**Improv Skills**

**Acceptance**

Accept everything! Improv is based on the spontaneous creation of ideas. Shooting down those ideas is the quickest way to kill a scene. ***Blocking*** is failure to accept new ideas in improv. Saying “no” is the most flagrant form of blocking.

Ex. Joe: Let’s go dancing!

Lisa: No.

Joe: Alright, let’s go to the movies then.

Lisa: No.

Joe: Ok, I’ve got this great book…

Lisa: No.

Improvisers must be willing to abandon their comfort zones, and oftentimes their own ideas, and dive into unpredictable situations. If Lisa had said “yes,” the scene would have actually gone somewhere. Saying “no” is not the only way a player can block a new idea:

Ex. Betty: I have some shrimp like you asked.

Vahid: I wanted salmon.

Betty: (Accepting) Oh yes, salmon, and with it your favorite wine.

Vahid: I don’ t like wine.

Betty: (trying her best) In that case, a nice cold glass of ice water.

Vahid: I’m not thirsty.

Accept everything! Do not be a scene killer like Vahid. Also, accept your own suggestions. When you say something, stick with it; it becomes the truth of the scene.

Ex. Mike: We should build a fire.

Sarah: (accepting) Ok. Let’s do it.

Mike: Actually, I’m warm enough.

Also, make sure that your acceptance is complete. A half acceptance is still shutting down your partner’s idea.

Ex. Mary: You appear to be moving your arms like a bird flaps it’s wings.

Will: I’m just limbering up. I get sore after I work out.

Ways will could have accepted Mary’s statement: He could have been a bird in disguise on a mission to kidnap human beings. He is in training to become a bird. He is in training to be Batman’s sidekick, Robin. He is crazy and believes he is a bird.

So…Say “yes.” Blocking stops things from happening, and since making things happen is what improv is all about, players should accept everything.

**Hold on to ideas throughout the scene.**

Once a new ideas is accepted, it becomes law—the truth of the scene. Here is an example of what not to do:

Ex. Megan: Is there a doctor in the house?

Tom: I am!

Megan: I cut my leg and I need you to sew it up!

Tom: Well, I’m not really a doctor. I just like to tell people that I am to

Impress them.

Tom originally accepted his role as a doctor, but later changed his mind and denied being a doctor. Although this may get a laugh, it does nothing to further the progress of the scene. Making Tom a doctor for the whole scene does not limit his imagination. Tom could have been an incompetent doctor, an evil doctor, a vetrinarian, a doctor of English Literature, etc… Any of these options would have given the scene levity while maintaining the truth of the scene.

Players must also ensure acceptance of physical ideas. If Ted is miming driving a car and Sally steps in front of him and cheerfully says, “hi,” she is failing to accept the reality of the car. She could step in front of him and then jump out of the way yelling, “crazy driver!”

Accepting the permanence of ideas does not lead to stagnancy in scenes, rather, it should inspire creative ideas regarding how to deal with the established situations. In order to follow this rule, players should pay close attention to what their teammates (as well as they themselves) are presenting in the scene.

**Always look for the bright side!**

Or, don’t play the party pooper. Consider the following:

Ex. Andy: How was the movie?

Stanley: It kind of sucked; I didn’t like it.

Stanley accepted the idea, but he drained the energy out of the scene. When a player is presented with a choice on how to accept a new idea, in general the player should choose a positive reaction.

Being positive can be scary. Players often have a natural tendency to act in a negative manner because it shields them from risk. Being positive, however, creates vibrant and entertaining scenes. If Stanley had chosen to respond, “It was the best movie ever made! It changed my life!” he would have made the scene exciting and interesting, but increased his personal risk. What if Andy had responded, “I would not have thought a movie about snails could have been that amazing.” The scene would grow more interesting because Stanley entered into unknown territory. Making the effort to make positive ideas happen is the mark of a player willing to take risks.

**Keep it moving!**

**Or….Tell, don’t ask**

A good improviser moves the scene forward and does not rely on someone else to do it for him/her. For truly successful improv, all players must believe in themselves and contribute new ideas to create scenes of an exceptional caliber.

Consider what Mel is doing:

Ex: Jeff: My gosh! That thing is big!

Mel: Yeah, it’s really huge!

Jeff: It’s getting bigger!

Mel: It sure is!

Jeff: Arg! It’s eating my dog!

Mel: Poor dog!

Mel accepted the ideas of her partner, but she did nothing more. Improv is about sharing, and it is everyone’s shared responsibility to push the scene forward. What Mel did—not blocking, but not contributing, is referred to as **wimping.**

Ex. George: Look at the new dog I got.

Perry: What breed is it?

George: It’s a German Shepherd. It can protect me.

Perry: Who do you need protection from?

George: The mafia. They’re out to get me.

Perry: Why?

Perry forced George to do all the work. Improv works better when the workload is shared.

Ex. George: Look at the new dog I got!

Perry: Wow! A German Shepherd! You must need protection.

George: Yeah. Dang Mafia is after me.

Perry: I told you not to date that girl.

See how much faster and exciting the scene is? Both players are working together. Perry stopped asking questions and started making statement. Eliminating questions and redundant statements allows improv teams to pack more content into scenes. In the first scene with Jeff and Mel, one person is improvising while the other is wimping. Sometimes neither player has the guts to advance the scene—a double wimp. When none of the players involved are willing to define anything it’s called **waffling**. This is bad. The scene will collapse. Make decisions, make statements, create action, keep the scene moving!

**Use Body Movement and Physical Action**

**Don’t Delay! If you’ve got it, use it.**

**Head to New Directions.**

**Relate everything with Logical Connections.**

New ideas injected into the scene should be clearly related to everything else all ready existing in the story. The audience should be able to observe the logical intersections of the different ideas. That does not mean that scenes must be tedious or “normal”--- rather actions should be justified within the context of the scene. Suppose a team was performing a scene about stealing a TV from inside a house. If a herd of elephants ran through the house, the audience thinks, “WTH, Where did the elephants come from?” However, if one player said, “Hurry up, guys, Tarzan will be home soon” or “Hey, I love this peanut commercial,” then the arrival of the elephants has a valid connection. They could be coming to avenge the theft of Tarzan’s TV or they were attracted to the peanut commercial.

Also, an apparently unrelated idea can be used successfully if the team reincorporates the idea, providing clever justification later in the scene. This is an advanced skill used effectively by actors with solid storytelling backgrounds.

**Make it make sense.**

New ideas created by a player must fit into the internal consistency of a scene. Be rational when moving a scene forward to avoid the, “What in the world?” audience reaction.

Imagine an improviser shaking dust out of a carpet. A player looking for bizarre ideas might:

* Get hit by lightning
* Be attacked by a dog
* Be swallowed by a whale

All of these actions would be wild and wacky, but have nothing to do with the carpet. A more focused improviser whose actions make sense in the context of the scene might:

* Discover it’s a flying carpet
* Get into an argument with the fleas who live in the carpet
* Tie the carpet around his neck and transform into a super hero
* Get dust on his face, making him unrecognizable to his friends

Note that these ideas, while still wacky and wild, are far more effective since they make sense.