



# 5 Games Designed To Improve Collaboration Across Teams

I want to thank you for checking out some of my favorite games that are designed to assist you and your team in improving your creativity, confidence, communication, and more importantly grow closer as a group. These games are rooted in the principles of improvisation that allow improvisers create amazing content out of thin air. This transformation doesn't happen overnight. Just like your muscles, it requires consistent exercise to experience the long term benefits. If you take the material that is provided below and start to implement it with your team, you will quickly see the your relationships and the ability to collaborate will make major improvements. Imagine having less friction with your clients and co-workers because you are a better listener. Or imagine how it would feel to easily and effortlessly generate ideas because you and your co-workers are supporting and building on each other's offers. To get the most of the games please take time to read and understand the agreements that I have listed before the games. By understanding and agreeing to them you will create the safe space for magic to happen. I wish you luck on your journey and if you have any follow-up questions, or need assistance with these games don't hesitate to reach out and schedule a complementary consultation.

Play On!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary Ware', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

- Gary Ware

# Why Improvisation?

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The question that I often receive is, “How does improvisation help me with confidence, creativity, and communication?” Well, think about what it takes to be an improviser. You have to be able to get on stage and entertain audiences, often with only a single word suggestion. Oh, and this isn’t a solo act. You need to be able to work with a group of people. I believe very strongly that if you understand what makes someone successful, you can emulate it and receive similar, if not better, results. The reason why improvisers are able to do magic on stage and turn a one word suggestion into an entertaining scene is that they follow a framework or agreements, which I will explain a little later.

# Why Play?

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Do you remember what it was like in elementary school? You came to class, worked hard for a few hours, took a break, went out to play for a bit, came back in and worked for a bit, went to lunch, played some more, came back and buckled down for a few more hours, and if you were lucky you got one more recess break. Back then things were good and you learned a lot. You made friends, collaborated, created, and were extremely productive. Now, fast forward to the present. If you are like most professionals, your day is probably more like this: you come sluggishly into the office, tired because you haven’t had your morning coffee. You plop yourself down in front of your desk and start working. You work for hours with little to no break then come lunchtime you either scarf down your food like a starving animal or you take your food back to your desk so you can continue working. You work for another 4-6 hours with little to no break. You dread Mondays and are starting to develop T-Rex arms from sitting at your desk all day.

Do you see a problem with this picture? When I was young, I was always told that I could play when the work is done. This stuck with me as I became an adult and dove into my professional career. The problem in this day and age is that the work is never done, which means we will never get a chance to play. It took two burnouts before I decided enough is enough. I was fortunate that a mentor suggested taking an improv class because it jumpstarted my play drive and helped me to see a different perspective. Once I started playing and taking breaks to play, things started getting better. My anxiety level went down, I was able to handle challenging situations, I felt more creative, and most importantly I was having fun at my job. A lot of people believe the opposite of play is work. I say that is BS! The opposite of play is not work, it’s torture! In my opinion depriving your life of play is the equivalent of depriving yourself of oxygen. You might be able to hang for a short while, but after some time, you WILL go down. When you learn the way of the improviser, you will start playing again and I promise you that your life will get better.



# Agreements

# Agreement 1: Say Yes And

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The first rule that every improviser learns is the concept of “Yes And”. In order for improvisers to do what we do, we have to have an established agreement that we will fully support each other and build upon that. Consider it like building a house, one person puts down a block, then the next person puts down a block and over time you will have built something beautiful. This is contrary to most real-life scenarios, where we have the tendency to say “no”.

Often, subconsciously before we give the person’s offer any thought. For example, say you are in a meeting and the leader of the meeting is asking the other attendees for ideas for a big project. Typically, things go like this... One person throws out an idea, then another person responds with, oftentimes “no”, then they throw out their own idea instead. Or, if you are lucky, you might get the more passive aggressive, “yes, but...”. I personally think “yes, but...” is a polite way of saying “no”, because anything that comes after the word “but” denies anything before it. When conversations follow this path, it is exhausting and the participants feel like they are spinning their wheels, but not going anywhere. Imagine, if you adapted the maxim of “yes and...”.

Now, let’s take that meeting scenario and instead of the person denying the other person’s offer, they accepted it and built upon it. When it comes to ideas, I feel like most people think that all ideas are fully baked, when in reality, sometimes the first iteration of an idea sucks and it takes a whole team to make it great. I also feel that most people say no as a way of protecting themselves and their ideas. According to Keith Jonstone, in his book *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, he states, “Those who say yes are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say no are rewarded by the safety they attain”

# Agreement 2: Listen!

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Listening is a big element for producing good improv. Since everything we do is made up, if we are not listening and fully present, we will miss an opportunity to support our fellow scene partner and produce a good show.

You know the phrase, *“we have two ears and one mouth”, so we should listen twice as much as we talk*”. I feel most people listen just enough to get their point across and the rest of the time they are in their own head thinking of their next response.

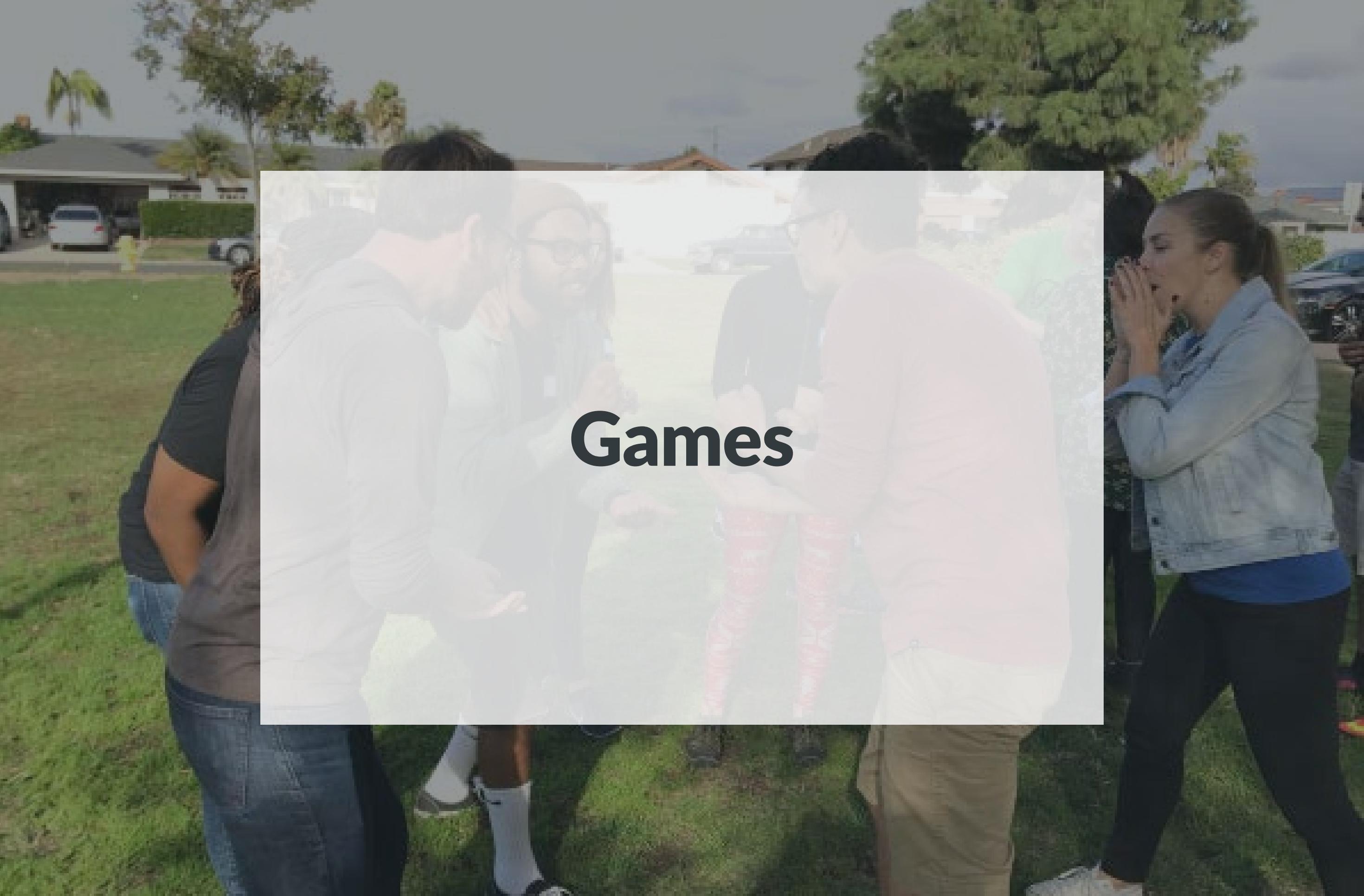
I feel listening is a full body experience. It is more than just hearing to the words that people say. It requires you to be fully present and observe everything about the person you are talking to. From their tone of voice, their eye contact and their mannerisms. The goal should be to listen to understand, rather than listen to respond. When you adapt this way of listening you allow yourself to be changed.

You will also find that you learn so much more about the person that you are talking with and you can provide more value in your response. **Pro tip: Before responding, wait one to two seconds. This will give your brain a chance to really absorb what you just heard, so you can provide a valuable response.**

# Agreement 3: Make your partner look AMAZING

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In improv, we like to say, “there are no mistakes, only gifts” and “the most important person, is everyone else”. Improv scenes that are really well done, look almost like scripted plays or sketches and leave the audience wondering if it was previously planned out. This is due to the players following the above agreement and supporting each other 110%. By doing this, the players create a bond that allows everyone to play full-out and trust that whatever happens, they have each other’s back. In real-life scenarios, oftentimes it is the opposite. Everyone is in their own heads, worried about what people are thinking about them. This often creates tension and non-authentic conversations.

A group of people are gathered on a grassy field, possibly a school or community event. In the center, a man in a grey hoodie and a woman in a black hoodie are engaged in a game, possibly a card game or a board game. To their right, a man in a pink jacket is also part of the group. In the background, there are trees, a building, and a car. On the right side of the image, a woman in a blue denim jacket is looking towards the group with her hands clasped near her face, appearing to be cheering or reacting to the game. The overall atmosphere is casual and social.

# Games

# 1. Walk - Stop

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**Objective:** Separating people from their day, clearing heads, dealing with mistakes

**Skills Learned:** Giving up control, Being ok with making mistakes

**Summary:** Have the group follow commands of the leader, then the leader will mix the commands up blowing everyone's minds

## Description of activity

- Team follows the commands from the leader to WALK and STOP. Have them walk randomly through the space, avoiding walking into each other or objects in the room. Say that out loud. It will save you some time later.
- Have them walk and stop for 3-4 times, then say, "Walk becomes stop, stop becomes walk"
- Go for about 3-4 iterations of the reversed/changed commands before you add another command
- Add in two new commands, NAME (participants shout out our first name) and JUMP (a small hop whether you are moving or not)
- Alternate commands randomly, then say, "Name becomes Jump, Jump becomes Name."
- Go for about a minute randomly alternating the four commands.
- Add in two new commands, CLAP (everyone claps together once) and TWIST (do the twist whether moving or not)
- Alternate commands randomly, then say, "Clap becomes twist, twist becomes clap."
- Go for another minute or so.

**Tip:** Emphasize that mistakes are common and are no big deal

# 2. Listen/ Respond

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**Objective:** To understand how to better relate with someone through deep listening

**Skills Learned:** Listening

**Summary:** Pairs will have a conversation with intentional pauses to enhance listening

## **Description of activity**

**Version 1:** Partner up. Partner A and Partner B. Partners must maintain eye contact throughout the game. Player A starts a conversation by saying something true about themselves. (Ex: "I'm Gary, I'm from Kansas City and my father was in the Navy"). Partner B must silently count to five, before responding to Partner A's statement. Then Partner B must say something true about themselves, and Partner A will wait five seconds before responding. Partners will alternate back and forth with making statements and waiting fifteen seconds before their response. During the pause of fifteen seconds, your brain will have a chance to absorb what you just heard so that you can craft an authentic response. After the exercise, everyone should come together and discuss challenges and how they can apply this in their real-life going forward.

**Version 2:** Similar to version 1, except this time there is no pause of five seconds between responses and when Partner B responds, the first word that they say must be the last word that Partner A just said. It doesn't matter what your response is, the point is that you are completely present in the conversation with your partner. Partners alternate back and forth for a few minutes. Group, once again, comes together and debriefs on any challenges and what they learned that they will be able to use in the real-world.

## **Tips:**

- If the group is struggling to find something to talk about you can give them a topic i.e. vacations.
- Debriefing Questions
  - When you were talking how did it feel when your partner paused before they responded?
  - What was challenging about this exercise?
  - What could you do better next time to help reiterate to your partner that you understood them?
  - What did you learn from this activity that applies to your day to day life?

# 3. Letter H

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**Objective:** To come up with more ideas

**Skills Learned:** Collaboration, Give & Take

**Summary:** Form the letter H in as many ways as possible

## **Description of activity**

Have the group get into pairs (If odd, one group of three), and spread out. Tell the group they have 7 seconds to make the letter H with their bodies. Count down from 7 then have the group FREEZE. Have the group look around and be inspired. Then relax. Tell them they now have 7 seconds to form...the Letter H... in a different way! Repeat this five or six more times.

Count down the 7 seconds immediately after saying 'go!' and after you say FREEZE have the group look around and be inspired. If they are stuck for any reason, coach them to jump into action, using all parts of their bodies. You should have capital H's first, then some will start making lowercase h's, then some will lay on the ground and hopefully some will do some outrageous things like handstands.

## **Tips**

- Tell the participants that they can make a partial offer then trust their partner to build on it.
- Debriefing questions
  - Why did we do this activity?
  - How did it feel to jump into something without knowing how it would end?
  - What strategies did you have to use to be successful at this game?
  - What did you learn from this game that you can take back with you to apply to your day to day work?

# 4. No, No But, Yes And

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**Objective:** To highlight how No kills ideation, and Yes And fosters it

**Skills Learned:** Building on ideas, collaboration, let go of self doubt

**Summary:** To plan a trip using either No, No But, or Yes And

## **Description of activity**

Have the group get into pairs (if odd one group of three), and assign one person to be Player A, and the other Player B. Player A will go first, and their objective is to do their best to plan a vacation with Player B. Player B's job is to say NO to whatever Player A offers them, no matter how exciting it may sound. Have the group start the game, and let it last for 45 seconds to a minute.

After the first round ask the Player A's how did it feel to have Player B say NO to everything that was offered. You might hear answers like exhausting, discouraging, or after a while they stopped trying. Also ask Player A's if they got very far in their planning.

For the second round it is Player B's turn. This time they will try to plan a vacation with Player A except Player A will respond to every offer with Yes But, and explain why it will not work. Have the group start the game and let it last for 45 seconds to a minute.

After the second round ask the Player B's how did it feel to have Player A say Yes But to everything that was offered. You might hear answers like frustrating, or normal because they are used to such a response. Ask Player A's if they felt like they got anywhere this round. You might hear yes as a response because Player A didn't say no, however don't let that fool the participants.

# 4. No, No But, Yes And (cont)

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For the last round they will go back and forth and plan a vacation together. Player A will start and suggest a location or activity. Player B must say Yes, And add to that suggestion. For example. If Player A said “Let’s go to Florida!” Player B might respond with “Yes, and while we are there let’s go to Disneyland.” Then Player A will Yes And that idea and vice versa. Once you start the activity let it run for 45 seconds to a minute.

After you stop the group ask them how did it feel this time compared to the previous two times. You might hear something like effortless, fun, or encouraging.

## Tips

- During the Yes And round if you hear participants saying yes but, or no encourage them to say yes and. Let them know that this is just make believe, and they will not have to actually do what was suggested.
- Also if you find participants agreeing but not adding detail during the Yes And portion nudge them to say the first thing that comes to mind.
- You might hear your participants say that they have more ideas than they can deal with. Let them know that during the ideation phase it’s important to get all ideas out no matter how silly it might sound, and build on them. Then you can prioritize them, or discard them later.
- A variation of this game can be played where instead of planning a vacation they are creating a product. To kick it off give them an objective like you are creating a product that is making running easier for elderly.
- Debriefing questions
  - How did it feel when someone agreed and built on your idea?
  - Why would someone resort to No, or Yes But? How does that block progress?
  - What did we learn during this exercise that we can apply to brainstorming sessions, or our everyday lives?

# 5. The Multi- tasking Game

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**Objective:** To highlight the how multitasking, can lead to short term memory loss, and how we naturally react in stressful situations.

**Skills Learned:** Prioritization, Giving up control, Empathy

**Summary:** One person's objective is to listen to a story told by another participant and to be able to retell the story with as much detail as possible. The other participants will be asking questions of the main participant.

## Setup

Have the participants get into groups of 5, and letter off A through E. The players will form a circle facing Player A. Player B will stand directly in front of Player A. Player C will stand to Player A's left. Player D will stand behind Player A Player E will stand to Player A's right. Once everyone is in position give everyone their roles.

## Roles

**Player A:** They will be the focus of the round. Their main job is to listen to the story that Player B is telling them, and after the time is up do their best to summarize the story with specifics. The other players will be asking questions, do their best to answer them.

**Player B:** Tell a true story from their life. When the time is up listen to Player A's synopsis and if they got 95% or more correct put a thumb up, if not put a thumb down.

**Player C:** Ask Player A addition questions. Example "1 + 1 equals?" Don't go higher than 10.

**Player D:** Ask Player A fill in the blank questions. Example "A tree is made of?"

**Player E:** Ask Player A spelling questions. Example "How do you spell Cat?" Don't go higher than four letter words.

Tell Players C - E that if Player A doesn't answer right away to keep bugging them till they answer. Also don't feel like they need to be polite they have needs.

After all the roles have been established have everyone repeat their tasks to ensure understanding.

# 5. The Multi- tasking Game (cont)

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## Description of activity

Player A starts by listening to a true story told by Player B. This goes on for 45 seconds to one minute. During this time Players C, D, & E are asking Player A questions based on the category that they were assigned. After you call time Player A must immediately summarize the story adding as much detail that they can remember. After Player A is finished Player B must score Player A with a thumbs up if they got 95% or more correct, or a thumbs down, if they got less than 95% correct. After the scoring everyone must rotate positions. Player A becomes Player B, Player B becomes Player C, Player C becomes Player D, Player D becomes Player E, Player E becomes Player A. After everyone is in their new positions you start the next round. This goes on till everyone had a chance to be in all positions.

## Tips

If you see Players C, D, & E taking it easy encourage them to pressure Player A for the answer

- After everyone had a chance to go let them know that this game is designed to simulate stress in the body, and when someone is stressed they tend to have a challenge with short term memory
- Debriefing questions
  - How did it feel to play this game?
  - Raise your hand if you got a thumbs up. What strategies did you deploy to be successful with this game?
    - You will find that people that were successful at retelling the story that Player B told often ignored the other player's requests
  - What did you notice about yourself as you were in Position A?
    - Is this similar or different from when you are in normal stressful situations?
  - Did anyone feel sorry for Player A after first being in that position?
  - What can you take away from this game that you can apply in your day to day life?

# 5. The Multi- tasking Game (cont)

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## Diagram of Setup

**B:** Storyteller

**C:** Math

**A:** Listener

**E:** Spelling

**D:** Fill in the blank



# Bonus Games

# Mirror Exercise

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**Objective:** To experience leading and following

**Skills Learned:** Give and take, letting go of control, support

**Summary:** Pairs will interact with each other as if they are mirror objects. They will take turns leading and being led.

## Description of activity

Get a partner. One person will be Partner A, one will be Partner B. Stand face to face, then for about one minute have Partner A move around and Partner B must copy them as if they are looking into a mirror. After the allotted time frame, have the partners switch places and Partner B will lead, and A will mirror for another certain amount of time. For the third round, have Partner A start moving again with partner B mirroring. But then after a certain amount of time, have Partner B take control and Partner A will copy. The pairs go back and forth with who leads for two or three minutes. Have fun with this, don't be afraid to stretch your arms, move around, open your mouth, close your eyes. The only rule is that if you are mirroring, you must follow the leader as close as possible. After all three rounds, everyone should come together to talk about what they learned and how they can use these skills in real-world situations.

## Tips:

- Remind the group to go slow at first.
- Tell the leader that if the person that is following doesn't keep up it is their fault.
- Debriefing Questions:
  - How did it feel to lead? How did feel to follow?
  - What was challenging about this game?
  - Was there one area (Leading/Following) that felt more natural to you? Why do you think that is?
  - If you were to play the game again what would you do differently?
  - What did you learn about yourself from playing this game, and how can you apply these learning to your day to day job?

# Monkey Wrench

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**Objective:** To bounce back after an interruption

**Skills Learned:** Reliance, creativity

**Summary:** The player will tell a story and their partner will say random words that the partner must incorporate into the story.

**Description of activity**

Pair up. Partner A will tell a simple, made up story. As Partner A is telling their story, Partner B will throw out random words. Partner A must take the word from Partner B and immediately incorporate it into their story. The trick is to trust yourself, and not over think. This game will help you get better at thinking on your feet.

# 185

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**Objective:** Getting over looking silly by telling bad jokes

**Skills Learned:** Confidence, communication, trust, taking risks, overcoming failure

**Summary:** The players will tell BAD jokes using the 185 joke format.

## Description of activity

This is a joke telling game that is very punny. The key to this game is confidence and delivery. Start by getting a suggestion of an object, occupation, animal, etc. Players line up or circle up, then step out when they have something for the joke. Players start with “185 ‘(earlier suggestion)’ walk into a bar. The bartender says, ‘I’m sorry but we don’t serve ‘(earlier suggestion)’ here. The 185 ‘(suggestion)’ reply ‘[insert horrible pun here]’.” After player delivers their pun, they step back into the line or circle. Another player may now step up with their own pun. After players run out of ideas for puns with this suggestion, switch to a new suggestion.

## Example

Suggestion: Cows

185 Cow walk into a bar. The bartender say, “I’m sorry we don’t serve cows here. The 185 cows reply, “That’s ok we will go to an udder bar!”

## Tips:

- Encourage players to step out even if they don’t have anything planned out.
- The players should pause after the deliver the last line before going back to their place.
- Remind players that the point of this game is having confidence in your delivery. We all know the jokes will be bad.
- Challenge the players to be even more confident in their delivery

# Pitch Game

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**Objective:** Help teams collaborate better and discover fresh ideas

**Skills Learned:** Collaboration, thinking on feet, trust, creativity

**Summary:** The participants will form groups, and will have collaborate on a pitch for a made up object

## Description of activity

The purpose of this game is to develop an advertising slogan for a made up product. This game will help players practice the Agreements of “Yes And”, Listening, and Making your Partners Look Amazing. Get into groups of 4-6. Someone starts the round by throwing out a name of a made up product. i.e. Worm Hat. Then the facilitator will ask the group a bunch of rapid fire questions such as: target audience, slogan, endorsed by what celebrity, and jingle. After someone says the jingle have the group as a whole repeat the jingle. At the end ask someone to summarize what was said by the group.

Someone in the group will respond to the question, and after each response, everyone must enthusiastically applaud to show their support, and build off of the ideas presented.

After you go one round if time permits mix up the group and go again.

## Tips:

- Remind the group that with improv there are no mistakes, only gifts.
- If you see someone answering a majority of the questions point to someone that has been quiet and ask them a specific question
- Suggest to the group if you are normally a person that take charge be more of a supporting role, and vice versa. Notice how that feels.
- Debriefing Questions
  - How did it feel to collaborate as a group on a made up product?
  - What was challenging about this exercise?
  - How did it feel to be supported for whatever you said?
  - What could you have done differently to be even more supportive?
  - What did you learn that you can take back to your day to day job.

# About Gary



Gary is a corporate facilitator, keynote speaker, aspiring coach, and self-proclaimed Creative Catalyst. Gary has over 14 years of experience in the corporate world holding various leadership positions. Being a multifaceted individual Gary also comes with nearly a decade of experience as a performer in improv theatre. After experiencing burnout in his pursuit for success and happiness, he realized that what was missing was play. Committing to a life of play is what led Gary to discover his passion for facilitating. Gary uses the power of applied improvisation and other playful methods to assist people in unlocking creativity, confidence, and better communication. When Gary isn't leading workshops or speaking, you can find him learning magic or off on an adventure with his wife Courtney and son Garrett.

## Share with a Friend

If you know someone that could use the guidance outlined in this guide, please pass it on! For more tips and practical advice designed to help you use play and improvisation to become more confident, creative, and better collaborators, check out my website [breakthroughplay.com](https://breakthroughplay.com)

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