he was impressed with it. So I was like, okay, I must not have sucked because brother Bob would have put me in my place otherwise.

Peter: So to take away from that... not that many people would be able to handle something quite like that. So you can basically walk into any type of environment today, whether it's a boardroom or a classroom or in front of a client or whatever, and, for the most part, be adjusted. What could be worse? There can't be anything worse, to me, than walking out and and you have 20 minutes and they're like "who are you?!" Honestly, that probably would have tripped me up right there, just on the get go, and they're spiraling and chanting back and you just plow through and get the job done. So you can walk into any place, except maybe a woman's restroom. Other than that, you're walking in with confidence.

Greg: Right. I wouldn't want to do that. But the funny thing is I would say, and I think part of the allure to me of doing comedy, whether it's improv or stand up, is that it's high risks whenever you get there. With stand-up, you go up onstage you go this is just me. If you reject this, you're rejecting me because this is this is just me onstage. If you hate this, you hate... it's nuts. I mean, I know there's a lot of people who can separate that, but for me it's always been a real personal thing be onstage. Butk, for me, that's what juices me up about it. So I'd say I put a little bit of a spin on what you said. I'm not I'm not intimidated by any audience to the point where I bail. You see I'm saying? And even with that I'd save the nerves and the anxiety that comes with presenting to any group, that I'm able to use that as fuel to propel myself to a better

performance, whatever that performance may be. Whether that's a sales meeting or a board meeting or whatever. So I can use that to get there, but I would say that the thing that persists is there is always a bit of anxiety, but the payoff of going headlong into something that does scare the pants off you.

Peter: Yeah.

Greg: There's just a huge payoff when you do that and you hit a homerun.

Peter: Yeah. I did that this past year, in February, when I closed the show for a theater group up in Detroit. I haven't done stand-up in about 10 years and I had about eight minutes worth of material, and I heard it, I thought I heard a belly laugh. Someone recorded it and, when I watched it, I went yeah, there's definitely a belly laugh there.

Greg: Good.

Peter: But it is that risk and reward. I mean, there's a lot of risk because it's just you and the audience is gonna love you or the audience could hate you, or it could be somewhere in between, but it's a tough thing to stand in front of a crowd by yourself, no matter if you're doing stand-up or if you're delivering a CPE, because all the eyes are on you and you're the subject matter expert.

Greg: Yep, exactly. I totally hear that. Do you go out and do open mics very much nowadays?

Peter: I will start doing it again from January to April because, since I'm not practicing CPA I have some down time.

Greg: Yeah, that's dead zone. I hear ya.

Peter: And I will start working, around Christmas time, on some new material to take out and do some open mics here around the Columbus, Ohio area. You know, that guy told me to just keep doing it, to get the chops. I mean, you still have to get up there, but there's a lot to learn from stand-up. In fact, I will share with you that, before, my fear, when I did some open mics in Columbus before I went to Detroit, and I forgot how people are really scared to do any type of presentation. I hadn't felt that in a very long time so that that helped a lot in connecting with the audience. To say, I've been there. Actually, I just revisit it, as well as to be able to stand up in front of a group and deal with crickets. Also writing, because, as you know, there's no writing for improv. It's all improvisation. There may be some shell around it, but writing for standup you've gotta keep cutting and cutting and polishing and cutting and polishing, and I look at that as a corporate memo going to the CFO.

Greg: Totally. That's so that's. I hundred percent agree with you and I think, for me, and I've eased off of this, for but for years I had a rule where I like forced myself to write and tweet 3

accounting jokes every day. So I'd go on to like Accounting Today and I get like the AICPA Daily News email stuff and use that as like my source material. If I couldn't get it there I'd go onto like CPA trend lines or Growing Concern, which I've written for in blog form, and I just try to find I had three jokes every day and tweet those out. And I think Twitter was one of the big things, for me, that just sharpened my skills and it's like... get rid of anything that's not necessary. That's a huge skill because how many times do you get an email where you're like, this email went on and on but he could have said this in about three sentences. That's so true. I mean. the fewer words you put in anything, whether it's a direct message, a tweet, an email, a text, whatever. People are going to appreciate you for being concise, and yeah stand-up definitely makes you be concise.

Peter: Thank you for reminding me about the Twitter piece there because I used to do that for a while. I kind of got out of that habit but I have some comedian friends who do that, in the sense of it's 140 characters Keep it to 140 and put it out. A little tangent, but there's a podcast you might like to listen to from a friend of mine named Rik Roberts. He's a touring comedian. he's got a podcast called School of Laughs.

Greg: Okay.

Peter: It's all about stand-up. He's able to take stand up and separate the personal from the product itself, but every now and then I'm listening and I'll pick up a tip or two just to keep in the back of my mind. He's been doing it for a couple couple years now.

Greg: School of Laughs?

Peter: It's Rik Robert. He's based out of Nashville.

Greg: Okay.

Peter: But I found that improv helps in reading an audience, adapting to that audience, using Yes And, keep things moving in a forward and positive direction. Because, as you know as accountants, the precision is number one, in many ways. As you well know, anytime you get to do any type of performance or any type of entertainment we have to let precision go.

Greg: Right. Yeah, and that's been a battle for me because I know, even in my stand up, I want to be super precise and it's hard for me when I have a joke where it's like... I know it's a little better if I'm a little sloppier. Like instead of being really concise. So not so much like the stuff I was talking about before, like one of the tools we have in tax planning is the charitable contribution deduction. That's different. This is more like allowing my wording to be less cerebral and more just, like, you feel it. That's where that tension is for me, where it's uncomfortable for me to go to those places where my communication is more intuitive and less logical. So I hear that.

Peter: Yeah, I hear from the precision standpoint. I get that piece from the material, but anytime you go and do any type of presentation you also have to expect something's gonna happen that's not going to go the right way.

Greg: Right

Peter: And it could be, if I'm so precise and memorized and I'm saying something and I forget a piece, if I stop and start to panic and I forget how to breathe and it just just snowballs into the paramedics showed up and trying to give me CPR.

Greg: Well here's the thing I've been doing. So, for the last couple years, I've been getting as many open mics as I can, specifically open mics, because the stakes are lower because you don't have a paying audience there – so I feel like I can kinda eff around a little bit more – but I've been putting myself in places where I try to show up without written stuff. It's like I'll have just some ideas maybe scrawled in a notebook, but not like real jokes written, and so for the past two years I feel like I've really sharpened my chops. And a lot of times, because in open mic only get, at most, 10 minutes (and that's hardly ever, usually you're talking between three and seven, sometimes two minutes they want to give you and that's it). So sometimes I'll do a whole set where all it is is it's me making jokes about the guys who went up ahead of me. There was this one time where I was at I was at Wise Guys, that's the main club that we got here in Salt Lake for an open mic, and there's some guy that went up and he was horrible. Like horrible in that he ruined the night.

Peter: Wow.

Greg: Like he ruined it. Everybody's just going what the hell just happened to us, and I was like oh I'm going to go but I'm gonna do my whole time about that guy. I know the club owner, and he was running the mic and I went up to him and said “Keith you gotta let me up, like, now,” because I need to rescue the room, and it was the best because it was stuff that just came to mind went up. It was not improv comedy, but it was off the cuff, and that was the best feeling because not only did I freakin destroy but I was able to take this open mic that was ok then this guy went up and just he ruined the party, and then you go up and you have this awesome set where you knock a homerun and you're the hero. You just feel amazing, but I also think that that's helped me when I do my ethics, because my main two presentations are ethics and fraud. So when I'm there and I know I'm able to just go off script and kinda monkey around with stuff that's in my head. That's a lot of power that you have, in terms of presenting.

Peter: Yeah, that has a tremendous amount of power, and there's one thing you mentioned earlier that I want to get to before we wrap things up. You've got comedian, you've got CPA, you've got get improv, you've got controller, but you're also a cartoonist, right?

Greg: Right. Okay, that's the dumbest thing ever.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: That I'm a cartoonist... okay, so I don't even really know the genesis of how or why I started cartooning, but not too long ago, just for fun, started sketching some stuff out and I go that's not horrible, so I scanned it into my computer and I put it up on Twitter. It doesn't even get much action on Twitter, but the stupid thing is – and this is the real lesson here – the whole idea that, if people are running a firm, they need to find a niche. Because, if you have a niche, you have so much more power than if you don't. The way that relates to me is I see myself as a stand-up comedian, but my niche is accounting. Anybody who knows me from my comedy, they would say “Oh, Greg, he's the angry accountant comedian,” and it's like, yeah, because I yell a lot. I'm very intense when I'm onstage.

Peter: yeah

Greg: But the fact that I'm also serving the accounting profession means, okay... I mean I know there's people who are like artists, who cartoon all the time, and can't sell a cartoon to save their damn life, and they've been doing it forever, and I understand how insulting it is. how easy this was for me to get started. Obviously I've got a decent sense of humor, so I start drawing these dumb cartoons and was wondering if somebody might buy these from me. I'm gonna just try. I have some connections with different online media outlets for the accounting profession, so I started sending the cartoons to them I go “Hey, Tom Hood, would you pay me for this?” He's kinda like, naw, and I'm like that's okay, you shouldn't, because I'm no good. I just started.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: So I send them to a few places then I go back to Going Concern, and I said I used to blog for them for long time, and I finally tried to quit a couple times and finally it stuck.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: I said, hey, would you buy these cartoons? They're like “yeah.” So, all of a sudden, I'm getting my cartoons published every other week, basically. The schedule's pretty much every other week that I get one on Going Concern. It has been a blast, and it's weird because it's so much fun for me to exercise that other part of your brain that is like drawing. So you kind of have the jokey side, which is one part of your brain, and the drawing, which is another, and it's great, and I feel very honored that I have a platform to share that cartooning stuff.

Peter: Yeah, I've been following your cartoons. I went, man, this guy's got a lot of talents. There's been some real funny ones. There's been a couple I looked at where I went, I don't get it, but I know sometimes I'm just that way.

Greg: [laughs] It's funny. Caleb Newquist is the guy who runs Going Concern. We talked about this and he's like I'm okay. Because definitely a lot of these people outside the accounting profession are not going to get them.

Peter: Yeah.

Greg: And even, depending on your specialty inside and even your experience and possibly even your point of view, people inside the accounting profession might not get them. It's like that's okay, I don't care. If it's a smaller and smaller little group of people that get it, he's ok with it. Plus he finds them to be a great way to populate the Pinterest page for Going Concern.

Peter: He's the only Accountant I know with a Pinterest page.

Greg: Right, exactly.

Peter: So, before we leave, I do have one question for you. You got the accounting side, a little bit of the tax side, what's your opinion on the deduction for the blind?

Greg: [laughs] Oh my gosh. I'm totally cool it. First off, my main opinion is that everything is more complex when you make accountants do it. So, like the tax code is obviously way more complex than it needs to be, and one and one of the biggest examples of that is the standard deduction. Because the whole idea of the standard is like – if you ask normal people do you know what the standard deduction is, they go yeah. And it should be a really straightforward concept because it's a tax deduction and it's standards, so depending on your filing status it's the same no matter what... unless you're blind, and, again, this is where, if I was doing this for accountants, I'd go “or unless you're over 65, relax.”

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: I'm not going to focus on that. Okay, but the biggest thing is that blind people get a higher standard deduction, and I'm totally cool with that. Because it's like, you know, I get it. It would be horrible to be blind, that's gonna affect your earning potential, so if we give them a break on the taxes that's wonderful. The thing I don't get is why that's the only disability, in the world, that gets it. Why is it that blind people are the only... it's like here's someone who's blind and it's like, dude, that sucks that you're blind because you've never been able to see a baby's face or a beautiful sunset... so how about we make that all better by allowing you to pay slightly less in taxes? Like, hey quadriplegic, stop whining about how you pay all of your taxes like a damn America.

Peter: [laughs]

Greg: It doesn't make any sense, but that's the world in which we live.

Peter: And and that's the humor in the tax code, and how he's been able to find that bit of humor just by saying the word "standard" deduction, which is for everybody. There's a carve-out for blind people, but, hey, people who diabetes, a quadriplegic, keep paying your taxes!

Greg: Yeah, it doesn't matter.

Peter: Well, Greg, thank you. I know we could probably do this for about three or four hours and it would be a blast. What I'm going to ask is I'd like to have you back on at a later date and we can pick this up and just keep keep flying with it.

Greg: I'd love to, yeah.

Peter: I appreciate you taking time. I've had a blast. I think you've had a blast too. I look forward to our next time. How can people find you?

Greg: Well, if you want to see those cartoons, go to [GoingConcern.com](http://GoingConcern.com). I still Tweet, probably not three jokes a day, but I probably get three a week out. So follow me on Twitter, which is [@GregKyte](https://twitter.com/GregKyte). Or you can go to [ComedyCPE.com](http://ComedyCPE.com). That actually takes you to my website, which I haven't updated for a while, but there's some links on that where you can check out some sketch videos and some standup videos that I've done.

Peter: Appreciate it!

Greg: Yep, thank you!

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