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“Playing Along: 37 Group Learning Activities Borrowed From Improvistational Theater”

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One Word AT A Time

Players experience team identity by creating a unique story, one word at a time.

GOALS

To be in the moment at all times.

To let go of the need to figure out the ending or steer the outcome.

To experience trusting that the end results will be correct however it turns out

GROUP SIZE

5-10 players at a time

TIME

15 minutes

PROCESS

- Introduce the goals of the exercise to participants. Ask for five to ten volunteers and bring them to the stage. If there is an audience, arrange the players in a straight line, facing the audience. Otherwise, arrange them in a circle.
- Introduce the game by telling the players they are going to create a story that's never been told before, and this story will be created one word at a time.
- Ask the observers in the room to select a title for the story the players are going to create. If there are no observers, the title can be chosen by the team of players.
- As titles are called out, choose the first title that you hear. As the director, by taking the first suggestion for the story title, you emphasize and model the importance of accepting whatever is offered, thereby demonstrating the law of agreement. If it's a real story such as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," ask for elaboration on the story such as "Goldilocks Retires in Florida."

Helping Speakers, Trainers, Facilitators, and anyone who stands up in front of an audience become more confident, spontaneous, and effective.

WHERE ARE YOU STUCK?

- Choose a player to begin and give the following instructions:
 - ✓ To create the story, each person will add one word at a time as the story progresses from one person to the next. After the first player says a word, the player to the right will add the second word. We will continue in this manner as each player contributes one word at a time to the story.
 - ✓ Remember to be spontaneous with your contribution. The most common block in this game is the desire to process what has gone before and to think about what to say.
 - ✓ It is important to stay focused on the story as a whole while remaining relaxed and ready for your turn.
 - When it is your turn to add a word, relate to the previous word in particular and the context of the story in general.
 - ✓ Do not anticipate the story before it arrives at your spot in the line and try not to get thrown by an unexpected word.
 - ✓ You cannot make a mistake because this story has never been told before so however it comes out is correct.

- As people stumble over their words and ideas, and the flow of the story is halted, feel free to start new stories. Explain to the players that starting over does not indicate failure.

- The storytellers may find it difficult to finish a sentence. When you begin to hear a string of clauses strung together with a chain of "ands", "therefores," and "howevers," remind the players that stories are made up of complete sentences. Encourage them to use voice inflection and tone to help determine when a sentence is over.

- Be prepared to start and stop several story titles before the group jells and completes a round.

- Continue until at least a partial story has been completed, which may be only be three or four sentences. It will be evident when the group has achieved spontaneity and flow.

- Lead a closing discussion by using the following questions:
 - What was easy or hard about this game?
 - When was the group successful?
 - When the story flowed smoothly, what happened to make it easier?

- What insights did you learn about the game, yourself, and letting go of the end-result?

VARIATIONS

- This game can also be played with two people facing each other, each one offering one word at a time. I often use this variation as the first activity in workshops as a way of introducing improv to new groups.
- In another variation, this game can be played with a large group divided into pairs. Each pair can have the same story title or each may have their own title.