

Key Takeaways from Improv Call with Amanda Hirsch

Just like improvisors, we don't have a script to guide our lives. Watching the best improvisers make something out of nothing onstage is a guide to living our best life offstage, as well. Below are the key takeaways from our call.

1. **Listen (don't just wait for your turn to talk)**...and let people know they've been heard. This isn't just polite; it will save you time, because you'll be accessing and processing all information available to you.

2. **Say "yes, and"** to show respect for the other people in the room and to develop creative ideas further. I like to tell people to be the one who brings "yes, and" to the party. As Maya Angelou said, people won't remember what you did, they'll remember how you made them feel. (Plus, it just makes any creative brainstorming session or difficult conversation so much more constructive. "No, but" may satisfy your ego short-term, by seeming to underscore your individuality, but it won't move things forward.)

3. **Make a choice and commit to it.** Hemming and hawing over "the right choice" won't actually make you any happier. (Social scientists [agree](#).) We torture ourselves thinking there's a "right" choice, but often, if we summoned the confidence to make our best guess, we'd launch ourselves into a happier state of being, onstage and off. Being more decisive frees leaves us with more energy to actually accomplish things, rather than being paralyzed by indecision.

4. **Treat the people around you like geniuses.** If a comedian assumes they're funnier than everyone else on stage, it derails the whole show. By contrast, when you treat everyone around you as though their ideas are worthy of respect, you allow creativity to flow and you solve problems faster. It also makes everyone feel a whole lot better.

The best way to get a taste for the awesome power of improv is to take a class. You do *not* need to have any previous acting experience and you will learn so much that you apply to every single facet of your life. In the DC area, I recommend [Washington Improv Theater](#). There are other great training grounds all around the country; if you email me, I'm happy to help you find them (ahirschdc@gmail.com).

I'd like to leave you with this quote from the actor Alan Arkin, who got his start in improv, and wrote a memoir called *An Improvised Life*.

"In the final analysis, it's all improvisation. We're all tap dancing on a rubber raft. We like to think otherwise, so we plan our lives, we plot, we figure, we find careers that will guarantee us an early retirement, we look for relationships that are permanent, we fill out forms, we do scientific experiments, we write rules -- all in an attempt to solidify, concretize, and control this universe of ours that refuses to be pigeon-holed....

We are at our best, I think, when we start to let it all go...It's all the nagging, the complaining, the plotting, the fears, the endless need to keep the universe in all its majestic chaos at bay -- that with a little more thought and effort we can figure it all out, control it all, the universe, our destiny. This is what kills us, robs us of our spontaneity, our ability to improvise, which, as Webster's says, is to create something on the spur of the moment with whatever material is at hand.

That's what we're all doing, all the time, whether we know it or not. Whether we like it or not. Creating something at the spur of the moment with the materials at hand. We might just as well let the rest of it go, join the party, and dance our hearts out."

Let's dance our hearts out, ladies.