



## The Business Case for Applied Improvisation

### The back-story:

Nearly 15 years ago a pivotal book by author Daniel Pink (*A Whole New Mind*) suggested that forces in the world economy would shift society from left-brain thinking (linear, logical, analytical) to right-brain thinking (intuitive, creative, holistic) as the dominant thought pattern. In retrospect, that is precisely where we've landed today. Think about the relevance of storytelling, our desire for product design, a resurgent demand for all things handcrafted, or how individuals are searching for greater meaning in their lives.

No longer are the arts being undervalued, quite the opposite. Of particular interest is the recent merging of art forms and business thinking to drive unique business (integrated thinking) propositions.

Case in point – the marriage of business imperatives with Applied Improvisation techniques. The art of improvisation capitalizes on the creative process to help reframe how businesses interpret – and therefore leverage – their capabilities.

The benefits of Applied Improvisation are far ranging, with the following merely a small sampling of how businesses are merging art with science.

Using Applied Improvisation techniques helps businesses to:

- Increase *divergent problem-solving skills*. In improvised scene work - because you have no idea what you will do next - you become much better at solving divergent problems, or problems that have multiple right answers. Often times in business we get stuck looking for the one right answer, when in fact there are several best solutions to choose from.
- Drive *creativity and innovation*. Innovation does best in environments where ideas simply flow. There are moments of absolute brilliance that you stumble upon while you're busy making theater out of thin air. Embrace serendipity.
- Understand exposure to *risk*. There is no failure in improvisation, there's just stuff that didn't go the way you thought it would. And that is brilliant! Once the fear of failure is removed, so is the pressure. The stage provides a free pass to make mistakes with no repercussions. Every error becomes endlessly diversified.
- Develop *reframing skills*. Improvisation is the bridge – it allows for conversations about what is learned from the doing of the improvisation. Reframing is a foundational skill because it is learning in one context that has application other, potentially unrelated, contexts. In essence, learning drives learning.
- Challenge *comfort zones*. People have comfort zones, and so do businesses. By pushing through the scary unknown, the awkward vulnerability, and the fear of failure, you develop greater muscle around agility and thinking faster and faster on your feet. You become less fatigued by the constant demands of change.
- Drive team *collaboration*. The improviser's goal is to make their scene partner look like a genius. Every choice made on stage is for the betterment of the scene. It is selfless. Each actor begins to understand where and how they add value – they learn how to play to their strengths as well as the teams. And businesses are only as strong as their teams.
- Share compelling *stories*. Storytelling is a nuanced art. It is the packaged content of brand and voice. And it is quite possibly the center of the human experience. That is why organizations all over the world look to storytelling as the most promising tool for sustaining organizational culture.

*The future now belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind. –Daniel Pink*



#### The current academic narrative:

Thought leaders around the world are offering strong opinions on the value proposition of Applied Improvisation.

*“Improvisation is probably one of the two or three cardinal skills for businesses to learn in the future.”*

- John Kao, studied philosophy at Yale, received an MBA from Harvard Business School, held faculty appointments at Harvard, Yale and MIT

*“Some people misunderstand improv...it seems that improv is all about being funny. But it is not. Improvisation is about being spontaneous...about being imaginative...about taking the unexpected and then doing something unexpected with it. The key is to be open to crazy ideas and building on them. And funnily enough, that is exactly what is needed if we are going to make our enterprises more creative and agile.”*

- Paul Sloane, author of The Leaders Guide to Lateral Thinking Skills

*“Improvisation should be taught in every business school in the country. It is a terrific way of learning the powerful creative competence of reframing. Improv also teaches you how to play in a team. It’s ‘ensemble creativity’. Think music or sports.”*

- Bruce Nussbaum, professor of innovation and design at Parsons The New School for Design (New York), and author of Creative Intelligence (CQ).

#### The definition:

Applied Improvisation is the use of principles and techniques (methods and mindsets) of improvisational theater – used in non-theater settings – to enhance the effectiveness of individuals, teams and organizations.

#### The concept:

Applied Improvisation creates a unique, interactive platform to examine, learn and apply specific skill sets needed across the business enterprise.

#### The design:

A highly interactive customized experience focusing on 3 components:

1. Core improvisation concepts:
  - a. Yes, and... (law of agreement; collaboration and the creative ensemble)
  - b. Making your partner look like a genius (Ubuntu; trust and collaboration)
  - c. Listening skills (surface and deep)
  - d. Giving up control (leaning in to the unknown)
2. Translating core improvisation concepts for the business environment.
3. Reframing skills: a learning in one context that has application in another, potentially unrelated context.

#### The Lab:

The Improv Lab\*, utilizing Improve Thru Improv® methodologies, serves as the leading voice in the conversation of merging the business of art with the art of business.

\*Located in downtown Bentonville, AR

*Focusing on business competencies will make you one kind of smart. Immersing yourself in Applied Improvisation will make you a different kind of smart. And while being smart is essential, being differently smart is a force multiplier. –Stacey Mason*

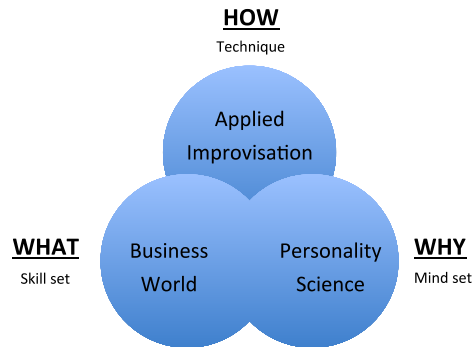


A sampling of individuals / organizations that have undergone Applied Improvisation experimentation:

Walmart / Sam's Club	P&G	Newell Rubbermaid	Beam Global Spirits	Kellogg's
Kraft	Unilever	Dial Henkel	General Mills	J&J / Kenvue
Viacom CBS / Paramount	PepsiCo	Home Depot	Hitachi Data Systems	Microsoft
ArcBest	CR England	JB Hunt	Tyson	Birkman International
CCF Brands	Hershey	Costco	Monster Energy	Nestle
Field Agent	Harvest Group	Happy Egg	SupplyPike	Shopkick
Saatchi & Saatchi X	DaySpring Cards / Hallmark	Baptist Health	HBM Holdings	Workmatters
Arvest Bank	Movista	Colliers International	Miller Zell	USA BMX
Rogers Public Schools	John Brown University	University of Southern California	University of Arkansas for Medical Science	Northeastern State University
University of Arkansas	McMillon Innovation Studio	Northwest Arkansas Business Journal	Rausch Coleman Homes	True Homes USA
Nabholz	East Harding Construction	AFCO Steel	Kinco Construction	Novar
AGC of Kansas	AGC of Arkansas	Falcon Jet	HP Engineering	Acxiom
Usable Life	Arkansas Blue Cross Blue Shield	Zebra	Neilson	IRI
Schneider Electric	Outdoor Cap	Simmons Foods	Walton Enterprises	Walton Family Foundation
Kroger	Zweig Group	Mike's Hard Lemonade	Heifer International	Vistage

Industries using Applied Improvisation methodologies:

- Retail / CPG
- Logistics / Transportation
- Manufacturing
- Architectural / Engineering / Construction
- Energy
- Technology / Information / Data Management
- Advertising / Marketing
- Entertainment
- Education
- Finance
- Food and Beverage
- Legal
- Health Care
- Human Resources
- Hospitality
- Public Service
- Professional Services and Development
- Publishing



Stacey Mason uses insight, perspective and humor to move teams and organizations toward greater self-awareness and differentiated thinking. Before creating Mason On Leadership, a leadership consultancy focusing on behavioral understanding, Executive Coaching and Applied Improvisation, she spent a lifetime with Walmart Inc. leading large multi-functional teams in Logistics, Global Supply Chain and Merchandising/Replenishment before shifting towards culture coaching, stewarding the Walton Institute, Walmart's flagship culture program.

Her clients include Fortune 1 – 500 companies, academic institutions, faith-based groups and NFP entities spanning industries as diverse as retail, consumer package goods, manufacturing, transportation, technology, construction, energy, data management, finance, advertising and entertainment.

As a columnist, she writes on the subject of thought leadership for several B2B publications, and as a published writer she has contributed client stories for a business and leadership book titled "The Birkman Method: Your Personality at Work." She partners with the University of Arkansas Walton College Executive Education, the Office of Entrepreneurship and Innovation (OEI) and the McMillon Innovation Studio on innovation programs and other initiatives.

For the last decade she has immersed herself in the field of Applied Improvisation and has trained widely with various actor-teams including Second City in Chicago. Stacey is most recently recognized as the founder of The Improv Lab (located in Northwest Arkansas) where she merges the business of art with the art of business.

**Intellectual Property**

**Improve Thru Improv®** is a preexisting proprietary product. All information, methodologies, techniques, templates, tools, games, know-how, designs, formulas, processes, and ideas are the exclusive intellectual property of Stacey Mason, dba Mason On Leadership, under the umbrella of Applied Improvisation, in conjunction with The Improv Lab.

