

# Improv as Practical Life Advice

by Will Hines | April 23rd, 2014

When you ask people to think of reasons why someone took an improv class for the first time you get answers like "I wanted to do something fun" or "I'm a huge comedy fan" or "I wanted to be able to think on my feet more for my job."

(Side note: people often say "wanted to get better at public speaking" but only when they're guessing why OTHER people might be taking improv classes.)

Improv classes aren't as silly as you expect. Yes, they're fun but they're more like acting classes. Many big comedy fans don't know what long-form improv is, and they take a class because they've memorized the casts of SNL and see that many of them "did improv." They don't know what they're in for.

I don't really think it improves thinking on your feet. And no one speaks publicly ever, now that we have the internet.

So what practical skills DOES improv give you? These ones.

- 1) **Listening.** Deeper, fuller, more actively. Time will slow down during conversations and you will be able to hear them more accurately. This absolutely will happen to everyone who takes improv classes for any decent length of time.
- 2) **Brevity.** Improv rewards succinct, direct talk. You'll learn to do it because the audience laughs and listens to you more when you get to the point.
- 3) **Empathy.** You will more easily be able to see things from other people's points of view. You will be able to argue the other side of an argument better.
- 4) **Acting.** Improv is acting and writing but it's more acting. You become more reactive and emotive just through the sheer reps of playing make-

believe in front of others.

5) **Clearer opinions.** You have opinions all the time but very often you don't pay attention to them as they're forming. Not the big ones, but the little ones. You see someone on the street eating an ice cream and lots of tiny versions of superiority, jealousy, gluttony will flit through your brain, and then vanish. Improv makes you notice and then hold onto those opinions because in a scene you might need them.

6) **Saying yes.** You will at least consider saying yes to things and see the value in that option more often than you did before.

7) **Patterns.** Patterns are funny, and you will learn to see them early and often.

8) **Silliness.** You will get sillier. You'll walk funnier. You'll use dumb voices more. You'll make up better fake names for things.

9) **Knowledge.** You'll learn more since you'll run across so many scenes where someone mentions something you don't know. You'll find out what they were saying and remember it.

10) **Losing.** You'll learn the joy of losing arguments and fights.

11) **Bravery.** You will be more comfortable to have people see you and watch you.

12) **Being Present.** You'll worry less about the future, less about story, and more about what the moment feels like and what that implies.

Those are some skills you learn. And nothing else.

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