

Tools for Inclusive Communication

Unless you're a cartoon villain, you've spent at least some time thinking about how to communicate respectfully with your co-workers. Inclusive communication is a way of engaging with your team that allows everyone to feel valued, heard, and respected. There's a huge up-side to this. Communicating this way increases collaboration, creativity, and just makes for a more enjoyable place to work. Though this may sound dry, theater provides a powerful tool for inclusive communication: improv!

Inclusive communication works well in any situation, but you'll find it especially important for minoritized populations like the LGBTQ+ community. With over 7% of the US population identifying as part of the community and over 20% of younger generations; it's likely you have co-workers who are LGBTQ+, even if they haven't disclosed that to you.

Growth Mindset

the belief that talents can be developed through hard work, good strategies, and input from others.

Psychological Safety

the shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for taking risks with each other.

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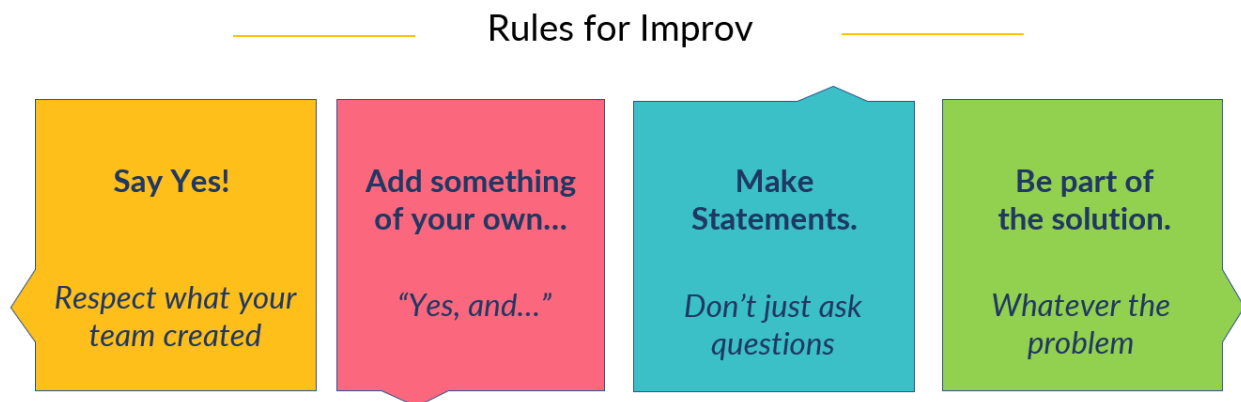
Safety First

Before we get to improv there are a few things about your workplace to consider: is it a safe place, and does your team have a growth mindset? Psychological safety means that your team feels supported if they make mistakes. This frees them to try new things. If you are in an environment where people feel belittled, ignored, or disrespected, you're probably going to find it hard to try new communication skills.

Even when you are psychologically safe you still need a growth mindset. A growth mindset is simply the belief that you can develop your skills. A growth mindset means not being afraid of being wrong, because you know you can learn more. If you can accept that you made an error you can grow; if you deny it, you don't.

Putting Improv to Work

If you have a growth mindset and psychological safety, you're ready to improv some inclusive communication. The rules of improv are:



**There are no mistakes,
only opportunities.**

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When interacting with co-workers try to find ways to support their thoughts and concepts by leading with a “Yes, and...” If someone makes a new request, consider adding an observation or idea of your own, rather than asking a question. If you see folks trying to solve a problem, find ways to join rather than take over.

Should issues arise, it's important to see them as opportunities. We all do our best to be kind and respectful, but sometimes we fall short. For example, you might accidentally use the wrong name or pronoun for a co-worker. This is an opportunity to show your co-workers that you really see them and know who they are by owning it and apologizing. It is crucial to the sense of safety that everyone knows they can be themselves and be respected. A growth mindset will help you remember in these moments that you can indeed learn and do better next time.

————— Switch Up: —————

ladies **gentlemen** **ma'am** **sir** **girls** **guys**

Consider using instead:

“Thanks, **team**.
Great work
today.”

“Please invite
your **partner**.”

“Hey, **everyone**”

“And for **them**?”

“Are you a **first-**
year student?”

————— Why? —————

Shifting to gender inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

Be expansive with language.

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One final pro-tip for inclusive communication is to avoid unnecessarily gendered terms. Remember, you may not always know the gender of the person or group you're addressing, and that's ok. A good place to start this is avoiding gendered phrases like "ladies and gentlemen," and using more inclusive language like "everyone" or "friends." Practicing inclusive communication regularly will make those moments less stressful.

