

Saying Yes

If we want to live joyfully, we can learn much from improvisational acting techniques.

Improv is all about bypassing the editorial left brain and moving fluidly into the instinctive, natural responses that bring us vividly into the present moment. One of the cardinal rules of improv is to say “yes, and...” when one of your fellow actors offers you something.

He hands you a pencil and says “Have a banana.” You look at the pencil, realize perfectly well that it is not a banana, but instead of arguing, you say, “Yes, and a very fine banana it is!” and proceed to peel and munch on it—in mime, of course—thus keeping the game going.

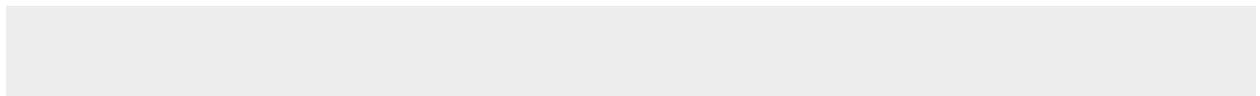
When we say “yes, *and...*” instead of “yes, *but...*” we keep possibilities open and enter a world where we’re not sure what we’ll discover next. This can lead to intensely joyful experiences!

After a rather lonely period last winter, during which I was convinced that I had no friends and no social life, I resolved to start saying “yes” to all invitations I received, if indeed I ever received any.

I was astonished to realize that I had ignored or said no to several invitations within the past month, for reasons that turned out to be...well, *stupid* is definitely the first word that comes to mind. Under the influence of my new resolution, I said “yes” to one invitation that I’d been ignoring, and the next thing you know I was blissfully bowling at a friend’s birthday party. (Yes, the party was at a bowling alley.)

You already know how to improvise—you do it every time you open your mouth and speak. Relax your inner judge and improvise a little bit every day.

Saying “yes, and” has the power to liberate you from all the scripts and patterns that keep you in joyless lock-step. It has the potential to expand and enhance your life in every direction. It leads to the magical, the unexpected, and the risky.



Joyfulness Snack 5:

The Universe is Big

Most of us have seen so many science fiction shows and movies that we tend to think of the universe as a pretty cozy place, with aliens from other planets dropping in all the time.

But in fact, if we were to go in a spaceship traveling at the speed of the Voyager spacecraft—in other words, 35,000 miles an hour—it would take us quite a while just to get to the outer edges of our own solar system—to the outer edges of the Oort Cloud, out beyond Pluto. Any guesses as to how long that would take?

Ten thousand years.

And in our cozy little Milky Way galaxy, there are at least 200 billion stars, many of them with their own solar systems. The Hubble Space Telescope reveals that there are about 125 billion galaxies in the universe.

Not to belabor the point, the universe is really, really big, and really, really empty. And really, really, *really* old. We are so tiny and ephemeral, all our worries and dramas and concerns so infinitesimal and insignificant. So—we might as well be joyful, don't you think?

Meditation for **Saying yes**

I'm breathing in the color yellow—the brilliant yellow of sunshine. The soft yellow of the center of a daisy. The scintillating yellow of lemon sorbet.

In a relaxed, curious way, I'm scanning myself. I'm looking around to see if there are any desires I have that can be fulfilled right now.

If the thought "yes, but..." occurs to me, I'm simply noticing it and letting it go. I'm entertaining the notion of saying "yes, and..." to any desires that arise.

I'm exploring further, letting desires float up. I'm noticing if there's one desire that I can say "yes" to right now.

I'm setting an intention to continue noticing occasions where I can say "yes, and..." to opportunities and desires. And I'm coming back into this moment, feeling eager for opportunities to say "yes."

Journaling

Notice when you say “no” automatically this week, and jot a note to prompt you to say “yes” the next time this opportunity comes along.

Joyfulness Games to Try: Saying yes

- When you’re driving, try holding the steering wheel in a way you have never held it before. At red lights, improvise a hand dance or beat out an interesting rhythm on the dashboard.
- Dance, hum, or sing improvisationally in your living room. See what your body wants to do next. Do it.
- Resolve to say “yes” to the next thing anyone asks of you—wholeheartedly, with enthusiasm. Astound your boss!
- Choose a day this week in which you will say “yes” or “yes, and…” to anything that’s reasonably asked of you.
- Sign up for an improv class. Don’t be shy—everyone else taking “Improv 101” is a beginner, too.

- When driving or walking to a familiar destination, challenge yourself to get there a different way every time.
- Attend an improv performance, or watch a rerun of “Whose Line Is It, Anyway?” and notice how the actors respond instantly to the suggestions offered to them.
- Play with a chunk of modeling clay for five minutes and let it become whatever it wants to be.
- The next time you are in a natural spot, make some ephemeral artwork out of the materials at hand—a sand castle, a daisy chain—and leave your artwork there to wash, blow, or melt away.
- Spend some time with a small child and enter her world completely.

Covenant for Saying yes

I hereby covenant to practice saying “yes, and…” to ideas, actions, and invitations that come to me from within myself or from the outside world.

I will start by saying yes to:

Signed: _____ Date: _____