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## ICFNE November Newsletter Article

### Coaching From The Moment: Creativity and the Art of Change

By  
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You're in the middle of a coaching call and you notice you're feeling stuck, flat, or stymied. Or maybe you're feeling at the top of your game, but you sense that something important is missing.

Have you ever yearned for better access to your creativity and spontaneity as you search for ways to inspire and motivate clients? Do you want to bring more passion, presence, and confidence to your work? Do you sometimes find that you get triggered by certain "characters" or behaviors that "push your buttons" or "hook you"?

If you're nodding yes to any of these questions, your *inner improviser* may be itching to get out! And you might want to consider learning the skills of improvisational acting and applying them to your coaching work.

Before you read further, do you hear a voice in the back of your mind saying:

*"Improvisation? Acting? That sounds scary...That's not me...I can't do that...and what does improvisation have to do with coaching?"*

If you're thinking some variation of that theme, you're not alone. This is a common response. And by the way, if you were able to imagine these thoughts as a "voice" or inner character, you just did an improvisation. We're all doing improvisations everyday from the moment we get up till the moment we go to bed. Even our sleeping dreams are improvisations. No matter how much we plan ahead and outline agendas -- every interaction, conversation, and relationship is an improvisation. The coaching process is also an improvisation. But even though we're improvising every day, we can get better at it. Like yoga, golf, or any other discipline, improvisation in life has a specific skill base that can be learned, practiced, and honed. The more we practice, the more facile we become, and the less we fall into counterproductive old habits.

I've been teaching improvisation classes and coaching people from all walks of life for over 25 years. During that time, I've had the pleasure to work in dual professional careers as an actor & director as well as a creativity coach & organizational consultant. People from virtually every profession come to my workshops and individual sessions -- including corporate executives, engineers, psychotherapists, managers, artists, doctors, writers, educators, lawyers, consultants, and life coaches.

When I first speak to someone about the training, I often hear one of two things:

*"I feel out of touch with myself and kind of stuck...My creativity feels dead...I want to loosen up, be less self-conscious, get more spontaneity...I want to be more comfortable in my own skin, especially when I'm up in front of people...but this whole idea of taking an improvisational acting class makes me a little nervous -- I've never done this before --I'm not an actor...can I really do this?"*

Or I hear:

*"Yippee! I'm excited! When do we get started! I want to break out of my routines and have fun!"*

Usually, I find that people are experiencing both of these sets of feelings simultaneously as they consider taking a leap into a new experience. I've also noticed that their initial reticence is invariably an echo of their "Inner Critic." This has led me to develop many exercises designed to help people harness the creative energy of these pesky and persistent "Inner Critics." After the workshops, participants consistently report that they've found a renewed sense of freedom, self-expression, and energy.

Improvisational actors and coaches actually have a lot in common: They are *change artists* who invite people into a journey through the unknown toward a series of goals. They both need to find ways to creatively build upon whatever is presented to them. Each are challenged to overcome resistance and obstacles, and they do best with a spirit of *yes* instead of *no* when faced with unexpected curveballs. They both need to be savvy about how their own personal issues and blind spots might unconsciously inhibit their choices, perceptions, communication, or trust in themselves or others. *Coaching, like improvisation, is the art of change.* Master improvisers and master coaches take risks, listen with emotional intelligence, and rely on their creative imagination. They instinctively build strong collaborative relationships. They have passion, empathy, a spirit of adventure and a healthy sense of humor.

Improvisation techniques help coaches strengthen their ability to be in the moment as they listen and respond. One coach recently told me that improvisation has helped her overcome the tendency to "over-analyze or process everything intellectually" during coaching sessions. Improvisers need to trust their moment-to-moment intuition as they allow their deeper impulses to rise to the surface. When you're improvising, you don't find much success if you try to figure everything out ahead of time. One of the basic improvisation ground rules is: Respond spontaneously to what is happening rather than to your expectation of what you *thought* would or should happen. Coaches need this same trust in their intuition, which offers a pathway to their wisdom.

Improvisational dexterity and creativity are synonymous -- each one leads to the other. When we develop our ability to improvise, our access to creativity in every area of life increases. We gain greater awareness about the personal stages and universal cycles of our creative process, and this understanding can become an important guiding light in our coaching.

Periodically, we need to clear away the waxy buildup that collects around our thinking in order to revisit the original vision that led us to the path of coaching. As we reconnect with that vision, one thing is for sure: We all need to return to the creative well regularly, to rejuvenate ourselves and fill our own inspiration buckets. I have found in my work over the years that *the most vital ingredient for avoiding burnout and attracting success is the cultivation of a vibrant relationship with our creative self.* Our creative process is a laboratory for the expression of our greatest potential and the fulfillment of our life purpose. Our success relies upon our ability to think outside the box, take risks, adapt to change, and invent new solutions. In other words, we need to become great improvisers!

The cross fertilization of my two careers prompted me many years ago to develop a variety of exercises, workshops, and training programs designed to help life coaches and other professionals learn the skills of improvisation and apply them to their work and life. I also created techniques and practices that help coaches cultivate a dynamic relationship with their creative process in order to bring more presence and vibrancy to their coaching. Many coaches have attended my *Improvisational Acting* classes as well as my *Your Creative Process* workshops, which began as an outgrowth of my book *"Changing Patterns: Discovering the Fabric of Your Creativity"*, co-authored with Wren Ross.

I am delighted to be coming to ICFNE on November 5 where I will be offering a presentation entitled *Improvisation, Creative Process, and Coaching: The Art of Change.* We will be exploring many of the ideas I have written about here and I will be offering many practical tips and tools for you to bring to your coaching practice.

I hope to see you there!

Daena Giardella

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Daena Giardella is an actor, creativity coach, teacher and author. She is frequently invited to give keynote presentations as a motivational speaker and humorist. She has dual backgrounds in the performing arts as well as in organizational development and coaching. Daena has worked with many prominent companies as a communications consultant, media coach, and executive coach. She recently gave an advanced training in *Negotiation Improvisation* for the *European Commission* in Brussels. She also custom designs original

performances to fit the themes and goals of conferences, annual meetings, and other events. Daena was featured as a creativity coach on *The Cheryl Richardson Life Makeover Show on Oxygen TV* and she also appeared on the *PBS* series *Discovering Psychology*. Her numerous one-woman performances have garnered kudos and enthusiastic responses across the USA and abroad. Daena's new comedy-drama, called *"What Can I Say?"* explores the life of a harried radio talk show host who is dealing with her inner voices of censorship, a micro-managing boss, and her fear that she might be a closet misanthrope.

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