

# S4E23: Avish Parashar

## **SPEAKERS**

Avish Parashar, Peter Margaritis

### **Peter Margaritis**

Hey, welcome back everybody. Wow this. I've been looking forward to this interview. I love all my interviews and my guests, but when I get a fellow improviser on my podcast, I get giddy. I mean, who knows what's gonna happen in this interview. It could go every which way, but this is gonna be fun. First and foremost, Avish, thank you so very much for taking time out of your busy schedule to be a guest on my podcast.

### **Avish Parashar**

My pleasure, Peter. I am giddy also. Giddy and excited.

### **Peter Margaritis**

I actually met you for the first time at an NSA Philadelphia Convention. Our National Convention in Philadelphia. I don't remember what year that was but you did a presentation on improv, but I sat through that, and I like, oh, okay, I get it. And I've kind of followed you around some social media stuff but our paths have crossed couple times. Most recently when we could go to convention live. 2019. We were in Denver.

### **Avish Parashar**

Yes.

### **Peter Margaritis**

And then I saw you at the NSA Pittsburgh virtual, and I said, I need to get him on the show. I've said that I want you on the show, and I'm getting older when my mind isn't as good as it was. And I'm glad I would cross paths again because I'm looking forward to interviewing you.

### **Avish Parashar**

Yeah, that's awesome. I appreciate that. Yeah and I always, you know there are people within NSA the Speakers Association who do improv and every so often you come across them. It's always great when you do. I was always happy when you I think you introduce yourself to me and we chatted so that's great I'm looking forward to, to chat about improv and whatever else we've been talking about.

### **Peter Margaritis**

So, my first question to you is, how did you find improv?

**Avish Parashar**

I found improv kicking and screaming. You know, so you know in improv obviously we talked about 'yes, and..' versus 'yes, but...' first plug of the day, I wrote a book called "Say yes and..." so this is my thing. Well, when I went to college I went, I did theater in high school and it took so much time, and I figured there's no way I could do that in college. So, I went to college, to get an engineering degree, which made my parents very happy. Indian boy going to get a mechanical engineering degree, but no theater anything. And but just messing around friends, I was one friend who said hey, you know, you're, you're really funny you should try out for the improv group. And guess what I said? No, I said yeah but my thing is not really improv. I just got a, I quote like movies. It's not really stayed in that format. And he would keep kind of dropping hints. He was a kind of a... he nagged a lot. He kept bringing it up and I kept saying no. And the irony of that is I've not even ever actually gone to see a show. I just said no, it's not for me. And then he sort of, it was like a romantic comedy. There was one weekend where he had a buddy coming in from out of town, and he was involved in some Saturday night activities. Like, hey you know my friends coming in, but I got to do this thing. Do you think you could hang out with him? I was like, yeah, no problem. He's like, you know, the improv groups doing a show that night if you guys want to go. I was like, Ahhh! So, we went. It was hilarious and looked like so much fun and at the end they said we're having auditions next week. So, I just on a lark I went, it just because it looked like fun. Auditioned, got in and that was, I guess, February or March of 92, and my life is, then completely changed.

**Peter Margaritis**

Where were you getting your undergraduate degree?

**Avish Parashar**

University of Pennsylvania.

**Peter Margaritis**

But you didn't go in, but you didn't go as a theater major. You went in as an engineering, mechanical engineer, I believe that you said.

**Avish Parashar**

I went to get a degree in mechanical engineering, transferred to computers because you know, I'm going to be a more Indian than I already am. But really all the way up till mid- late junior year, I was still going to graduate with a degree in engineering and maybe go to grad school or maybe get a job. And then towards the end of college people started saying to me, you know, you're good at this, like are you gonna do any performing or acting on the afterwards? And, again, no, no, no. But the more it kind of rattled around my head, the more I thought well I am good at this and I love doing it. So, you know, after college I decided to not go on to like a real job, quote unquote. And I just, I started my own improv group here in Philadelphia with the dreams of turning it into like the Second City of Philadelphia. And that, you know, didn't happen, but I learned a lot along the way. And I learned, you know, because I was both artistic director and business manager, I was read, and I love reading and learning I was, you know, I would live in like the business and personal development sections of bookstores. And I would just like it has voracious appetite for reading about marketing, and leadership, and teamwork, and

communication, and motivation and goals. And that's kind of how I started seeing some of the crossover and transitionary there.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, I have a question for you. It just dawned on me, It happened the other day. I mentioned to somebody that was preparing for a presentation. And that, because there was a time constraint, I wanted to see how many words would cover that timeframe. And I got this snarky remark from this person, it's like, I think you guys just wing it. Isn't improv just winging it? And that's the probably one of the biggest myths, that's out there about it. Is that we just make stuff up. Can you address that?

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, so we do make stuff up, but within constraints and guidelines.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Avish Parashar**

You know, it's easier if you think about improv as a sport than theater. Only for the context that like, you're gonna play basketball, you practice. You run plays, but when you get onto the court you don't know what's going to happen and you got to kind of respond in the moment, and adjust to take what's given to you and make something out of it. And that's what we do with improvise. Yeah, I say that like improvising is not winging it number one. And for most people, and in many cases myself, improv is not your first choice. Like when I present a keynote, I have... I play improv games within my 60 minute keynote, but the content blocks are pretty much the same. Like I tell the stories. I know what I'm going to say. So, I'm not... I don't just get on stage and wing it every time. But if the client comes along and is like, oh hey we're cutting your time, or if something interesting is happening in the room, you have that freedom to improvise. But, you know. it's a great. What I often say in workshops is like I'm just giving you different tools for your toolbox, and you don't use one tool for everything. It's just improv is one tool, amongst a few, I think it's a great tool.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right. And the one thing I've learned over the years about improv is, and you said you love to read. Yeah, you hang out in bookstores and look for the more that we expose ourselves to reading and reading different topics that we normally do, and different. Helps with that inventory in our head when it comes time to oh, this might work here let me craft it so it fits versus I only have a shallow pool in the head. I don't I don't have that deep end of knowledge. I think that's another thing that people don't get about improvising. We love to read, we love to study, we love to think, we love to, as much as the environment around us into us, then we can play with that environment, at some point in time.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, and I think I think the overall word I would use for that for improvisers, and just general comedians is, is observation. Like the more you observe, the more you have the kind of pull from. And I'm going to pitch, someone who's not me, a New York Times author is a guy named Steven Kotler who just wrote a book called...he's got a book called The Art of Impossible, which I love. I read it. And when

I heard him on an interview he basically everything said he talked about in the book is everything I kind of dealing with or wanting to improve or struggled with for the last like, you know, one to 20 years. But he's done a lot of like research and neuroscience and this and that and as I was reading he has a whole section on creativity. And patting myself on the back, so much of what he said kind of validated with data. The things I had been teaching anecdotally. And one of those is like this loose connection idea that like he suggests everyday you read 25 pages from a book that is outside your core competency, because that opens up your creativity and connections get your mind working in different directions. And yeah, it's cuz you never know an audience is gonna throw you, number one.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Avish Parashar**

So, your ability to respond to that. And number two, you know, the whole way, and we don't need to go super in depth in this, but like for me the way the creative mind works is you get your ideas pop up from your subconscious. And so, the more things you have in there the more random book connected ideas, you can play off of. And that's where the fun comes from. To me. Opps, there goes my water glass.

**Peter Margaritis**

He says it's water. It's 1:50 in the afternoon eastern standard time so we'll take you on that. So, as you found it. You had the improv group. You've done it. You've performed it. Now, you're out helping others improve by using improv in some way shape or form because I would think every keynote that you have, there's a thread of improv that runs through it.

**Avish Parashar**

Ah, yeah, I mean, for me it's not even a thread. It's like a hammer, right. I know a lot of speakers who use improv but they sort of keep in the background or just one like thing they've mentioned or touch upon. Like for me, it's right up front like my tagline is how to improvise, adapt and innovate. You know, the title of my keynote is Ding! Happens which Ding is an improv game. So I start right out, right out saying life is like improv comedy. Like you got to plan but Ding happens, you got to adjust. So yeah, throughout the program I'm playing improv games with volunteers. Having the audience play games, so it's a, it's like the whole program.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, I'm the same way with mine. I'm pretty upfront with it, and just because I want them. I want them to be it a little uncomfortable, but hopefully to get them comfortable, And not, you know, just kind of make it in somewhere. You probably remember this guy's name. I saw him at NSA, went to Austin. He was an improviser, I can picture him. Kind of an older guy. He talks about applied improvise.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah. Izzy Gaselle.

**Peter Margaritis**

Izzy Gaselle. And then he was doing stuff but he was having people at the table do it before he brought up volunteers to make sure that there was this safe environment out there. And prior to that I'd never even tried that, and I incorporated that that philosophy and to get people comfortable because there's something about the word improv, that kind of scares people.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, because people want to know what they're getting into before they get in. So, it's like, oh.. what do I do? And, you know, one of them in my... most of my keynotes I get volunteers. I'll bring up and I'll have them play what is...many people consider like one of the harder improv games out there. It's a game called Scenes Without the Letter, where you suppose have a conversation but there's one letter of the alphabet, you're not allowed to use in any word you say. And if you do we ring the bell, you go out someone comes in and takes your place then just switching in and out. There's a challenging game.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yes.

**Avish Parashar**

So, I bring up two volunteers have no improv experience and haven't played the game. And I just give them the two bits of advice in advance which is look, just have fun and just be willing to fail, And 90-95% of time they actually do quite well with it. And, you know, I love that your show is called you Change Your Mindset because that's what I that's the section I called Improviser's Mindset, and I think I just listened to a podcast episode titled that. And for me, I define the improviser's mindset as the combination of have fun, be willing to fail and focus on what you can control. And so, I use that game, to demonstrate that and it's amazing how... now what's funny about that one is other games I tell the audience what they're going to do when they come up. That one. If I get the volunteers, then I tell them.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, I would imagine everybody sitting on their hands if you tell them exactly what they're going to be doing.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, but you know, there's a, there's a little bit of pre-selection bias because someone who is willing to come up is going to be a little more willing to have fun and willing to fail so that helps. And if it's a workshop, I'll have the whole audience do it then in small groups of three. And you know, I think, you know, since you, you're talking about how you want to make them uncomfortable and comfortable, and if you feel this way bu, you know, one of the best comments afterwards is when people say like I was a little nervous doing it but it went really well or I didn't think I could, and oh man I was so surprised like how well it went.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, I had this one guy came up to me he goes I was about to kill you when you volunteer... when my friend volunteered me because bringing somebody else up. He said he was so nervous inside. He was

so petrified, but after he said, "It's not that bad. There was actually a lot of fun. I just psyched myself out."

**Avish Parashar**

Yep. Mhm. Yeah, people just assume they can't do it.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right. Like, it's, it's that, that fear of the unknown, but I think we're improvisers looking at that unknown as, oh, let's find out let's look into it, let's let's figure it out being comfortable with the uncomfortable.

**Avish Parashar**

It is. It's true. And it's weird cuz I talk about this and stuff like this as well. I find that I can separate most improvisers into two categories. When we're talking short form suggestion game based. Is there are the people who when they get a suggestion that they haven't heard or they're not quite sure how to do, they don't take it. You know, or, then they're the kind who, when they hear something never heard before, or the first thought is I'm not sure how to do that, they get excited. And I tend to fall in the same category like I even say this. If someone in an audience yells out a suggestion, I've never done or heard I'm like, especially, it makes me smile like alright, I'm going to take that. So, it's fun to even improvisers still have that like, even people years of experience can fall in that rut of like well I don't know where this is gonna go so I don't want to do it. You know, let me let me just.. how about a location. I'm not sure about that. Yeah, let's do the coffee shop. Like nah.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, I think the one that's gonna take the one that's given. I don't know, it's crazy. It's like, I get excited about going to someplace I don't know, and what's gonna happen. And what, what, especially when it comes to what we do in front of an audience, you don't know that audience. And you're going out there and walking... I call it without a net.

**Avish Parashar**

That was the name of my college improv troupe was Without a Net.

**Peter Margaritis**

Oh, nice. That's what we did, but I think it's because one we accept failure.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

And the other piece of it, and we only focus on things we have control over, not the things we don't have control over. And I think those two things are just the exact opposite what most people deal with every single day, especially in their jobs.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, they don't want to mess up, and their minds are focused on everything they can control like what's my boss gonna say, what's the client gonna complain about or is this gonna work. Yeah, and it's amazing, like productivity and stress are affected by that like the more you just focus on hey what am I doing right now like you get more done, and you feel less stress. The more time your attention goes on everything outside of your control like you freak out, get anxious, and you don't get as much work done.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right. That anxiety begins to build. And I don't know about you, but when COVID hit, the first couple of days I was a little freaked out. But I said, you know what, I gotta figure this out. I can only control today. I can't go tomorrow, and I just kept moving forward. Tomorrow is always much different than it was that day before.

**Avish Parashar**

And it's, it's funny. So, when I talk about dealing with change. You know, talking about getting better versus getting through. And for many people, when the change happens, their thought is, how do I get through this? Like how do I maintain the status quo? So, when things end I can kinda go back to the way it was. And that's what I did when the calendar sort of emptied out and everything shut down And so, I'm like, let me just keep trying to get the bookings and when it comes back. And when I stepped back and said, Okay, well, how can I use this to my advantage? How can I get to a place that's even better than pre-COVID? And I hated virtual presenting for a while, but I've embraced that and now I'm kind of enjoying it more now that the bookings are coming back. When someone's like, 'Oh we got an in person in the Fall.' I'm like, "Aww really." I sort of liked doing it this way. Yeah, and I started working on some new stuff but like, you know. So, yeah it's just what you can control, but you can also control like how can I get to a better place instead of just, you know, how can I go back to where the way it was before? Which is where a lot of people's first instinct is I think.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah. And I think that that is the status quo of everybody's thinking as we went into this I want to go back to what it used to be. But then I go, well wait a minute, and I know some people who want to go back, you know, 20-30 years ago. I go, well you want to go back when the World Wide Web was just an internet service? Do you want to go back to when you're driving a car and you don't have those little blindside alerts that so you don't get into a wreck?

**Avish Parashar**

So, that's kind of what I've been working on what I try to get people to work on is like or how do you know the question is, whatever project you're working on, if you could wave a magic wand, and go back to the way it was before, would you? And if the answer is yes, then you're not working on a better solution. You're working on getting through solution. And in improv, this is the same way. A lot of even experience improvising, you get a bit of a one track mind like you're improvising. And then something throws the scene in a different direction or something happens. And when you... alot of people will just try to acknowledge that mistake, but then go back. But if you can kind of follow that thread to me that's when like that real brilliant creativity happens is when you are forced to go in a direction you had no idea you were gonna go in. That's when the best stuff happens.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely, and I keep this little sticky on my like desktop. If this is true then what else is true. So, if this is actually... what you're giving me is actually true. And I have the 'yes, then' philosophy, and I'm accepting that. What else can be true from that? And I think that helps in that also that that creativity is by accepting and going alright oh can I make of this? No, we're not going to kill our competition sales people just in order for our profitability to rise.

**Avish Parashar**

Right.

**Peter Margaritis**

And that was said to me in a creativity workshop but we accepted that and said, Well, that is true, what else, what else can we make of it? Other than going to jail.

**Avish Parashar**

Well, I also tell people along those lines, like you know following like being willing to play with and explore stupid and terrible ideas is a great creativity exercise. Because it like you're not gonna, you know like, and the idea is let's do something illegal obviously you're not going to do it but by letting your mind play with it that can lead to something that you never would have thought of, if you immediately said oh no we can't do that. So, that playfulness and that exploration is so critical.

**Peter Margaritis**

How do we get. So, what are you working with outside the conference here but when you're working with a company. You're inside the company and working with them. How do you get them to become playful? Because I might be in a suit, I might be in a work attire, and this is within the office environment. How do you get to within that workshop to take that playfulness, that mindset, in order to be successful throughout your workshops?

**Avish Parashar**

So, a couple things. Number one is you, as the presenter, I... for me, everything's part performance. So, I perform. I'm gonna kick things off by playing Ding. And that gets them laughing right away, right? So, once they're laughing and having fun. It's a lot easier but if I get up there and just seriously telling listen you got to have fun like. But if I already got them laughing number one. Number two, and this kind of comes back to what you were talking about with Izzy. I tried to, you know, gradiate the level of involvement. So, I'll start with a simple turn your partner exercise. And that gets them loosened up and laughing a little bit. And then the next level of difficulty and next. So, it's like taking them through a process. It's, I'm not trying to get them way out of their comfort zone the very first step. It's like step by step. Progressing them through. And early on in the workshop I try to do an exercise around the power of the mindset and fun, so that I can refer back to it throughout.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, I have to believe that my audience is listening to this conversation you said this one word a couple times, Ding.



**Avish Parashar**

Oh yes.

**Peter Margaritis**

Would you mind doing a demonstration of the Ding, you're talking about. I saw you do this at the workshop in Pittsburgh, and I thought it was brilliant, and for me to Ding for you. With this it might come across a little bit delayed, but..

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah. Alright so yeah this is a game called Ding. I'm gonna start telling a story. Anytime Peter says 'Ding' I'm going to roll it back, say something different and change the story. And it's called Ding, because normally I have a bell.

**Peter Margaritis**

So. I'll just say the word Ding.

**Avish Parashar**

Okay, sounds good. You ready?

**Peter Margaritis**

Yep.

**Avish Parashar**

All right. Once upon a time there was a man who loved to collect stamps.

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

There was a man who loved to collect squirrels.

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

There was a man who loved to hunt squirrels. He would go out into the park every day and look for squirrels. And one day he saw a giant squirrel.

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

He saw a tiny squirrel. It was tiny...

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

He saw a female squirrel, and he felt feelings he hadn't felt in a long time. He's a lonely man, if you're a squirrel collector you're kind of a lonely guy, and he looked and said, "My You are a beautiful squirrel." And then...

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

He said, "Come with me squirrel!" He grabbed the squirrel and said you're gonna be with me, and she just been right on the nose.

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

And she kissed him right on the mouth. And she smacked him in the face with a little claws and he got scratched. And he dropped her, and she said, "Don't you know how to treat a woman!" He said, "But you're not a woman. You're a squirrel." She said, "I'm a female squirrel, don't you know, and listen, if you want to get my attention you need to be nice to me. Don't just grab me!"

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding! Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

She said, "If you want to get my attention you need to buy me dinner. You got to wine and dine me. You gotta let me order lobster. Let me order a la cart." So he said, "Fine, I don't have a lot of money but I will spend an entire month budget taking you to dinner."

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

He said, "I have no money, so I will buy you a hotdog and you will like it." She said. That was pretty rough but I kind of like a man who takes charge,"

**Peter Margaritis**

Ding!

**Avish Parashar**

She says, "Oh, that was mean. I'm not going to get you know, I'm going to tell all the squirrels. We're going to rise up. We know you've been hunting us. We're all going to kill you." So, she started speaking, and all these squirrels came and they ate him, and he died. And all the squirrels live happily ever after. And they're, you know, that is the game Ding.

**Peter Margaritis**

That was really good. That was really, really good. I have a colleague, she's actually a CPA in Grand Rapids, and she's an improviser. And she is up there with you as relates to Ding. She said to her improv instructor would go Ding, Ding, Ding. He would go four or 5,6,7,8 times on a specific to really. Yeah, I just, I work on that. Sometimes I get stuck but that was, that was really good. That was, that was a great job.

**Avish Parashar**

Thank you and that game is just so much fun, like I love playing

**Peter Margaritis**

Couldn't you use that game in a way to spark one's creativity?

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, actually, and I've done that in workshops. So, I use that, normally I use it to frame the keynote talk of 'this is how life works...' la la and then it becomes a theme. Well I did, and I did this live virtual last year to virtual workshops on creativity thinking differently. And so, this game specifically is about getting off of tunnel vision and one track, thinking. So, when I'm the one saying Ding and working with people, the natural inclination is to say something that is along the same lines of what you already said. So, oh, you know, we went into the big house, you went into this giant house, ding, you want this huge house, ding, you want this mansion, ding. Variations on the same theme, or you might stay on the same track, but go the opposite and I did quite a bit. You know, he saw a giant squirrel, ding. He saw a tiny squirrel. So, one way you can do is you keep dinging, like you said with your friend you keep dinging until the person is forced to say something that is completely on a different path. And so, that gets them out of it kind of shows them like look, you got to get out of the track you're on to be truly creative. And so, you can use this in brainstorming yourself. When we're brainstorming, a lot of times we're all writing the same kind of ideas. So, use this kind of ding mechanic to force yourself to come up with something that is completely different. And then, that often opens up the floodgates. I had no idea the story is going to end up with, you know, wherever it went.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right right right right. But it's because you kind of trust, the blurting of the next word and just let it and follow that thread wherever it goes. So I, I've always said that when we're brainstorming for ideas, it was like picking the first five minutes and ideas just dropping ideas dropping, you're getting the ones that are in the forefront of your mind. You're clear that path. The real gem is the ones that are after those that can actually solve that problem, or create that new product. You're having to go deep. I'm forcing myself to think in different directions is like being...

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, cuz if the, you know, the first few that come up or when you've already thought of they're kind of in your conscious mind, and if that was the answer to your problem, you wouldn't have a very big problem to begin with. Because the like you're at the answer. So, the thing is you have to keep generating ideas when your mind is quote unquote empty. And to add so people do that is to just keep talking, like literally open your mouth to start talking, and just say something. And that's, you know, and I play some improv games with people around this, and it's amazing. That's one of the ones they come back when they're like, like wow, that was fun or I can't believe like I was able to do that because it's literally one mechanic. It is open your mouth and start talking. And it works. That's that's the way I get people to access their creativity. That's why I just have a hard time doing long engagements, or like long workshops for eight week engagements. My whole thing...I like to distill stuff down. So, I feel like I've got a handful of techniques but from those techniques like all so many things work, so I can't go into like here's your 25 step process and the first day we're gonna do five and the next day we're like no here's like three ideas. You got to practice them a lot to get good at them but these are the ideas that will help you.

**Peter Margaritis**

And you just said the magic word. You have to practice. \

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

Not like Allen Iverson. I was interviewing one of my coaching clients yesterday, and we were working on some presentation skills through this process, And I said, "So, what have you done now that our coaching is done, we're, we're two months out?" She goes "To be honest with you after the class, after the coaching, I blocked out specific time on Fridays. Yes, work on improv games that you taught me." And I went, "Thank you." I mean that was probably one of the best compliments I think any of us could get and what we do. And one of our favorite ones was Connecting Two Things, two different things that would not go together and create a story around it. She goes I have found it to be so powerful, and what she does in her role is to practice that at least once a week for like 30 minutes. And it's just strengthening her more and more as she's gaining so much more confidence but she does the work after the fact.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, that actually going and applying what you talked about or practicing the skills. It is a huge compliment because, I mean, as good as I think I am, you got to figure 90-95- 99% of the audience just listened to it, just..Oh, that was great, and then never actually does anything with it.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right, goes back goes back to the rock, that they did it. I think that's the frustration that all of us who do what we do have is, we know we want to test like is that everybody already know, maybe why. But even if we just get that one. That's a step in the right direction.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, it's pretty it's pretty huge. Yeah, just that the low reward is like having someone say they use it and helped or Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

So it. I think this is right. You are not a new daddy, but you've got a young child at home.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, I have a one who just turned six and one who's about two and a half now. So...

**Peter Margaritis**

Two and two and a half. And when I talked to audiences I go everybody in this room is an improviser. How many of you have you had children? And all these hands go up. So, I don't know about you but when I left with my son. They didn't give me a manual.

**Avish Parashar**

No.

**Peter Margaritis**

And if it did, it wasn't the language that I could understand. So how did you figure out how to take care of this little human being? And you improvise almost every second with that child.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, cuz that child is always gonna do things, you know, What to Expect When You're Expecting did not warn you about.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. So when you're, when your child has that projectile vomiting going on and they're like, What do I do? You find the answer. You talk to somebody, you ask somebody. But you're just throwing that information into yourself, so you can use it later or to pass it on.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, and so everyone's improvising as you parent children, and everyone when they were children were tremendously creative and imaginative. And it just, you lose it and it gets beaten out of you and you're constantly told to watch what you do and say and so you, you get very self conscious and you cut yourself off from all those great creative powers. So, when you have children or with a child like it's all in there. It's just like that's what I mostly do when I'm training improvisers. Yeah, there's like are you give him some things around skill and, you know what are the techniques you do, but a lot of it is just getting that filter out of the way so they can really express that creative genius that they really already have. Like, I'm not making them more creative, I'm just kind of getting some of the barriers out of the way. Right. It was Sir Ken Robinson, I believe. I may have his name wrong but he's got the number one downloaded Ted Talk about how schools kill creativity. Yeah, yeah, it's very true. It's like you're not rewarded for being creative. And there's some stat I heard I tried to find the source, I can't remember where I heard but it was a study or stat that says the number one most like requested skill employers

have for their desirable skill employers have employees is creativity. The number one most rewarding trait from employers is compliance. So everyone says we want someone creative and innovative but what they reward is doing what you say.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right. That would be an interesting article to write. But it's so true.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, and I tried to find the original source I couldn't but it's out there somewhere. So, if you find it let me know.

**Peter Margaritis**

It was either....It was Fast Company cover story I think in April of four or five years ago. It was about creativity, and they said, one of the surveys that they did and said leader in leadership, one of the most needed qualities is creativity. But out of that number only 27% were said that they were allowed to be creative. And the same thing. And it's just, you know, it goes back to the health of the organization.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, what are they rewarding? What are they encouraging? What are they punishing?

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, it's more of that. There's a time that come across lately and maybe when I first read it, what a man I said that's improv. Have you heard of psychological safety?

**Avish Parashar**

I have I haven't read much about it but I've heard of it. Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

It's providing an environment that allows you to fail. Allows you to take risk. Allows you to speak your mind without being judged or punished.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

Well, that's probably some fancy words around it.

**Avish Parashar**

It really is. Yeah, and then I think as an improviser setting up that dynamic is important as a leader of an improv group, and even just as a participant, right? Like that's the whole 'yes, and...' idea. It's like, that's pretty much creates psychological safety of no matter what you say, I'm not gonna say, yeah, but that's a stupid idea yeah but that's way off track right now, Peter. If I can 'yes. and...' that even, yeah there's a nuance there in 'yes,' because not every idea is in fact good. And not every, you know, thing is safe to actually pursue but it's how do you respond to that and address it. Makes a huge difference, and

it's all about paying dividends down the road. Because 'yes, but...' is always, it's always more efficient in the short term. Like for me to say, "Yeah, but that's what we're doing right now." It's gonna save me time right now but in the long run it's going to reduce that relationship, remove that safety, kinda cut morale. So, you know, what's more important the long term or the short term.

**Peter Margaritis**

Long term but we live in a short term environment.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, we really, really do.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, the quality of life. And but as you were saying that, I came across I was working with the sales team, and we were doing, 'No, because...', 'Yes, but...' and 'Yes and...' and I, when I briefed him afterwards I said so what do you feel around 'Yes, but...' and they said, hope. I went, "Hope? Explained that." Well in the sales, when someone says yes, and they give me the but, they're telling me they might be interested in discussing it. There's that obstacle standing in the way, and I went that one's an interesting thought because I had never put it is that perspective. But I guess in that field, somebody says 'Yes, but I've got a deadline.' Okay, that's the objection.

**Avish Parashar**

Right. Salesmen like the 'yes, but...' so they know what to talk about That makes sense. What I, when I, I don't do a lot of a sales because when I do I talk about the word isn't like don't, then say 'yes, but...' to overcome the objection. Like if someone says "Yeah, but I got a deadline." Don't say, "Yeah but here's how I'm going to fix that for you." That creates a defensiveness, rather, yes, you have a deadline, and here's like what to do about that. I get it la la, so. But that is very that's an interesting. I hadn't heard that either, but that is interesting,

**Peter Margaritis**

What I find in the accounting profession, they're excellent at that 'No, because...' and "Yes, but..." Hey, I got a great idea. Yes, but we don't have the budget for it.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, exactly. Or no, because we don't have the budget.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right, and when the CFO is known as the CFNO within an organization, that says he's not pretty much an improviser, or she's an improviser.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, I find that 'no, but...' is is pretty useful though, and that's a nice like... it's not as powerful as 'yes, and...' I find that "no, but..." is good for shifting focus. Like if someone is wanting me to do something I really don't want to do. If I'm kind of understanding what they're saying I can say, "No, I can't do that, but here's what I can do." It kind of creates that because here's the thing, but sort of negates what you

said before it. That's why 'yes, but...' is false, because, 'yeah, but no.' I say, 'no, but...' I'm not negating the but's softly. I don't think it's definitely not as powerful as 'yes, and...' So, it's almost like a little bridging I have for people like you can say 'no, but...' Like if you can say 'yes, and...' start with that. "No, but..." is not a bad choice if you've kind of explored the 'yes, and...', as a way of kind of maintaining some positive energy without agreeing to things you don't want to agree to.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right, and that's when people they say, well I'm agreeing to something . No, the philosophy of is your second point is opinion thoughts.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

And you're adding on to it and somebody says, "Okay, yes and you still suck." What. No, that's not the philosophy of it. It's yes, and have you thought about this or have you explored this or let's take it, maybe down this path and see what happened. And you can say 'yes, and...' still, we say 'no' but in a much kinder way.

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, and I also find that the 'yes, and...' it doesn't even have to be agreement. It's exploration.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Avish Parashar**

So, I say, you know, you push back because you think I'm agreeing but you can just like if someone says, "Hey you know I want to, you know, we should invest in this new software package for our company." You can say, "Yeah, and tell me more about that. Yeah, and what are the benefits? Yeah, and why do you want to do that? Yes, and what are we going to get out of that?" As opposed to immediately saying, "Yeah, no." We don't need all those bells and whistles. So, it's just an energy on mindset, right? It's not like literally "Yes, and let's also get a new computer." It's like...

**Peter Margaritis**

You said it right. It's the exploration. It's allowing for the exploration to occur. And you know what I worked with leaders I go at some point, if we do this process right, and then you get to this one piece to go. Yes, I hear you. I understand you. Put yourself in my shoes, and figure out how I'm going to sell this to my boss. And they go, "Arroo, No." Then go think about it. Go figure it out. And someone will want you just have to do your job, I said, as a leader, I was supposed to be training people to take over our jobs, to take our jobs? Isn't that a great training tool? Okay.

**Avish Parashar**

That's a great idea. I like that.



**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, as we get to wrap up, what is the biggest 'aha moment' you've ever had in doing, teaching, performing improv?

**Avish Parashar**

Well, I can think of one or two. The first one I had was this idea about focus on what you can control. And this happened way back when I was doing improv I think was when I was on college. And there was one person who was a little bit unpredictable in the group, and a lot of people didn't like working with them because it was like, you don't think it's gonna happen. And they're like you throw one offer around, they completely backward like a non-random. It's frustrating and not fun. And so, one day we're doing a show and I had to work with them and I just went in there like, I don't know what they're gonna do or say so, whatever they do, I'll just respond to it and build off of it. And that went pretty well that night. And that got me thinking like, well, if this technique works well with someone who's unpredictable, and how well would that work with, you know, people who are doing it, kind of, quote unquote right? And so, that was like that moment where it kind of shifted from worrying about what's going to happen and what's behind you know what, no matter what happens, I'll just take it accepted and build off of it. And that was like a, that was an 'aha moment' my improv got better from that moment. That's probably one of the big ones I think really, really worked for me.

**Peter Margaritis**

I love that story because the number of workshops that I've been in over the years it's always that one person. There's always that one, you know, shoot from the hip. I can't predict. And I see people who don't want to, I admit I was probably one of them. And I think back I'm like man I just missed an opportunity. But I appreciate you share that story, because that makes me think about how many opportunities I'm getting to that situation. And I was like going with the crowd, but not thinking in a way of like, just go ahead accept, and let's see what happens. What's the worst thing that could happen? Thank you for that.

**Avish Parashar**

Sure. And that's where I'm, it's funny, one of the first crossovers to improv and business stuff was Stephen Covey's Seven Habits book. I read that book from a business standpoint, but I started seeing the connections improv right away. And from a larger sense, the structure of the book was another kind of sort of 'aha moment' for me because the seven habits of highly effective people the first three habits are independence, which is basically you working on yourself. The next is interdependence, which is communication. And it's structured that way specifically because like you got to work on yourself before you work on others. And that was kind of an 'aha moment,' and it sort of got where I want to develop to a point where the better I was, and the more confident I was in my ability, the easier it was for me to like let go and just take whatever this random person gives me. But if I'm insecure don't think I'm that good, then I'm gonna be way more worried about what's gonna happen on stage. So yeah, I think I really worked on that mind and kind of that ownership like hey, no matter what happens, like you're good enough like, you know, you talk about that one person. I start my keynotes playing this Ding game that we did, bringing up a random volunteer. There's no, I haven't pre-selected them I haven't talked to them. I don't know who it is. And I hand them this bell, and it could literally be an audience of 1000 people for a keynote. And I'm putting this bell in the hands of a random person. I give a tiny bit of

coaching on stage like alright, ring as much as you want but more is better. And I think that's an area where a lot of people would be freaking out about, right? Like I don't have the control over this. And that's one of those like it doesn't always work amazing but almost always does, and because I have confidence in kind of what I can do and having that faith that hey, no matter what happens, like we'll just gonna roll with it and make it work.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely, that's, that's great advice. So, I'm sure people can find you but help people find you, Avish.

**Avish Parashar**

Alright, well the best place I find me, and you know see video clips and information about speaking programs and stuff is at my website, Dinghappens.com That's D I N G happens.com. There's some information there. If you go to Dinghappens.com/podcast, I am in the process of launching at least one if not two podcasts. So, if you want to kind of follow me as well. You can go there and check it out. And I'm doing a virtual improv comedy class. By the time this goes live, the next class will already be well underway but if you go to that podcast page and get information kind of sign up to be notified from the next one if, you know, you're wanna. That's a straight improv comedy is not applied if not like leadership skills. It's like, I'm going to teach you how to do improv so the main thing is going to dinghappens.com or dinghappens.com/podcast.

**Peter Margaritis**

Alright, so you just said the P word podcast about these two podcast real quick.

**Avish Parashar**

So, the first one is called Motivational Improv or the Motivational Improv Podcast, and that's gonna be it's gonna be like a daily dose of what I call inspiration, information and improvisation. It's going to be three times a week, Monday Wednesday Friday. Episode is gonna be short like 10 minutes and basically I'll get on, I'll talk about a quick point. Play an improv game. Hopefully we'll make a laugh and energize. And then, give you a takeaway like look, I just played Ding. Here's a lesson you can take away and apply right away. So, it's like a, you know, on your way to work or start in the morning. Ten minutes start your day with little laughter and inspiration. The other one is probably launched a little bit later. Don't have a title for it yet but it's something I'm doing with a partner. It's going to be a combination long form/short form pure entertainment improv show. Basically using short form improv games to tell long form cohesive stories, usually in the style of a specific genre or movie. So, we've done a bunch of play tests already. It's a lot of fun. We're still working out the kinks. Yeah, when it launches, if, if I can take what I've got in my head and realize that, it's going to be pretty cool.

**Peter Margaritis**

Oh, I love the first one but I'm very intrigued by the second one.

**Avish Parashar**

So am I!

**Peter Margaritis**

And you can find Avish on Facebook, and I know that this during the pandemic you had a Facebook page that you were doing a lot of. It sounds like you're doing a lot of what you're gonna be doing a podcast, the first one the 10 minute segments,

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah, there's a Facebook group which is called months got a little low. And as I got focused on these other things. But once the podcast launched the name of the Facebook group is Motivational Improv, which is name of the podcast so they're gonna tie together. So, again, there'll be a link to that on that podcast page and you can join the group, and, you know, once the podcast launches they'll probably be more tie in. We'll kind of be active again.

**Peter Margaritis**

Congratulations, one for joining the world podcasting.

**Avish Parashar**

Congratulations or condolences. Yeah, we'll see which way it goes.

**Peter Margaritis**

Whatever, whatever it is but you know Rick Roberts out of, out of Nashville. Right?

**Avish Parashar**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

I asked him, What's the most important thing to remember when you start a podcast, he said, 18 months. Give it 18 months,

**Avish Parashar**

I've heard that unfortunately.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, yeah it's it's it's a long, 18 months but then you start watching the numbers grow and you go, "Oh this is really kind of cool." And I, we will post links in the show notes, where people can find you to the podcast, and to your websites. So, I can't thank you enough for taking time out of your hectic busy improvisational day to put some time with me, and I look forward to our paths crossing hopefully at a live event soon.

**Avish Parashar**

Hopefully I can't wait. T

**Peter Margaritis**

Thanks a lot.

**Avish Parashar**

Thank you.

**Peter Margaritis**

I want to thank Avish for his time and the stories about how improv is a communication tool for anyone. I mean, anyone in the business community. You've heard me say that a number of times. I will conclude with an improv quote, that is fitting for this interview. "Improv takes place in the present tense." I hope everyone's vaccinated. Stay safe. Be healthy.