Improv for the Rest of Us

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How this came about

• Design Thinking Cincy meetup – Oct 12, 2016
  • Improv Meets Design II: Ideation for a local Non-Profit through an Improv Lens by Bobby Moran (OTR Improv)
• Free improv class – Oct 29, 2016 @ Improv Cincinnati
  • OTRimprov
• Level 1 Fundamentals - Jan-2017
• Level 2 Scenic Foundations
• Level 3 Game of the Scene (Armando)
• Level 4 Characters & Status
• Level 5 Improv Longform (The Harold)
A brief history of improv

• Atellan Farce ~ 391 BC
  • Began as improvisational; relied on simple plots, stock situations and
    stock characters in masks, improvisational dialogue, + slapstick and burlesque.

• Commedia dell’Arte
  • Beginning early in the 1500s and flourishing by 1550-1575, unwritten comedy however:
    the characters, plot and locale were pre-set

• Viola Spolin (1946) - Improvisation For The Theater
  • Josephine Forsberg was her protégé

• Paul Sils – Spolin was his mother, The Compass Players ➔ The Second City
  • Stephen Colbert & Tina Fey

• Keith Johnstone - Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre, invented Theatresports
  • inspiration for Whose Line Is It Anyway?
  • Don’t Do Your Best -- TEDxYYC

• Del Close – Truth in Comedy with Charna Halpern, “Harold”
• Dick Chudnow (Kentucky Fried Theater) founded ComedySportz
Viola Spolin quotes

- Creativity is not the clever rearranging of the known.
- It stands to reason that if we direct all our efforts towards reaching a goal, we stand in grave danger of losing everything on which we have based our daily activities. For when a goal is superimposed on an activity instead of evolving out of it, we often feel cheated when we reach it.
- That which is not yet known comes out of that which is not yet here.
- If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he chooses to learn, and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach him everything it has to teach.
- First teach a person to develop to the point of his limitation and then-pfft!-break the limitation.
7 Rules of improv
(Lessons from the 2^{nd} City)

• Listening
• Yes, And
• Co-creation
• Authenticity
• Failure
• Follow the “Leader” (Follower)
• Create an ensemble
• /*/*C****E****T****L*****/
  • Bonnie Tinker – LARA
  • Active Learning Fellows (ALF) program
Listening Is a Muscle

• Listen at every level
  • Words
  • Emotion
  • Intent
  • Be in the moment
• Listen and then speak to only what you heard
• John Wayne – don’t be “short on ears and long on mouth”
• Gift – when partner says something to you
  • Build on what’s being offered
• Active listening - repeat or paraphrase what was said
• Make mistakes work for you
• Last Word exercise
Yes, And: How to Get Something Out of Nothing

• Sounds easy enough
• Can take one to unexpected places
• Can make one a bit ill at ease
• Develop better interpersonal and team communication
• Affirm and build upon an idea
• Be non-judgmental
• Brainstorming/ideation sessions
• Taking off filters at an early stage of a brainstorm session allows ideas to go to new places
• Creative Problem Solving Institute (CPSI)
Co-Creation

- Find the idea, not *your* idea
- Cede control
- Eradicate fear
- Avoid asking questions
- Aggression is not improvisation
  - Need a code of behavior along with expectations
  - Share the stage and co-create with respect
- Rapid prototyping
- Former Twitter CEO Dick Costolo is an improv veteran (UM CS + Comm)
  - Life is an improvisation. We don’t always know where we’re headed or how we’re gonna get there. Especially, if you’re involved in IT project discovery. ... You just need to learn the “rules” of improv to help guide the way.
  - He worked with one of my improv classmates
Authenticity: Change Is Hard

• Recognition
• Pain
• Distance
• Calling out the elephant
  • Can Elephants Collaborate
  • Elephant Carpaccio
  • The Elephant in the Room is Wearing Red
• Who put my ethics in your compliance?
  • HIPAA, FERPA, Title IX
• Respect, reverence, and authenticity
• Improv: a way to build change skills
Following

• Following is as important as leading and involves risk taking
• You need to feel safe to take risks
• Expect the unexpected
• Rushing creates tension
• Have to be committed
• Steve Tobak (Real Leaders Don’t Follow: Being Extraordinary in the Age of the Entrepreneur)

• IDEO
  • 1. To create a happy group atmosphere... Hello & High Five
  • 2. To get people into an agreement mindset... Yes, Let’s!
  • 3. To stretch capacity for attention and focus... Red Ball
  • 4. To free people of their inner censor... Ba Da Da
  • 5. To get everyone making eye contact and collaborating... Pass the Clap
Failure & Risk

• Improvisation for the Spirit, Katie Goodman
  • Bad risks -- Nov 7, 2016
    • Having unprotected sex
    • Betting on the Chicago Cubs (8-7 scoring 2 runs in the 10th)

• In Improv - it can be celebrated
• It happens even to the best of the improv groups
• Acceptance of failure can be difficult if you are not taught how
• Rob Asghar (Leadership Is Hell)
  • The key, really, shouldn't be to embrace failure, but to embrace resilience and the ability to bounce back

• Steve Tobak
  • Learning from mistakes is natural and taking risks is what entrepreneurs do ... ... failure is not a good thing. It’s not a goal. It’s not a desired outcome.
How to Build an Ensemble

- Team vs Ensemble
  - Team implies competition
  - Ensemble is a thing unto itself
    - Each part is considered only in relation to the whole
- Successful solo acts are rarely, in fact, solo
- Collaborations can create synergy
- Ensembles preserve talent
- Tight-knit, high-functioning ensembles can create things that no individual could do on his own
- Be in the moment
- Give and take
- Surrender the need to be right
- Improv for Geeks and Those Who Want to Work with Insanely Great Ensembles (Jan -- CodeMash Conference; Feb – ACM SIGCSE)
Yes And Thank you