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## 25 Improv Tricks That Will Make You a Better Business Person



Posted on February 1st, 2011

At first glance, improv might seem like the direct opposite of the business world. It's silly, raucous, and spontaneous. But improv actors are sharp professionals who have an incredible ability to pull from past dialogue, anticipate future scenes and relationships, and engage audiences in just moments. If you're trying to make it in the [business world](#), you can learn a lot from improv actors. Here are 25 tricks that work just as well in business as they do on stage.



1. **[Introduce yourself](#)**: Don't assume anyone already knows who you are. As character actor, writer and improviser Jeremiah Murphy reveals, "the trick is to cram your introduction with as much detail as you can so your scene partner and you will have all sorts of material." It's the same principle you should apply to interviews, business meetings and networking events.
2. **[Don't block others](#)**: This meaning of "block" refers to the refusal of any line a player throws at you. Even if it seems cheesy, laugh at or contribute to a joke, and play along with the person you're talking to. Otherwise, you'll seem offensive and boring.
3. **[Remember the "Yes, and" rule](#)**: Accept information your partner gives you, but also remember to add something to it. "Yes, I also think this speaker was a great choice, *and* I'm excited to see him/her at the lecture series next month, too." You want to be a source and to fuel a two-way conversation, not just a nodder.
4. **[Listen](#)**: One of the most important strategies in improv is to listen to your partner. You're relying on each other to move the scene along, and it's the same in a business meeting or conversation. Pay extremely close attention to what the other person is saying and how they say it. These details will pay off later, when you're trying to remember everyone you've talked to and want to follow up.
5. **[Use your body](#)**: Actors rely on their bodies to convey emotions and improvise whole scenarios without props or scenery. In business, you should also be aware of your body language, posture and handshake to make sure you're relaying the right message: confidence, positivity, friendliness, and capability.
6. **[Establish history](#)**: Improv actors use this trick to very quickly move the plot along and add humor. You can use the strategy to swiftly establish your experience, relevance or relationship with the "scene," involving other business people, the industry or anything else that's relevant.
7. **[Commit](#)**: It's not easy to back-track in improv, once you've hooked the audience and engaged your partner. In the real world, you need to prove that you're accountable and can follow through, so commit to whatever you say, and use confident language and voice to convey your message.
8. **[Practice on your own](#)**: There's an idea that going to as many networking events or volunteering to give presentations is the only way you'll get enough practice to feel comfortable and gain experience, but practicing on your own is useful too. Many of the best professional improv actors practice 3-4 hours a day, usually on their own. So review your strengths and weaknesses, practice in front of the mirror, and you'll be even better prepared.
9. **[Help your partner](#)**: If you're in a group or with a colleague or contact who's floundering because of a bad joke or nerves, don't make fun of them. Instead, help them out by adding to their conversation, beefing up their point, and introducing them to others in the group.
10. **[Don't ask questions: make statements](#)**: Statements don't just sound stronger, they propel the conversation in a new, active way.

11. **Stick to the present**: Don't complicate a brief scene or conversation by focusing on something that happened years ago or your lifelong goals in the business world. Keep your interlude focused on the present, which shows your sense of control and will help others remember you.
12. **Become a quick thinker**: The best improv actors are extremely quick thinkers who can evaluate every little nuance of a situation, remember past dialogue, and anticipate a comprehensive, humorous action in the future. Becoming a quick thinker will help you come up with ideas on queue, communicate more effectively, and solve problems more resolutely.
13. **Be specific**: Being able to recall details is important, but being specific is more than having a great memory. Speaking in specific terms keeps your audience engaged and convinced of your actual message. You don't want vague interpretations of your speech or conversation to be muddled later.
14. **Understand your motivation**: Don't give a presentation or even walk up to a person at a networking event if you don't know your exact motivation for doing it. Understanding your expectations will help you act more transparently and confidently.
15. **Enter and exit with purpose**: It's confusing for others if you just butt into a conversation or leave without any real justification. Always have a motive — that you communicate — before entering or exiting.
16. **Make physical contact**: In improv, touching your partner's shoulder is a good — and immediate— way to establish a relationship. While encroaching upon someone else's personal space isn't usually a plus in American business culture, shaking hands, or just lightly touching someone on the shoulder as you move on will make it easier for them to remember you.
17. **Don't be selfish**: Bragging and hogging the conversation will get you noticed — in a bad way. Stealing the scene is only going to embitter the clients and contacts who didn't get to contribute because you were blabbing the whole time, too.
18. **Advance the scene**: If you're well tuned in to everything that's going on around you, you can take charge and advance the "scene." If people in the group or audience are getting shifty, come up with a graceful exit strategy. Or, if you're on the verge of making a deal, keep the conversation going with the right dynamic and flow to close.
19. **Balance out the Silly Monster with subtlety**: Jeremiah Murphy's got a name for the jerk improv partner — or colleague, or boss or whatever — who keeps sabotaging your "performance." Overcompensate — in the opposite direction — and try to win over your remaining audience by being subtle, quietly clever, and mannerly.
20. **Create potential**: Dangle ideas, motivations or goals in a conversation or presentation to create potential for future collaborations or meetings.
21. **Remember the "karaoke rule"**: The "karaoke rule" states that as long as you can sell your performance, you don't have to be the best singer/dancer/actor, etc. If you're able to communicate — or just fake — confidence and charisma, you have a better chance of convincing others of your idea.
22. **Be consistent**: While it's important to be open to new ideas — also a valuable asset in improv *and* business — you shouldn't confuse your audience by flip-flopping between opinions or decisions. You'll come across as amateurish and unreliable.
23. **Maintain high energy while staying relaxed**: This is key to winning over your audience from the beginning, without getting too nervous yourself. Visualize yourself succeeding, and convince yourself that presenting, networking or negotiating is your favorite part of the day.
24. **Make the other guy look good**: Improv — like all acting — is a complete partnership. You need to be able to give as much as you take, and highlighting your colleague's accomplishments — in industry or just as a witty commentator — will reveal your own generosity and strengthen the dynamic of the group as a whole. If you can all acknowledge each other's strengths, you'll have a better idea of what you can achieve together.
25. **Pick one "tip" to work on**: If you're nervous about perfecting your body language, active voice and handshake, you might fall apart. To calm yourself down, pick one "tip" to focus on

during a meeting or presentation, and the rest — as The Improv Wiki reassures — "seems to fall into place."

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