

# Improvisation techniques can improve your rep firm's business

*"Improvisation is a quality until it becomes habit."*

— Anonymous

Last year I started taking improvisation lessons. I am a somewhat self-conscious introvert. I wanted to learn to speak up more quickly in meetings without feeling that pit in my stomach. I wanted to think faster on my feet, to expand my coaching range by working more fluidly with my clients' energy, and to do something that didn't resemble my everyday life. It's been great.

Here is what I didn't know:

- a) There are rules for improvisation.
- b) If we followed some of these rules in the business world, we would quickly amp up the ability to trust our teammates and bosses, think more effectively under pressure, sell and manage more effectively, and have a blast doing it.

*If we followed some of these [improvisation] rules in the business world, we would quickly amp up the ability to trust our teammates and bosses, think more effectively under pressure, sell and manage more effectively, and have a blast doing it.*

## Teaching kindness

Above all, I learned that improv is about teaching kindness. Who knew?

For example, we played a game called "Hotspot." As a group we turned our faces to the wall, and one of us had to go into the middle of the room and start singing — how embarrassing! Quickly, one of us facing the wall had to save the singer by taking his or her place and singing ourselves. Repeat. Save and sing ... save and sing.

The point of the exercise is to take a risk, not let your teammates make idiots of themselves for too long, and not to make them feel like idiots when you save them. Just save them, and perhaps, make them look good.

What a concept!

What if that was the focus of how we interact with each other in meetings? Take a risk ... I will save you when you risk ... and I will try to make you look good.

Participation rates at your rep firm meetings would probably increase.

Improv rules require participants to accept and cooperate with each other, listen interactively, and jointly advance the action of a given task while continually supporting each other to be successful.

## Applying improv activities in rep meetings

Here are two improv activities you can use in any rep firm meeting, live or virtual. Each activity takes only minutes.

### 1. "Yes, and ..." (versus "No, but ..." or "Yes, but ...")

**The intent:** To tell a story by accepting and building on each other's ideas rather than by blocking them.

**The process:** One person starts a story by saying a simple sentence (i.e., "Joe went to the store."). The next person adds to the storyline, beginning his/her sentence with: "Yes, and ... he bought an ice cream cone." Everyone keeps going until the story concludes.

Feel free to start with a ridiculous premise (i.e., "Barb created a new soft drink from gasoline.")

without killing off anyone.

You may notice that some people have trouble accepting and building. Our group experienced this. Ask the person who blocked an idea to try again, using "Yes, and ..."

After playing this game, have the meeting facilitator request that "Yes, and ..." be used as a way to proceed during the meeting discussion. See what happens.

**The business payoff:** Break down barriers and generate ideas, increase cooperation, trust, and a positive work environment. You can do this activity on the phone, so it works well for virtual teams.

### 2. Tongue twisters

**The intent:** Loosen up everyone's lips before a meeting begins. Try the following tongue twisters by reciting each one as a group about 10 times, very quickly.

*(continued on page 28)*



by Nicki Weiss

*Certified Professional Sales Management Coach and Master Trainer*

*Nicki Weiss is an internationally recognized Certified Professional Sales and Leadership Coach, Master Trainer, thought leader, speaker and facilitator. Since 1992, she has trained and coached more than 20,000 business leaders, sales teams and reps. Nicki has a particular passion for working with manufacturers, distributors and rep firms in the electronics industry.*

*Nicki is ERA's sales consultant, the brainchild and facilitator of ERA's free teleforum programs and the founder of the SalesWise Academy. Every day, leaders wake up knowing that they, their technical reps and field sales engineers need to sharpen their focus and their skills. But they don't have the tools, resources or patience to continually help enhance their strategy, communication and relationship building skills. The SalesWise Academy fills that void and delivers those skill-building lessons. To learn more, go to [saleswise.ca](http://saleswise.ca) or call 416-778-4145.*

## SA1ESWISE: Applying improvisation techniques

(continued from page 23)

- Unique New York
- Toy boat
- Red leather, yellow leather
- She stood on the balcony, inexplicably mimicking him hiccupping, amicably welcoming him in. Good luck with this one! It's not as bad as it looks.

**The business payoff:** Everybody has already tripped over their tongue in a group, so it should help people participate individually. This is great for virtual rep firm meetings.

Improv's emphasis on generosity, cooperation, trust and experimentation counterbalances fear and releases creativity. Be willing to take more risks, accept and advance others' ideas, and trust you will know what to do. The magic of improv is that it nurtures us as creative, connected human beings, and this can drive business performance.

**Business book recommendation:** "Working With You Is Killing Me," by Katherine Crowley and Kathi Elster.

Too much of our time at work is spent ensnared in emotional traps, as somebody does something that drives us nuts and we can't figure out how to get unhooked. The authors of this book offer a four-step program to break loose from such situation. I'm tempted to say easy four-step process, but of course it's never easy. They reinforce their model with many examples of how it can be applied in different situations. ■

### REPS, DISTRIBUTORS AND MANUFACTURERS:

Access to ERA education programs has **NEVER** been easier or cost less!  
All **ERA WEBINAR** files are available for just \$20 per program for members (\$30 for non-members). Listen and learn **WHENEVER and WHEREVER** you choose.



#### TITLES AVAILABLE:

- Becoming Your Reps' Emotional Favorite
- Boosting Your Time Management Skills
- Closing for Commitment Starts in the First 10 Seconds
  - Consultative Selling Skills for Reps
- The Five Worst Mistakes Reps Make and How to Fix Them
  - Goal Setting: If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else!
- I Hate Cold Calling: Alternatives for High Impact Prospecting
  - Managing Your Line Portfolio
- Negotiating with Both Customers and Principals
  - Redesigning the Rep-Principal Relationship
  - Strategic Planning for Any Size Rep Firm
- Time and Territory Management: Parts I and II
  - Turning Objections into Sales
- Valuing, Buying, Selling or Merging a Rep Firm

**For details and an order form, go to [era.org](http://era.org).**

### Electronics Representatives Association



ERA Officers

*Chairman of the Board:*  
Paul Nielsen, CPMR  
paul@bnmsales.com

*President:*  
Dan Parks, CPMR  
dan@westelec.com

*Senior Vice President/Fiscal & Legal:*  
David Norris  
dnorris@norrisrep.com

*Senior Vice President/Education:*  
Kathie Cahill, CPMR  
kcahill@netsalesrep.com

*Senior Vice President/Membership:*  
John O'Brien, CPMR  
jobrien@cbane.com

*Senior Vice President/Industry:*  
Chuck Tanzola, CPMR  
ctanzola@fusionsourcing.com

*Manufacturer Delegate:*  
Ken Bellerio  
ken.bellerio@scaffner.com

*Distributor Delegate:*  
Chris Beeson  
chris.beeson@digikay.com

*Chief Executive Officer (Ex-Officio):*  
Walter E. Tobin  
wtobin@era.org

#### ERA Staff

*Chief Executive Officer:*  
Walter E. Tobin  
wtobin@era.org

*Executive Assistant:*  
Karin Derkacz  
kderkacz@era.org

*Conferences and Special Projects Coordinator:*  
Tess Hill  
thill@era.org

*Database Manager and Webmaster:*  
Katherine Green  
kgreen@era.org

*Chapter Management & Social Media Coordinator:*  
Stephanie Tierney  
stierney@era.org

*Communications Director:*  
Neda Simeonova  
nsimeonova@era.org

*Finance Director:*  
William R. Warfield  
bwarfield@era.org

*ERA Office:*  
1325 S. Arlington Heights Rd., Suite 204  
Elk Grove Village, Illinois 60007  
Phone: 312-419-1432 • Fax: 312-419-1660  
Email: [info@era.org](mailto:info@era.org) • URL: [era.org](http://era.org)