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[music]

Peter: [00:00:20] Welcome to improv is no joke podcast. It's all about becoming a more effective communicator by embracing the principles of improvisation. I'm your host Peter Margarita's the self-proclaimed chief edutainment officer of my business the accidental account. My goal is to provide you with thought provoking interviews with business leaders so you can become an effective improviser which will lead to building stronger relationships with clients customers colleagues and even your family. So let's start to show.

[music]

Peter: [00:00:55] Welcome to episode number 58 and today My guest is Allison Estep, who's a former creative services associate for the Indiana society CPA and a graduate of the conservatory program at the Second City in Chicago. Our conversation focuses on the everyday application of improvisation skills to help us combat fear, take risks, and become a more well-rounded person. I believe an interesting part in our conversation is when Allison states improv should be part of our current day educational system. She makes some very valid points to the statement and I know you'll enjoy this interview. Before we get to the interview, I'd like to talk about Listen, learn, and learn. I have partnered with the Maryland Association of CPAs and the Business Learning Institute to bring [an exciting new learning opportunity for accounting professionals to earn CPE credits](#). You can earn up to one CPE credit for each completed podcast episode purchased for only \$29 through the American Association of CPAs and the Business Learning Institute [self-study website](#). The podcast episodes are mobile friendly. Open your browser on your smartphone, tablet, or computer, Go to the MACPA and BLI self-study account, and listen to an episode. Take the review and final exam while you're working out or after listening to an episode on your commute to and from work - It's that easy! While all Improv is no Joke podcasts are available on my website, only those purchased through the MACPA and BLI self-study Web site are eligible for CPE credit. You can get detailed instructions by visiting my website at www.PeterMargaritis.com and clicking on the graphic "Improv is no Joke for CPE credit" on my home page. I hope you enjoy this exciting and flexible new way of earning CPE credit. OK now let's get to the interview with Alison Estep.

[music]

Peter: [00:03:02] Welcome to episode 58. Today my guest is Allison Estep, who is the former creative services associate for the Indiana society CPA. But better yet, Allison was one of those very creative types and I'm in envy and awe of her because she got to spend three years studying improv at Second City and did another year of studying improv at an Improv Olympics, or otherwise known as IO, and for my audience I'm very good at improvisation but I may have met my match today because I'm dealing with a pro. So first and foremost Allison-- Oh and by the way Allison speaking to us today from a pretty shabby location. She said she can look out her window and see the Rock of Gibraltar and that's not a bar.

Allison: [00:03:52] I can pretty much touch it. [laughs]

Peter: [00:03:54] You can pretty much the Rock of Gibraltar. She is in Spain as we speak. Oh thank you for taking time out of your very busy day to spend with me on my podcast.

Allison: [00:04:09] Well of course. Anything I can do.

Peter: [00:04:11] Oh this is going to be so much fun. We may have to edit out laughter which has never been done before.

Allison: [00:04:18] Ohhh.. OK well we'll get there.

Peter: [00:04:22] The two of us doing this... There'll be a tremendous amount of laughs. But give the audience a little bit more about who Alison is and some of your experiences and your background.

Allison: [00:04:35] Where do we start? So I'm from Indiana originally and I started doing improv off and on and I would drive up to Chicago on a Sunday morning, take a class, and drive back that night to make it to work. I kind of got obsessed with it after my first class and the boyfriend at the time we actually ended up moving to New York to pursue it because he was like I'm not going to do this one day driving anywhere with you. And I was like well we've got to move That's what I've been trying to do. So you know we did that. Longer story short I ended up in Chicago by myself in 2010 and I immediately started taking classes, went about three years with the program, and just had an absolute blast. And it's it's one of those things that it becomes so much part of your life that you get a little bit of separation anxiety when you're kind of removed from it. Like when I moved back to Indiana in 2016, it was total... not complete culture shock because there is a smaller scene in Indiana. But my God do I miss it. There's nothing like doing improv on stage in front of people and having it kill. I mean you can't understand how like your soul lights up with that laughter. You know like you know we're talking about you've done it... like it's it just it's amazing! It's such a high it's crazy.

Peter: [00:06:08] It's my heroine, actually. When I can when I can do that and have the improv skills all come into line and have have the audience just laughing hysterically... there is nothing better.

Allison: [00:06:20] Oh yeah. When you're vibing with a crowd it's out of control. I did this one bit one time when I was a lounge singer, and I was out there most of the time by myself because that was that was the sketch that I had pre-written, and some of the riffs were just with audience members, and you know you're out there by yourself- it is scary.

Peter: [00:06:41] Yes.

Allison: [00:06:42] But the second I say the first syllable, I'm out. I'm done. The fear has left to me and I'm ready to roll. I told you I'm going to go off the rails - you've got to get a reel me in or I'll just keep talking. Or you'll never get a word in.

Peter: [00:06:56] That's OK. But tell me... I mean when you're in Second City and you're there for three years and I know they've got a curriculum outlined and the courses that you can take

and they're over I think like eight weeks... you fell in love with this. But what was it about the curriculum that just really inspired you?

Allison: [00:07:18] Well so I went through the entire program and you have to audition to get past a certain level. And I made it all the way through the conservatory and graduated the program, so to speak. The very first class... for me at least, by the end of it, it was something that I felt every person - it needs to be a requirement that they take an improv class at some point in their life because it's not to prepare you to be onstage. It is to prepare you to not fear life period - to just not be afraid. I mean you know exactly right?

Peter: [00:07:59] You've said it right there. I mean you just summarize it all right there. That's wonderful how you how you put that.

Allison: [00:08:07] And that's that's exactly how I felt from day one. And so I was like well I'm now going to be a disciple and prophet of this because it's out of control. Everyone needs to go through that because I know so many introverted people that-- So I know some shy people.

Peter: [00:08:38] Yes.

Allison: [00:08:39] That would really benefit from this. When I say I'm going on stage and it doesn't scare me at all and some of them say that's their worst nightmare... you know you should not feel that way and you should be able to. And I know that's an inherent difference in people but we all have to talk in front of other people at some point for any reason - a number of reasons. And it really takes the fear out of that. And I used to be terrified - like I had a speech class in high school and I was absolutely terrified... my teacher told me to put my hair back because I would sit and play with my hair the entire time I was talking because my nerves were just running wild. If I would have had a class earlier in my life, I think it would have set me up a little bit... I would have succeeded in a few other areas possibly. Like you know mean? See I told you I'm just gonna ramble.

Peter: [00:09:35] No it's fine.

Allison: [00:09:35] Especially when I get on a subject I'm passionate about I just go.

Peter: [00:09:40] Well you're validating a lot of things that I've been saying for a long time. And the thing about the fear - it does help you get past that fear. And I used to be a very shy person and when I tell people that they just kind of laugh like I never.

Allison: [00:09:57] Yeah. But you would never know that.

Peter: [00:09:58] You never know that. But it took a lot but and I started getting that shyness. But what it really honed in is when I started doing improv, and you're right. It takes that fear away, and you know people say standing in front of People's their worst nightmare. I have two worst nightmares: One is the crazy guy in North Korea hitting a button we're going to a nuclear war.

Allison: [00:10:21] Oh god. No kidding. Yeah that's that's a good one.

Peter: [00:10:25] And my other worst nightmare is the client's check does not clear.

Allison: [00:10:30] Oh no [laughs]

Peter: [00:10:31] Those are my two.

Allison: [00:10:32] [laughs] Those are a lot of those are legit.

Peter: [00:10:35] Those are legit fears - those are worst nightmares. I'm not getting paid. You know the check bounces.

Allison: [00:10:42] Mhm.

Peter: [00:10:43] So you obviously discovered this early on and I forgot because we met, and just so the audience knows: I just met Alison about maybe three, four weeks ago.

Allison: [00:10:56] Yeah. I think like right at like three. Yeah.

Peter: [00:10:59] When I was at Indiana society of CPAs speaking, a good friend of mine - and Karl if you're listening, you're the man - introduced me to Allison. He just happened to be at the Indiana society that day. He was actually coming to give me a couple of pictures that he took that he thought I would like. And then I guess he struck up a conversation with you Allison and you mentioned something about improv and then on my break he said you got to meet this woman.

Allison: [00:11:24] [laughs]

Peter: [00:11:24] And it just just it just-- I know my wife will be listen to this but after we sat down and talked, it was love at first improv.

Allison: [00:11:35] [laughs] Well and the reason I met Karl is because he overheard me talking to Stacy about that I was moving. And then you know we kept talking and he was like oh I've got to get the book after you know we kept talking and I realized who he was and I was like Carl! No! I've been stalking you.

Peter: [00:11:53] [laughs]

Allison: [00:11:53] You're the member that takes all these amazing photographs, because Kara had some of them framed on her wall. And They were beautiful. So I had been trying to figure out who he was. It was very serendipitous that whole day.

Peter: [00:12:07] It was.

Allison: [00:12:08] Yeah it was very strange, in a beautiful beautiful way.

Peter: [00:12:12] So thinking back at your time at Second City, is there a point in time that you would say, whatever you were doing, That was the pinnacle. That was at the top of the

mountain. It couldn't get any better than that day or that evening when you were studying improv.

Allison: [00:12:30] It was a show case, our graduation showcase, and it was when I was doing that cabaret scene and I mentioned earlier.

Peter: [00:12:37] Right.

Allison: [00:12:37] Because that was kind of my own thing. And that's... I just need to write myself a one-woman show because that's kind of... that was a taste of where the pinnacle would be for me. You know I haven't reached that pinnacle. My pinnacle at that time though would be probably... well my sketch group and I were in sketchfest and that was pretty big. But there were a few times just when just doing improv on stage in class shows that were kind of the height of happiness.

Peter: [00:13:16] So let's talk about this one One woman show that you had mentioned, and just so my audience gets a feel of it... in writing a one woman show, it's just not Alison just sitting there by herself and writing. It's a collaborative effort between a lot of individuals that know you and your writing style and helping you build that one woman show, and then also getting feedback for an audience. It's not you in a vacuum.

Allison: [00:13:44] No no no no no. That's kind of workshoping. Well just two things. So my boyfriend and I... he actually is very good at helping me with character work because we'll just start and offhanded comment you know and then just run with it. And now there's a palm tree named Allen outside of the front of this hotel that we have a whole backstory for. Like there's just silly rambling things that start something and you develop a character out of it. And that's kind of how improv starts you get a suggestion - you get one little nook, you know one little tidbit of something, and it flourishes because the actors just go with it. They just run with it.

Peter: [00:14:24] And how do they do that? What's the magic words that they use to get that to happen?

Allison: [00:14:30] Oh it can be bumpy. So sometimes it's not just magic out of the gate. Like let's not sugarcoat it. I have sat through many many an improv set Not laughing through The whole thing, by any stretch. I don't want to say it's fully saturated, but Chicago is very rich with the improv scene. And so they're all walks, and I do fully believe that every person should take an improv improv course throughout their life. I don't think every person is an improviser... you know those are very different things. It is very hard. It is very hard, and if you're having an off day It can be crippling completely.

Peter: [00:15:12] So everybody's taking Improv course but not everybody is an improvised, so that what I hear there is, with improv and this character development and this you know let's run with it. It's all around two words. Yes, And. It's not negating. It's positive. We're moving things forward. So I see that, but I think those who might not be good improvisers are those who are thinking more about they're trying to be funny, and they're not listening and they have an agenda that they're trying to push and it just doesn't mesh, and that's when it becomes you know cringey... when we don't have cohesiveness of the team and somebody is just trying to be

the center-- the person wants to be a stand up comedian. But there's no there's no stand up in improvisation.

Allison: [00:16:05] No, there really isn't.

Peter: [00:16:07] They're two separate beasts.

Allison: [00:16:11] Yeah they are. They are completely you know separate animals there. You're not out there for yourself by yourselves. You are very much with a team and everybody on that stage wants you to succeed. You know everybody off that stage wants you to succeed. Nobody really... I don't think people typically like to feel embarrassed for other people. You know I think that's where it gets cringey. Yeah nobody really wants to feel that, and with improv it's all unknown. That's why it's such a scary thing for people that have never been through a class maybe, or don't know everything about it, but it's a little less scary for the people on stage once you realize everything you have to say is not a joke. It does not have to be funny. Sometimes the most mundane things can be the funniest.

Peter: [00:17:04] I've had people laugh when I'm doing improv just on the word "OK.

Allison: [00:17:09] Exactly. Because being the straight man sometimes is the funniest part.

Peter: [00:17:14] Right.

Allison: [00:17:15] You know, some of my throwaway lines... we did an improv. It was it was a Christmas special. God that was a riot. Actually that could have been one of my... See I have so many good memories. I don't know, but it was really good and I was Mrs. Claus and I just said a throw away you know kind of line and this lady just lost it. You know when I was like oh my god... I kind of muttered it even. And she lost it.

Peter: [00:17:44] Because you know when I think about that.. Did you see Don't Think Twice?

Allison: [00:17:50] I have not seen that. No I'm so excited, with Mike Birbiglia. I have not seen that yet.

Peter: [00:17:55] It stars Keegan-Michael Key. It's a story about improv, an improv group, and there's a couple of scenes in there where the main character, Keegan, starts to take over because he wants to turn it into him versus the group because he wants to go on SNL.

Allison: [00:18:14] Oh sure.

Peter: [00:18:14] Yeah and you could... And they did a great job with this because you can see the body language and see the other improvisers just kind of going oh here he goes again. It's not about the team, it's about me. He did a great interview with Stephen Colbert about the movie and he talks about the Yes, And, and improv, and he goes is the exact opposite of showbusiness because show business it's all about me baby and in improv It's about the group.

Allison: [00:18:44] Yeah. I've never-- Yeah have never thought about it. It is the exact opposite of showbiz. But there are people who are trying to be in show business. And so that's the thin

line that you walk. Because to be kind of a stand out in an improv world... like the ones that are currently on SNL that I have seen... they were so good at listening to each other - the give and take - that that's actually what made them stand out. Knowing how to walk that brilliant line between hilarity and timing and listening to your partner and you know like mining your inner gold from what they are saying. Those are people that really shine. Like Aidy Bryant. Oh my God. She was a riot to Watch, but she never stepped on anybody's toes.

Peter: [00:19:35] Right.

Allison: [00:19:36] And even if you do, you know you back it up or you know you figure it out, but it really is such a collaborative piece. And when somebody tries to do that, like his character, it doesn't go unnoticed by anyone.

Peter: [00:19:49] Right.

Allison: [00:19:50] And it doesn't look great.

Peter: [00:19:52] It's very obvious.

Allison: [00:19:54] Yeah! it's so obvious... like you go off and do that. Exactly.

Peter: [00:19:58] So so I want the audience understand, when we talk about Second City and improv, they think you know if I go see a show it's all improvisation, but it's a lot more of sketch comedy with some improv built into it. But how they come up with these sketch comedies... it's through audience feedback because I believe, if I'm correct, after - you know say the shows like Two acts or two sessions - they'll have a third session and the actors will come out and just start improvising a scene and something that they're working on, and those who stick around will give them feedback. So the co-creating with that audience... is that true?

Allison: [00:20:37] They don't exactly give feedback, but it's kind of based on what laughter - I mean feedback that way. They don't actually say audience participation on that front. But yeah after they finish the show, it's the third act and that's where we used to go after class. Every Tuesday night, My buddy Adam and I would go and watch the third act and it was... God. There's just... yeah there's definitely some comedy gold on there.

Peter: [00:21:05] Hahaha.

Allison: [00:21:06] But that's how they do. So they'll finish their sketch show and then a third act is where they do improv and they will ask for suggestions or they'll ask some standard improv questions and just go, and then the bits that really nail and like resonate well then they'll try to grow sketches for the next show out of that. And that's kind of how the writing starts over there.

Peter: [00:21:30] OK so let's take all of that and... we talked about the fear. It helps you get past the fear. But what skills from improv were you able to bring into the business world in your role at the Indiana society of CPAs?

Allison: [00:21:46] You know it's funny because people do tend to live, often - Not everyone - supremely fear based it is theory. It's absolutely night and day from before I went to Second City

and to after, if I was to even to give a presentation, if I was to you know give out a couple of ideas on a project, but my confidence level, in that aspect, is 110 percent better. I used to have a very hard time, If I had a design concept, being able to sell it. It is not that hard anymore. You know I'm far more confident in my abilities... it's not because I'm such a better designer, it's because I've done training. You know I'm still a good designer, Yes, but it's not like I haven't taken more classes along that line. It's been classes on working with people. Basically.

Peter: [00:22:43] It's that collaboration piece.

Allison: [00:22:45] It is and it's not being afraid of what they're going to say to you.

Peter: [00:22:50] In the corporate world, there's this thing that kind of gets in the way of collaboration and creativity. It's called ego.

Allison: [00:22:59] Mhm.

Peter: [00:22:59] And I think that's probably my biggest challenge in dealing with the corporate world... I'm coming in in this collaborative team base. Give me all your ideas. I don't care for bad ideas will make something out of it. We'll make something out of nothing. But then the ego gets in there, the show business gets in there, because it's all about me, and if they're not able to control the meeting or control the idea... it seems to get squashed. And it's just I think that's the frustrating part of it.

Allison: [00:23:31] That is extremely frustrating. I do think it helps to be able to handle that person a little bit better. You're always going to win when you've got somebody like that in the room you know but there's a lot of egos when you're on stage and you have to work with those people because... just is I'm saying, they teach you to listen to the other person. That doesn't mean everyone follows those rules ever. At all. And so just like you know in a boardroom or whatever you're going to have to deal with that person fighting for control. But it helps you.... I don't want to say manage expectations.

Peter: [00:24:14] Maybe it maybe it might be just helping to manage the egos in the room.

Allison: [00:24:18] Yeah.

Peter: [00:24:19] Because everyone has an ego and some are stronger than others. And I look back and I think OK. I used to love watching whose line is it anyway. And then I look at I look at the four actors up there and they all get huge egos. But some way they're able to park the agenda, put it aside for a bit, and become collaborative. Because they all want to be the one to say the funny thing that gets the crowd roaring, but somebody at some point time may have to be the And person that helped set up the other person for the laugh. I think that's what's helped me is you know recognizing what I'm what I'm working with. I guess I was the first one is figuring out how I can help manage that in order to achieve that goal. I don't think I could've gotten there that quickly without some improvisation training.

Allison: [00:25:13] Oh yeah absolutely. Yes that's a very strong point.

Peter: [00:25:17] I try to get to Chicago, if I can and it fits into my schedule, for three days a year to attend like a weekend immersion or something and go.

Allison: [00:25:26] Yes.

Peter: [00:25:27] And last year I got to do it twice, and one was a three day and one was a one day - they did improv for business. And I tell you every time I leave I'm just I'm outside of my body. I am just so giddy because it just.... it's just like it's my heroin. I just get such such a wonderful high. And let's talk about some of some of the exercises they do because the ones that I remember from last year... do you know the human knot?

Allison: [00:25:59] I think I do. Go through it because I think I'm just remembering it called something different.

Peter: [00:26:04] Yeah you get six or seven people and you create a circle and you put your arms out and you grab the person's arm so you kind of tangled up and you try to get them to get untangled out of this group of people. And you can't let go and you violate The other person and yours personal space. But it's a great way of really learning how to work together as a group to figure out a problem. And I will say we did not completely get untangled, and it took us about seven minutes, and it was probably the most interesting and uncomfortable time because... I mean you get males and females in this and you're getting real close. But after it's all said and done you've solved the problem. And as a team. That was one of the first games that we play that just resonated with me, and I think it's a wonderful team building game. It just needs to be in the right atmosphere in order to really execute to it.

Allison: [00:27:20] [laughs] Right. With the right people in the right set up because that can get supremely uncomfortable.

Peter: [00:27:28] Yes yes it can. A few times it did. And so you know that was one that always resonated with me, but I think the thing about improv that has always stuck with me, and I'm getting better at it over the years, and it's that whole thing about listening.

Allison: [00:27:49] Mhm.

Peter: [00:27:49] And it's about listening to understand, not listening to respond, and and some of the games like I remember we would play a game like one word at a time, and last word spoken. Remember those?

Allison: [00:28:04] Mhm mhm.

Peter: [00:28:04] You want to have a little fun with one word at a time?

Allison: [00:28:08] Yeah! Let me say one thing about the knot real quick: That's one of those ones that I wish they would have done sooner because I get very touchy feely. So if I'm excited on stage, say maybe I need to touch someone or I'm playing their girlfriend or you know something is happening.

Peter: [00:28:27] Right.

Allison: [00:28:27] It gets you comfortable with the people physically, and sometimes not everybody's on that same page with me. And so it's yeah it's one of those things that it kind of breaks down those barriers first. That's all.

Peter: [00:28:43] No. That's a very good point. And I actually I didn't think about it that way but it does. It helps break down some of those barriers if we're going to be working in a close environment. And it also helps you get to know the other people in the group a little bit better and we can also... And usually what happens is someone in that group, we don't know who it is, someone is going to start taking the lead.

Allison: [00:29:07] Yeah.

Peter: [00:29:08] So someone takes the lead role to help untangle. But you know there's the thing about a team with the team we've got a leader, but another thing that I saw in that is someone will take the lead and then we'll get to a point that we can't solve... then somebody has the idea and they take the lead. So we transition from a team to an ensemble working together where everybody has a role, just at different points, in this leadership piece, in order to try to get completely untangled.

Allison: [00:29:37] Yeah yeah. And it's a pretty cool game.

Peter: [00:29:41] Yeah it is.

Allison: [00:29:42] And just to watch.

Peter: [00:29:44] And you're right. I think that's one of the first things... because I think when I took the class five years earlier I don't think we did.... I'm not sure if we even did that one.

Allison: [00:29:55] I feel like I didn't... that might have been at IO that I finally did that because I don't remember it being until much later, and I just I remember... in some of the first few you'd be thrown in different people in different classes all the time. And sometimes people are just not that comfortable with you touching them and I'm like hey look I'm a toucher.

Peter: [00:30:18] [laughs].

Allison: [00:30:18] We're going to have to deal with this. So if we're going to be in a scene, I need you to know that about me. And so it's better making people comfortable when you force them into that situations... it sounds weird to say that. But it's a good game! Yeah.

Peter: [00:30:35] And we did it... Stephanie Anderson was the one who was leading us. And you know you're there with seven or six other people that you don't even know - you just met.

Allison: [00:30:46] Right.

Peter: [00:30:47] And you go OK this is... But you know you could see there was like two groups in the room and you can see the uncomfortableness at the very beginning... but it was

amazing how quickly it went to solve this problem, let's get comfort with one another, and let's just let's just do it.

Allison: [00:31:05] You've got to let that melt away so you can get the job done.

Peter: [00:31:08] Bingo. And that does translate into a lot of what we need to do at work and working with teams and stuff.

Allison: [00:31:19] Right.

Peter: [00:31:19] But talking about the listening piece, you want to play a little game of one word at a time?

Allison: [00:31:27] Okay. Sure I'll do it.

Peter: [00:31:28] What we're trying to do here is create a cohesive sentence. Sometimes it works sometimes it doesn't. And we do it at one word at a time, and I still remember my teacher saying "Don't think - just react. Don't think just react. So I will let you start. Ladies first.

Allison: [00:31:51] No way! You start. I insist.

Peter: [00:31:55] Oh you insist. I.

Allison: [00:32:00] Went.

Peter: [00:32:01] To.

Allison: [00:32:02] The.

Peter: [00:32:03] Theater.

Allison: [00:32:04] This morning-- Oh! Sorry. Already ruined it. Out of the game.

Peter: [00:32:10] Let me go to Google and see if this morning is one word. [laughs].

Allison: [00:32:14] I believe so. Dialect.

Peter: [00:32:17] Yeah there's a hyphen in there somewhere.

Allison: [00:32:19] [laughs] This

Peter: [00:32:28] Morning.

Allison: [00:32:28] [laughs] that.

Peter: [00:32:31] I.

Allison: [00:32:31] Flew.

Peter: [00:32:32] To.

Allison: [00:32:34] Gibraltar (low hanging fruit).

Peter: [00:32:38] So.

Allison: [00:32:39] You.

Peter: [00:32:40] Can.

Allison: [00:32:41] See.

Peter: [00:32:42] The.

Allison: [00:32:44] Horizon.

Peter: [00:32:46] From.

Allison: [00:32:47] My.

Peter: [00:32:48] Room. Period!

Allison: [00:32:52] [laughs]

Peter: [00:32:52] There you go!

Allison: [00:32:53] Tada.

Peter: [00:32:54] A sentence! But the thing happens in this game, and it happened to both of us... the teacher always says "think and just react," but a lot of times when you're playing this game you're thinking three or four words ahead because you think you know how this is all going to play out.

Allison: [00:33:14] Oh yeah.

Peter: [00:33:15] And when you do that and you hear another word you're not expecting, there's that oh crap moments like.

Allison: [00:33:21] Oh yeah. Well i'm rusty. Like I had those - clearly. This morning. I was ready. I had a whole narrative going. You've got to release that.

Peter: [00:33:29] But it really... I play this when I do my my keynote presentations and stuff. I do this with the audience. I have them do it in pairs and stuff, depending on the sized of the audience and how willing they are to volunteer. I may get somebody up on stage with me to play that game. And it's amazing. Once you play it one time and you hear the feedback afterwards and you hear what the goal is, it immediately sticks with you.

Allison: [00:34:00] Yeah. Well it's so fun in big groups. Because it just gets elaborate.

Peter: [00:34:08] And then... well I just did this last week when I was speaking at the National Association of Black accountants. I had a group in there and I was doing my I embrace your inner superhero, which is based around my book, which is based around improv. And we did one word at a time and they did such a good job I said let's take it to the next level. Let's work on it as a team. Do you remember the game.. I call it Dr. Know-It-All. It could be Mr Know it all. You get three people sitting in chairs.

Allison: [00:34:37] Yes!

Peter: [00:34:38] And they know the answer to every question that's ever given.

Allison: [00:34:44] Yes.

Peter: [00:34:44] But they answer one word at a time.

Allison: [00:34:49] Yes.

Peter: [00:34:50] And three people immediately volunteered and came up and sat down and the first question was - I liked it - Why is the sky blue? And I'll be - most people they really stumble out of the gate because they're anticipating. But this group they nailed it.

Allison: [00:35:05] Oh nice.

Peter: [00:35:05] And I said OK let's let's take this to another level. I said why is the food in New Orleans so good? And they did such a good job of listening and not trying to think ahead. So I would say the last question - always the fun questions - this is the new question I've added to this. "Where do babies come from?"

Allison: [00:35:30] [laughs]

Peter: [00:35:30] Oh my god! The whole place was absolutely roaring.

Allison: [00:35:38] That's fantastic.

Peter: [00:35:38] We kept it clean, But everybody... I mean I think people were crying we were laughing so hard.

Allison: [00:35:46] Oh that's awesome!

Peter: [00:35:47] But it got the point across that they were able to really park that agenda, not anticipate / get ahead of themselves, listen to what's being said, and then react to it. And I remember the first time I did this with the group somebody asked that question and they started off "well Mom and Dad got a bottle of wine and--" and then it went. And I mean hilarity galore. But you know to that point that you were saying: improv can be cringey. It's when you're not listening and you're trying to formulate that into you want to steer that conversation versus let that conversation build something out of nothing.

Allison: [00:36:42] Yes.

Peter: [00:36:43] And.

Allison: [00:36:44] Oh! [laughs] I told you sometimes there are off days [laughs].

Peter: [00:36:51] It must be the time zone - it's what... it's probably close to getting to five o'clock and you're probably preoccupied because happy hour starts promptly.

Allison: [00:37:02] Funny it is - it's 4:52 [laughs].

Peter: [00:37:08] On a beautiful day in Spain as she looks out to the Rock of Gibraltar. It's pretty beautiful.

Allison: [00:37:14] It it's pretty beautiful.

Peter: [00:37:16] I don't want you to miss happy hour, but I do want to say that I want to make sure that we keep in contact because.

Allison: [00:37:24] Absolutely! Well I've got time-- I don't know what your time is.

Peter: [00:37:28] No!

Allison: [00:37:29] We should try one more. We should try to do one more game.

Peter: [00:37:32] OK we'll do one more game. You want to do last word spoken?

Allison: [00:37:37] Yes. Remind me again. Last word spoken. Just don't mess it up.

Peter: [00:37:41] OK. So the last word in someone's sentence becomes the first word in the next person's sentence.

Allison: [00:37:49] Yeah. That's what I thought.

Peter: [00:37:49] You remember that now? You're picking up what I'm putting down?

Allison: [00:37:56] I'm picking it up. I don't know if I like it but I'll pick it up.

Peter: [00:38:00] OK you want to start or You want me to start

Allison: [00:38:03] I will start... no you start. I'm better at reacting right now.

Peter: [00:38:08] Now is a good time for us to play a game.

Allison: [00:38:12] Who is with me?

Peter: [00:38:13] No, the last word's game.

Allison: [00:38:16] Haha! See, get out of here. My head is already downstairs at the bar! Games are what I like to play with my friends.

Peter: [00:38:28] Friends. You can never have too many friends.

Allison: [00:38:31] Friends for life, Some might say.

Peter: [00:38:34] Say you will but the movie... that the movie the show Friends was one of my favorites.

Allison: [00:38:41] Favorites. I have so many favorites saved in my bookmarks on Firefox It's probably not legal.

Peter: [00:38:48] Legal. They made marijuana legal in Colorado.

Allison: [00:38:55] Colorado, the Show me and get high state.

Peter: [00:39:02] State... It could be the state of intoxication, it could be a state of altered memory altered memory.

Allison: [00:39:08] Altered memory Is probably what I will have by the end of this evening after Happy Hour.

Peter: [00:39:13] Hour. It seems to be 60 Minutes but sometimes hours can go by so fast.

Allison: [00:39:23] Fast fast fast is how that boat is heading out to the harbor.

Peter: [00:39:28] Harbor - That's the name of a restaurant isn't it? (And you never end it on a proposition, Pete, you know better than that.

Allison: [00:39:37] [laughs] or with a question!

Peter: [00:39:40] Exactly. But I mean that's another... and actually I played that game with 400 CPAs in Nebraska last year at a conference. They paired up and there was a gentleman who had introduced me came up to me afterwards and said he absolutely loved that game because it really resonated with him. He was a CEO of a manufacturer of clay products in Endicott, Nebraska. So he loved this game so much, last words spoken, that he actually contacted me a couple of weeks later and wanted me to come out and work with his national sales team with this last word spoken and the principles of improvisation because he realized that his team was not that great at listening, as well as himself, and wanted to become a better listener. But even though that was really cool, when we were talking he said that he immediately went home that night took that game, last words spoken, and played it with his nine or 10 year old son, and his nine or 10 year old son absolutely loved it and he goes we play it all the time.

Allison: [00:40:45] Awww!

Peter: [00:40:45] That to me was the price of admission. That to me just kind of made my day - that he loved it so much that he introduced it to his son. And they play it all the time. So it's a very powerful game and it really helps us and it teaches us how to become better listeners.

Allison: [00:41:04] That's really cool. Well that's the thing about so many improv games is that they do just have fundamental teaching skills. And it's weird that they don't... I mean I think... I can't remember what it was founded on. Remember the basis for improv? I think wasn't it... Like it was a teacher I thought that was trying to get kids to learn.

Peter: [00:41:29] Viola Spolin?

Allison: [00:41:31] Yes yes yes yes. Exactly.

Peter: [00:41:34] Yeah. She was trying to get the kids to learn and she came up with this new way of teaching and learning, which actually turned into the development of improv.

Allison: [00:41:45] Yes. Absolutely. I know I said this like six times already but it's I don't understand why it's not taught everywhere because these are fundamental things that I think a lot of people would be a lot happier in life if they knew a couple of fundamentals, like listening to people. Exactly like that sounds like the most basic thing but a lot of people do not do it all the time.

Peter: [00:42:08] Right. Actually, one time when I was at Ohio Dominican University I was thinking about writing a course for the business department on improv for business and I had the OK from the chair and I had OK from a few other faculty members. So I was going to start on it, but then came the point I had to decide if I wanted to stay with the university or take my business full time so I never got to do that.

Allison: [00:42:32] Ohh, Sure.

Peter: [00:42:32] There's actually a paper out there - somebody wrote a paper from the University of North Carolina on improv and teaching skills. I've seen a lot more stuff recently written on the power of improv to use it in teaching. And if you look at Second City and their training, they're doing improv for autism and probably for Alzheimer's. And there was a wonderful interview. It was an NPR piece. It was talking about how this couple used improv in dealing with their mother in law who's having Alzheimer's. But instead of sort of fighting with her, the son in law was using improv skills and stepping in her reality and it completely changed the mother's outlook and they seemed to get along a little bit better versus you know how frustrating that can be. So there's a lot of good use of a lot of power in it. And I agree a thousand percent. It should be part of a curriculum early on in life.

Allison: [00:43:39] Yeah. That's amazing. I haven't heard about the Alzheimer's.

Peter: [00:43:48] While we're wrapping this up, I'm going to see if I can find the name of that podcast. I think it was called a beautiful life. I believe it might have been that. And actually somebody had sent me a link to it and said I just listened to this and I immediately thought of you because of all the stuff improv that you do.

Allison: [00:44:11] Yeah.

Peter: [00:44:12] And it's an NPR base. Or maybe it's the American life. Something along those lines.

Allison: [00:44:19] OK.

Peter: [00:44:20] If I find it, I'll do two things: I will find it, I will put it in the show notes, and I'll also e-mail it to you so you can listen to it.

Allison: [00:44:29] Oh yeah. That's perfect.

Peter: [00:44:30] I'll do that. And it's a three part podcast and I believe it's the second part in there but it's actually very powerful what they did and dealing with Alzheimer's. And I know there was a curriculum in second city with autism. And you're right, once again, it really should be part of a school's curriculum.

Allison: [00:44:51] I mean it's such a frame to think about it. It just helps you to not care what people think you know or just not harbor it so deeply, as many people do.

Peter: [00:45:03] Right.

Allison: [00:45:04] And follow the fear. I know Jay Suko always says follow the fear. He puts it on Facebook every Friday. What fear are you following? Show me what you're doing. That's when I said - I'd waited for months - and I'd put "moving overseas!" I've been waiting for this follow your fear friday for months.

Peter: [00:45:27] Yeah. Lean into it.

Allison: [00:45:28] Pretty exciting.... Oh absolutely! It's all freek'n an adventure at this point.

Peter: [00:45:36] It is. And I cannot thank you enough for making a Tuesday even more exciting by having this conversation because I know you and I could probably sit and have a cocktail or two. And it would just be banter the whole time and so much fun and it would be the next thing you know we'd be... How did you get to be two o'clock in the morning?

Allison: [00:45:58] [laughs] Exactly. I would not be surprised at all.

Peter: [00:46:02] So we will keep in contact. And I can't thank you again for spending time with me. I thoroughly enjoyed this conversation and I know my audience well as well.

Allison: [00:46:12] Oh thank you so much. I'm so pleased that you asked me on here. Thank you so much. And yes e-mail me that and talk to me soon.

Peter: [00:46:22] It sounds wonderful. Thank you again Allison.

Allison: [00:46:24] Thank you.

Peter: [00:46:29] I'd like to thank Allison for being a guest today and sharing her thoughts on the power of improvisation. I have partnered with the Maryland Association of CPAs and the Business Learning Institute to bring [an exciting new learning opportunity for accounting professionals to earn CPE credits](#). You can earn up to one CPE credit for each completed podcast episode purchased for only \$29 through the American Association of CPAs and the Business Learning Institute [self-study website](#). The podcast episodes are mobile friendly. Open your browser on your smartphone, tablet, or computer, Go to the MACPA and BLI self-study account, and listen to an episode. Take the review and final exam while you're working out or after listening to an episode on your commute to and from work - It's that easy! While all Improv is no Joke podcasts are available on my website, only those purchased through the MACPA and BLI self-study Web site are eligible for CPE credit. You can get detailed instructions by visiting my website at www.PeterMargaritis.com and clicking on the graphic "Improv is no Joke for CPE credit" on my home page. Remember you can subscribe to my podcast on [iTunes](#), [Stitcher](#), and [Google Play](#). If you'd like to purchase an autographed copy of my book *Improv is no Joke: Using Improvisation to Create Positive Results in Leadership and Life*, for \$14.99 with free shipping, please go to my website, PeterMargaritis.com, and you'll see the graphic on the homepage to purchase my book. Please allow 14 days for shipping. You can also follow me on social media. You can find me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#). In episode 59, I interview Karl Ahlrichs and we discuss the storm clouds of the future. You might remember Karl from episode 5 where we have a similar discussion, but we take another look at those clouds one year later. Thank you again for listening. Remember to leave a review of the podcast on iTunes. I would greatly appreciate your support. Remember to use the principles of improvisation to help you combat fear, take risks, and become a better well-rounded person.

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