

15 Improv 'Rules' That Anybody Can Follow To Live A More Fulfilling Life

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Comedy is a form of theater in which nearly everything that happens during a performance is being created at that very moment. I fell in love with improv two years ago, and since then, it's been a whirlwind of lessons about being present, going after the things you're most afraid of, and learning how to be a better person to those around you. But these lessons don't just apply to the stage – they also apply to how you can conduct yourself in your everyday life. So here are 15 popular improv 'rules' that anyone can apply to lead a happier, more exciting, and more fulfilling life.

1. Play for the group, not for yourself. The people who hurt or neglect others in order to get ahead in life are always the most unhappy. We are social creatures. We gain power, joy, and strength from forming deep relationships with other human beings. You will find that the more support you give to and receive from others, the more successful and happy you will be.

2. Stay in the moment. You're not doing yourself any favors if you waste away the present by obsessing over the past or fretting about the future.

3. But still keep the future in the back of your mind. 'Staying in the moment' is not to say that you should throw all cares, worries, and responsibilities out the window. It just means that you should always be paying attention to what's happening *now*, while also remembering that the decisions you make now will affect the decisions you make in 5 minutes – or 5 months – from now.

4. All mistakes are gifts. Obviously you won't be proud or pleased with yourself when you screw something up. But what improv teaches is that you can find a reason for everything. If you did something dumb or don't like a decision you made, find a way to turn it around and pull some positivity out of it.

5. Follow the fear. One of my favorite teachers continually drilled into our heads that if you're afraid of doing something, it usually means you should go after it. Fear often manifests itself when there's something we know we want to do, but we're hesitant to try because we might fail, get rejected, be disappointed, etc. So when something keeps popping up in your brain and causing your stomach to drop – applying for a new job, moving to a new city, asking someone out on a date, getting involved in a nonprofit – it's usually a sign you should be going after it.

6. Stop planning the next thing you're going to say, and just listen to the person in front of you. It takes you out of your head, it lets the person in front of you know that you care about them, and it will lead to you being a much more empathetic, approachable, and delightful person to be around. You'll be surprised how quickly people notice the change.

7. "Yes, and." One of the golden rules of improv is to agree with the reality that your partner has created and to add to it. This rule can easily apply to real life too. As Tina Fey explains it in *Bossypants*, "Now, obviously in real life you're not always going to agree with everything everyone says. But the Rule of Agreement reminds you to 'respect what your partner has created' and to at least start from an open-minded place. Start with a YES and see where that takes you.'

8. Being truthful will get you much further than being the funniest or smartest person in the room. Being smart is great. Being funny is great. But at the end of the day, we all just want to be around people who are authentic, people who actually want to hear what we have to say, and people who are more concerned with connecting to us than they are with showing off.

9. Never hesitate to step outside the box. The moment someone decides to step out of the box is the moment when everything suddenly becomes really interesting. So if you're drowning in the never-ending monotony of your own life, try mixing things up for a change. Do something exciting, inspiring, or educational that you wouldn't normally do. That will likely change the game pretty quickly.

10. Your choices should always be conscious. Do things because they add to your life, or they help others, or they move your personal story forward in some way. If you need some new clothes, purchase them carefully and thoughtfully, instead of falling into the trap of *want, want, want*. If you haven't been a good son or daughter lately, take a break from mindlessly perusing the Internet to call your parents. If you're at dinner with a friend, put your phone on silent and pay attention to the real conversation happening in front of you. Always be aware of what you're doing, and be wary of falling into the zombie-like state that we're all guilty of in this day and age.

11. The most interesting characters are the ones who are weird, quirky, and specific about what they want. For the love of God, don't take this as a sign that you should become a hipster. Just remember that what makes you unique are those things about you that you're often the most embarrassed by or insecure about. Don't worry about trying to be exactly like your best friend or that random person you follow on Instagram. Just be you.

12. Play smart. Anyone in the improv community will tell you that lazy, smut-themed jokes almost never work on stage. People prefer something smart, clever, and unforced. Real life works the same way. You don't need to be foul, dopey, or offensive to connect with people or make your mark at the party/office/birthday dinner/etc. Just be genuine and friendly, and you're guaranteed to make connections that are much deeper and more natural.

13. Sometimes it's okay to lean on others. There are moments when you're simply not going to know what to do in life. Or you're going to feel discouraged. Or burnt out. That's what your friends and family are for. In the moments – or days, or weeks – where you feel lost and confused, ask the people you trust to help you find your way again.

14. The best moments are unscripted. It's important to have goals in your life – to be focused, driven, and always working towards what you want. But it's also important to let go, let loose, and allow yourself to just be a kid sometimes. Sometimes the most important realizations we ever have occur when we have temporarily quieted our stream of consciousness and allowed ourselves to simply breathe and exist.

15. You often have the most success when you are outside of your comfort zone. When you are anxious, nervous, or uncomfortable, you're not obsessing over the next perfect thing you're going to do or say. Your brain doesn't have room for that. Instead, being outside of your comfort zone simply wakes you up and forces you to react to what is going on right in front of your face. And most of the time in those situations, your ideas are smarter, funnier, and much more useful.