

GENIUS NOW!

GENIUS NOW!

USING IMPROVISATION SKILLS
FOR CREATIVITY,
PROBLEM SOLVING,
FUN AND THINKING LIKE A GENIUS



ALAN MARRIOTT

WHY
NOT
BOOKS

This book is dedicated to Keith Johnstone and Rudolph Steiner, who gave me the reason to write it all down.

Genius Now!

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INTRODUCTION

'Genius Now!?' When does someone who possesses a great deal of knowledge become a genius? How do you make the leap from intelligence to inspiration? It happens in a flash, in an instant of insight. It may take years of observation and study to reach the moment but the leap is 'Genius Now!'

When I first started writing this book, I thought I was writing a book about comedy improvisation. My students in London, England, had been bugging me for years to write down in book form a good explanation of what I was teaching. Not having written a book before, I hired a writing coach to help me organize my ideas and what material I should include.

The weekly conversations over the phone with Amanda Seyderhelm became the highlight of my week and often spun off into the most amazing, deep philosophical discussions. We would delve into everything to do with thinking, from idea creation in modern business practice, to mental health issues like depression, and the role creativity plays in the birth of a world-changing scientific theory. It seemed every time I explained to Amanda some process of improvisational thinking, I kept coming back to examples from the life and work of Albert Einstein and it wasn't long before she and I began wondering if a scientific genius and an improviser have certain thinking practices in common.

Einstein has always fascinated me. He was shy and humble and yet also strong willed and certain, even rejoicing (in his younger years) in his 'impudence'. He fundamentally changed the way we think about the universe, not once, but three times in his life. What began to catch my imagination, as I read more about him, was the way he seemed to approach thinking. What really made him a genius, rather than just another clever person, was that he relied as much on intuition and visualization as he did on intellectual reasoning.

I read as much as I could about Einstein's life and work, particularly drawing on biographical details from Abraham Pais book *Subtle is the Lord* and also from Walter Isaacson's excellent new biography of the physicist, *Einstein: His Life and Universe*. In doing so I began to understand the process of what I was doing as improviser much more clearly.

Improvisers and geniuses must be unprejudiced observers of the world around them. They must both have a strong feeling or impulse that pushes

them to act in a specific direction from the information they have observed. They must trust intuition to give them the ‘leap’ into the unknown; for an improviser – to tell a story that has never before been told; for a scientific genius – to go beyond current conventions. In the end, both must have a strong sense of structure and possess the discipline and will to complete the idea.

This is not a biography of Albert Einstein, although it contains many interesting biographical details about his life and goes into much speculation about how the mind of a genius like Einstein had to work to produce world-changing theories. And although this is a great book for anyone who is serious about learning to improvise, it’s not only about improvisation theory and technique.

The core idea of this book is learning to think creatively, as an individual and in groups, getting out of your own way so that idea creation becomes as natural and easy as breathing.

WHAT IS ‘IMPROV’ ANYWAY?

When you hear the word ‘improvisation’, what do you think of? A TV show like *Whose Line is it Anyway?* Perhaps improvisation for you means a group of amazingly funny performers in a comedy club, effortlessly creating instant entertainment without a script – the mental equivalent of Olympic athletics or a high-wire circus act, not something you or I could do . . . except that it is.

Improvisation, whether in performance, in a class, or in life, is an exhilarating way to let your mind run free. Improvisation, the art of making it up as you go along, is pretty much what you do every day, minute and second of your life. No one really knows what events are going to happen next. No matter how much you project or plan for the future there will always be things you can’t expect. And that’s when you improvise.

How do you describe what it feels like to improvise? Imagine being a good skier at the top of a ski run. You’ve got your skis on, you’re ready, it’s a beautiful day, you push off with your poles and soar off down the side of the mountain. It’s exhilarating! It’s fun. You’re committed to going down the run, there’s no turning back, but you embrace it and whatever apprehension you may have had at the top evaporates. That is a bit like how it feels to improvise. The cascade of emotions and the feeling of being aware of what’s happening every second, a sense of ‘being in the moment’, is what improv is all about.

To improvise is to throw away the plan, to fall in love with not knowing what is going to happen next. People who dedicate themselves to improvisation as a life path reap the most amazing rewards. Every crisis truly becomes an opportunity,

every mistake an asset. You enter into a world of fun and joy that celebrates and rekindles a sense of wonder that is sadly lacking in the world just now. The amazing part is anyone can learn to do it if they are prepared to approach the work with an open mind and willing to learn how to think differently.

This book reaches out to people who are a bit stuck and unsatisfied with where they are in their lives, people who are locked into patterns and ways of thinking that they can’t shake off or change. This book is not elitist or directed at any particular sex or age range. Maybe you’ve spent a good portion of your life relying on analysis, criticism and hard logic but you’re starting to question whether that way of thinking is enough.

This book also acts as an entry-level book on improvisation and so is an essential tool for teachers (particularly in the performing arts), marketers, facilitators, and any person who needs to enhance their creativity and thinking power.

My intention with this book is to help you, whether you’re a scientist, actor, lawyer, doctor or IT expert, to start thinking in a different way. Is your thinking as spontaneous and innovative as it could be? Are you cleverer at thinking up why something can’t be done, than you are at how it can? Are you locked into habits of thinking that produce more or less the same solutions, irrespective of the problem you face? Do you unconsciously fight every new idea presented to you? Is creative thinking a joy for you, or does the mere thought of it freeze you into immobility?

To create genuinely new solutions to difficult problems, real step-changes, you have to learn or at least rediscover how to observe and think. Any mind, even a brilliant one like Einstein’s, only reaches its full potential when the three modes of thought (instinct, intellect and intuition) are used for the correct part of the thinking process. Creative leaps come from observation and intuitive action, not through endless analysis; direction comes from honest passion in an idea, not from a focus group; stability comes from an understanding of form, not from rigid adherence to hierarchy.

Where *Genius Now!* differs from other improvisation books is that it focuses on thinking processes (the true gift of improv), which everyone can benefit from. Most improv books emphasize performance skills, which, though important, are only relevant to a fairly small number of people. The games in this book can be played by anybody – a mother could play the two-handed games with her child, for example. I’ve used many of the games in this book to keep ten-year-olds busy at my sons’ birthday parties.

I really believe that anyone who embraces this work becomes a kind of ambassador for a form of thinking that is sorely needed just now. We live in a self-centred, fearful world, full of people who have forgotten how to observe – a world where action has become reaction and dialogue is drowned by debate.

Whether you're looking for something different, perhaps really big changes in your life, or you simply want to enjoy what you're currently doing more, 'genius-improv thinking' can help you. Amazing things can happen. Mail carriers, secretaries and social workers become world-class writers, street performers become film and television stars, and teachers and journalists become creators of whole new theatrical forms. If you think I'm dreaming, talk to Eddie Izzard, Jake Arnott, Stella Duffy, Dylan Emery, Alan Davies, Fay Ripley, Andy Stanton, Colin Mochrie or Keith Johnstone.

Although it's nice to know that this form of thinking can lead to public acclaim, it is actually the big leaps that no one ever hears about that, to me, are even more profound. I was recently at the birthday party of one of my students who is not an actress and works as a marketer nine-to-five in an office. As the cake came out and she was about to make the customary birthday speech, a friend (who knew she had been attending my improv classes) facetiously suggested that she make up a spontaneous poem instead. Without another thought, she improvised a very good poem in four stanzas, complete with rhyming couplets. When she had finished there was a slightly shocked silence from friends who hadn't seen her for a while, followed by an impressed applause. It was not something she would, or even could, have attempted a year before. This same student has now embarked upon a career as a writer.

Genius-improv thinking gives you the tools to explore the potential genius in you regardless of your education, upbringing, or job.

GENIUS-IMPROV THINKING AS A MOVEMENT

I have a little dream. I dream that one day there will be many little groups of like-minded people who make a conscious choice to link their minds together and become part of the most fantastic thinking machine the world has yet experienced. Little groups of four, five, six, maybe even ten people, who begin to make a difference in their communities, groups that become part of a worldwide movement, who use the power of genius-improv thinking to begin tackling problems they face, both small and – with practice and confidence – even the intractable problems of our time.

People are drawn to this work often not knowing what it is they are looking for but they are entirely delighted when they find it and explore it for themselves. When I lived in London, England, I used to run a weekly, three-hour, drop-in improv workshop. Along with a hard core of regulars, I generally got about three or four new people each session and I often asked them, at the beginning of the class, how they found out about it. The answer was nearly always 'I found you by searching the web for information on improvisation.' (I advertise my classes very little – only a small insert on the website of the Crunchy Frog Collective (CFC): www.thecrunchyfrogcollective.com.) There are a lot of searchers out there who just need to know that this work is available to them. My students constantly ask me, 'Where can I read more about this stuff?'. This book is my way of answering that question.

This movement is about average people, you and me, agreeing to agree on ideas and then taking those ideas forwards till genuine solutions appear. This is a movement that can help rebuild communities, find common ground between people who seemingly have none, and maybe even rekindle hope at a time in history when it has never been needed more.

What I love about this work is that it spreads on its own. It's like Tom Sawyer white-washing the fence and all his friends joining in because they think they're missing out on something special. Genius-improv thinking is something special that profoundly affects people who immerse themselves in it. Even those who just dabble get a sense that they are touching upon something that is not only extremely fun but also potentially life changing. This is a movement that governments and businesses will eventually want to be part of, but one that is totally dependent on the individuals who learn the skills and form the groups.

You don't even have to be a performer to reap huge dividends from this work. Every student has the potential to become the nucleus of a small group (or 'thinking circle') that practises the techniques once or twice a week. From the CFC London workshop group at least four smaller groups have formed. One group, consisting of a writer, two teachers, and a musician, has even decided to take the work to a performance level – and I am told that many more have formed in the last year and a half.

The next thirty years will throw up some of the most difficult challenges mankind has ever faced. To deal with climate change, population growth, ethnic and religious conflict, food production, pollution and financial meltdown, our species will need a whole new set of tools, tools that will never be created in time if we use the same old mind sets and ways of thinking. Only by working

together as a kind of international ‘group mind’ do we have a chance to write a different chapter than that which fate seems to be pushing us to write. It starts with one person, you perhaps, joyfully learning to go beyond competitive thinking, and linking your ideas with those of another, and then another, and another till ideas cease to be possessions exploited for greed and ego. This is a movement that you begin with a friend simply by reading this book and saying ‘yes, and . . .’.

A NOTE ABOUT GETTING A GROUP TOGETHER

The games throughout this book can mostly be done with just two people and many of them you can do by yourself as a mental exercise. I have indicated the best numbers for a game at the beginning of the mechanics section of each game. For games that work best with three or more players you need to put together a little group and find a place where you can move around a bit without knocking over lamps or bumping into furniture. A playing space can be anywhere you feel comfortable like a room in a school, church hall or community centre. But it doesn't need to be very big especially if your group is small, say six people or fewer. A reasonable-sized room in a house will do, like an attic or rumpus room, even a back yard or garden can work great. I once taught a workshop of thirty people in the front room of one of my students! It went very well.

In putting together a group, find some like-minded friends, family members or work colleagues. Balance the speeds, temperaments and skills of your players if you can. If one player is fast and nervous then balance that by adding a player who is more thoughtful and measured. Finding as many funny or clever players as possible is common mistake people make when putting together a new group. This is the equivalent of a soccer team full of stars that doesn't play well as a team because it's too busy competing with itself. Experimenting with the games should be fun, so give everyone permission to be silly. Getting it wrong should be just as fun as getting it right.

Try each game two or three times. Remember you are changing the way you think – that doesn't happen right away.

No one should feel that they have to take the games into a performance situation, although by all means do when you think you are ready. A performance can focus everyone's mind and solidify concepts that you've worked with your group. Successful genius-improv thinking is about living without fear, and a performance (aside from pre-show butterflies and excitement) can be a good test of how far along that road you have come.

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1.

Intention:

Live Life Like it's a Miracle



'There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.'

WALKING FORWARDS AND BACKWARDS WHILE DOING A SUM

Purpose

This is a practical way to experience the two different intentions.

Mechanics

Here's a little intention test you can try now. Go into a room where you have a bit of space to walk around. Stand up and straighten your back and neck. Now, gaze across the room but, rather than looking straight ahead, cast your eyes about forty-five degrees up, as if you were looking at an aeroplane in the distance. Walk forwards or in a big circle (use your peripheral vision to prevent yourself running into the sofa). Now, allow a feeling of wonder or joy build inside you (if it helps, use a mental image, such as a view of Mount Everest, the Earth from space, a lamb being born, whatever works for you) and start projecting that emotion upwards and ahead of you. Think of it going beyond the confines of the room.

Once you've really got that upward/outward feeling, try doing a simple mathematical calculation in your head. Did your eyes drop or look to the side?

Next, do the opposite. Start by looking down and shuffling slowly backwards. Really come back into yourself, be aware of what you look like, what you're wearing. Now try doing a different simple calculation in your head, like dividing your weight by your age. You should find that it is much easier.

In order to 'think' we have to disengage all our sensors and be inside our own mind for a moment till the thought comes out.

Tips

If you have trouble with upward/outward, try opening your eyes wide and raising your eyebrows as if you are delighted and surprised at the same time. Think: 'Wow, that's amazing' at everything you look at. Upward/outward mental images should evoke wonder, joy and awe. They should give you a sense of 'a higher purpose for things' as opposed to just being warm, comfortable and relaxed. An image of the Grand Canyon then, is probably better than a cosy fireplace (although to many people a flame can be quite awe-inspiring).

If you have trouble concentrating on the sum while walking with a downward/inward intention, try shutting your eyes. This reduces the amount of new information your senses are bringing into your mind, which helps the process of 'thinking about something'.

INTENTION: LIVE LIFE LIKE IT'S A MIRACLE

Einstein found miracles in just about everything, and his ability to observe the world around him with a sense of childlike joy and wonder was a key component in the development of his eventual genius. There are two fundamentally different ways of observing and dealing with the world around you. You might think of these two stances as expressions of optimism or pessimism, the glass being half full or half empty, or perhaps even Yin and Yang. But what this simple statement really boils down to is this: You either take delight in the opportunities placed in front of you every moment of your existence, or you perpetually prepare for the worst that can happen to you. Embrace the world and all it has to offer, or fear it and live only for safety.

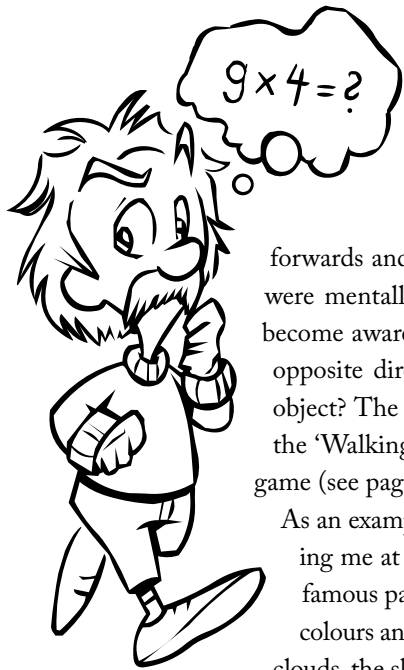
You are influenced, through natural inclination and conditioning, to choose one of these two paths as your main strategy for coping with life. This choice dramatically alters the way that you think.

INTENTIONS

I call these two mental directions 'intentions' because they happen at the very beginning of your thought process. You *intend* to do something and then you do it. The intention you choose makes a striking difference to whatever action you then choose to carry out.

The two intentions also give you a very clear sense of mental movement and so I describe them as being either upward/outward in nature (life is a miracle) or downward/inward (life is an endurance test). Obviously you can't live stuck in one intention all the time, whether it's upward/outward or downward/inward. Effective thinking comes from knowing how and when to switch from one intention to another.

It may never have occurred to you before that you experience a sense of movement or direction in your head when you think. But just ponder for a moment what it 'feels' like in your mind when you look at an object. Find something right now and focus your attention on it. Don't think about the object,



just observe it and take in its details, colours, etc. Now *consciously* think about the object by comparing it to other similar objects.

Did you get a slight sense of your mind going forwards and outwards from you as you observed it, as if you were mentally reaching out to touch it? Conversely, did you become aware of your mind turning inwards and going in the opposite direction when you consciously thought about the object? The effect is quite subtle and if you didn't feel it, try the 'Walking Forwards and Backwards While Doing a Sum' game (see page 17).

As an example of intention in action, imagine you are observing me at the National Gallery in London. I'm looking at a famous painting, *The Hay Wain* by Constable. First I see the colours and the painting's composition, the river, the cart, the clouds, the sky, the size. I'm aware of the smell of the room and

I hear the echo of quiet footsteps near by. I'm not thinking about it, I'm simply experiencing the painting and its location. My intention as I attend to the painting and its surroundings is basically upward/outward. But then, before I'm even aware of it, I start to consciously process and analyze the information I'm observing. The painting is much bigger than I expected it to be. Where in England is this river? The people in the picture seem a lot less stressed than we are now. How did Constable ever paint that river to look so real? My intention has changed. My thinking has become so downward/inward that I've virtually stopped observing altogether, to the point where you have to tap me on the shoulder to bring me back into the 'here and now' of the room.

ARE YOU A STUCK-IN-THE-HEAD PERSON?

Einstein spent a great deal of time in his head. His ability to visualize a complex problem was one of his greatest assets. What was more remarkable, however, was that he was also able to let go of analysis and allow the intuitive part of his mind to reveal crucial insights into whatever problem he was working on.

Before he wrote his famous paper on the special theory of relativity in 1905, Einstein (who at the time was working as a lowly patent clerk in Bern) had spent an evening heatedly discussing all the key issues and ideas with his close friend and work colleague, Michele Besso. By the end of the evening Einstein had come to a complete impasse, declaring that he had failed and that

'HELLO' – BE AN ITALIAN

Purpose

The purpose of this game is to get a group to experience a strong upward/outward intention in a fun way. Often it's good to play this game first as a group ice breaker and then explain 'intention' afterwards.

Mechanics

First have everyone walk around randomly in a relatively confined space and at a normal street pace. Have everyone start making eye contact with different people as they meet them.

As they make eye contact, they say 'hello' to each other. This usually starts some people giggling a bit, breaks the ice and builds a bit of anticipation of what might come next. Get them to start making the 'hellos' bigger, as if they were meeting a long lost friend or relative.

Once they're doing that well, tell the group to insert a big, delighted 'Aaah!' of recognition (some will already be doing this because of the last instruction) before the 'hello'.



Finally, get them to imagine they are Italians. Tell them they are quite emotional and full of life. The 'Aaah!' should get bigger and longer, tell them to follow it with a name, for example: 'Aaah! Giovanni!', 'Aaah! Benadetta!'.

Tips

Encourage the players to open their eyes wide and raise their eyebrows, as if meeting and greeting each person is a happy surprise.

You can help the feeling of upward/outward intention by opening your arms into a ready-to-embrace-someone position once you make eye contact with them.

Make sure the 'Aaah!' is non-aggressive. Emphasize the warmth, the joy, It's not an attack.

Reassure players who are closed and tense by encouraging them to do a big 'Aaah!'. The sound itself helps them enter into the upward/outward intention the game generates.

Alternatives

An alternative way of playing this game is to separate the group into two lines facing each other about 10 feet apart. Tell the group they are Italians waiting at a train station for their favourite relatives to arrive. Tell them that there is a train pulling out between the two groups that, as it leaves, reveals their relatives on the opposite platform. They greet each other with a joyful, 'Aaah! Giovanni!'

This should generate a lot of laughter, get everyone experiencing an upward/outward intention and should set a nice tone of 'It is OK, you have permission to be silly right now.'

Try doing the game on your own to your reflection in a mirror. Oddly the effect is the same and you feel even sillier.

he would give up on the idea, it was beyond him. It was not until he was riding home on the tram, and he allowed his attention to stray on to Bern town hall's famous clock and away from theoretical physics that (as he put it) 'a storm broke loose in my mind'. Einstein began scribbling the next day and wrote out almost the entire special theory of relativity, including his famous formula $E=mc^2$ in just six weeks.

DOWNWARD/INWARD INTENTION

For the most part, we spend our time completely stuck inside our own heads, categorizing and analyzing all the data we collect with our senses. The downward/inward intention required in analyzing the data we acquire means that we rarely reach those Einstein moments of insight. Downward/inward intention also isolates us and makes us much more conscious of ourselves.

Imagine for a moment you are walking down a city street and someone comes up to you and asks: 'What's the quickest way to get to the train station?'

Information is immediately gathered, a snapshot of the person from your eyes, the content of his speech and tone of his voice from your ears, maybe the smell of his breath from your nose. In less than half a second an 'inner monologue' starts inside your head and you become aware of yourself thinking things like:



‘Uh, let’s see, the train station is on Duke Street, that’s four blocks from here – wait! I’m in a rough part of town, why did he ask me that? Is he trying to distract me so he can take my wallet? I’m alone, I can’t be too careful. Oh! What’s wrong with me? I’m just being paranoid. If he goes down Market Street then turns left . . . etc.’

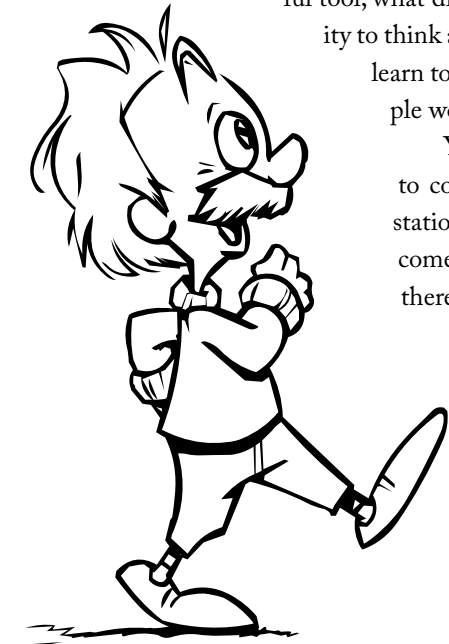
While all that is happening you’ll probably say something like, ‘Um,’ and stick your tongue out slightly. As the ‘um’ comes out of your mouth and you go into your head to think, your body will involuntarily perform some very specific physical movements. First, your eyes will probably swing up to the left or right, or your head will turn slightly down and away from who ever you are talking to. As you continue to think, you’ll probably start making small, shuffling steps backwards.

Try asking someone a relatively complex question, for which they have to use their logic skills to answer, and watch closely how their body position changes. Try thinking about a logic problem yourself and you will most likely experience a sensation of your mind moving inward, and slightly downward, as you consciously think.

Avoiding eye contact, looking up to the left or right, and shuffling, backward steps, are all indicators that you have fallen in to a downward/inward intention.

You are taught from a very early age that your most powerful tool, what distinguishes you from an animal, is your ability to think and make judgments between things, and you learn to show this externally so that presumably people won’t bother you when you’re trying to think.

Your brain doesn’t have to be hugely creative to cope with a question like ‘Where is the train station?’ You either have enough knowledge to come up with the answer or you don’t. Even if there are several different routes you could advise, it’s mostly just a memory exercise. You analyze where you are now in relation to where you remember the train station to be, and then give directions based on that knowledge and your habits.



ENDLESS BOX

Purpose

Endless Box is a great game for generating upward/outward intention near the beginning of a creative session. It’s energetic and fun, and gets people laughing and more relaxed. Its other purpose is to encourage you to use intuitive thinking when creating content.

Mechanics

Work with partner or, if you are leading a class, divide it into pairs. Each pair kneels on the floor face-to-face about 2 feet apart. In between them is an imaginary box full of objects. One of each pair, at a given signal, begins grabbing objects from the box and says what the object is as they pull it out. The other person encourages the ‘puller’ to extract as many objects as possible from the box.

Tips

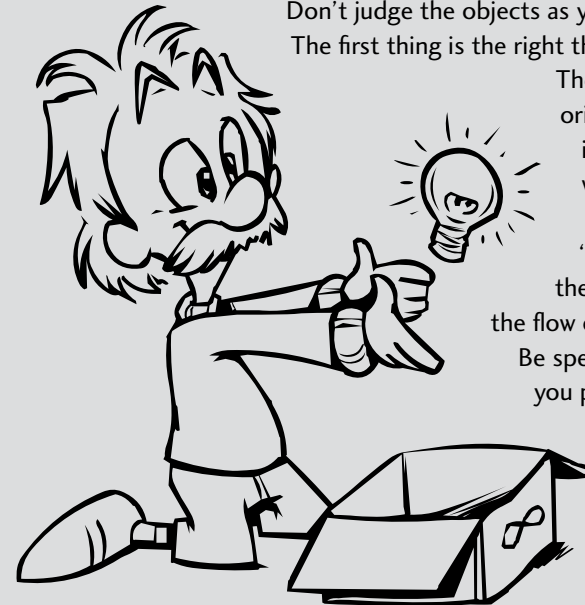
Try to pull out the objects from the imaginary box as quickly as possible and with as much joy as you can.

Allow the names of the objects to fall forwards into the front of your mind. Don’t think them up or try to keep a list in your head. If you are doing it correctly you should be surprised (sometimes even slightly shocked) by what you pull out of the box.

Don’t judge the objects as you are pulling them out. The first thing is the right thing.

There is no pressure to be original. Your box may, for instance, be entirely filled with shoes. That’s OK. Try not to say ‘A . . .’ or ‘It’s a . . .’ before you name the object, as it slows down the flow of your thoughts.

Be specific about the objects you pull out. If your box is full of shoes, then maybe one shoe is brown, or old, or a sandal worn by Jesus, etc.



allowing an idea to come to fruition almost without you being responsible for it. With creative thinking, 'trying harder' is like slamming a revolving door. The effort you put into 'trying' just makes your analytical wheels spin faster and puts you into a downward/inward intention, where you're trapped in the limited world of your conscious thoughts, habits and prejudices only. You just repeat old patterns and don't create anything new. This is as true in relationships as it is in the world of ideas.

INTENTION IN RELATIONSHIPS

The amazing growth in personal ads and computer dating services shows that (aside from the fact that we allocate very little time to forming lasting relationships) we start from the assumption that analyzing data will find us the best mate. We no longer trust in our ability to choose a partner intuitively. People seem to be encouraged to have an intellectual picture of their perfect soulmate. How tall? How rich? What kind of car do they drive? What is their favourite movie? Yet with all this extra thought and expectation going into relationships, four out of ten marriages will end in divorce in the United Kingdom.



YES, LETS!

Purpose

This game is another good way to loosen up at the beginning of a session and get everybody feeling an upward/outward intention. Yes, Lets! is a Keith Johnstone game that was first described in his book *Impro*. I use it frequently with a new group. It's really good if you want a group to take itself less seriously and just have a laugh.

Mechanics

This game can be played with two or more players. A player makes a suggestion of an action like 'Let's all hop on one leg,' to which the group loudly replies, 'Yes, lets!' Everybody then hops on one leg for a few seconds until the first player offers a different suggestion that the whole group once again joyfully responds, 'Yes, lets!' to. After a few 'Yes, lets!' have passed the first player encourages anyone in the group to suggest actions. The whole game lasts about three minutes.



Tips

Start with obvious easy actions, particularly with a new or inexperienced group.

Encourage players to have fun. Give them permission to be silly.

As the game progresses make the suggestions more lateral: 'Let's all be librarians.' I remember once someone shouting out 'Let's all be Margaret Thatcher!' which got a huge laugh and really bumped up the energy of the group.

Play the game until everyone has an open smiling face and their eyebrows are up.

UPWARD/OUTWARD INTENTION

Creative thought is best served by adopting an upward/outward intention. This intention is experienced most visibly when you feel emotions like joy or wonder. An upward/outward intention allows you to imagine, to dream. It opens you up, making you more receptive to new ideas. It is characterized physically by openness in your face. Your eyes will widen and eyebrows rise. Your head will tilt up at a little less than a forty-five degree angle. You might find you straighten your back a bit and widen out your chest.

One reason I think so many people will pay huge amounts of money to see a West End or Broadway musical is because they often contain very clear upward/outward moments in them. 'Something's Coming' from *West Side Story*, for example, absolutely captures the essence of an upward/outward intention. We live in a cynical, frightened time that seems to be conditioning us away from feeling an upward/outward intention as much as possible. We need to take the time to relearn how to experience it again.

You can always tell when a person shifts back into a downward intention because they will start avoiding eye contact with the people they are working with and begin to take small steps backwards. Keith Johnstone, one of the world's leading improvisation teachers, will often talk in workshops about weaning actors away from the back wall. Improvisers who are feeling uncomfortable become self-conscious, fall into a downward/inward intention and gradually edge backwards until they have virtually plastered themselves against the back wall of a stage or rehearsal room.

ANNUS MIRABILIS

The year 1905 was an amazing one for Einstein. On one hand it must have been one of the most difficult and depressing times of his life. He had narrowly managed to get a job. His wife, who had married Einstein strictly against her father's wishes, had recently given up their first child (who was born out of wedlock) for adoption and just given birth to their second. Yet, 1905 would see him publish three papers that would change not just face of theoretical physics but the very way in which we all view the world. Einstein himself referred to 1905 as his 'annus mirabilis' – his miracle year.

SOUND BALL

Purpose

The purpose of Sound Ball is to get you to listen and react better to offers made by other people. Sound Ball also helps you to create content without judging it first.

Mechanics

Sound Ball is a group game that works best with between six and twenty people. Form the group into a circle making sure each player in the circle is able to make eye contact with any other player.

Start the game by establishing eye contact with another player and then 'throwing' them a vocalized sound (a noise rather than a word). The other player 'catches' the sound by repeating it as accurately as they can. The player who catches the sound makes immediate eye contact with a different player and throws a different sound to them, and so on.

The game continues till everyone has caught and thrown a sound ball several times.



Tips

This game is about being silly, and getting out of your conscious mind so that intuition can guide the changes in the sounds; for this reason the sound ball must be passed around the circle quite quickly.

The sounds should also contain an emotional quality like 'love' or 'desperation' or 'joyful greeting', etc. Ensure that the sounds being thrown are voiced. Throwing a 'shhh' or 'ssssk' avoids emotional information because there are no vowels.

Emphasize acceptance of the sound, like it's a real gift. Catching the sound well is what is important; the new sound takes care of itself.

There should be no pause between the caught sound and the throw of the new sound. One sound should fluidly change to another.

Alternatives

If the throwing gets too aggressive, give the ball a quality. Say something like, 'OK, now this ball only makes warm sounds.'

Experiment. Does a female ball sound different from a male ball? If you are working on music throw a musical 'note ball' or try throwing single vowel shapes.

A nice variation is to throw a sound and a physical gesture.

If it is going well, try getting two or three balls going at the same time.

2.

Three Ways of Thinking



'The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift.'