

Improvise to Success!

Bonus Improv Games and Exercises

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Sound Ball

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to be a little bit silly, let go of self-consciousness, and have a little fun. Just to get some smiles and energy going and show you how easy having fun is if you learn to let go.

Summary

In this game you and your partners will pass around an imaginary ball while making sounds.

How to Play

Stand in a circle with your fellow performers. One person will begin by passing an imaginary ball to somebody else. Just toss it as if it were a real ball (you don't need to use a real ball). When the person throws it, they should make some sound. It can be any sound at all and it shouldn't be a real word. It can be a simple sound like "Wheee" or "Whooosh" or "Hah." When they pass it to their partner, they should make good eye contact so that the partner knows that the ball is being thrown to them. This is even more important when you get into a larger group. When you catch the ball, you must repeat the sound that the person who made who threw it to you. You will then look, make eye contact with a different person, throw them the ball, and make a completely new sound.

Again, no stress over what sound it is, just make a new sound. This continues as the person who catches the ball makes the sound of the person before them. They then turn to somebody else and make a new sound. They only have to repeat the sound of the person before them. They don't have to repeat every sound.

When doing this game it is important that you don't stress over the quality of sound or how good your sound is. Some people may feel stress about trying to come up with a "funny" or "good" sound. That's not important; what's important is that as soon as you catch it, you look at someone, make eye contact, and throw the ball with a new sound. And when you repeat the sound that you do your best to repeat it to the best of your

ability and not stress over mimicking it exactly. As you do this game, go faster and make the commitment to as soon as you catch it, look, and throw it to someone else. The faster you do this, the sillier the sounds will be and the more fun you will have.

Takeaways

At the end of this game, if you and your partners are committed to going fast and just letting go, you should feel a sense of increased energy. You should also have some smiles and laughs because of your willingness to be silly with other people. You should feel an overall sense of fun.

The lesson to be taken from here is that fun is really a state of mind. You don't need to do great things to have fun, you just need to be willing to be a little silly and just let yourself go and get out of the box. This simple exercise can energize you and also teach you how simple it is to have a good time even when you are in a tough situation.

The Laughing Machine

Purpose

The purpose of this game is to demonstrate how invigorating laughter can be.

Summary

In this game, you and your partners will be demonstrating different kinds of laughs and seeing how the act of laughing affects you.

How to Play

In the laughing machine, you get yourself and a few partners(4 to 6 is a good number, but you can go higher). One person will step forward and begin laughing out loud while doing a repetitive motion. It doesn't have to be a real type of laugh. It can be a silly laugh, or it can be a repetitive,, "Ha ha ha," or "Ho ho ho." The motion can be anything such as slapping their knees, doubling over, or holding their belly. The bigger the motion the better.

They first person continues their laugh and motion and then, one at a time, the other partners will step forward and join in the laughter doing their own unique laugh motion. This will continue until all the players are out together making one boisterous laughing machine.

Things to remember

It is important that you get as in to this exercise as possible. Don't come out with a small laugh; make the laugh as big as possible. Also, don't come out with a small motion, make a BIG motion. Get both your body and your laughter into it. Make sure that you really feel the laughter. If you are self-conscious about this exercise, it is going to be very, very

tough. Just come out, be willing to laugh as loud as you can, and just experience that sense of laughter and get that blood flowing and moving.

If you want to try this first alone, you may want to go some place where it is secluded and people can't see you and just really laugh out loud at length. Don't just do one laugh, but laugh over and over and over and move your body and just see how you feel at the end of it. It sounds weird, but by the end you'll find yourself laughing naturally.

Takeaways

The point to this simple exercise is just to show you how invigorating laughter can be. Also, it demonstrated how even when you are not laughing at anything, the simple fact that you are laughing will make you feel better. This is doubly true if you and everyone playing this game are throwing yourselves into it. You should find that you have an overall greater sense of happiness and fun just from laughing with yourself and your partners.

Try to experience the laughter, and then, when you get in a situation where you're feeling down, just try laughing. Don't worry about finding something good to laugh at, but rather, just let yourself experience laughter and see how that changes your mood.

What's Fun about _____?

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to get your mind flowing and thinking of different ways of having fun.

Summary

This exercise is a brain-storming exercise where you tap your creativity to generate fun ideas.

How to Play

Simply take a piece of paper and at the top write, "What's Fun About _____?" Fill in the blank with whatever it is that you want to make fun. So if you have a job you don't like, or a relationship that's not going well, or some task that you have to do that's not fun, write that in the blank. Then, just let your mind flow and start answering that question. Don't worry if your answers make sense or are valid or not. The point is to just flow and let your mind create ideas about different things that could be fun about this activity that you don't like. Keep going for as long as possible, but ideally do not stop until you have at least twenty ideas. Feel free to go longer.

Tips and Things to Remember

Don't let the pen stop moving. When you are writing your list, don't write an idea and then stop and think. Just keep writing the first thing that comes to your mind and keep the pen moving on the page. You want to fill a page very quickly without judging. Don't be afraid to write ideas that are silly, crazy, or impossible. Don't be afraid to write ideas that don't make any sense. The goal here is just to get your mind wrapped around this idea and to think of ways to have fun doing something that you don't normally have fun doing.

Takeaways

When you finish this exercise, you should have a large list of ways to have fun doing something you don't generally like to do. You may be able to implement some of those ideas and find ways of having fun. More importantly if you do this consistently, when you start tackling that idea, you'll find your mind-set shifting around it so that you'll have a little more fun doing it naturally. You'll also find that if you ask yourself this question, you will find yourself naturally, even instantly, thinking "what's fun about this activity?" That way you will automatically be training your mind to find the fun in situations. This will automatically improve your mood and will make you a more fun person in general.

Observe Children

This isn't really an exercise or an improv game as much as just a simple task to do. The next time you're out and about in the world, just pay attention to small children at play. Watch what they do and how they do it. You'll see them laughing, you'll see them making fun out of nothing at all. You'll see them picking up ordinary objects and turning them into magical items. You'll see them occupying themselves in amazing ways. Just go out and observe children at play.

After having done that, think about what it is that they are doing that provides them fun in these situations. How are they able to make something out of nothing? Just by putting yourself in that mind-set of observation you might find yourself tapping back into some of that child-like play sense that we all had. That's a great way to begin tapping your ability to have fun into any situation.

Scenes without the Letter _____

Purpose

The point of this game is to demonstrate that it's not whether we succeed or fail, but how we make our attempts that make the difference.

Summary

In this game you will attempt to have a conversation with somebody without using one letter of the alphabet.

How to Play

This exercise works best with four people. Two people will begin having a conversation about some topic—it can be anything at all. However, they will be given one letter of the alphabet they cannot use in any word they say. They cannot use the letter at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the word. If they use a word that has that letter, then they will be eliminated. You can have someone observing to ring a bell or clap their hands when they catch the person using a word with that letter.

That person will jump out of the scene and one of the two observers will jump in and continue the conversation-- again, not using that one letter. This game continues on for a while as people keep switching out all attempting to speak without using a certain letter of the alphabet.

Tips and Things to Remember

The choice of letter is important; do not use a vowel because that will make the game almost impossible. Use a consonant, but use a common consonant. Good choices are the letters, "S," which is probably my favorite for new people; "T" is good but incredibly

challenging; “N, R, and H” are also good. Resist the temptation of a boring or less common letter, because that makes the game too easy.

The point of this game is not to stay in the conversation, so try to speak as best you can in normal English and in full sentences. Don’t cheat by speaking a foreign language or by using poor grammar or by speaking only one word at a time. If you’re playing this with people and that becomes a problem then start eliminating people who do not speak in full sentences and move them to the end of the line.

Be willing to mess it up. If you find yourself not being eliminated for a while, don’t pat yourself on the back for how good you are. Rather, realize you probably are not taking enough risks. If you have enough people then take turns just watching. The important question to ask yourself is, “when was the game fun to watch?” This game is fun to watch in two instances: 1) Someone tries their best to not use that letter and speak normally and they mess up and accidentally and say a word that has that letter in it. 2) Someone does their best to speak normally without using the letter and they manage to get out a full complete sentence without messing up. The game is not entertaining when people speak very slowly and very poorly in an attempt to not mess up.

If you don’t have that many people you can play this with just two people. Do a story telling version where you and your partner tell a story together., You start telling the story without using that certain letter of the alphabet. If you say a word that has that letter your partner will ring a bell or clap and they will pick up the story where you messed up and continue telling it without using that letter. Then you will watch them and catch them if they use that letter. Then you will go back and forth just switching.

If you can’t observe somebody else playing, then try video taping it then watching it afterwards seeing which is more fun to watch.

Takeaways

There are a few takeaways in this exercise. One is that this game is fun when you try your best to succeed whether you fail or actually succeed. The game works when you are trying. When you play it safe and are afraid to fail then the game is no fun for anyone. The takeaway is that the more willing you are to fail; the more likely you are to succeed. Sometimes it’s not what we do, but rather how we approach it. Also, use this game to gauge your willingness to take risks. If you find it hard to let yourself go and speak as fast as possible, then you may be risk-adverse. This is just an improv exercise so imagine how it will be in a larger scale...

Free Lecture

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to help you tap into who you are and to show you how to start expressing yourself.

Summary

In this exercise you are going to speak freely at length without thinking about what you're saying.

How to Play

In this exercise you are going to do what's called a free lecture. Assign yourself an area of expertise and just begin talking on that area. It can be helpful if you have a partner assign you the area of expertise so you don't over think it. Just begin talking by opening your mouth and explaining anything and everything you can possibly think of about that topic. Even when you feel like you are running out of ideas just open your mouth and let yourself go. Continue to talk for at least one to two minutes. Ideally you will go longer. If you have a partner, have them push you to keep going.

Tips and Things to Remember

Do not pick an area of expertise that you are familiar with. If you know a lot about quantum physics, don't make quantum physics your topic. Instead, pick something you don't know anything about. For example, if you don't know anything about gardening then that would be an excellent topic. The point in this exercise is not for you to speak accurately but to allow yourself to flow.

The more you flow, especially when you're talking about something you don't know much about, the more you'll be tapping inside of you and just getting in touch with your subconscious creativity and with who you are.

If you're having trouble with this, really just open your mouth and start talking. Even if it's to say, "I don't know what to say," just keep repeating that until an idea comes to you. Get to a point where you can really just let ideas flow out of you. Once you have done this multiple times with random topics, then take an idea from your own life and begin talking it out, but use the same principal of talking out loud very fast without thinking of what you're saying. You might be surprised at some of the things that come out when you let yourself flow like this.

Takeaways

The purpose of doing this is to show you that you have ideas inside of you and you need to let them out. To really express your true self, you need to access the deep down ideas, desires, thoughts, and feelings you have. One of the best ways of doing that is to just let yourself flow; the only way you can flow is by going fast and just continuing to talk even when you think you've run out of ideas. When you've run out of ideas what's really happened is that your conscious has run out of ideas, but your subconscious (which is where the true you is), has much more to say.

Free Writing/Journaling

The purpose of this exercise is to get you in the habit of tapping into “who” you are and letting your creativity go.

Summary

Using pen and paper you will free-write to get the ideas that are inside of you out and on the paper.

How to Play

Take a few sheets of blank lined paper and a pen. Start writing on the first sheet of paper and continue to write until you have filled at least one page. Ideally you should fill three pages. What you write isn't important, just let yourself flow. Don't stop and criticize ideas as they come up. These pages are for your own viewing only, so don't worry about what you write. If an idea comes up that you're not comfortable with or don't want anyone to see that's fine, just get it on the page. Once you have finished three pages, you can stop.

Tips and Things to Remember

Just flow! If you feel that you have hit a block, don't stop writing. Just keep writing anything, even if it's just the words, “I can't think of what to write.” After writing that a few times your mind will give you something and you'll be off in a new direction. If you find yourself resisting doing this then begin your writing by simply saying that, “I don't want to do this, I wish I wasn't doing this.”

The point of this is to take whatever is in your head and get it on to the page, even if that thought seems negative or seems like it is not going to be productive. You need to clear out those top-level thoughts to make room for all the thoughts that are deep inside of you and to help you tap into who you are and allow you to express yourself.

Takeaways

Do this exercise every day consistently for at least three weeks. It should only take twenty to thirty minutes per day. You should find by the end of the first week, and throughout the second and third, that memories, feelings, ideas, and dreams you have had will start to surface.

This is an excellent exercise to use if you're feeling confused or feeling stressed about something. It really helps clear the mind out, get the ideas on the page, and help you really see what is going on inside of you and get in touch with who you are.

Confidence Walk

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate how by moving your body in different ways you can increase or decrease your fear.

Summary

You will practice walking around with different poses to see how your body language can affect your mood.

How to play

Find an open space, such as a large area in a room or somewhere outside. Simply begin walking around like you would naturally. Then stop and stand up straight as if you were the most confident person in the world. Then walk around in that pose of confidence. Walk for a few minutes then stop and compress your body as if you were nervous and scared about something. Walk around with this sensation and pose. Compress your body, hunch over, and move quickly.

Try this with a few varying degrees. Go from extreme confidence to extreme fear and try different levels in between.

Things to remember

When doing your confidence walk, try standing up straight with your head up. Look out into the world, keep your hands at your side (not in your pockets or crossed), and move slowly with purpose. Move leisurely and take your time, because that is how confident people act. Look around and take in your surroundings.

When you are doing the nervous walk, hunch over a little bit and compress your body. Cross your arms or put them in your pockets, look around quickly like you're trying to take everything in, and move a little faster than you might normally.

Play around with these different physical characteristics and see how they feel.

Takeaways

The purpose of this is to really feel the effect that your body language has on your fear. As you do this, really feel what it is like just to move your body. Notice if you actually begin to feel nervous.

When you stand up straight, do you feel confident? This is a great exercise in “faking it until you make it.” Sometimes when you feel nervous your body naturally compresses, and this will just heighten the sensation of fear and make you feel worse. If you want to take action and face the fear, first adjust your body so you move in a confident manner. Even if you don't feel it inside, by changing your body to a confident posture you will feel confident and this will allow you to perform better.

Taking Little Steps

Think about something you are afraid of doing or cannot do. Work backwards from that activity and think about all the small steps you could take that are not fully that activity but might be close. For example, if you have a great fear of cold calling for sales, maybe you could take the little step of just calling up different companies and for some information. If that makes you feel a little bit nervous but it is something you could do, then do that until it stops making you nervous. If that doesn't make you nervous than find an intermediate step that does. By taking little steps you can overcome larger fears just by getting momentum and making progress.

The key is to find a step that you feel capable doing but still feel a little nervous about. This is how to take actions that will help you grow.

Smile

Very quickly, put a giant grin on your face and see how that feels. Hold it there for at least ten seconds. Think about how you are feeling at the end of ten seconds. Chances are that your mood improved naturally just by smiling. Or, the virtue of the fact that you were smiling made you think of something that makes you feel good. This is a great thing to remember when you are afraid or not feeling great. Something as simple as remembering to smile can instantly dissipate your fear and make you feel better.

Spelling Bee

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to show you how sometimes it can be more fun to fail than to succeed.

Summary

In this game a group of people will work together to spell a word.

How to Play

This game will require at least two people, but ideally you will play it with three to five people. Stand in a line with your partners and pick a word to spell. If you have an additional person who is not in the game, have them assign you words.

To play this game, first in unison all say the word, then starting with the person who is standing to the extreme left from the audience's point of view, begin spelling the word one letter at a time. When you've completed the word, all say it in unison. Then, use the word in a sentence one word at a time again starting with the person to the extreme left from the audience's perspective. When the sentence is complete, say the word in unison again.

If somebody messes up and misspells or uses the word that doesn't make sense in a sentence, do your best to continue. Do this for multiple words.

Tips and Things to Remember

Progressively make the words more difficult. Start with easy words that are four or five letters long and go through about five words, making each one a little more difficult than the previous word. This is an excellent game to observe. You may observe the other

people doing it or video tape it and watch it later. The ultimate key to this game is to go fast. Say the words as quickly as possible and say the letters as quickly as possible. While you do want to try to spell the word correctly, the objective is speed.

Takeaways

When playing and observing this game, the important thing to ask is, “when is the game enjoyable to watch?” If you and your partners are moving very slowly and taking your time to say the word and letter, really thinking it through, then you might spell the word correctly. From an observational standpoint, however, it will be less fun to watch. If you are doing your best to say and spell the word as quickly as possible and use the words in the sentence as quickly as possible and you mess up, that is when it is fun.

On the flip side, sometimes people will intentionally misspell the word. While at first it may seem fun, it very quickly gets old and boring and not really entertaining. As you play and observe this game, pay attention to the fact that the game works best when you do your best to go fast and spell the word correctly but are willing to fail. It is the willingness to fail and in fact that occasional failure that really makes this game work. So play it and really embrace the concept that it is okay to fail.

Intentionally Failing

If you find it very hard to embrace the concept that failure is okay (provided you are doing your best and have covered your bases), then you may want to try to intentionally go out and fail. That is, take an activity that you don't really care about as to whether you succeed or not and go mess it up. Don't make this one of your career or relationship goals; take an activity that you don't have much of an interest in. Go at it with the intention of messing it up.

Do this and see what happens. The world won't end. People won't hate you. And see how people react to your failure and what happens to you. Intentionally failing is a great way to really retrain your mind as to how you think about failure.

Once you have gone out and intentionally failed, step it up a notch by picking an activity that you really do try to succeed at. It should still be something that you don't care about if you fail.

So pick a new activity—something that you don't really care about if you do well or not. Make it something that's a little bit difficult and go into it with the absolute effort to succeed at and do the best you can, but if you choose a difficult activity the chances are that you will fail. This is really the attitude that you want to bring to everything else. Attach yourself to the outcome, do your best to succeed but be willing to fail. Practice this on things that are less important to you until you get to the point that you can apply this to the things that are very important to you.

Meditation and Silence

Purpose

The purpose of meditating and staying in silence is to train the mind and let go of the past and future and just stay in the moment.

Summary

You will meditate and learn how to focus all of your thoughts on just this moment.

How to Play

Meditation is a vast topic with many books, videos, classes, websites, etc. about it. All we are going to talk about here is a simple way of practicing letting go and staying in the moment. Simply sit down in a comfortable chair or on the floor. You may not want to lie down because you might fall asleep! Make sure all of your distractions (TV, radio, phone, etc.) are off.

While sitting in the chair just close your eyes and try to let go of all your thoughts. This will probably be very hard at first. A good technique is to simply focus on your breathing. Breathe in and breathe out and just pay attention to your breath. As thoughts come up, and they will, don't struggle with them. Don't dwell on them, but don't get upset at yourself for having thoughts and don't try to force them to go away.

In your own head, just acknowledge the thought and then let it go and bring your thought process back on to your breathing. Try to do this for as long as possible. If you've never done this before, doing this for even five minutes will seem incredibly difficult. Work your way up to twenty minutes or so.

Takeaways

As you do this over time, you will find that the thoughts that come up pertain to the past or the future. By training yourself in this format to let it go and refocus on the present, you are training yourself to be able to let go of the past and the future. That's the key to staying in the moment.

Meditation like this can be done as a treatment for stress reduction is. It is also a phenomenal way of tapping your creativity.

Go out and Observe

One of the keys to staying in the moment is to really put your attention outside of your own head and instead to put it on the world and other people. Go out into a public place, outdoors or indoors, where other people are. Simply walk around and rather than being wrapped up in your own thoughts, put your mind outside of yourself. Pay attention to the things and people going on around you.

You do not even need be in a place with other people; you can just be out in nature. Really observe things; look at the sky, buildings, stores, or whatever is around you. Look at other people and surroundings. When your mind starts to wander onto your to-do list or onto the things in your life, gently push them away just like in meditation and refocus on the world outside of you.

When you're focused on the world outside of you, you are absolutely staying in the moment. This technique will be invaluable when it comes to communication and working with others. Practice this on a regular basis and it will become very natural for you.

Word Associations

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to practice tapping your creativity.

Summary

In this game you will say the first thing that comes to mind based on what your partner says.

How to play

Start by facing your partner. One of you begins by saying a word. It doesn't matter what the word is, just any basic word. The other person, upon hearing the word, will then say the first word that comes to his or her mind. The first person will listen to that response and then say the first word that comes to his mind. Then you go back and forth as fast as possible. The key to this game is that you must listen to the word that the other person says before you say your word. You cannot pre-think your word. Continue doing this for a while and just see what happens.

Tips and Things to Remember

The key to this exercise is speed. When you first do this, you might find yourself pausing or hesitating a little bit after your partner says a word. When you do that, it means that you are thinking of the next word in the sequence. When you are thinking, you are cutting off your creativity and your subconscious mind. The goal is to immediately say the first thing that comes to your mind. Even if you think you don't have anything, open your mouth and start talking and see what comes out.

You want to get to the point where you are going very fast. You can work with your partner in this exercise by pointing out to him when he is stalling or thinking. You'll

know he is doing this if he says, “um” before he speaks. Watch his eyes - if he looks away before he speaks then he is thinking. You want to get to the point where you don’t say, “um,” or pause or look away, and you just say words.

You can do this exercise on your own. Simply say a word out loud and then say the next word that comes to mind out loud. Then continue on and on. Keep going. Once you say your first word, if doing this alone, your mind will automatically give you the next three or four words, but once you get beyond that, you will really be in a place of creativity where you don’t know what’s coming next.

Takeaways

When you did this with a partner, were you going fast? Every time you do it, strive to do it a little faster. When you do this right you’ll find that you and your partner are smiling and laughin. When you think about that, it is odd because you aren’t making jokes, you’re just saying words!

Did you surprise yourself anytime you said a word? Did your partner say something and you blurted out a word and you’re not sure where it came from? Maybe afterwards you thought about it and figured it out, but not before hand. When you do that it means you are really tapping into your creativity because it means your subconscious is giving you ideas that are going faster than your conscious mind can process them. That is a wonderful thing and that is where you want to get to. Practicing this exercise will make it easier for you to use creativity for brain storming and problem solving. Practice this often as it will develop your skills.

Paper Cups are Great

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to tap your creativity by practicing saying things that are ridiculous. This game also develops teamwork.

Summary

In this exercise, you and your partners will trade off throwing out ideas very fast that don't make sense but do demonstrate creativity.

How to Play

You and two partners will play the game. Start in the middle with your partners on either side of you. Pick some basic object, such as paper cups, and the person in the middle starts stating reasons why paper cups are great. Each phrase will start with "Paper Cups are great because." For example:

Paper cups are great because you can drink out of them
Paper cups are great because you can crush them and use them as a hockey puck
Paper cups are great because you can use them as spare tires

Keep going saying as many ideas as possible. These ideas can be true but it is not necessary. This game will work if you are willing to say ideas that don't make sense or are just funny and goofy.

The ideas can get more and more ridiculous; they need not make sense or be justified. Just say "Paper cups are great because you can power your car with one." It's not true, and that's ok. The point is to flow.

When you start to stumble, stutter, or hesitate, one of your partners will tap you on the shoulder and switch places with you so that they will jump into the middle of the line and

you will go on the outside. They'll pick it up giving their own ideas for why paper cups are great. When they start to hesitate, one of the other two people will tap them. It's a big trade-off where you just flow as fast as you can and when you have run out of ideas, one of your partners will help you.

This is a really great exercise to generate ideas quickly and really practice tapping into that creativity.

Tips and Things to Remember

If you're on the outside and your partner in the middle seems to be struggling just a little bit, tap them and jump in. Even if you think you only have one idea, that's okay because that's the teamwork aspect— really supporting the other person with your own creativity.

As with any creative activity, go very fast, opening your mouth and beginning the phrase to see what comes out afterwards. Obviously you can change the object from paper cups. It can be turtles, jeans, or anything at all..

Takeaways

The goal here is to loosen up the creative flow. What you'll find is that as you're on the outside listening to the person in the middle, they may say something that will trigger ideas in your mind. This is how creativity works. If you are brainstorming, even if you are working with another person who does not have the best ideas, they may still trigger ideas for you.

Pay attention to when you surprise yourself and come up with clever ideas or random thoughts that just pop out. This is an excellent sign that you've tapped into your creativity. Discuss with your partners afterwards as to whether you felt supported. This is a combination of creativity and teamwork. Sometimes if you are in the middle and you are running out of ideas and nobody is tapping you to replace you, you might feel abandoned..

Once you develop your ability to use this on silly ideas, you can use this as a brainstorming exercise. Take a question and pose it to your group of three and start rattling off answers, switching in and out not worrying about the validity but seeing where the creativity comes from. If you don't have three people you can do this with two people and just swap back and forth. Just as in, "What's fun about ____," you can play this exercise in that format. If you have a tough situation, the person in the middle will start

by taking the situation and saying, “What’s fun about this.” It’s a good way of adding some levity and really shedding some light on a dark situation.

Expert Interview

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to tap your creative flow while starting to direct it and control it.

Summary

In this exercise you will be an expert on some topic and you will then answer questions on that topic in a way that really taps your creativity.

How to Play

In this game you will be an expert and your partner will ask you questions. The first thing is that you need an area of expertise. Have your partners assign you an area of expertise, and it should be something pretty basic, but nothing you would normally find an expert on, such as Quantum Physics. Suggest anything day-to-day such as bird watching, furniture, or fruit. The game will be easier if the suggestion is less crazy.

Once you establish your topic, your partners should begin asking you questions as if you were the expert. They should push you, asking questions that are open-ended. Questions should start with, “How” or “Why.” “Yes/No” questions should be avoided because it is easy to get off the hook with those. Your partners may ask you to tell them stories about things or make up weird questions that don’t seem to make a lot of sense and you’ll have to make sense of them. For example, once I was asked as a school bus expert, “Why is it that when UFO’s come they always steel school busses?”

The goal of the questions is not to be funny. When the question is asked your job as the expert is to answer the question, but your objective should be to answer fast, immediately, and without hesitation.

Do this for a while, answer five or ten questions and just see where it leads you to.

Tips and Things to Remember

As in all things creative, the key to this exercise is speed. Answer the questions immediately and without hesitating. Novice improvisers will take a second upon hearing the question and pause to think about something to say. The instant they do that, it's over because they have shut off their creativity and turned things over to the conscious mind. Your goal is to tap your creativity and just flow. Open your mouth and start talking, even if you're not exactly sure where your answer will lead.

Don't use stall tactics. Sometimes when a question comes in someone will stall by repeating the question or by saying something such as, "That's an interesting question, I am glad you asked that. I actually had that question last week." This is a stall to try to think for a few seconds.

Don't evaluate your ideas as they come out, because sometimes you will start to say something that you think is stupid, but you have to just go with it.

This is a great exercise in confidence as well. You should project confidence. When you do this exercise, don't hesitate, even if you are saying something stupid. Act as if your answer is 100% correct.. Stand up straight so it is not just your voice, but your body language that is projecting that confidence as well.

You must remember that your mind gives you these ideas for a reason. If your rapid fire answer starts out with something goofy, don't be afraid of it. Instead, realize that your mind gave you that answer for a reason. Just keep talking and see where it leads you to. You know you're doing this game right when you start surprising yourself with answers. This is a great exercise in being quick witted and thinking fast on your feet because you realize that if you trust yourself you can really come up with some creative ideas.

Brain Storming

Brain storming is a directed application of creativity. Just as in the expert interview, when you brainstorm all you are doing is answering questions. So the exercise is to brainstorm next time you need to come up with a new idea or solve a problem such as an ad campaign. Use the principles of creativity and go very, very fast. Write your question across the piece of paper just as if it were a question in the expert interview and then go as fast as possible and start writing answers to that question.

As with everything else, don't think through the answers, don't evaluate them as you go, just keep your pen moving even if it is just to write out things like, "I don't know what to say." By doing this you will very quickly come up with a list of ten, twenty, forty, or even fifty or more ideas. Most of the ideas will be silly or goofy but those ideas might lead you to the great ideas. By tapping into your creativity this way you can open up many doors.

Do not evaluate as you go. If you do, and if you go slowly, you will never get to those new ideas. Unfortunately, those new ideas are the solutions to your problems.

If you're going to brainstorm with a group, be sure everybody understands these rules. With a group you will be doing this out loud instead of on paper, but someone should record the ideas as they come up. In a group dynamic it is very common for one person to start criticizing the ideas as they come up. Or, every time someone says an idea, the group starts talking through its validity. The purpose of the brainstorming phase is to leverage everyone's creativity for fabulous new ideas. Everybody should go fast and understand that this is not the time to criticize - just build off ideas and see where it leads you.

Blind Line

Purpose

The purpose of this game is to practice reacting to changing circumstances quickly and powerfully.

Summary

In this game you will tell a story but periodically you will have to read a piece of paper that will have a random line on it. You will have to immediately incorporate that line into your story.

How to Play

Have a partner or friend write sentences on a variety of index cards. They can be quotes, random sentences, or anything at all. You want to get about ten. They can do this at any point, so you can get these ahead of time before you are practicing your improvisation. Don't read the cards ahead of time! You should have no idea what's on the cards.

Begin telling a story, starting out with, "Once upon a time," and just start telling the story. Introduce a character; give them something to do, and then introduce some complication. For example, "Once upon a time there was a boy named John who needed to get to the grocery store to buy some milk, on his way there he had a flat tire." Just start with something very simple.

At the end of the sentence, take one of the cards, read it out loud as if that is the next sentence in the story that you are telling. So, if it is, "John had a flat tire," and you pull up a card and it says, "The rabid goat attacked the capitol." This would have to be the next line in the story, so you would have John going to the store to get milk and all of a sudden the goat attacks the capitol. Your job is to then weave that element into your story. Now you have to lead your story to say John has to get milk but also deal with a rabid goat.

After a couple sentences you have to pull up a new card, read another one, and take the story in a new direction. This game continues until all the cards are done or until you reach a natural ending to your story.

Tips and Things to Remember

Remember when you pull up a card read it as the exact next thing. Blurt it out, don't read it then think about how you are going to do it then say it out loud. The goal is to incorporate these ideas, so if you read something that is totally random, don't try dismiss it, just get back to your original story. The goal is to let these obstacles and changes move your story into a new direction. Have fun with this because it will be a crazy game and if you take it too seriously you will never make it...

Takeaways

This game can be considered a great confidence exercise because it is the manner in which you say or read your statements that is going to make all the difference. When you flip over a card and read it, read it with confidence as if you intended to say that as your next line. Then when you make your justifications, which in many cases will be a stretch or just crazy, say them out loud with confidence. Have an observer watch this exercise and ask them to tell you how they felt with the confidence level of each change you were given.

Building off all the creativity in early games, as soon as you read the card, continue telling your story and see how your creativity ties those elements in because that is where the fun happens. If you pause and try to think about how you will tie it together it will never work.

Try this game a few times, and really develop that ability to be confident and flow with change. Some of your stories will end up being really interesting as a result of using the unexpected instead of running away from it.

Warming Up

Purpose

The purpose of these exercises is to get your mind and body flowing to be in a more powerful position to improvise, be creative or just tackle the day.

Summary

These are a series of simple exercises you can do pretty much anywhere to increase your energy and therefore increase your performance.

How to Play

Warming up is quite simply like any athletic activity. It does not need to be as intense but you can do some really simple things. If you have the space and you have some privacy and don't mind looking silly you can get the whole body into it.

The first thing is to stand up and just do some simple movements such as stretching. Stretch your body up, hands over head, and make your body as big as possible. Alternate that with stretching down, bending over and just letting your arms hang trying to touch the floor or your toes. Just do whatever is comfortable. The goal here is not to increase flexibility, but to get the body moving.

After you have stretched up and down a couple times, shake your arms and make circles forward as if you were swimming. Then do it in the reverse direction. Flap your arms back and forth behind you, swing your arms to get your blood flowing. Twist at the waist, left and right back and forth. All of these you should be doing gently just to get a little blood flowing.

If you have the ability to go exercise you should go do that but in lieu of that doing these simple stretches will really get the blood flowing.

You can also do deep breathing. Breathe in, deep through the nose, hold it, and breathe out through the mouth. Do this a few times. While this may make you calmer, at the same time it will clear your head and get you more focused which will increase your energy.

If you can't stand up, then cross your arms while sitting in your chair and shake your body a bit. shake your arms and your wrists. Do anything you can to get your blood flowing!

Musical Hotspot

Purpose

The purpose of this game is to increase your energy and have some fun.

Summary

In this game you and your partners will sing brief snippets of songs and learn to support each other.

How to Play

This game works best with a group of people. Form a circle and have one person start out in the middle. That person starts singing a song. It can be any song at all, it does not matter what.

The people in the circle should listen to the singer, and once the song the person in the middle is singing makes them think of another song, any song at all, for whatever reason, they must jump in and start singing the new song.

Once the new person starts singing the new song, the person in the middle immediately stops singing and goes back to the circle. Now a new person is in the middle of the circle and anytime anything from their song triggers another person, they jump in and sing their song. You keep doing this back and forth.

Tips and Things to Remember

This should be a high energy and teamwork building. No person should sing more than two lines of their song before somebody else jumps in and helps them out. For this reason you should feel comfortable jumping into a game even if you don't feel you know that many words to your song because you should only be out for two lines at a time.

If you stick to no more than two lines then this game should have a lot of energy because people will jump in and out quickly. This is an energy exercise so when you do take the floor to start singing, do so with volume and energy. Even if you don't sing well (I know I don't when I play this game), belt it out with confidence and energy as best you can. It will be fun, people will appreciate it, and the overall energy will increase.

Takeaways

This is a great game to increase energy. It does take the right group of people. Chances are you might not have the office environment to do this sort of thing. However if you ever do anything creative and you have some singers or people who like to be out of the box, this is a great way of increasing energy. This exercise is what I would use to warm up before all of my improv group's performances. But even if you can't do this exercise fully, the concept of singing as a warm-up is great. If you are headed somewhere and are alone in your car and a song comes on the radio that energizes you, consider singing along with it—not just humming but sing it loud, be off key and throw yourself into it. If it is a high energy song, by the end of it you will feel your mood has instantly shifted and your energy is instantly up. You could just listen to the music, which will boost your energy, but not nearly as much.

The more you throw your body and voice into it, the more immediate and dramatic the change in your energy level will be. If you have the opportunity with the right people to play this game, I encourage you to try it. If not, take elements away from it. Sing, sing in your living room, car, in your car and feel how the energy changes and how you could incorporate it into your daily life when you need energy.

“Yes, and” versus “Yes, but”

Purpose

The purpose of this game is to demonstrate the powerful difference of changing your mind-set from "yes, but" to "yes, and."

Summary

In this exercise you and a partner will have two conversations. The first will be an example of saying, “yes but,” and the second will be an example of saying “yes and.”

How to Play

In this exercise you and a partner will have two conversations. The first conversation can start with any first statement, but after that every statement must start with the two words, “yes, but.” So if the first person said, “Let’s go to Chinese Food.” The next person has to start with "yes, but" saying, “Yes, but I had Chinese Food last night. I don’t want Chinese Food.” The other person also has to start with “yes, but” as well. So they will say, “Yes, but I have a coupon.” And so on and so on. Go for about a minute just having a conversation.

Once you have completed that, repeat the exercise starting with the exact same first sentence. This time, however, begin each sentence with the two words "yes, and." So for our Chinese Food example it would be, “I really want to go out to Chinese Food tonight.” “Yes, and while we are there we can stop at the record store next door.” Then the other person goes back, “Yes, and I have a coupon so that we save money and we can spend that money to buy records at the store.” Again go on for about a minute and see where it leads.

Tips and Things to Remember

It is important in this game to not ask questions because after you ask a question the other person has to start with "yes, and" or "yes, but." Yes or No questions might be okay but

stay away from asking questions. Stick to making statements as it will really help move this game along. Don't over think your answers, just say "yes, and" or "yes, but" and just flow with whatever comes immediately afterwards and see where it leads you. That is where the creativity and fun in this game comes from. Try this for a few different topics just to see what happens

Takeaways

After you've done this exercise, you and your partner and any observers should discuss how "yes, but" differed from "yes, and." How did "yes, but" feel to play and watch? How did "yes, and" feel to play and watch?

This is a simple and powerful exercise. "Yes, but" will feel like an argument whereas "yes, and" will feel more collaborative. Which one was easier? There is no right answer to this question as some people find "yes, but" easier, while others find "yes, and" easier. People that find "yes, but" easier do so because you do not have to listen to your partner or use your creativity.

Many people stay in an argumentative or set-in-ways mentality to make this easier. It does not mean they are wrong, but this is a starting point from where to develop. This one simple shift, catching yourself from saying "yes, but" and switching it to "yes, and" will probably have a greater impact on your life and career than any other shift you can make. Play this game, practice it to the point to where you catch yourself saying "yes, but" and then think in terms of "yes, and." You want this to be a natural reaction.

Focused Listening

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to practice listening skills and to demonstrate how difficult it is to just simply listen.

Summary

In this exercise you will listen to another person and pay attention to how it is like to be in that situation.

How to Play

Do this game with a partner. One of you will go first and be the speaker while the other is the listener. Use a stopwatch or a clock with a second hand and have the speaker begin speaking and speak exactly for one minute. The listener should do nothing but just listen to the speaker. At the end of one minute, switch roles and have the other person speak and the other person listen and repeat the exercise with the speaker speaking for one minute and the listener listen for one minute. At the end discuss how it all felt.

Tips and Things to Remember

If you are the listener, your job is to just pay attention and listen. You cannot interrupt or ask questions, even if the speaker isn't speaking clearly. For one minute you must stay absolutely silent and just pay attention to the other person.

As the listener you may find your mind wandering. If you do, gently bring your attention back to the speaker. If you are the speaker you may speak about anything at all. You could bring up your day, talk about the future, or discuss things you like to do. You can use this exercise as an icebreaker to practice listening while you have people talk about

themselves to help them get to know each other a bit. If you are the speaker just keep speaking. It is not important what you say but that you keep speaking.

Takeaways

Make sure you discuss this exercise afterwards with your partner. How did it feel to be the listener? Did you find your mind wandering or did you pay attention for a full minute? Did you feel the need to interrupt them? Did you break the rule and actually interrupt and ask a question? Did you find yourself wanting to chime in and say, “Oh I do that as well?” These are all natural reactions but the goal is to pay attention to them and realize that they exist and how they get in the way of real listening.

Listening is not complicated; it is actually very simple. It’s really about taking it all in and putting your mind on the other person—which is all you are doing in this exercise. Yet, to really listen is one of the hardest things in the world. So discuss how it felt to just listen. As the speaker how did it feel to have somebody really just listen to you for a full minute without interrupting or without their minds wandering? This is an excellent way to get and practice.

When you’re doing this exercise one minute may seem like a long time but it is worth increasing the time and repeating the exercise. Go a minute and a half, two, or even five minutes. See how long you can get to without being distracted. Once you’re able to do this and instantly shift into this kind of focused listening, you will get rapport, make connections, and pay attention to people. This will help relationships both personally and professionally.

Ding

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to practice changing your ideas and flowing with change at the ring of a bell.

Summary

In this game you will tell a story but a partner will periodically force you to change your story and to move into a new direction.

How to Play

Do this with a partner. You start out as the storyteller. Your partner can either clap his hands or if he has a bell, he can ring a bell.

You begin telling a story; however at any point your partner can clap their hands or ring the bell. When he does you have to stop, go back, and repeat the sentence you just said but change it so that something is different. You could say anything at all as long as it is different. As long as your partner keeps ringing you keep changing. For example if you start, "Once upon a time there was a girl who had a pet dog." Ding. "There was a girl who had a pet cat." Ding. "There was a girl who had a pet mouse." Ding. "There was a girl who had a pet llama." You keep repeating as long as he keeps ringing the bell or clapping his hands. When he stops you continue to tell the story but only with the last thing you said.

So in this example, the dog, cat, and mouse would be gone but the llama would remain in the story. Continue to tell the story about the girl and her llama. Keep going and at the next point the partner can ring or clap again forcing you to change. In this exercise you are telling a story but you constantly change directions from what you planned.

Tips and Things to Remember

The key is that as soon as the bell rings you should start talking, repeating the sentence, and change it by saying the first thing that comes to mind—do not over think it. The game is painful to watch when someone pauses every time they hear the bell or clap. They try to then think about where to go.

To make this game effective you have to incorporate the random things you say. In the example above if the story starts with the girl and her dog and it changed to the llama, then some people would quickly get rid of the llama and bring the dog back into the story. For example, “The girl had a llama but she didn’t like it so she got rid of it and got a dog.”

Now you’re back on your original track. That’s a way of not flowing with the change but fighting against the change and keeping you within your box. Work on whatever randomness your mind throws out due to the bell or the clap and incorporate it to move the story in a new direction.

Takeaways

This is not the easiest game in the world. It takes practice, but ask yourself, “How did you feel every time the bell rang?” Did you freeze like a deer in the headlights and regroup your thoughts? If that’s the case then chances are you’re not staying in the moment and instead are thinking ahead as to where the story is going. When the bell rang it broke you out of your thought process. This is one of the main reasons people have trouble with control. Rather than being in the moment they are living in the future. When something unexpected happens it throws them out of whack because they are lost in a future which can’t happen anymore.

Practice doing this game to the point where as soon as you hear the bell you can change on a dime. As you get more advanced in this game you can incorporate new random ideas but still tell good stories and move the story in the direction you want it to go... which is really the essence of letting go of control.

It is not so much about abandoning all of your dreams, ideas, and plans. It is about being so flexible that no matter what happens, you can adapt to it. As you get more refined you may still achieve what you want without being rigid.

Practice doing this game as it is one of the most fun games you can play if you are willing to throw yourself into it.

Two Word Stories

Purpose

The purpose of this game is to build a story with a partner two words at a time.

Summary

In this game you and your partner will tell a story by each contributing two words at a time.

How to Play

Face your partner and make good eye-contact with them. It helps to stand up to increase the energy. Simply tell a story with one person contributing the first two words, the next person adding two more words, and so on. Make a familiar story structure by starting with, “Once upon” and the next person saying “a time.” Then after that just free-form with each person contributing two words. Continue going until the story loses control or reaches a natural ending. You may also end the story if it just kind of fades out, which sometimes may happen.

Tips and Things to Remember

As with most exercises in this guide, the key is to go fast. When your partner says their two words, you should immediately say the first two words that come to your mind based on what they said. They should then listen and say the first two words that come to their mind based on what you said. It is okay if the story messes up... just simply throw it away and start a new one. The goal right now is not to tell a brilliant story but to flow, let go of control, and tap your creativity.

Do not stress over the rules as your goal is just to say two words at a time. Invariably someone will say only one word or will let three or four words come out. If this happens

only once and a while then it is not a problem. Do not stop and go back to correct them, just pick up at the end of their last word and continue your story saying your two words. Stick to the two words but don't let someone making a mistake stop the flow of the exercise.

Takeaways

This is a great game to discuss afterwards. How able were you to say two words only? If you make a mistake once and a while it is no big deal but if you consistently say more than two words, then there is a good chance that you have a control issue going on. What is happening is that you have an idea that you think is really good and want to get across but you can't convey it in just two words. Rather than following the rules of the game and letting go of control you keep pushing it and saying more words to get your ideas across.

Chances are in this game there will be a point where you say your two words and you will have an idea of where you want the story to go and you expect your partner to give you two specific words back. Your partner may very well say two words that are completely different. They are not the words you expected them to say and they take the story in a completely new direction. At this point what did you do? Did you try to force the story back in your direction or did you let go and be willing to go in the new direction? Did you find yourself telling your partner that he should have said something else as it would have been funnier?

This exercise is a great demonstration of control. The best stories happen when you say your two words with an intention for where the game is going, but, when your partner says two words that are completely different, you are willing to be flexible and abandon your original idea and go where they go. This is an excellent give and take exercise because you are not just being subservient to your partner but really both of you are working together and being flexible. One person says two words, then the other person contributes two words, and then you contribute and it is a lot of give and take. This is the key to teamwork, relationships, etc.

Practice this game often until you get to the point where you can tell stories very quickly and be able to flow and adapt to the strange things your partner says.

This is a simple exercise but the more you practice it the better your relationships and dealing with little problems in life will be.

Three Word Sentences

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to think through what you say to make sure you are communicating clearly.

Summary

In this game you will have a conversation where you and your partner can only speak using three words at a time.

How to Play

You and a partner decide on the topic to talk about—it could be a basic topic such as where you'd like to go on vacation or about a new piece of furniture you are thinking about buying. Then begin having a conversation but you may only speak using three words at a time. So, whenever you speak your sentence has to have exactly three words, and when your partner responds they have to have exactly three words.

Unlike previous games, in this one you have to stick to the rules. Make a focused effort to only speak three words at a time. Also, in this one exercise it is okay to not go super fast. Think through what you are about to say. Try to make your sentences sound like they make sense; don't say just three words and then in the middle of the sentence just stop and nod your head as if you said a complete sentence. Do your best to make sense speaking three words at a time.

Tips and Things to Remember

Think before you speak. Think about what you want to convey to your partner, how you can convey it using only three words, and see if you can do it. Sometimes people will

start speaking and get only about halfway through their thought with their three words. Then your partner has no idea what you are saying!

Try to make statements that make something happen—that is, do not just ask questions because that puts the burden on your partner. Make statements, suggestions, and get out ideas. It will make the game more challenging, but that is the point! With most improv games, the easier you make it the less entertaining it is and the less you will learn from it.

Takeaways

How did this game feel to play? Chances are it was difficult. This is a very hard game. The purpose of this game is to really get you to think through your communication. A big problem in communication is that people just speak without knowing the point of their communication. This game is an exercise in goal-oriented communication. Sometimes you might have to change your thought because you want to convey something that you just cannot figure out how to say in only three words. This is where most people run into trouble. At this point instead of changing their thought they struggle sticking to three words, make no sense, and then try to use gestures to convey half of their meaning.

If this happens to you, it is an indicator that you need to be more flexible in your thought process and not that you need to be more creative in your words. This is a good exercise in terms of marketing and sales or anything where you really need to crystallize your message. Babbling and going on and on is a way that people really get in trouble with communication. So try speaking only three words at a time and get that sense of really sending your message simply and concisely.

One Sentence Stories

Purpose

To practice communicating, listening, and building off other people's ideas.

Summary

In this game you will tell a story with partners, each contributing one sentence at a time.

How to Play

In this game you and your partners (anywhere from one to twenty), will tell a story together. You will each contribute one sentence at a time. The first person will say the first sentence in the story—whatever they want. The next person in line will say the next line in the story, and on down the line. Each person may only speak one sentence.

Things to Remember

In this game you have to listen to the person before you so that you know where the story is at. In this exercise, when you say your sentence, you must build off something the person before you had said. You may find yourself thinking ahead so that when the sentence comes to you, you ignore the person before you and move the story on where you want it to go. The best conversations are when people build the conversation together—this is how this story games works too, when you are building it together with your partners.

This is also an exercise in communication. You need to speak clearly in terms of volume and tone so that the next person hears you, otherwise they won't be able to build off your idea. You also need to be able to convey whatever you want to happen with the story in one sentence. Sometimes without the ability to speak a full paragraph or babble on, you

need to really crystallize your idea in one sentence. This is really another exercise in gathering your thoughts and speaking clearly and concisely.

Takeaways

How does this exercise feel to play? Did you find yourself really building off the person before you or did you find yourself thinking ahead to where you wanted the story to go? You could be introducing new elements that have nothing to do with the story so far. Were you communicating your ideas clearly? In this exercise you have to communicate your ideas clearly and quickly. You have to listen to what the person before you says and quickly think of what you want to add to the story and concisely say it in one sentence. Doing this exercise is really a nice way of practicing communication, creativity, and the ability to work with other people.