Life Lessons We Can All Learn From Improv

Improvisation is a comedic art form valuing creative action without pre-planning. This focus on spontaneity and the creation of meaning in an ever-changing environment has relevancy beyond the stage into everyday life itself. Many professionals and novices alike have gained valuable insight from comedic improv, allowing them to become both better artists and better people.

1. *There are no failures, only revelations.*

When it comes to improv, there are no wrong answers and all ideas are valid. A scene can never be ruined, but only to be laughed off and learned from. This applies to the importance of failure in all of our lives, as an opportunity for personal growth. Life itself seems to have a script, and we can’t help but wonder why certain events happen to us and not to others. Instead of wondering “why me?,” ask yourself “how can I learn from this?” Having a mindset focused on improvement for the future rather than worrying about the past allows us to become an ever-improving version of ourselves that’s ready to face life’s uncertainties.

1. *Less talking, more action.*

Improv has no script and the actors cannot think about their actions because they must keep the scene alive and moving. Many actors struggle with this immediate action since it is in our human nature to evaluate our choices and act upon our best option. However, over-thinking can be a crippling trait, killing a person’s spontaneity and leaving them to dwell about the hypothetical. Our desires can only become realities through our actions.

1. *Yes, and…*

One of the golden rules in improv is “yes, and….” This idea means that if someone comes up with an idea, instead of negating it, you build directly off of it. Actors must completely trust each other on stage, building off each others ideas, no matter how outlandish, in order to keep the plot rolling. This willingness to support each other’s ideas translates to school, work, or friends. Instead of dismissing an idea because you believe it to be impractical, or redundant, find areas to add value and make the idea plausible.

1. *Never expect a certain reaction. Listen and react to what was actually said.*

Plot twists and turns are what make improv such an engaging art form. The actors must listen to one another and take actions that make sense to the storyline. If one actor says the scene is taking place in the desert, another can’t say they suddenly become stuck in a hurricane. Listening to one another is important on and off the stage, but is only productive with the correct intent. If the listener is motivated by desire to debate, argue, convince, or discount the speaker, the conversation will surely escalate to confrontation. Listening to others with a genuine desire to understand what is being communicated is necessary to defuse conflict.

1. *Commitment*

One of the keys to captivating the audience with improv is commitment to the character. This includes immersing in the reality that is being created on stage, allowing for an authentic connection to be made amongst the actors and the audience. We struggle with commitment daily, with our checking of our never-ending social media feeds because of FOMO – the Fear Of Missing Out. Our constant checking is fueled by the fear that someone else may be having more fun, cooler experiences, or a better relationship than us. Our competitive nature causes us to post idyllic versions of our experiences, to create an illusion that our lives are better than others. However, the constant likes, tweets, and instas are causing us to miss out on the real lives we are leading. Committing to the moment and valuing our current experiences and company is the key to fostering genuine connections with others, on and off the stage.

One group that knows the value of these improv lessons all too well is the cast of Broadway’s Next H!T Musical. These master improvisers gather hit song suggestions from the audience, who then votes for their favorite song and watches the cast turn it into a full-blown improvised musical – complete with memorable characters, witty dialogue, and plot twists galore. Witness the magic of Broadway’s Next H!T Musical at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts on Friday, January 29, 2016 at 8PM. For more details about the performance and to purchase tickets, visit whartoncenter.com or call 1-800-WHARTON. Student tickets available for just $15!