

# improv wisdom



Don't Prepare,  
Just Show Up

Patricia Ryan Madson

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## Improv Wisdom: Don't Prepare, Just Show Up Patricia Ryan Madson

In an irresistible invitation to lighten up, look around, and live an unscripted life, a master of the art of improvisation explains how to adopt the attitudes and techniques used by generations of musicians and actors.

Let's face it: Life is something we all make up as we go along. No matter how carefully we formulate a "script," it is bound to change when we interact with people with scripts of their own. *Improv Wisdom* shows how to apply the maxims of improvisational theater to real-life challenges—whether it's dealing with a demanding boss, a tired child, or one of life's never-ending surprises. Patricia Madson distills thirty years of experience into thirteen simple strategies, including "Say Yes," "Start Anywhere," "Face the Facts," and "Make Mistakes, Please," helping readers to loosen up, think on their feet, and take on everything life has to offer with skill, chutzpah, and a sense of humor.

## Improv Wisdom: Don't Prepare, Just Show Up Details

Date : Published May 3rd 2005 by Harmony (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9781400081882

Author : Patricia Ryan Madson

Format : Hardcover 160 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Self Help, Psychology, Personal Development, Business



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## **From Reader Review Improv Wisdom: Don't Prepare, Just Show Up for online ebook**

### **Becca says**

Because of this book... I make my bed every morning!

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### **Betsy says**

There's a lot of good advice in this pop psych/self-help book - but it is a pop psych/self-help book. I wanted more substance, more depth. It's an interesting take on pop psych to use the rules of improvisation to give life advice, but it is lite, lite, lite. (Spelling, here, is deliberate.)

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### **Kat says**

This is definitely not a typical self-help book: it's laconic, precise and not repetitive, and I found it very inspiring and full of helpful practical advice and exercises. Especially good for someone like me who is constantly making plans and writing lists and then gets upset when things (inevitably) take an unexpected turn.

For me the most important message of this book was about embracing uncertainty and insecurity and living a fuller and more colorful - unscripted - life. Which also reminds me of a Tove Yansson's (or rather her character Too-Ticky's) quote that I really like: "All things are so very uncertain, and that's exactly what makes me feel reassured."

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### **Eleonora says**

The day I was reading the first maxim, I was asked by my daughter (21 years) to take her to the university by car... usually I would have said "no, take your bus and don't bother me, please" but instead I said "ok, I will do" and it was very special to me, to see a special light in her eyes for this unexpected answer!! "just show up" was a reason to go to a meeting with people I didn't know and it was a very pleasant opportunity to meet new persons.. I have to practice very much..

To me "improv" is also not having any clues about what to do, and most of the times I had to improv I were in dramatical and sad situations, as no one taught me how to act in these moments... so it is important to remember, and Patricia said also this, that you can ask for help, as you are not alone- our time is so short that we couldn't waste it :-) and meaningless acts of kindness make our lives better. Thank you Patricia.

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### **Jacopo says**

Un manuale ben strutturato che va direttamente al punto e offre parecchi spunti di pratica per incorporare l'essenza della vita: l'improvvisazione. Personalmente l'ho trovato illuminante non tanto per i concetti

esposti, quanto per il modo in cui l'autrice ha unito i puntini del mio percorso di miglioramento personale, facendomi capire che il minimo comune denominatore delle mie ultime letture e dei miei recenti interessi è proprio il voler ritrovare la spontaneità ed essere in grado di improvvisare. I riferimenti al Buddismo Zen sono tantissimi e spesso evidenti, al punto che mi è sembrato quasi un manuale di pratica Zen — filosofia che pone grande enfasi sulla spontaneità.

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### **Katya says**

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### **Alyssa Foll says**

This is a gem of a book about improvisational acting and about principles of improv.

I wasn't reading it to learn so much about acting, per se, as I was looking for ways to apply the principles to my vocation of chaplaincy. Patricia Ryan Madson anticipates that many readers may be looking to do just that and has plenty of helpful "real-life" examples.

An enjoyable, quick read.

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### **May-Ling says**

there's so much wisdom in these 160 pages, and although it may sound improv-focused, the content really applies to your whole life. what's great about this book is that ideas are simple and concise, really packing all of the author's thoughts into the fewest words possible - it's an efficient book.

i especially love how "just show up" is in the title, as madson says a lot about how being in the room and also full present already goes a long way towards getting somewhere. i think back on this week at work already and look at how many colleagues show up 5 or 15 minutes late when the meeting has already started, or people are on their phones instead of in the room. the simple maxim of focused attention on collaborative activities goes a long way towards the success of achieving something as a team.

i'm not really a book buyer and carry my library card everywhere i go, but these ideas are worth revisiting time and time again. we lose our way with the busy and distracted nature of living life in america. it's a work i would pick up again to refresh my thinking in a few years.

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### **Melissa McGowan says**

This book is a wonderful introduction to the philosophy and methods of Improv. The author clearly

illustrates how anyone can benefit from applying these methods to their personal lives. The concept of just saying yes, which is the key to improv, seems so simple. However, it can also be profoundly transforming. I highly recommend this book.

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### **Jane Stewart says**

Not what I expected. This is more about adding variety and enjoyment to your life.

She gives suggestions like go to bed 1 hour earlier, get up 1 hour earlier, walk a different way when going someplace. For one day smile at everyone you see. Say thank you frequently and with details. Mistakes are good.

My favorite improv rule is say "Yes And." Don't say "Yes But." Also don't say "No." I heard that before I read this book, and I was hoping for more ideas like that, which I did not get. I was also hoping for a lot of examples from improv skits. I only remember one example, but there may have been more. The example I remember was about the value of making "mistakes." The skit was a group of nuns. One of them was named Sister Agnes. A guy knocks at the door and asks for Sister Agnes. The girl says I'll go get her. Then she realizes she was Sister Agnes, so she says something like "Oh I forgot, that's me. Sometimes we nuns all look alike."

I do not recommend this for someone who wants to learn about improv on stage. I see it as how to open yourself up to new things in life. I might have given it more stars if she added a lot of skit examples.

#### **AUDIOBOOK NARRATOR:**

The author narrates her own book. She was a good reader, but her accent had an interrupting effect, not bad but it was there. I kept wondering what it was when she said words like Stuart, student, and our.

#### **DATA:**

Unabridged audiobook length: 4 hrs and 55 mins. The book is 160 pages. Swearing and sexual content: none. Book copyright: 2005. Genre: self help psychology.

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### **Tim Holme says**

The first half is good, and inspiring as it hits the high points of improv -- say "yes", for example. That's the best tip in the book, and unfortunately, I already knew it, so I didn't find much new here. And the second half of the book loses its way into the self help pathos, which was a downer after the excitement of the beginning.

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### **Deb says**

\*\*Living well = Improvising wisely\*\*

Ohmygoodness. Is this book ever a gift!

I actually checked this book out of the library a few years ago, and life happened, and I never got a chance to

read it before it was due. But then, the Universe sent me a gentle reminder (thanks, L!) that this wisdom was just what I needed to read. Right here. Right now.

Right on.

Just looking at the book's table of contents (which has an uncanny overlap to my own working draft of How To Do Life) was soul-jolting:

1. Say yes
2. Don't prepare
3. Just show up
4. Start anywhere
5. Be average
6. Pay attention
7. Face the facts
8. Stay on course
9. Wake up to the gifts
10. Make mistakes, please
11. Act now
12. Take care of each other
13. Enjoy the ride

Needless to say, I was enthralled with every line of this book. (And, the spaces in between.) The author does a remarkable job in illustrating how the same principles that make for good improv, also make for good life. Life, after all is a series of improv acts, and although knowing the basic script is helpful, knowing how to be flexible, focused, forgiving, and yes, funny, are the ingredients that ultimately matter most.

In an effort to preserve this book's wisdom in eternal space (the next closest thing being this space here on goodreads.com), I'm going to include the key points that the author makes for each of the 13 maxims above. Hopefully, they'll also encourage you to get your hands on your own copy of this wise, wise book:

1. Say yes (p. 34)
  - \* Just say yes.
  - \* Become a "can do" person.
  - \* Look for the positive spin, for what is right.
  - \* Agree with those around you.
  - \* Cultivate yes phrases: "You bet"; "You are right"; 'Good idea"; etc.
  - \* Substitute "Yes \*and\*" for "Yes \*but\*." Add something to build the conversation.
  - \* Exercise the yes muscle. This builds optimism and hope.
2. Don't prepare (p. 44)
  - \* Give up planning. Drop the habit of thinking ahead.
  - \* Attend carefully to what is happening right now.
  - \* Allow yourself to be surprised.
  - \* Stockpiling ideas for future use is unnecessary.
  - \* Trust your imagination. There is always something in the box.
  - \* Welcome whatever floats into your mind.
  - \* Fear is a matter of misplaced attention. Focus on redirecting it.
3. Just show up (p. 52)

- \* Walk, run, bike, skip to the places that you need to be.
- \* Motivation is not a prerequisite for showing up.
- \* Start your day with what is important.
- \* Use rituals to get things going.
- \* Showing up to help others is already service.
- \* Change your vantage point and refresh your mind.
- \* Location, location, location--in real estate and in life.
- \* Be on time for the sake of others.
- \* Show up on time for yourself. Lost time is never found.

#### 4. Start anywhere (p. 59)

- \* All starting points are equally valid.
- \* Begin with what seems obvious.
- \* Once it is under way any task seems smaller.
- \* When speaking in public don't use a script. Write down questions and answer them.
- \* Talk to your audience. Don't give a lecture.
- \* Trust your mind.
- \* Edit and develop ideas \*as\* you speak.

#### 5. Be average (p. 66)

- \* Close enough is perfect.
- \* Dare to be dull.
- \* Think "inside" the box.
- \* Celebrate the obvious.
- \* What is ordinary to you is often a revelation to others.
- \* Remember "classics" or "favorites" can be fresh ideas, too.
- \* Don't make jokes. Make sense.

#### 6. Pay attention (p. 76)

- \* Life \*is\* attention.
- \* Notice everything, particularly the details.
- \* Become a detective.
- \* Shift your attention from yourself to others.
- \* Make an effort to remember names and faces.
- \* Keep on waking up.
- \* This moment only happens once. Treasure it.
- \* Avoid multitasking. Attend to one thing at a time.

#### 7. Face the facts (p. 83)

- \* Don't fight reality.
- \* Accept other people as they are.
- \* Work with what you have been given.
- \* What \*are\* the facts? You are probably not noticing all of them.
- \* Embrace the wobble.
- \* Insecurity is normal. Count on it.

#### 8. Stay on course (p. 88)

- \* Every improvisation has a point.
- \* Don't let feelings alone run your show.

- \* There is meaning in everything we do, even small tasks.
- \* Keep an eye on where you are going. If you miss the target, adjust your aim.
- \* Ask often "What is my purpose?"
- \* What would not get done if you were not here?

#### 9. Wake up to the gifts (p. 102)

- \* Notice that the glass is half full.
- \* Treasure the details.
- \* Who or what is helping you right now?
- \* Make a point of thanking those with thankless jobs.
- \* What are you doing to give back?
- \* Keep the gift moving forward.
- \* Our smallest actions count. Everything we do has the potential to help others.
- \* Make "thank you" your mantra.

#### 10. Make mistakes, please (p. 113)

- \* If you are not making mistakes, you are not improvising.
- \* Be like a turtle: stick our your neck to make progress.
- \* When you screw up, say "Ta-dah!" and take a bow.
- \* Mistake? Focus on what comes next.
- \* Let go of outcomes. Cultivate a flexible mind.
- \* Mistakes may actually be blessings.
- \* Become a confident mistake-maker. Lighten up.
- \* Try bricolage--use what is there artfully.
- \* Admitting a mistake shows character.

#### 11. Act now (p. 122)

- \* The essence of improving is action.
- \* Act in order to discover what comes next.
- \* You don't need to feel like doing something to do it.
- \* Schedule a difficult task and stick to your timetable.
- \* Invite a buddy to join you in doing what you need to do.
- \* Do the hard things first.
- \* To find a new perspective, try doing something a different way.
- \* Sometimes \*not doing\* is what is needed.
- \* If you can't get out of it, \*get into it\*.

#### 12. Take care of each other (p. 136)

- \* Be someone's guardian angel. Make your partner look good.
- \* Rescue or join someone struggling.
- \* Share control; don't hog it.
- \* Kindness is essential during chaos or a crisis.
- \* Try giving yourself away.
- \* Always put positive thoughts into words and action.
- \* Do "random acts of kindness."
- \* Put other people's convenience ahead of your own.
- \* Listen as if your life depended on it.
- \* Deliver more than you promise.

### 13. Enjoy the ride (p. 143)

- \* Find joy in whatever you are doing, including ordinary tasks.
- \* Look for ways to play. Play is essential to human growth.
- \* Learning is enhanced when we lighten up.
- \* Laughter is good medicine.
- \* If something is not to your liking, change your liking.
- \* Give away smiles every day.
- \* Do something just for the fun of it.

Perhaps a slight edit to Shakespeare's quote is in order:

All the world's a stage, and all the women and men merely improvisors.

May we all improvise wisely!

(With this 20-years-in-the-making book serving as the sage that sets the stage.)

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### **Santhosh Guru says**

A good, non-intimidating intro to the principles of Improv. In a very applicable wisdom, the author breaks it into entertaining and consumable chunks. This definitely lays foundation for me to tackle the works of Keith Johnstone and others.

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### **Peter says**

Improv wisdom, by Patricia Ryan Madson, is a delightful book that invites the reader to apply 13 basic principles (or “maxims”) of improvisation to our daily life situations. While clearly rooted in the tenets of improvisation, the book also reveals subtle influences of Eastern thought including Zen and Yoga which, like improve, guide us to be fully focused in the present moment, and direct our thoughts and energies towards harmony, collaboration, and kindness. The maxims are:

1. Say Yes
2. Don't Prepare
3. Just Show Up
4. Start Anywhere
5. Be Average
6. Pay attention
7. Face the Facts
8. Stay on Course
9. Wake up to the gifts
10. Make Mistakes, Please
11. Act Now
12. Take Care of Each Other
13. Enjoy the Ride

While these maxims could be considered trite or obvious, Madson does a beautiful job using stories, quotes and historical references, to flesh out the deeper truths behind each. Perhaps more importantly she offers a

number of “Try This” practical exercises in each chapter which help ground the truth of the material in the actual experience of each reader. There is much wisdom to be had in this relatively slim volume, and Madson’s compassionate, human, and humorous voice makes it a thoroughly engaging and enjoyable read.

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### **Scott Wozniak says**

This isn't really a book about improv. It's a life philosophy inspired by improv principles. Mostly, it can be summed up as relax, say yes more often, be okay with mistakes, and be present in the moment. It's not bad advice in general. It isn't particularly powerful and it certainly isn't original.

She most often quotes other Zen thinkers, along with a few other sources. She shares her story (from careful rule follower to free spirited improv teacher) and it's both relevant and fun to learn.

It was well written. Maybe I'm skewed because I have a lot theater training in my background, but I was underwhelmed with the depth of insight.

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