

Showtime / Improvisation Exercises

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(Revised: 1. February 2000 by Clinton Callahan)

FORMAT:

Various

PURPOSE:

SETUP:

INTRO / BACKGROUND:

INSTRUCTIONS / PROCEDURE:

IMPROV THEATER EXERCISES

- Circumstances are irrelevant. Principle of agreement. One person is committed to principle (possibility, abundance, love, integrity, clarity), the other person is committed to a belief (I don't have enough money, I am not good enough, no one could love me, if I show up people will leave me). Do not argue. There is evidence to support any interpretation. Choose your interpretation.
- Shooting voices. Give a presentation about the "psychology of man's possible evolution" and say the voices out loud and shoot them: "BANG!"
- Getting killed and not dieing.

1) Improv Exercise #1

The group stands in a circle. One person goes onto the center (leave them plenty of room to move but keep the circle bonded) and begins an activity ANY activity, allow people to use their imaginations (mowing the grass, fixing the bluxfor valve on a spaceship, tangoing with a LLama) they do not say what they are doing they just GO! When they have established this (usually less than a minute) another person asks them what they are doing) "Hey Bob. What are you doing?" The person in the center replies with an activity, any activity that they are NOT presently engaged in. "I'm swallowing Boston whole Janet!" Then Janet replaces Bob in the center of the circle and engages in the improvised activity of swallowing Boston whole. Then after a minute another person asks Janet what she is doing. She makes something up and then THAT person replaces her ETC.

The advanced version might be to replace WHAT ARE YOU DOING? With WHO ARE YOU BEING? The question should not be answered with a feeling (this is my

hunch) but with a quality of BEING. I'm being a world leader, I'm being as risky as a possum etc. I have never actually tried the ADVANCED version I just made it up for you. I have to go. I will write again tomorrow night withg more.

Situations:

Fireman are evacuating a 5 story building that is on fire. They get to the top floor and through the window discover an old woman playing the violin. She will not leave until she finishes the piece.

Scientist staying up 5 days and nights accidently discovers cold fusion. The cleaning lady comes in and is angry with him for making such a mess and for being there. As she is cleaning up she accidently destroys the scientist's equipment.

Circus act tiger gets loose in the crowd. People play out the drama as persecutors, rescuers, victims.

Gambling casino, one man is addicted to gambling and is almost out of money. He tries to get some from a fisherman gambling away his family fortune, a billionaire woman, an insurance salesman, and then his mother shows up. The casino manager is trying to keep everyone happy.

2) Improv Exercise #2

PHYSICAL PLANT THAT IMPEDES AN OBJECTIVE (an interesting proof of the axiom: Creativity is the process of eliminating options)

Two people engage in an improvised scene. Each has an objective that is secret from the other. An objective should be: Possible, challenging, have an urgency relative to time that involves a consequence, and have a result that is physically evident, e. g. my objective is to make B leave the room. If I do not make B leave the room in the next 2 minutes Assassins will kill my whole family.

When the group gets the hang of playing an objective (this is not necessarily easy and is 90% of what good acting is made of) it is fun to add a physical plant. A physical plant is an imaginary characteristic that one endows one's scene partner with. A physical plant should be; secret from the partner, imagined as visible (my scene partner has a big gun in their hand vs. my scene partner has a gun . . . somewhere . . . and in contrast to the objective one is trying to achieve, e. g. my objective is to make B leave the room - If I do not make B leave the room in 2 minutes assassins will kill my family. The physical plant I am endowing B with is that B has only scar tissue where B's ears should be. No matter what evidence I receive to the contrary I believe this. The evidence is not ignored. It merely suggests other phenomena than the existence of B's ears. I take it in and process it in this way (as we do every day to reinforce any of our various "stories"!)

The final note about the physical plant is that it is imagined for the actors benefit - it should not be "indicated" in any way to the audience" The point is to exercise imagination - not reveal what is imagined by "Acting" there should be no "acting" allowed! Solve the problem as yourself within the given circumstances or transcend the circumstances - do not pretend to be Not Yourself (just like in life!). I suggest you or the group at large give each participant

(secretly from each other) their plant or objective at least at first as people tend to the inexact and vague with this stuff.

STORYTELLING EXERCISES:

We understand storytelling innately from childhood (Once upon a time...)

1) Story-Story

Have people stand in a line, shoulders touching.

When you point to a person they begin a story on any topic.

When you point to someone new they must continue the story from exactly where the other left off, even mid-sentence or mid-word if you're gutsy.

Keep the story flowing and connected without any leaps that are too unbelievable, but let it go where the collected imaginations go. (In performance we add the "Die" element, where if someone hesitates, repeats, or fumbles on the switch, they are out.) You can also get more people involved by having groups of two or three go simultaneously throughout the room.

When you call switch they must change narrators in a predetermined order.

2) Yes-And

Really just as an additive to the above, especially if people are denying what others have established and taking the story off in their own, pre-determined direction.

With every switch you must say "Yes, and...", thereby accepting what has been said, and also adding to it, so the story doesn't run around in circles, but grows. Affirm what others are giving you; trust each other and go with the unknown.

3) Just Talk

Can be done with solo stories, or with a group.

Give a topic to speak about or tell a story about.

At different intervals, throw out random words (and the less they have to do with the subject at hand the better.).

They must keep their story going and fit that word into it.

This really gets people out of the box of their narrative, as they think fast to make the nonsense work.

You may want to write some words on a list, or put them in a hat; it's is deceptively difficult to coach this game without getting into the same box yourself.

4) I Wish I Had Said or Change That Phrase

When the actors are talking, make a loud and distinctive buzzer sound.

This signals them to change the phrase they have just said, using the first thing that comes to them. (Don't let them get away with simply stating the same thing in a different way. Keep buzzing them until they really get into their instincts.)

Example:

"I'm going down the the street to the store."

buzz "I'm going down the street to go to church."

buzz "I'm going down to hell. Help me!"

Or whatever.. and when they change the phrase they must accept it as the new reality in their story and play it as real.

5) ABC

Every time you point to a new actor they must begin their line of the story with a word that begins with the next letter of the alphabet.

Example:

1st actor: "Alice went to the doughnut shop on a sunny Saturday."

2nd actor: "Bartholomew's doughnut shop, the best in the city."

3rd actor: "Cats followed her home because of the smell of the fresh crullers."

et cetera, It's best to move through the actors in a random order to keep them on thier toes. People enjoy the simplicity and delight of this rule.

6) Blindfold trust exercise

Pair people up, A and B. A puts on a blindfold and B leads them around by the hand, or steering them from behind. Explore. Giving and receiving care, taking things in through other senses, fear and surrender come up. A simple exercise that does without a lot of explaining (just be safe, don't run into each other, respect boundaries, have fun.), but I have seen yield some pretty remarkable feedback of the experience.

DEBRIEF: