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PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Preface</i>	xiii
	<i>Foreword</i>	xix
Section 1:	The Path of an Improvised Life	1
	1 <i>Life Is a Talent Show, With Many Sidebars</i>	3
	My First Report Card	7
	The Gaftop Realization	9
	And Then There Was Gig	11
	2 <i>Comedy Jobs</i>	13
	The Good...	14
	The Bad...	17
	...and The Ugly	20
	3 <i>Business Finds Me</i>	23
	The Great State of Texas	24
	* <i>UN Desk</i>	26
	The Hicks	27
	AT&T	29
	MBA Schools	30
	Networking	32
	Clients Who Care	33
	Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Teamwork	34
	Change Management	34
	Motivation, Stress Reduction, New Staff, Kick-Offs	36
	4 <i>What Do You DO?</i>	37
Section B:	The Improvised Life	41
	5 <i>You Too Can be a Professional Comedian!</i>	43
	The Mystery Problem	44

	The Third Career	46
6	<i>Plays Well With Others</i>	47
	It Still Counts	48
	<i>Yes, and...</i>	49
	Business	50
	Life	50
	Lower My Expectations!? “ <i>Uncle Roland and the Potato Salad</i> ”	51
7	<i>The Improvised Life</i>	55
	Humor	56
	The Moment	56
	Respect	57
	Loving Your Collaborators	57
8	<i>Now and Forever</i>	59
	Ease and Creativity	61
	Improvisation and the New	61
9	<i>How to Feel Joy, Opportunity, Peace, and Success</i>	63
	Confidence and Trust	64
10	<i>Can You Prove It?</i>	67
	Humor and Health	68
	4 Out of 5 Doctors	69
	Humor and Productivity	72
	What Your Team Really Wants	74
	The Group Mind	75
	The Federal Judges and the Airborne Group Mind	79
	* <i>Everybody go...</i>	80
C-Section:	The Handbook For an Improvised Life	83
11	<i>Ready to Play Improv?</i>	85
	Where to Start?	88
12	<i>Improv Basics</i>	91
	Games and Scenes	91

<i>Yes, and...</i>	92
Relationships	93
Who What and Where	93
Failure	94
IFHE	95
13 <i>Improv for Fun and Health</i>	97
* <i>World's Worst</i>	97
Private Play	98
Feel Like a Dork?	99
Play Well With Others	100
* <i>Alternate Clapping</i>	101
* <i>Trust Walk</i>	101
* <i>Things in...</i>	102
* <i>Zig Zag Zor</i>	103
* <i>Gibberish Conversations</i>	104
* <i>What are you doing?</i>	105
14 <i>Improvisation For Business</i>	107
Listening	107
* <i>First Letter Last Letter</i>	108
Communication	109
* <i>Ball Toss</i>	109
Business Decisions	112
* <i>Expert Definitions</i>	112
Co-creativity, Collaboration, and Teamwork	113
* <i>Two Eyes on Paper</i>	113
* <i>Yes and Party Planners</i>	114
* <i>Dance Diamond</i>	114
Other Games for Business	115
* <i>Slogans</i>	115
* <i>Wrong Name</i>	116
* <i>Things in Common</i>	116

	Other Skills	117
15	<i>Improvisation For Professional Entertainment</i>	119
	Tech Skills	121
	Management	122
	Event Design	123
	Let's Talk Improvisation!	124
	Warm-Ups and Exercises	125
	* <i>One Touch</i>	125
	* <i>Kitty Wants a Corner</i>	126
	* <i>10 Characters</i>	126
	* <i>Counting Together</i>	127
	Music, Style, and Movement	127
	* <i>Shakespeare and Style Games</i>	127
	<i>Yes, and...</i>	128
	Start a Group and Book a Show	129
	The Mystery Problem Returns!	129
Coda	Communion, Community, Communication	131
Appendix	An Improvised Life on the Road	135
	<i>Tour Journal Excerpts</i>	
	Five Basic Rules for Improv Scenes	155
	The Games: Quick Reference	157
	In Their Own Words	171
	<i>The Power of Improv and Play as Told by Artistic Directors, Players, and Clients</i>	
	Author Biography	183

I wrote this book because it is a good way to drive a dagger into the heart of the demon monkey on the back of so many people, the lying tyrant of worry, control, and unhealthy competition that makes so many people unhappy and limits their abilities to know success. Don't get me wrong, I believe in preparation, practice, planning; I believe in a lot of things, but success is elusive without balance and none of these things need our exclusive loyalty. Improvisation helps you value your assets evenly and allows you to use those assets to the right degree, at the right time, for the right reasons.

Reject Lying Monkeys

I see solutions to some of our personal and societal ills within the practices of play and improvisation. Play has ethics or it isn't play. There is open competition or it isn't play. Improvisation is how we carry these values with us in action. If there was more play and improvisation in the business world, for example, there would not only be more successes but also there would be better ethics. Improvisation and play prefer better ideas. No one minds if a capitalist gets rich on a great idea. It's those bad ideas with their bad business ethics and weak business structures that frustrate the consumer.

And we all need humor in our lives. I guess everyone doesn't need comedy, but everyone does need humor and play to stay in good form. I should say that again.

Everyone Doesn't Need Comedy, But Everyone Does Need Humor And Play

You deserve to have fun and thrive. Play and improvisation values contribution and moves quickly. It improves productivity while reducing miscommunication, stress, even missed workdays and insurance claims. It values the natural humor and beauty flowing around at any given time. And you can own it in your heart and soul and take it wherever you go.

Improvisation is done now, whenever and wherever that now might be. It can flourish in any moment. You can see it when you live in the moment.

When you are in the moment, you are at the crossroads of everything. You are at the crossroads of your education and your next thought, the intersection of your skills and beliefs, your past and your intentions; it is all accessible in that moment when you need it.

I think everyone can benefit from these reminders. I've proven this hundreds of ways in hundreds of diverse situations and have found it to be true consistently. Almost every participant of every show or workshop sees it, too. Life should be more fun and productive and I, and some of my fellow professionals, know ways to do that. I'm here to share it.

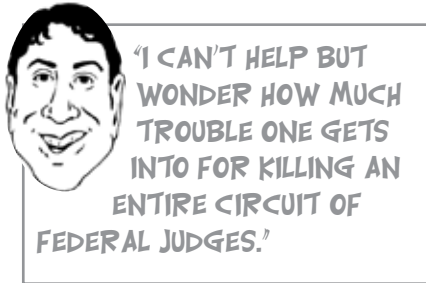
I know the monkey on your back lies to you. I'll tell you the truth about it.

— Yer Pal, Les

The Federal Judges and Airborne Group Mind

When groups experience play and GSS for the first time in a long while, they can get a little overwhelmed with happiness and spunk. This is the story of how I learned to remind everyone of safety before each and every workshop.

The federal judges of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals hired me for a half-day improvisation workshop on teambuilding, communication skills, and stress relief at the lovely Horseshoe Bay Conference Center, a place I had used many times before.



I was warned that they were older and stodgy and it might be tough. I've gotten *warnings* lots of times and they usually don't affect me. This time was no exception. I found them willing. Once they

saw that I knew what I was doing and they were having fun, things started getting energetic. There were about 30 or 40 participants, so it even got a little loud.

I was assisted by Terrill Fischer, friend and fellow performer in my company. We were having a great day and everyone was engaged. There were little eruptions of group mind occurring and they were getting jazzed about it. Eventually, I got to a game I wanted to play with them called, "EVERYBODY GO!"

For that game we all stand in a circle. One participant steps forward and says, "Everybody go..." and then does something. The group all says, "Yes!" together and then we all do that same thing. Well, they were getting into it and some were a bit delirious with laughter. It was a sight to see all those distinguished white-haired individuals playing their judicious butts off.

So, I'm standing by a judge as his turn comes up and he yells, "Everybody go..." He glances at me as he sets himself into

motion and with the group mind thing going on I feel his thoughts and his physicality and then adrenaline shoots into my veins.

Switch to extreme slow motion.

This older gentleman is leaping up into the air. Not a hop or a jump but a full-fledged, gravity-defying leap. In a flash I realize I didn't tell them they couldn't kill themselves or anyone else. People get unpredictable sometimes when you turn them on to the energy of play that they'd left behind at some point. They were ready to say *Yes and* to any darn thing I let occur.

My mind is white hot with possibilities. He is in mid-air and starting to flip over. He is *flipping over*. My muscles all clench as I realize he is tossing his brittle body into a headfirst, hip-hop snaking dive maneuver on the hard floor. His eyes are wild with childish challenge and glee. His open-mouthed grin is barely contained by his silver beard.

Terrill and I dive to throw ourselves between this old federale and the unyielding earth. I'm diving with my hands out flat trying to get them between the guy's head and floor before impact. I may not be able to save him from a broken neck and concussion but at least I can try to save his life. His eyes are gleaming and show no fear whatsoever. I wonder what happens when a federal judge kills himself doing an improv exercise in front of all his fellow justices.

Oh, my GOD! The other judges!!! By the time I think it, the air is split with the exuberant yelled response of "Yes!" from the other judges. They are thrilled and eager to comply with his charge and they are all beginning to leap in the air and flip over to headfirst position! Terrill and I are screaming and reaching in all directions. I can't help but wonder how much trouble one gets into for killing an entire circuit of federal judges. Bye-bye, home and family. I killed federal judges in a state that is over productive in executions.

Thankfully the instigator is unscathed. The rest of them were stopped in the nick of time still able to land on their feet. They

are looking at the now apoplectic me and I am reeling with the group mind flashing in my head. They think they won. What, I don't know, but they have the gleam of bad kids in their eyes and they are oddly proud.

The power of play and group mind is huge and can be dangerous in the hands of someone who knows how to get groups to that point but doesn't have the experience to manage it proactively. It is a palpable power. Not vague or mystic or new age-y. I have NEVER missed safety admonishments since. ESPECIALLY with groups I've been warned might not "get into it." The bigger they are, the harder they fall and you gotta be intuitive and careful.

In the old days I sure could have used a handbook...

CHAPTER 11



READY TO PLAY IMPROV?

This time like all times is a very good one if we but know what to do with it. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

The good news is that anybody and everybody can improvise. You improvise all the time, do you realize that? Some examples of important improvisations you do regularly are driving, answering the phone, and responding to an unplanned event or opportunity. Important stuff, huh? You also improvise partially or completely when you do anything for the first time, which I guess is just about anything you've ever done. Improvisational moments define your entire life if you look at it this way.

When you ask a roomful of people if they improvise, or if they improvise at work, some say, “No.” Sometimes it's more than some. The denial! My heart goes out to them. If more of us practice play and improvisation, stress will go down, productivity will go up, people will be healthier and happier—and more attractive, I might add. We'll have a funner tomorrow.

If you have never practiced or studied improvisation, then you mainly improvise by instinct. Instincts and instinctive action are developed and exercised while playing. These instinctual

skills empower your other skills of organization and preparation, planning, and managing, etc. Improvisational skills value your preparation, but also show you doorways and combinations that illuminate opportunities as they swirl about, unseen by rigid thinkers.

Let's take a world champion basketball team for an example. There is no denying the organizational and preparation skills necessary to get them to the brink of championship. But likewise there is no denying the next level of play they achieve, which is intensely improvisational, instinctual, *full* of electric play, and group mind.

This state of synergistic and exciting flow exhibited by champion team players shows us a way to access our utmost interests and the unfettered electricity of life. This is the state of mind we intend to learn about. You need to know it about yourself. You deserve the flashes of focused imagination and glimpses of alternative angles, empowering combinations, and outright pleasant surprises.



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Anybody can learn to improvise and enjoy it and recapture the sense of play they had as a child. I've seen it done by the rich and the poor, executives, programmers, bankers, accountants, manufacturers, plumbers, supervisors, office staff, probates,

and judges, and even the occasional self-absorbed actor, to name a few. Virtually everybody loves it. Some study only a few levels. Some think about becoming performers. Many are so hooked they go pro or semi-pro. Almost all of them have day jobs that benefit from their improvisation.

And it is a blast and a hoot and a darn fun time. People are always telling me that improvisation makes them feel more like themselves. They remember things they like about themselves and others. They are reminded that they are quick-wit-

ted and strong and fun. People also tell me that other people like them better. It might be that they've dropped some stress and recovered their positive attitude and a smile. Smiling can show you in a whole new light and it is a fine thing to be seen in a new light.

Some more good news is that it is often free or cheap to learn and practice improvisation. There are improvisation groups and training centers in every major city in the world nowadays. I'll tell you where some of the good ones are and what they're like.

This book is where to start, of course. Share yours with your friends. Give them the message to have more fun and do better. If you get a couple of friends thinking this way things can come together very quickly and you'll find yourself enjoying some more fun and less stress sooner. It's good for everybody. Give your friends the gift of longer life, more fun, and better looks by giving them their own copy of my book. Improve friends' lives and help pay for my daughters' braces at the same time.

The exercises and games I teach later in this book are easy to learn and will get you on the right track. You'll learn from this book and other sources, but you'll really *get it* when you play, so get the message to your family or friends who will play.

It's true that some types get it more easily than others. Sometimes getting it has to do with career training and sometimes it's personality, but it can be pretty hard to tell which of those things lead. Some professions that historically get the improvisation message and run with it are educators, entrepreneurs, caregivers, managers/supervisors/team leaders, groups going through change or forming a new team, and young people; those folks get it quicker.

The main advantage the young grown-ups have in improvisation, other than physical resilience and flexibility (sigh), is that they probably remember more play than their older counterparts. Middle-aged grown-ups have more references and more experiences to draw upon, so their improv can have