

Improv, Business and Spirituality

IMPROV IN BUSINESS

The word improvisation comes up most frequently in the entertainment world. However, interest in improv has grown over the past two decades in the business world as well, in part because organizational life is changing fast. Technological and social innovations are emerging at an unprecedented rate. In these circumstances, detailed plans and existing routines may be inadequate or impossible, leading people to improvise. Research suggests that improvisation can generate novel and useful solutions in organizations, such as real-time problem-solving by managers in fast-paced industries, entrepreneurs dealing with unexpected problems and opportunities, or responses to life-threatening crises that go beyond the scope of people's training. In short, improvisation can be an important source of creativity at work and can have lasting consequences for organizations.

THE STRUCTURE

The structure of the improvisational scene is quite sparse. This is purposely intended to allow the actors to be freshly creative, i.e., to provide the possibility for the actors to create something much more than would be created by a writer isolated in front of their computer. During the improv scene, the actor is in front of their partner and feeling the connection; the situation is quite real; and the connection will likely spur emotions and words that may not be imagined by a writer. This is the essential hope and design of the improv – to create something more impressive and more surprising than one could write on their computer where there is no energetic connection to a partner.

CENTERING / LOADING

Prior to beginning a scene, the actor must “load” to embody the qualities of the character they will be portraying.

In business, we generally have multiple responsibilities within our overall role, with each responsibility requiring a different set of skills and possibly attitudes. In an article entitled, “The Wise Leader”, the authors Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi discuss how CEOs can learn practical wisdom to help them do what's right for their companies – and society. They state that the CEO must be a philosopher, a master craftsman, an idealist, a politician, a novelist, and a teacher. Each of these roles clearly requires a different skillset and a different demeanor. As such, it is critical for the CEO to understand what “role” they are exercising in each moment in order to set their proper demeanor, i.e., appropriate loading.

DEEP LISTENING

From the very first line of an improv, listening is totally critical. Since there is no script, we will have nothing upon which to speak from if we do not listen to our partner. Their statement is basically the foundation upon which we will build the scene. If we do not listen, we will likely speak and reply with something totally different to our partner, which basically invalidates the original statement made by our partner. And this violates the first rule of improvisation – ignoring your partner's words is effectively a “no” rather than “yes”. It is therefore essential to listen to your partner, to accept the validity of their statement, and use that as the foundation upon which to build and offer your response.

COMMUNICATIONS

When we speak of communications, we are talking about truth and not superficial words. And the truth in communications can only follow the deep listening and understanding of the words of another. I consider this to be conscious communications.

BENEFITS

I have divided the benefits into two sections – the first section noting benefits that would be more popularly acknowledged and the second section noting benefits that may not be as obvious.

Popularly acknowledged benefits would include:

- Thinking on your feet
- Free of limitations
- Develop creativity
- Enhance public speaking skills

Other significant benefits, perhaps less known, would include the following:

- Improve listening skills
- Develop collaboration
- Keep an audience or partner engaged
- Develop trust
- Enhance flexibility and adaptability
- Foster positivity
- Discover hidden talents
- Develop comfort in discomfort
- Improved communications
- Improved social interactions
- Enhance confidence and self-esteem
- Quell anxiety
- Explore and practice intuition
- Laugh at oneself
- Awareness/Reading cues
- Concentration/Focus/Being in the moment
- Patience
- Tolerance

PATHWAY TO CONSCIOUSNESS/SPIRITUALITY

Since the 1980s, I have been a strong proponent to integrate spirituality in business. I taught this subject at the Metaphysical Center of New Jersey and in various other locations during that same time. In the organizations I founded, I endeavored to integrate spirituality as much as possible, although uncertain of the best approach.

Recently, I was doing an independent study to complete my MBA at FDU. In my work with Dr. Farias, an expert in Sustainability (organizational as well as climate), I was researching various organizations that were considered conscious and employing new, creative organizational procedures. During that process, I discovered the intersection of improvisation and business, and I embarked upon a subsequent independent study focused exclusively on the feasibility of applying improv principles to business. Hence, I am now deeply entrenched in the direction of offering improvisation into the business world.

Although I do not know the optimal approach of integrating spirituality in business, I see this as a pathway to the world of consciousness, ethics, and essentially spirituality. I see the positive attributes of improvisation (authenticity, respect, tolerance, listening, acceptance, etc.) as a part of awareness, consciousness, and arguably spirituality.

As a student of consciousness, I follow the energy, and I have clearly been pointed in this direction of improvisation and business. I anticipate that this is an entry point upon which fuller teachings may emerge and be presented in a format that I may not yet understand. I am very grateful for what has been presented to me, for the opportunities before me, and for the journey ahead of me.

CONTACT

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