

6 YES, AND.....

In the world of improv, we have a term we use that is called “Yes, And.....

It is a cornerstone of all improvisational comedy, as it is taught to anyone in their first class of improvisational comedy.

The term Yes, And means that you agree (or accept) what your partner has given you, and then you add just a little bit more to help the scene move forward.

I see this being a great addition to a brainstorming and /or a problem solving session. Wouldn't it be great to actually conduct a brainstorming session rather than a barnstorming session? If you just rolled your eyes, you know exactly what I mean!

Have you ever noticed that at work many times you hear, “No, But”, rather than Yes, And? It is not anyone's fault; it is the reptilian response in our brain.

According to Dave Gunby, what the reptilian response in our brain tells us is – if it is not food, or it is not a mate, then it is an enemy, and we should kill it. So, our natural instincts make us skeptical of new information.

So, how as a manager can you break through that and make your brainstorming session most productive?

Well, first, you determine that this is a zone where anything and everything will be considered. No sacred cows. I would also recommend that there not be any senior management in this session.....at least at first, because the underlings will most always defer to the senior manager's ideas. And that isn't the object of the exercise. If that was the case, why would you gather up this meeting in the first place? You could do that from your office and send out an email!

So, the idea is to get everyone excited about being creative.

There is also a difference between Yes, And, and Yes, But. Yes, But is just like saying No, But, only nicer. You are still trying to control the conversation, or tell the person yeah, thanks for trying, but I have a better idea.

When we teach improv to corporate clients, sometimes just getting everyone to say yes, and is a challenge. One way to allow everyone to understand the idea of Yes, And is to actively participate in a story that the group all contributes while practicing Yes, And. Here's how it might look:

Ask everyone to form two lines, one facing the other. Ask the first person in one of the two lines to begin with a neutral statement about their day. The next person shows they are listening by re-stating what the first person said, and then adds one new piece of information. Just one. No one needs to take on any more responsibility than adding one little tidbit, since everyone together is creating this story. For example:

Starting point: I am having a great day today!

Next person across from them: Yes, and because you are having a great day today, you are actually smiling!

Next person across from them (you are forming a zigzag pattern from one line to the next) Yes, and, because you are actually smiling, I notice that you have had your teeth whitened.

Next person across from them: Yes, and because you have had your teeth whitened, you would be perfect for the new position we have on the network news at 9:00....and so it goes, until everyone has had a chance to Yes, and the previous person's ideas. It is important to have each participant repeat the "Yes, And statement before adding their new idea, as that repetition allows them to embody how it works, not only from getting into the rhythm, but also embodying the feeling of how they felt when their idea was not only accepted, but move forward with another idea.

This is a great warm-up activity to help them get in the mindset of always saying yes, and allowing all ideas to be spoken, generated and acknowledged.

To take this idea to your company, here is an exercise I have used with corporations and organizations to help them make the shift from negative experiences of previous brainstorming situations to being in a very creative space to allow REAL brainstorming and/or problem solving to occur.

Your first step is to state the problem or idea that you would like to work on together as a team. It can be anything – from naming a new product, to identifying why a particular division of the company has more turnover than the others; it is totally around what your organization needs to concentrate on at that time.

Then, break out into teams of about 4 – 5 people in each one. Have each team name themselves to build camaraderie, like Team Fantastic! Team Warriors! They will have fun getting into this playful place, plus it is a warm up for working together in their small team. Give each team member a blank piece of paper (both sides blank), and ask them to write in one minute the most ideas they have in resolving the situation. Anything goes! No filters.

After the minute is over, have each of them review their list. Assign a scribe to list on a new piece of paper all of the original ideas generated by their team. Put this piece of paper aside for the moment.

Now, round two – have each team member turn over their piece of paper, and ask them to think through and write down even more ideas, not repeating the ones already thought of the first round.

After that minute is over, again assign a scribe to document all of the new original ideas generated by the teams. Ask them how the first round of ideas might differ from the second round of ideas. Chances are they will be the more creative ideas.

We utilize this technique in improv, too. We call it “ten things”. When we get a suggestion from the audience, we instruct all of our improvisers to immediately start thinking of ten things that could be related to that suggestion. The first two, three or four ideas that come to mind probably come to everyone’s minds in the room, including the audience. However, the audience doesn’t want to see what they already can think of – they want more creativity from the group. So, we go

for the seventh, eighth and ninth idea, and see how much more original these things will be. These are the things the audience wants to see – they can see where you got it from the suggestion, but they didn't think of it and so you are brilliant.

For example, if we were to get the suggestion of turtle, what are the first ideas you think of? Maybe slow, or shell, maybe water? Then, without duplicating those ideas, what are three more ideas about a turtle you can think of? Green? Old? Wrinkly? Then, let's think some more. What about turtle neck – as in a piece of clothing? Or Turtle Wax – without this, would anyone on a game show ever get a consolation prize? Or Turtle soup? The candy called Turtles? Do you see how the longer you allow yourself to come up with ideas without any filter, the more interesting your ideas become?

You follow the same path when generate ideas through business brainstorming. You need to have that element of “why didn't I think of that?” Well, you might have, had you given yourself some permission to not be linear or quick to judge and just go with the flow.

Ok, so back to our exercise. Now, have each team member rank their responses to their favorite five. Have a scribe on a large flip chart in the front of the room write each one of the favorite five ideas down (five top vote getters from each team), and when the list is complete, allow everyone in the room to celebrate all of the creativity on the board (you may need to lead this celebration). This is a big deal. Don't let this step go!

Then, ask each team to vote on their favorite five that they all like as a group. Each person gets three votes. Then, from the voting, the team provided their team favorite five to the group.

You, as the group leader, take the favorite five of each team, and put it on another piece of flip chart paper in front of the group.

From there, you do the voting exercise with the entire group, so the group votes on their favorite five (again, each person gets three votes.) On this one, you may need a helper to help you count up the votes.

From here, you assign each team one of the most favorite fives and have them write down all of the pro's and con's for their topic. ALL of them. Do the same exercise that you did earlier. One minute, and then one minute more. This way, with a time limit, they are just writing and not filtering. That is when creative genius strikes!

From those pros and cons, again, have them evaluate the top five in each category, and then choose a team leader to report back to the group. You will be surprised at what you come up with!

From here, you can do the same evaluation, and have the group whittle it down to one solution, posed with the five pros and cons they see attached to it, and from here can start problem solving around the "What ifs'!

By doing this as a group, you may discover there is actually more than one really great idea to pursue. The objective is to allow everyone to have a say in the project, and feel like their voice has been heard. One of my favorite quotes I learned from Howard Jenson, a guy I used to work with in the Formal Wear industry in Seattle, Washington is: "People have a tendency to support what they help to create". (Yes, I have had several interesting career moves in the long time I have been here on this earth!) Anyways, back to my point- allowing your employees to work together builds trust and confidence that there is buy-in and energy around solving the problem/situation with the very best results in mind. They want to help! Let them! Yes, And...!!!!



Yes is such a powerful word

It lets others know that they have been heard

Yes, and is one of my favorite phrases

It makes people happy, and truly amazes!

Challenge:

Try “Yes – And...ing” for an entire day (within the limits of your responsibilities at work), How did it feel to say “yes, and” rather than “yes-but” or “no-but”? Did you have to stop and remind yourself of the activity? Did it become easier to do the longer you persisted?
