



Yes, And: How Improvisation Reverses "No, But" Thinking and Improves Creativity and Collaboration--Lessons from The Second City

By Kelly Leonard, Tom Yorton

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Executives from The Second City—the world’s premier comedy theater and school of improvisation—reveal improvisational techniques that can help any organization develop innovators, encourage adaptable leaders, and build transformational businesses.

For more than fifty years, The Second City comedy theater in Chicago has been a training ground for some of the best comic minds in the industry—including John Belushi, Bill Murray, Gilda Radner, Mike Myers, Steve Carell, Stephen Colbert, and Tina Fey. But it also provides one-of-a-kind leadership training to cutting-edge companies, nonprofits, and public sector organizations—all aimed at increasing creativity, collaboration, and teamwork.

The rules for leadership and teamwork have changed, and the skills that got professionals ahead a generation ago don’t work anymore. Now The Second City provides a new toolkit individuals and organizations can use to thrive in a world increasingly shaped by speed, social communication, and decentralization. Based on eight principles of improvisation, *Yes, And* helps to develop these skills and foster them in high-potential leaders and their teams, including:

- Mastering the ability to co-create in an ensemble
- Fostering a “yes, and” approach to work
- Embracing failure to accelerate high performance
- Leading by listening and by learning to follow
- Innovating by making something out of nothing

Yes, And is a must-read for professionals and organizations, helping to develop the invaluable leadership skills needed to succeed today.

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Editorial Review

Review

“I know one of these guys, so at least half of this book is pretty good. *Yes, And* is for anyone looking to be more creative in their work and in their life.” (Stephen Colbert)

“If one phrase can capture the essence of the creative mindset then ‘yes, and’ might just be it. If one book can inspire you to apply that creative mindset then *Yes, And* is most certainly that book.” (–Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO and author of *Change By Design*)

“*Yes, And* takes you behind the curtain of Second City to reveal deep insights and practical tips about how to lead a creative life. If you want to flourish in the new world of work, this book is an essential read.” (–Daniel H. Pink, author of *To Sell is Human* and *Drive*)

“You’ll learn, you’ll laugh, and you’ll immediately test out the rich set of practical exercises at the office—and the dinner table.” (–Adam Grant, Wharton professor and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Give and Take*)

“Accepting and building on what others have initiated, *Yes, And* is the best teamwork advice for the stage or the boardroom.” (–Dick Costollo, CEO of Twitter)

“An excellent guide to the lessons that have bubbled up in Second City’s improv workshops. It sounds crazy that a comedy troupe should have anything to say about how you should lead your life. Trust me: it isn’t.” (Vanity Fair)

From the Back Cover

The Second City has launched the careers of celebrated comic performers such as Tina Fey and Stephen Colbert and produced award-winning content. But it's the actual improvisational process developed and honed over the years by The Second City that has become its legacy. Players master an ability to co-create in ensembles, using philosophies that celebrate a "Yes, And" approach. They embrace authenticity and failure, and espouse the idea of "following the follower," which allows any member of the team to assume a leadership role.

For more than two decades, The Second City has taken these same principles in thousands of corporate clients, showing leaders how to apply the tools of improv to common business challenges. Here, for the first time, Second City executives Kelly Leonard and Tom Yorton describe how you can use the same skills that thrill audiences around the world to improve your emotional intelligence, increase creativity, and learn to pivot out of tight and uncomfortable situations. In this engaging, often humorous, and highly practical book, you will learn how to become a more compelling leader and a more collaborative follower by employing the seven elements of improv:

- *Yes, And*, by which you give every idea a chance to be acted on;
- *Ensemble*, reconciling the needs of individuals with those of the broader team;
- *Co-creation*, which highlights the importance of dialogue in creating new products, processes, and

relationships;

- *Authenticity*, or being unafraid to speak truth to power, challenge convention, and break the rules;
- *Failure*, teaching us that not only is it okay to fail, but we should always include it as part of our process;
- *Follow the Follower*, which gives any member of the group the chance to assume a leadership role;
- *Listening*, in which you learn to stay in the moment, and know the difference between listening to understand and listening merely to respond.

When we are fiercely following the tenets of improvisation, we generate ideas both quickly and efficiently, we weather storms with more aplomb, and we don't work burdened by a fear of failure. Even better, these qualities are fully transferable to our lives outside the office.

More people are beginning to recognize what The Second City has known for a long time: In the midst of a revolution in how we learn, communicate, and work, professional success often rests on the same pillars that form the foundation of great comedy: Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration. That's where improvisation comes in.

About the Author

Kelly Leonard is the executive vice president of The Second City and the president of Second City Theatricals. He has worked at The Second City since 1988 and has overseen productions with such notable performers as Stephen Colbert, Tina Fey, and Amy Poehler. Mr. Leonard cofounded Second City Theatricals, the division of the company that develops an eclectic array of live entertainment all over the world. He has fostered creative and business collaborations with Lyric Opera Chicago, Norwegian Cruise Line, Hubbard Street Dance and the Chicago Tribune, to name a few.

Tom Yorton has been CEO of Second City Works, the b2b arm of The Second City, since 2002. Before joining The Second City family, Tom worked in advertising and marketing at agencies like Ogilvy, Grey, and Hal Riney before jumping to the client side, with stints as a marketing vice president at Sears and 3Com, where he actually hired Second City Works on a couple of occasions. Second City Works now does more than four hundred engagements a year, half with Fortune 1000 companies. Tom and his team are focused on refining The Second City's unique capabilities—creating funny short-form content and using improv to develop vital skills in businesspeople—to help companies communicate, collaborate, and innovate better in a web-first, social-everything world.

Users Review

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