



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer

Transcript for Episode #062:

How to Use Improv to Build Creative Teams

February 2, 2017

Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 62. In today's episode, I am talking with Dr. Chris Esparza. We are going to talk about Improv and how it connects with creativity in teams. If you are new to this podcast, welcome. This podcast is all about teaching you how to lead innovation in your teams. Today, Chris is going to talk about leadership and creativity in teams and how all those connect and how Improv can help your team be more creative.

Before I bring Chris onto the show, I want to share with you a new [iTunes](#) review. This review is from KatieM13. Katie titled the review: I can't believe it took me so long to find this podcast. Five stars. She says, "The only good thing about me missing out on this podcast for so long is that I now have 60 plus episodes of awesome content to catch up on. I love that each episode is a bite-size chunk of practical insightful information on creativity." Thank you, Katie, for that wonderful review. I am so excited that you are listening to the show now!

If you have not left an [iTunes](#) review yet, please head on over and write a review. It only takes about a minute or two. It helps others find the show and it helps me realize, "Oh, people are listening, yay!" I see the stats. I know hundreds, if not thousands of you are listening to the show, so that is awesome. But yeah, if you can leave an [iTunes](#) review, I will read it on the air and give you big thanks. Thanks again KatieM13. I appreciate it.

Today, I am excited to have on the show Dr. Chris Esparza. Chris works at the University of Oregon. Chris and I met a few years ago when I was leading a leadership program for students at the University of Oregon. Since then, our paths have crossed in many ways and today you are going to hear about a cool experience that he had this last summer, about six months ago, and how it might help you lead your team to be more creative. In the conversation, Chris mentions a

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lot of resources and I put all of these in the shownotes and you can find links to all those resources at www.climerconsulting.com/062.

The other thing that I just started doing is that I now have an email that you can subscribe to where you will get the podcast episode and the blog post that I write every Thursday. I alternate one Thursday I put out a podcast, the next Thursday I write a blog post and if you are interested in signing up for that, you can go to www.climerconsulting.com and sign up for that or just shoot me an email. Go to that same website, click on the contact page, shoot me an email. I always love hearing from you. If there is something you want me to cover on the podcast that you have not heard yet, send me an email. Or if you have someone that you think, "Oh, I'd love for you to interview them," let me know. I will reach out to them or maybe you can introduce me, whoever it is.

All right, let's get on the conversation with Chris. Chris, welcome to The Deliberate Creative podcast. Thank you for being on the show.

Chris Esparza: Thank you. It is so awesome to be with you.

Amy Climer: Awesome! You recently had an opportunity to take a one month Improv course in Chicago and so we are going to talk about what you learned and how Improv can help teams be more creative.

Chris Esparza: Yes.

Amy Climer: Can you start by sharing a bit of your background, who you are, what you do and how did you get into Improv?

Chris Esparza: Oh my goodness! We could do the whole podcast on me trying to figure out who I am and what I do. I am still trying to figure that out.

Amy Climer: As we all are, right?

Chris Esparza: Yeah. Let me go way back. I will start way back. In high school, I had some friends that were in drama and they invited me to join up with a play and one thing led to another. We were introduced to Improv as a bunch of high school drama kids and we absolutely loved it. We would have parties together where we would play Improv games and so it started there. When I

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went to college, it turned out my freshman RA also did Improv and I was so excited about going to college to meet my RA because they did this thing called Improv. It launched, I do not want to say a career, but my trajectory of learning Improv started even in college where I spent four years learning, performing, and teaching Improv. In fact, my first two classes in undergrad, fall term freshman year I took an Improv class and a peer counseling class and those have turned out to be maybe some of the most influential classes I took all four years of college.

Academically, I graduated from undergrad, took a few years off and then I went to graduate school for counseling psychology, which is where my academic professional roots are. I started working as a counselor therapist here at the University of Oregon and then after about four or five years, I transitioned into leadership development and I now sit as the Associate Director of our [Leadership and Community Engagement Office](#) here at the University of Oregon. But Improv has been with me this whole way and I have never made it my full-fledged title or my number one job objective, but it has always been in the background and I have quietly, sometimes not so quietly, have worked to infuse it in my work.

When I discovered leadership, I found a bigger platform that was more amendable to introducing Improv. My latest interests have been how to fuse improvisation and leadership development. How to use Improv as a methodology to teach leadership, to teach this notion of what it means to work together as part of an ensemble. That is where I am at now and I could not tell you what the next step in that journey is. It has all been an emergent process, but I have been really grateful for the various opportunities I have had to see it through.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. Wow! Thanks for sharing. I love hearing that path and how these small classes you took your freshman year of college many years ago set the trajectory.

Chris Esparza: Yeah. I had no idea back then that either one of those classes -- they were just things I was interested in. In fact, it did come at a price. I was going to university and I was the first in my family to go to college and so my family did not really have a grounded sense of what all happens, but they knew enough that peer counseling and Improv are not the classes you should be taking to complete a degree. There was some resistance on that and there was some second guessing about I should be in math classes and science classes and English classes and these were not that.



It came at a little bit of price, but what I did know is that they really just tapped into some deeper interests that I had been wanting to follow through. And I think the fact that they had existed on a college campus sort of legitimized them for me of like, “Well, if my peers are doing it and they are teaching it and offering it, that’s got to count for something.” And so it has continued from there. My mentor/guru from my Improv college days, I still keep in touch with her. She is still very much a mentor and I am so grateful for that relationship. She wrote a book called [Improv Wisdom](#) that really captured what we learned from those four years. So yeah, I have a lot of gratitude for that experience.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. I think sometimes there is just so much value in following what you want to do and seeing what happens and letting that unfold.

Chris Esparza: Yeah.

What is Improv? [08:44]

Amy Climer: We keeping talking about Improv and I just want to maybe pause a moment before we get too deep into that and can you just explain what is Improv for those people who have not heard of that?

Chris Esparza: Really good question because I think there are a lot of different definitions of Improv, a lot of schools of thought of Improv. Improvisation, as I have been introduced to it, I think of it in the context of theater and performance. But we can think of Improv as something that happens in music, if you think about jazz performers who get on stage and essentially start improvising music together. We could also think about it in terms of athletics. If you think about a basketball athlete who is dribbling down the court and is responding to the variables that are right there in front of them without a script and makes a move one way, makes a move another way, adjust for an oncoming defender and goes up and then switches the ball to their hand, that is Improv as well.

I think Improv is this idea of how we can learn skills to help us respond when there is no script, when there is no line by line “this is how we are supposed to do something.” When I think of it in the context of theater and performance, it typically means a group of players, performers, team members who are looking to create a story together and it is in that co-creation that I



think the Improv emerges, which is making it up on the spot, if you will. It means co-creating this experience and this story and this narrative. Neither of us on stage knows what we are going to create, but we can trust that if we get there together, it will be beautiful in and of itself.

The fun part of Improv, when performed, is if you think about either musically or theatrically, we end up creating stories that have never been told before and will never be told again, these sort of isolated moments of time that because of the configuration of who is on stage or who is playing or who said what, those things will never be recreated in the same way again.

That is a longwinded answer to what is Improv, but essentially, it refers to what it means to work without a script and the schools of Improv are essentially trying to teach skills that will help us be more effective in that ambiguity. That is where I see the connection with leadership. How do we build our tolerance to ambiguity? How do we respond to ambiguity? Or the leadership field refers to these as “wicked problems” when there is no technical answer or response here, we have to feel our way through this. What are those skills? I think that is what Improv offers.

Amy Climer: I think that is where you said that is what leadership is. Leadership is not about leading when there is a clear path, but rather leading when it is like, “I’m not really sure. I know where we want to go, sort of.”

Chris Esparza: Yeah.

Amy Climer: I think that’s how creativity is as well. If you know exactly what the end product is going to be, that is not necessarily creativity. There is ambiguity throughout. I love that.

Chris Esparza: Yeah.

How Chris Took Five Weeks Off Work to Dive Deep into Improv [12:01]

Amy Climer: You took some time over this last summer and you went to Chicago for a month for a month-long class to dive deep into Improv. Can you tell us a little about that?

Chris Esparza: Yeah, absolutely ridiculous what I did, and incredible. I have been teaching Improv. I have offering workshops, training sessions, been using it in different offices, but I have not been in my own practice of Improv for a long time. I am in Eugene, Oregon and for lots of



different reasons we do not have an Improv scene where I could join a group and be in my own practice. For a while, I have been yearning and itching to be a student of Improv again and also wanting to learn from experts so that I can make my own teaching and facilitation even better.

The global capital of Improv is Chicago. Chicago is kind of the mother ship of Improv. I did some research and looked around, asked some friends about their thoughts and recommendations and one woman in particular told me about this theater, [iO Theater](#) in Chicago and she absolutely raved about the summer intensive. During the summer intensive they essentially condense the [iO Theater](#) school of thought into five weeks, classes running Monday through Thursday for most of the day. You get a different instructor each week. All these instructors are performers in their main stage theater. Then the core class culminates in a performance at the end of those five weeks. But essentially, you are learning from people who live and breathe Improv every day and the school has been many, many years in the making. At first, I dismissed it as, “There’s no way I could do this. That sounds amazing, five weeks of Improv in Chicago sounds incredible, but how would I ever pull that off?”

Amy Climer: Because you have a full-time job, right?

Chris Esparza: I have a full-time job at University of Oregon, I work over the summers and I could not imagine doing this. The person that I spoke with was also juggling other responsibilities, she was like, “You can find a way.” Part of what we did was found a way to make this happen. I spent July-August of last summer in Chicago for five weeks and it was, indeed, incredible.

The Importance of Preparation Versus Planning [14:40]

Amy Climer: Wow! Just building on that last point, what did you do to leave this job for a month? You did not quit your job, you came back.

Chris Esparza: I did. I was very nervous. There were a couple of things; I felt selfish for thinking of doing something like this. I felt like, “Wow, this is all about me and I am going to be asking people to make a lot of accommodations on my behalf, including my family because what would it mean for me to step away from household responsibilities and whatnot and also work? What would it mean to my colleagues? What would it mean for them to make this accommodation happen?”



The session was in the summer, but I think it was in November of the previous year that I had actually made the initial ask of my director. I was very strategic about it. It was not as much of an ask as a proposal. The ask was: what would need to happen for me to be able to pull this off? For better or for worse, I had a lot of vacation accrued, so I knew I had vacation, I knew that I could pull it off if this was not at all going to be considered professional development in any way, shape or form. And I was not sure it needed to be, I knew I had the vacation to cover it. Nonetheless, to still ask for five weeks off, that is a lot of time off.

As it so happens, summer is a little bit slower for us so I had that going. We had another colleague in our office who had previously taken an extended leave so I went to our director and said, "Here's what I'm thinking. Here's what it would do for me personally and professionally. I've thought this through. I am going to pay for myself to do this. For work, I'll still check in remotely." The classes were Monday through Thursday so I knew on Fridays I could use that to check in with some projects that were ongoing. I planned ahead a little bit of what would my strategy be to have a minimal impact on my staff and my office and I think that homework really helped me.

After I talked with the director, I then sent this two-page proposal to the rest of the staff saying, "Hey, heads-up, this is something I'm thinking about." So, a full six to seven months before I had even left, I was already in conversation with staff about this departure and wanting to check in with each person about what it would mean for them and our work together. I think that went a long way so by the time the trip happened, everybody knew what was happening and were excited for me because they knew how important it was to me. I never felt like there was a sense of bailing on anybody or anything like that.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. I am really glad you shared that, Chris because one of the questions that I get a lot from podcast listeners and clients that I work with is, "Okay, great. We have this creative idea, we feel really strong that it's going to work. How do we pitch that to the people we are working with?" And I think sometimes the inclination is to say, "can we do this?" Which throws out this yes/no dynamic, right?

Chris Esparza: Right.

Amy Climer: And you really thought through this, you said, "Hey, what would it take for me to



make this happen?” And so now it becomes a collaborative experience between you and your director and the people that you work with.

Chris Esparza: Right. It was more of this notion of here is what I am thinking. I think this is something that I would like to do, what concerns do you have? Because if there were major concerns that I had not thought, then those became problems to solve rather than a roadblock that was just a flat no. It was more of like what issues am I not thinking of here that I can try and address. So that, I think, reframed the problem, if you will.

Amy Climer: I hear that. Reframing is huge.

Chris Esparza: Yeah. I also say I have some cache. I have been at the university for 10 years, I have been in this office for five years and I stand by my work and relationships so I think that proposing something like this was not just out of the blue. People know that I have been teaching Improv on campus and so there was some context that I think fed into that. And I think my own diligence in terms of doing the homework before asking really paid off. But again, it started with me feeling super nervous and super selfish of like, “Gosh, I’m asking for people to go out of their way for me to just do this crazy thing.” And I think these were just some of my own fears and insecurities creeping in about like this is ridiculous. But on the other hand, it was also very exciting to be thinking in that way so I am glad I pushed through and made it happen.

The Key Takeaways from the iO Theater Course [19:38]

Amy Climer: That is awesome. Thanks for sharing that piece. Let’s go back and talk about this month-long class that you took, this five week class. Tell us, what were some of the big learnings you had from the course about Improv?

Chris Esparza: The first day, the very first lesson came from Charna Halpern, who is the co-founder of [iO](#). She provided us an introduction. There were 150 of us from all over the world who descended on Chicago to do these five weeks. She, essentially, is the mother of long form Improvisation. She opened up the summer intensive with a tip on what makes [iO Theater](#) so special. She framed it as it is the way we treat each other. And this is a refrain from all of the good Improv schools will teach this, this notion of taking care of each other, making your partner look good, building on each other’s ideas. At [iO Theater](#) specifically, she said, “It is



assumed that everyone arrives as artists, poets and geniuses and from that simple assumption comes a culture that exudes optimism, exudes inspiration.”

There were many, many lessons throughout this experience, but that core assumption was super key. It is this idea that we are going to build on a culture of affirmation, both for myself, which is to say, “Hey, I belong here because she just said I’m an artist, poet and genius. I have something to contribute.” And for others, it builds this affirmation for others that there are artists just waiting to be invited in, just waiting to be asked, just waiting to be played with, just waiting to be tapped into. So that really was a beautiful foundational piece for me that what if we were to walk around the world assuming that everyone is an artist, poet and genius? That is a fundamental shift on how I view people. So that was a big take away and really laid the groundwork for the rest of our time together. So yeah, that was a big one right there.

Amy Climer: Oh my gosh! To me, that feels so timely. It is also timeless, but just thinking of all the stuff going on politically in the world right now, especially in the U.S., and that what if we really were, in that case, presuming positive intentions about everyone?

Chris Esparza: Right.

The Connection Between Improv and Leadership [22:18]

Amy Climer: You have been back from the [iO](#) course for six months. How did what you learned impact the work you do with leadership?

Chris Esparza: I have been using that framework. It has coincided with our use of strengths and strengths-based leadership and more explicitly using Gallup Strengths Finder instrument with our students, it ties hand in hand. So, this idea of building a culture of affirmation is really this mindset or this framework. In the context of leadership, we talk about an asset-based approach, a strength-based approach which is to look at the people on your team and assume that they are working from a place of natural talent and strength rather than a liability.

Classic example I use is when we talk about strengths, one of mine happens to be empathy. I really appreciate that as a strength, but it also means that I start to judge other people based on how much empathy they have. But that is unfair if it is not a natural strength for them. So instead of just thinking of other people as, “Oh, you are just a jerk because you are not as



empathetic as me,” the artist/poet/genius or the strength-based approach would be, “Wait, what other strength is there that I am not seeing? I’m simply judging you based on what comes natural and easy for me, but it’s likely that you’re working from a different set of strengths. You’ve got some different artistry, different poetry, different genius that I have not yet connected with and/or I’m not seeing accurately.”

Starting from that, changes the whole problem from “you are in my way because you are not more empathetic” to “how can I help uncover that genius?” “What is it that I am not seeing?” And that might be reciprocal. There might be, if there is tension or conflict, that process does not work if only one of us is approaching with that mentality. It does really require buy-in from the group. I think that is where we start to blend the leadership pieces - how do I make my team look good? How do I make them look like artists, poets and geniuses to whoever it is we are serving? And in my case, it is students or administrators. And when I think about leadership, my job is not about how do I look like an artist, poet and genius, but how do I make my teammates look as awesome as I know them to be?

Amy Climer: I love that! I love that shift. And I am thinking about teams where I have been a part of teams either as a consultant or a team member where I have seen teams that do that really well and it is amazing.

Chris Esparza: Yeah, it is so fun to see.

Amy Climer: Yeah. And then I have seen teams where it is just like, “Oh my gosh! You guys have to be a bit more caring towards each other.”

Chris Esparza: Yeah. I even think we can take this into our personal relationships. If you think about partners and the value when you see two people, when you can see this notion of making each other look good, you can see that in different relationships where I think of my grandfather, he was brilliant at this. He was never a trained improviser, but I think very much improvised his whole life. Whenever I would call him, he would always say, “Oh Chris, it is so good to hear your voice. You made my day!” And he would say it with enthusiasm and authenticity and it made me feel great, and if not like, “I should call my grandfather more,” but it was like it was such a simple thing that could make his day. But I think of this idea of building me up, I loved that about him.



He exuded this sort of affirming words and his affirming tone made me happy to be there, be in that relationship with him. My job to be in relationship with someone is to reciprocate that, is to bounce that back because the relationship will falter and ultimately potentially fail when that is one-sided. If one person is exerting all this energy to make the other look good, but that is not getting bounced back, that eventually will erode. Some of us, myself included, I love making my teammates look good, but I only have so much energy. I will need to draw energy back from others from other people making me look good. That is a classic tenant of Improv, is to make your partner look good. If you can imagine a team of four or five people or even bigger where we are all focused on making each other look good, that team is capable of a lot more.

Amy Climer: I love that visual, I imagine those dynamics like okay, this is going to be amazing and they are going to do amazing work together.

Chris Esparza: Yeah, absolutely. It made me think; when you said teams I remember co-facilitating at a [LeaderShape Institute](#) with a colleague. I do not remember what exactly happened, but she tripped on something. It was just before the session was to get started and she had walked into the room and she tripped and fell to the floor and my initial instinct, which I followed, was I got down on the floor with her. I was like, “Whoops, here I am too!” And she went from this brief moment of embarrassment to just laughing hysterically. And in that small way was an example of not that I could make her look good, meaning I could not avoid her tripping, but in that moment it did not focus the attention on her tripping, but more of like how silly? We are on the floor together. What is next?

She later reflected back on how much she appreciated that where she was, in that trip, in that moment of embarrassment, not feeling alone. So that idea of making your partner look good is not just about even around our successes, but even when we trip up, to have somebody be there with us like, “Okay, I can get up now and I am excited to get up because I got a partner here who I can essentially do no wrong. They are going to be there with me the whole way.” It extends it in a lot of other ways as well.

Amy Climer: I love that example. Thanks for sharing that.

Chris Esparza: Yeah.



Improv in Not Invention [28:49]

Amy Climer: I am wondering, Chris, is there maybe one more Improv principle that you learned that might also be related to teams and team creativity?

Chris Esparza: There are two that I am thinking of in particular. One is that Improv is not the same as invention. Many of us think of Improv as learning to invent something out of nothing. However, as it turns out, I think the opposite is true. In that, what I have learned over time and certainly reinforced at [iO](#) was that Improvisation is following what is already there, what has already been established, what is the given reality that we are working within.

Maybe an Improviser that others would relate or at least identify and agree that this is a classic Improviser in action, MacGyver. [MacGyver](#) was an Improviser, in that he would take whatever was in front of him and finesse that into some lock-picking device or whatnot. It was not that he could magically invent a key, it was that he used what was immediately available to him to problem solve and outfit some new widget that could solve whatever problem that was in front of him.

I think that is key because when I am teaching Improv, one of the biggest barriers is that people really freeze and they worry that I am not funny enough, I cannot think on the spot like that, I cannot make up stuff. And I think that relates to why people freeze when we talk about creativity. That so many people see themselves as creative because they are thinking of creativity as invention and they are comparing themselves with others thinking, “Gosh, if they invented that out of nothing, there is no way I could ever do that.” But what we are not seeing is the process. What we are not always able to access is the process for how somebody got there. The product looks amazing and brilliant, but it is really the process that is the Improvisation. So that was one of the key lessons, is that Improv is not invention.

Recognition and Willingness

The second one that I think relates is that the key to group work, the key to group and team Improv is recognition and willingness. Those two words really became a mantra for me as that recognition and willingness. In Improv it is understood that noticing what is already there and accepting that reality that has been constructed up to that point, noticing the little gifts, the little

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things that somebody says, the little gestures. So instead of seeking to invent or introduce something brand new, “Here is an octopus,” when there is no octopus here, notice what was already there and using that. Our willingness manifests when we co-create what is happening here together using what we have already got so that the willingness piece is engagement, is sort of this active agreement between you and I that we are both willing to work here together with what we have got rather than relying on some invisible forces, some “genius.”

I am thinking of a book I read recently, like that genius is within us. It is not something that magically just sort of drops in on some random day. I can go on and on with that, but I think lesson one: Improv is not invention, and lesson two: this notion to recognize and to bring willingness is what unleashes the creative process. To recognize is to notice and willingness is to engage with what is already there.

Amy Climer: Wow! That is great. I appreciate your example about the octopus because sometimes when I am working with clients, there is this hesitation and they feel like, “Well, I don’t want to be creative because I don’t want to be crazy outlandish and all over the place and we have these specific goals you want to meet,” when actually it is like, yes we can meet those goals without being crazy and outlandish -- and crazy is not the best word -- but just more of like let’s use what is here and let’s use what is happening in the field and how do we build on that.

The Three Principles of Improv and How to Use Them with Your Team [33:33]

Chris Esparza: Yes. If I may, there is a book on some of these Improv principles. In fact, there is a whole group, a network of professionals around the world who are taking Improv and applying to various professional settings. I have met people working with International Red Cross who are using Improv. I have met folks working in medicine. I remember talking with a gentleman who has seen Improv work really well with Alzheimer’s patients. There is a gentleman who uses Improv with lawyers and how to teach them to use these skills of Improv. A bunch of folks across all sorts of industries have found application for Improv principles.

One of the books that gets mentioned amongst this group really simplified Improv as being about three pieces and I think for me they exist as a metaphor for how we might think of creativity as well. The three rules of Improv are these:



1. **Let go:** Let go of your agenda, let go of this fixation on how it should be.
2. **Notice more:** Which is, again, that recognition piece.
3. **Use everything.**

In some of the workshops that we do, I often will ask people to think of a time when you had to step into the unknown. Think of a time, maybe it was moving across the country or maybe it was traveling for the first time, where you were not sure how it was going to work out. In reflection, you can look back at this time and think, “Hey, everything has worked out.” We have them share that story with each other and then I introduce this “let go, notice more, use everything.” I have them go back to their story and think how did let go, notice more, use everything contribute to a successful outcome of that ambiguous transition, that move across the country or that trip you took abroad to a place you had never been to?

It is likely that you had to let go of maybe certain expectations or certain agenda for, “Oh, we thought we were going to do these five things today and then everything changed.” You had to let go or you just had to pay more attention to your surroundings. And you had to use everything. “The truck that was going to move was canceled so we ended up calling a few friends and it turns out three of our friends had trucks.” You use what is already there.

Let go, notice more, use everything. Those are the three rules of Improv and I think they fit to working in groups and creativity and really any scenario where we are facing a bit of ambiguity, none of us knows what is coming next. Are there things we need to let go off here, are there things that we need to pay more attention to and how can we make use of what is already right here rather than waiting for, “Well, if only our manager would just give us \$1,000 more dollars then everything would be great.” Well, here is what we got, how do we make the best of it? Again, that MacGyver analogy is like MacGyver could have sat around waiting for the helicopter to drop a ton of keys to get into the building, but that never happened. He had to work with what he had.

Amy Climer: Great. I love that example of like, “Oh, we just need another \$1,000. We can’t do anything until we have that.” It is like, “Wait, no, actually...” And I think that is where teams can be using creativity and Improv every single day, like every problem that they have.



Chris Esparza: Right. I think that is an interesting thing that you just said there. I would suggest that we are all Improvising every day. I have never articulated it this way, but I am wondering if we are also creative every day. What I think that you are offering and the work that you are doing and what I am hoping to introduce is a sense of intentionality behind that, that there are tools and skills. People ask like, “Well, if it is all made up in Improv, why do they rehearse?” Good question. Why are we rehearsing? Because there are skills, there are practices and principles. There is the notion of fusing together our teamwork in such a way so that we can more likely produce a positive outcome.

In Improv, we talk about the difference between preparation and planning. There may be a scenario where you have to plan what is going to happen, but we all know that the plan is going to change. We all know it is never going to go exactly that way. It is useful though, to prepare. It is useful to prepare for the various things that might happen. When you get up in the morning, we are all Improvising our day. Very few of us wake up and somebody hands us a script of like here is your dialogue for the day, here are all the lines that will be spoken by you and everyone you encounter, here is the blocking and here is the movement that you will have to do. No, we are figuring it out as we go.

We have probably prepared some things for the day, but inevitably something will change. We are all Improvising and we are all going to be forced into a situation where we have to be creative, that is we are going to have to maybe reframe a problem or shift our thinking and look at it from a different perspective. We are not always calling it Improv or creativity and thus we are not always being intentional about it. And so rather than those things happening accidentally, rather than accidental artistry, poetry and genius, what we are trying to say is I think we can increase the conditions for this. If we learned these tools or these skills or these techniques I think we will find more genius in our everyday life.

Amy Climer: Absolutely, Chris. I love that you used that word skills. Really what I am trying to do is to teach people like there are these skills around creativity. We are not born creative, we are not born good Improvisers, we develop these skills and habits and then we can be more prepared.

Chris Esparza: Yeah. I do think that the world is somewhat set up for us to unlearn our natural skills. I think children are excellent examples of this natural improvisation and natural creativity.

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Like some kids could just play for hours. They enact whole roles, they construct whole roles around them and I think our society is set up in such a way where we unlearn some of those things. I think this is, in some ways, about re-learning some of our innate talents around Improvisation and creativity.

Amy Climer: Yeah, I love it. Chris, you have given us so much already. We are running out of time. I feel like oh my gosh, we could talk for another half an hour, at least.

Chris Esparza: Yeah, totally.

The Weekly Challenge [40:27]

Amy Climer: One of the things on this podcast is at the end of every episode I like to give listeners a weekly challenge and a way to immediately start applying what we explored on the podcast. What weekly challenge will you give to listeners this week to start working on at least one of the things you talked about?

Chris Esparza: I am going to go with the let go, notice more, use everything. In a couple of different scenarios, I have been invited to take a journey or in another context it was referred to as a quest. In one scenario, it was a two-hour walk, essentially, a solo walk in Montreal with the instructions to apply an Improviser's mindset as you walk around the city. For two hours, take this idea of let go, notice more, use everything and just see what happens, see what emerges. There I was walking around Montreal, I had no idea where I was going and it was incredible what I noticed. It was incredible to see all these things that I tune out and when I am paying attention how much brighter the world becomes.

I did it again in Chicago. We did something very similar to this. We did it as a group of four where we took two hours, but for half an hour one person in the team would be the designated leader, which is to say we would follow their instinct and impulse. For the three of us following, our job was to affirm, was to say, "We are going where you are going, this is great. Whatever you need, how can we help you?" But their job was to follow this Improviser's mindset with just the sense of discovery.

So I think what I would offer the audience and your listeners is find some way, whether it is for an hour, wherever you work or live or if you could do a whole day, to try to adopt the



Improviser's mindset as a tool to explore and see something different, to see things you had not seen, to notice more. Figure out are there things you need to let go that are these mental roadblocks, just let it go for an hour or two and see what happens. Or are there things that if you see a sign and you have always wondered what is that sign for? Walk into that store. Walk into the store front and just see what is there.

Let go, notice more, use everything. I would invite folks to give that a try and go on a journey, go on a quest if it is an hour, if it is a two-hour thing. If you want to take a buddy, but whatever it is, in the next week try to intentionally deploy those rules of Improv to let go, to notice more and to use everything and then see what happens.

Amy Climer: Wow! I love it Chris. That actually sounds really fun.

Chris Esparza: Yeah, it can be a real blast and sort of it is a whole new way of interacting with your surroundings.

Amy Climer: Very cool. Thank you so much for sharing that.

Chris Esparza: Sure.

Amy Climer: You mentioned a ton of resources that I will put in the shownotes. I will definitely put a link to the [iO Improv Theater](#) and some of the books you mentioned. I am wondering if folks want to learn more about you and the work that you do, where should they go? How can they get a hold of you, if you want to share that?

Chris Esparza: Absolutely, yeah. They should go to you and listen to this podcast. I am contactable, if that is a new word, here at the University of Oregon. There is a website for the [Holden Center](#). My email should be on there. I am occasionally at a conference or two, so [International Leadership Association](#) we have been presenting on applied Improvisation and emotionally intelligent leadership and so folks may find me in that context. But whatever means necessary; phone, email, those are all available on the internet either through my University of Oregon affiliation or potentially here connecting through you in the podcast.

I am happy and always willing to collaborate and connect and share. As you have already alluded to, I can go on for hours talking about this stuff. In part, because I feel like I am on the edge of

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my own learning so these conversations are super helpful because it is one thing to have this in our heads, but when you begin talking about these ideas, they crystallize and you find a little bit more resonance of like, “Yeah, that’s what I mean,” and you find some traction and movement in there. It has been fun to talk about it.

Amy Climer: Awesome! And those of you listening, I will put the links to the [University of Oregon](#) website in the shownotes. Chris, thank you so much for being on the podcast. I really appreciate it.

Chris Esparza: I cannot believe it is over. I feel like we have only been talking for like two minutes. It is already done. This is great fun, thank you. Maybe in some future session we will actually do some Improv exercises you and I together on a podcast if you could pull that off.

Amy Climer: That would be awesome. That would be really cool. Thank you Chris so much for that great conversation. I loved talking to you. I felt like we could have kept going. Maybe we will have a part two in the future. If you want to check out any of the resources that Chris mentioned, the books that he mentioned or the organizations, you can head over to the shownotes which you can find at www.climerconsulting.com/062. Head on over there, you can click on any of the links to find the books and other resources that Chris mentioned.

If you have not written an [iTunes](#) review and you enjoyed this episode, go take a moment and write a review. If you want to follow me online, I am on [Facebook at Climer Consulting](#) and I am also on [Twitter @amyclimer](#). I post new content every week and I share it on both those feeds and so it is a great way to follow along and stay connected. Anything you need, if you have questions, if there is something you want me to cover on a future podcast episode, shoot me an email. I would love to hear from you.

Have a wonderful creative week. I will see you next time. Bye.