

IMPROVing Teamwork

3 Essential Practices for Earning Your Team a Standing Ovation

1. **“Yes, but ...” or “Yes, and ...”?** Divide the group in half, giving them the task of planning a company party, where one half always says, “Yes, and ...” after each team member suggestion and the other half always says, “Yes, but ...” (5 minutes). In the debriefing, discuss who was most successful in the short time period and why.

The learning: Even at a basic level, finding common ground with your colleagues is important. An antagonistic relationship benefits no one and the judgment of a “Yes, but ...” stifles team members. Collaboration, creativity, and results grow out of an environment that is positive and affirming.

Tip: Stand in a circle and use “Yes, and ...” every time you want to re-energize your brainstorming. Be consistent and persistent with it!

2. **Are You Tuned In or Tuned Out?** Divide people into pairs. Have them introduce themselves to each other, conduct a short conversation, and find three things they have in common (3 minutes). Then, direct them to turn their backs on each other and remain silent. During the silence, the leader/facilitator asks group members increasingly difficult questions about how much they noticed about their partner, such as: “What color are their eyes? Their pants/skirt? Their shoes?”

The learning: Listening is the key to teamwork, and listening extends beyond words and even tone of voice and body language. Masterful listening requires us to pay attention to others on multiple levels.

Tip: Repeat the exercise another time with the same group (later in the day, week, or month) as a way of practicing the art of noticing.

3. **Name, Logo, Tag Line, Ad Campaign!** Divide the group into subgroups of three to four people each. Task them with creating a branding campaign for the entire group, including name, logo, tag line, and some sort of ad campaign (like a television commercial). Give them a compressed time period (10 - 20 minutes total) to complete the task. In the debriefing, invite the entire group to mix and match ideas until you reach a “best of breed” solution.

The learning: The group that came up with the knock-em-dead tag line may not have been the most successful with the other tasks. This highlights the importance of checking your ego at the door and collaborating across the entire organization to produce the best overall result.

Tip: Do a Round Two using a real business issue that’s at stake.

Serving Suggestions

- Start all your routine team meetings with these practices (and others). Team members will be alert and ready for “business as unusual.”
- Use as an after-lunch energizer during a team retreat.
- Use as reinforcement for key learning about creativity, listening, or collaboration during a training event.
- And if none of these strike your fancy, say “Yes, and ...” and create one that does!