



Improv Comedy Techniques for Better Communication

courtesy of

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Warm-up Exercise: Logical Word Toss

Why We Do it

To warm up and begin thinking differently. The exercise stresses listening and responding in the moment, passing focus, and working off of other's ideas. Also focuses participants on being present, in the moment, confident and engaged.

Note: This exercise can also be executed around a specific topic, project or program to stimulate ideas.

How it Works

Participants stand in a circle facing each other. One person starts by pointing to another person in the circle and "giving" them a word (pointing to someone and saying any word out loud, so the whole group can hear it). That second person does a word association in his/her head, and "gives" that new word to someone else, who does a similar word association giving a new word to a third person, and so on. This continues around, with the ultimate goal of getting back to the first word eventually.

Takeaways:

- By listening and working off of each other, ideas emerged that you hadn't thought of.
- Often in the exercise people respond not to the word given directly to them, but the word or two before it. This demonstrates the tendency for people to stop listening while they think about what they should say, losing attention and not responding properly.

Application

- By listening to team members (or partners/clients), you can play "logical word toss" in your head to drive a conversation or to further an idea. Stresses listening throughout what someone else is saying. Need to listen all the way through, or might respond to what you thought they meant/were saying rather than what they actually said. We're used to listening and starting to think of what we are going to say, ignoring the last part of what someone else has said. So, we stress to listen throughout.
- To remember what the conversation started about/what the topic and goal of the meeting is. The corollary to the exercise is to remember the first word. Stresses the idea that you can drive toward new ideas, but to remember to apply it all back to the goal/decision at hand.

Exercise One: Electric Company

Why We Do it

To listen and work off of someone else to create a new idea. Working with someone else's idea rather than forcing own idea through. This demonstrates that a better interaction or idea can occur by listening to a co-worker/client and then building off of that.

How it Works

Participants stand in a circle. One person starts by thinking of a word and "giving" just the beginning, or first syllable, of that word to the person to the left of them. The second person listens, and creates a word off that beginning. The entire group repeats the word.

Example: "Cray", "on", "Crayon". The person who finished that word, then starts the next word and the person to the left of them finishes it, and so on around the circle:

Example:

Person 1: Cray-

Person 3: Doll-

Person 2: -on

Person 4: -ywood

Everyone: Crayon

Everyone: Dollywood

Person 2: Ligh-

Person 3: -ter

Everyone: Lighter

Signature
BOSTONTM

Takeaways:

By listening and responding off of someone else, new ideas and solutions can emerge to drive better decision-making. In this exercise, words emerged that neither participant had in mind. For instance in the example above, first person may have had "crazy" in mind, but just said "cray". The person who finished with "on", making "crayon" had no idea what to expect, and couldn't pre-plan (or at least shouldn't pre-plan) his response.

Metaphorically speaking, "Crayon" could be a much bigger, better idea than "Crazy" and we got there by simply listening and working off of each other.

Application

By listening to others, you can work off of their ideas to build to more successful ideas and decisions. This exercise also has application to working as a team in the field – by listening and working off of each other, new approaches and ideas can be found.

Exercise Two: Story in One Word

Why We Do it

To focus on listening and building within a group setting. To notice what happens when participants stop listening or try to force their own ideas in without a natural fit/flow. Also explores creating ideas and decisions in a realm of constant change.

How it Works

Participants stand in a circle facing each other. A story is told/made up one word at a time per person going around the circle. When someone thinks the story is over, they can say "The End". The story doesn't have to be funny...but it should make sense.

Example:

Person 1: Sam	Person 6: car
Person 2: liked	Person 7: to
Person 3: to	Person 8: scenic
Person 4: drive	Person 9: mountain
Person 5: his	Person 10: passages

Takeaways:

- It is important to make decisions that fit within the flow/structure of your team, while also driving ideas ahead. In this exercise, the story can easily reel out of control – grammatically and subject wise. People often ignore the first sentence so the second one doesn't build off of it; and so on with subsequent sentences. (In this example, second sentence could reel off with Sam likes pizza, etc. or "Judy likes..." and never bringing the two together). There are also often instances when someone is forcing in a word that throws the story off. (In this example if someone suddenly put in "aliens")
- By working off of others even with constant change, you can make necessary decisions to get things back on track or to drive an idea ahead. In this exercise, often there are spots where the story could have been thrown off, but people made sense of it. (In this example "mountain" could have thrown it off, with people thinking it should have been "mountains" to make sense – but the next person corrected it by having mountain be an adjective rather than a noun that doesn't fit).
- Have to listen and work simply off of each other's ideas or it doesn't work.
- Doesn't work when we don't listen, doesn't work if one forces own ideas.
- We also point out how people thought they knew where the story was going, but then it changed; but again maybe the result was equally or more interesting (if they do it well) than where they thought it would go.

Application

- The importance of listening all the way through and building off of other's ideas. If the story succeeds, again it is probably bigger and better than anyone had on their own, and most likely went interesting places that participants didn't think it would go.
- The importance of teamwork. Participants have to listen and justify other words to make it work.
- Stresses listening throughout what someone else is saying. Need to listen all the way through, or might respond to what you thought they meant/were saying rather than what they actually said. Again, we're used to listening and starting to think of what we are going to say, ignoring the last words said before our turn to input. So can stress to listen throughout.

