

# THE “DING! HAPPENS”

## Self-Training and Application Guide

A simple but in-depth instruction guide on understanding, developing, and applying the skills from Avish’s “Ding! Happens” keynotes and workshops



## About the Author

Avish Parashar is quite possibly the world's only Motivational Improviser. He uses his 24+ years of experience performing, teaching, and studying improv comedy to show organizations and individuals how to improvise, adapt, and innovate in an ever-changing world.

Avish's expertise is in instilling a flexible and innovative mindset in individuals and organizations who want and need to think quickly, adapt to change, and increase creativity and innovation.

He is also the author of two books (Improvise to Success and Say, 'Yes, And!') on applying improv comedy skills to business and life and leads the Business Innovation Accelerator group mentoring program.

You can learn more about Avish at [www.DingHappens.com](http://www.DingHappens.com)

# Before You Start

## Goals of this Guide:

1. **Understanding.** By reading this you should understand the critical skills that lead to great improvisation, on stage and off.
2. **Development.** Each skill will share techniques you can use to practice it and improve it over time.
3. **Application.** For each skill, there will be an exercise or activity you can do right away, or at least within the next day or two, to apply the skills and try them out.

## This is Not a Comprehensive Guide:

1. **This is just a starter.** Performing improvisation and applying improvisation are big topics. There are so many principles and ideas, a short guide would never be enough to cover them all. Consider this a primer.
2. **This is the foundation.** Just because this is a streamlined guide, it doesn't mean you won't get value. In fact, the goal of this guide is to accelerate your path by having you focus on the key skills that will give you the maximum return and improvement on your improvisation.



## This is More About Mindset than Tactics:

1. Improv is a reflex. The ultimate goal is to get to a point that when “ding” happens, you respond in an improv style automatically, like you would with any other reflex. That’s a mindset that develops over time with repetition and practice.
2. Improv comedy ideas are about mindset. Because improv is very cerebral, the techniques will all be taking place in your mind. The key to developing great improvisation is to retrain some of your neural synapses, so you can respond in a specific way. It’s all in the head, less in the tactics.
3. That being said, the immediate application pieces of this guide are the tactics. In the short term you can apply these techniques even before they have become ingrained in your mindset and before they have become a reflex. You’ll have to think through them in practice, but you will be able to apply them right away in a tactical sense.

## This Takes Time to Develop:

1. Don’t expect immediate results. Any habit takes a long time to develop. So give yourself the time to practice. And be patient with yourself.
2. Think of it like a habit. If you are trying to develop any habit, you would need about 66 days to make it stick. So be willing to give yourself the time to get good at this.
3. The more you work it, the faster it goes. If you only refer to this guide once every couple of days, and apply the skills every so often, it will take you a long time to get good. If you make a conscious effort to consistently work on it every day, potentially even multiple times a day, you’ll see the skill develop much faster.



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# THE SKILLS

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# 1. HAVING FUN

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Having fun simply means enjoying what you do. It doesn't mean goofing off, being silly, not thinking, or not taking things seriously. It simply means that you find joy in what you do. Either you do things that you already love, or you find ways of adding fun and joy to the things you are doing.

## Why this is important for improv comedy

1. **Being funny:** The name is improv *comedy*. It's supposed to be fun and entertaining.
2. **Connecting:** An audience likes to watch people who are clearly enjoying what they are doing. You improve your ability on stage as a performer when you allow yourself to have fun. It helps you connect with the audience.
3. **Improving creativity:** The more fun you are having, the more creative and playful the ideas you come up with. If you doubt this, consider how ridiculously creative children are when they're playing "make-believe" and having fun.
4. **Warming up:** In my history of running improv shows, I've found the fastest way to make sure our show was good was to get everyone having fun as a warm up beforehand. That was the greatest delineator as to whether the show would be successful.



## Why these skills are important off-stage

1. **Connecting:** In the same way an audience likes to watch performers having fun, the people you interact with want to be around people who are enjoying themselves, having fun, and being positive. If you bring that energy to a relationship, it will improve the connection.
2. **Improving creativity:** Even though we're not children, we can still use having fun as a way to come up with new, better, and improved ideas.
3. **Increasing mojo:** By mojo, I simply mean engagement. Mojo is that sense that you are doing what you like, what you love, and that you're motivated to do it. When you are having fun, you get that sense of mojo and motivation. Too many people go through the motions at work, not enjoying it. If you want to have some excitement and energy, focus first on having a little more fun.



## How to develop it

1. **Change the questions you ask yourself.** The mind is very responsive. If you ask, “What is horrible about today?” you’ll get answers. If you change the question to, “What is fun about today?” or “What could I do that would be fun today?” your mind will find answers to that instead. You can control your fun and mood just by changing what you ask yourself.
2. **At the end of the day, ask yourself, “What was fun today?”** This is a great end of day reminder. At first, you’ll be shocked at how many nights you will struggle to come up with an answer. If you start doing this on a regular basis, it will condition you the next day to start looking for fun, so when you ask yourself, “What was fun today?” you will have a clear, solid answer.
3. **Set a “Ding” reminder.** The hardest times to have fun are when “Ding! Happens” – when something goes wrong. Those ruin our sense of fun. Set a reminder – whether it’s a card you carry with you, a post-it you put on your computer, or a rubber band you strap around your wrist – so when ding happens, it will remind you to try to find something to do to have a little fun. It will remind you not to avoid the problem, but rather to open up your creativity so that you can be better at solving the problem.



## How to apply this right away

1. Pick an activity you have to do in the next 48 hours that you don't want to do.
2. Change the self-talk you use when you think about it and when you talk to others about it. Switch from seeing the negative to finding the positive.
3. Find ways of changing the activity. Obviously, if the task has to be done, you can't change the core essence of it. But can you change it by collaborating with a friend on it, or listening to music you like while you do it, or turning it into a competition? Whatever is going to make it fun for you, there are ways you can use to improve doing the task.
4. Warm up. Just like my improv group would warm up before a performance, you can warm up before taking on an activity you'd rather not do. So instead of going into that activity dreading it, start out by doing something that activates your sense of fun, motivation, and excitement, and then jump right into the activity that you think is not fun.



## 2) BE WILLING TO FAIL

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Being willing to fail simply means that you understand that there's no guarantee of success. And while you don't want to fail, you take action, letting go of the fear of failure. You approach it from the mindset of, "I will do my best and see what happens." Failure is not okay. It has consequences. However, the *fear of failure* does nothing but hold you back.

### Why this is important to improv comedy

1. **Preventing failure:** Improv is wrought with the possibility of failure. Because we don't have it preplanned, you don't know what's going to happen, and you don't know how the audience will respond. There's always a chance of failure. The performer who is afraid of failure will ironically do the worst.
2. **Avoiding paralysis:** When we are afraid to fail on stage, we try to play it safe and not take any strong actions, which basically keeps us stuck. By being willing to fail, we keep moving forward. We keep the action moving in an improv scene.
3. **Risk and reward:** The improv performers who reach the highest heights of success are the ones who are willing to risk failure, because they know that when they take chances, they also have the greatest opportunity for success.
4. **Starting point:** Because improv is an art form where we develop the material as we are performing it, the best performers realize that failure is often just a starting point. If you try an idea or say a line that fails, it's not permanent. You just pick up from that point and move in a new direction. You never would've had that new direction had you not risked failure and taken that action. So in this way, we reframe failure as just another starting point.

## Why this is important off-stage

1. **Analysis paralysis:** Action is better than over-analysis. So many people don't get started on a project or small task, a goal, or even their dreams because they want to have it all figured out first. However, by risking failure and taking a little action, you will make faster progress and learn more than you possibly could by spending weeks, or even months, trying to figure it all out sitting at your desk.
2. **Risk and reward:** In the same way as performers, the greatest rewards come to those who take calculated risks. This is not about being stupid, but it's about realizing that if you never stick your neck out and risk messing something up, you're probably never going to get anywhere.
3. **Developing a growth mindset:** Studies show that people with a growth mindset tend to succeed and advance the fastest. This simply means that when you reach failure, don't look at it as an ending point, but rather as an opportunity to learn. The opposite of this is a fixed mindset where people believe their skills are set. So any time they fail, it is a judgment on them. As a result, they avoid situations where they fail, and don't give themselves the opportunity to shine.



## How to develop this

1. **Fail at something small and safe – but not too safe.** You don't need to tackle this principle by taking the biggest project in your life and trying to mess it up. But you don't want something where there are no consequences if you fail, because you want to develop the ability to deal with failure. So pick something small like maybe speaking up at a meeting or trying a new recipe for someone who is a little critical. Try an activity in public that might lead to a tiny bit of embarrassment. You have to find the one that works for you, but by conditioning your mind to take on small risks and being willing to fail, you start developing the right mindset.
2. **Change the language you use around failure.** We make failure so huge in our minds, often because of the language we use. We'll say, "Oh, if we mess up, it will be a disaster." What if we changed that language to, "Oh, if we mess up, it's going to be inconvenient"? Little shifts in our language can take the pressure off and make us more willing to take action in the face of failure.
3. **Do the "What's the worst that could happen?" exercise.** So often, we are afraid of failure because we don't have the perspective on how small the risk actually is. So when you need to take an action, take a piece of paper and write down, "What's the worst that could happen?" and start listing potential consequences. Be realistic, but really flow through it. Then ask yourself, "How realistic is it that any of these things will happen?" And then ask yourself, "What would I do if these realistic things *did* happen?" This then creates a plan for you to respond to failure, which makes it easier for you to take the action.



## How to apply this right away

1. Take an activity that you are nervous about doing or worried that it won't work.
2. Do the "What's the worst that could happen?" exercise around this.
3. Write down how you currently talk about this and think about it, and then write replacement text that you can rehearse and replace in your head.
4. Find a small action that moves the project forward. Make it big enough that you're a little afraid of messing it up, but small enough that it doesn't feel overwhelming. Then take that action and see what happens.



## 3) CREATIVITY

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Creativity, as a skill, is simply the ability to create. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with artistry or performance. It is something we all do every day. In fact, we were all amazing at this when we were children. We just, over time, have cut ourselves off from our creativity.

### Why this is important for improv comedy

1. **Improv is pure creation:** Since nothing is preplanned, improvisers use their creativity from start to finish through the entire performance.
2. **Freedom to flow:** When you have access to your creative resources, you are much more willing to change direction and go with the flow. You work with your partners because you understand and trust that your creativity will give you great content no matter what you do. It makes you more willing to take chances.
3. **Greater joy and fun:** There's a concept called "creative self-expression." The basic idea is when you are expressing your creativity, what's truly inside of you, you really tap into a part of yourself that most people never tap into. This leads to tremendous satisfaction, fun, enjoyment, and engagement. One of the reasons I've kept doing improv for the past 25 years is the rush I get when I am truly creating. For the audience, this rush translates into increased attention, excitement, and enjoyment from being in the presence of creation and someone who's in that flow.



## Why this is important off-stage

1. **Problem solving:** The most direct use for creativity off stage is brainstorming and problem solving. The more creative you are, the more ideas and potential solutions you'll come up with.
2. **Innovation:** To me, innovation is simply applied creativity. The more ideas you can come up with, the more potential innovations you can implement. Also, because innovation is a messy process, the more creative you are, the easier it will be to adjust and improve your innovation and make it truly applicable.
3. **Mojo:** In the same way that creative self-expression leads to fun on stage, the more you are tapping into and using your creativity in your day to day world, the more mojo, momentum, and motivation you will have to do what you need to do.



## How to develop it

1. **Pre-write:** Take three blank sheets of paper and just start writing. It doesn't matter what you write. The important thing is that the pen never stops moving. By never letting the pen stop, even if you're just writing, "I don't know what else to write," or "This is stupid," you will be tapping into your creativity. Try this exercise. You'll be surprised at some of the ideas that pop out of your head, especially when you get to page number three.
2. **"What if":** When it comes to creative writing, one of the cores for creating novels, movies, TV shows, etc., is to start with the question, "What if?" This is a great way to let your mind be creative and throw ideas around in your head. This could be fanciful, like "What if I traveled to the moon?" It could be very practical, like "What if I applied for a new job?" The key here is not the question so much as your willingness to let that question be a launching point to let creative ideas flow.
3. **Old task, new way:** One of the most powerful ways of practicing creativity is to find new ways of doing things. Take a process that you do, but that you feel is a waste of time or could be done better. Then ask yourself, "How would I do this if I couldn't do anything I'm currently doing?" If you had to do something in a completely new way without relying on anything else that you have ever done before that worked, how would you do it? This will direct and force your creativity, and by practice and exercise, you will be amazed at some of the new ideas you come up with.



## How to apply this right away

1. Pick a problem that's been bothering you for a little while and write it down on the top of a piece of paper.
2. Free write a list of solutions. You're basically brainstorming, but the difference here is that you're never going to let the pen stop. You'll write down ideas that are stupid, impossible, and you know won't work. You're not evaluating, you're just dumping. Write down at least 30 ideas, ideally more.
3. Circle any that have even a tiny bit of promise. You're not looking for a fully formed solution. You're just looking for a starting point.
4. Take an action on that idea right away. It could be small, but just try it and see what happens, and then evaluate.



## 4) FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

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In improv, as in life, there are many things out of your control. The only thing you can control is your response to everything that happens around you. Ironically, so many people spend so much time focusing on and paying attention to everything out of their control.

### Why this is important for improv comedy

1. **Improv is an unpredictable art form:** There's no way of knowing, much less controlling, what's going to happen. The energy you put into worrying about what you can't control takes away from working on what you *can* control.
2. **Everyone is making things up as they go:** Your partners are using their creativity just as much as you are. If you try to control them, you are stifling *their* creativity and limiting *their* fun, potential, and mojo.
3. **It improves response time:** Improv is very much about speed. The more time you spend focused on things you can't control, the less time you have to respond. There's less energy and attention on your response, which means you'll respond less powerfully and more slowly.



## Why this is important off-stage

1. **Reduces stress:** If you think about the most stressed out person you know, chances are they spend the greatest amount of time focusing on things they can't control – like things that happened in the past, what might happen in the future, or what someone else is thinking. To reduce stress, just focus on the things you can control. It gives you a sense of autonomy and helps you stop worrying.
2. **Productivity:** The most productive people in the world simply focus on what they can do *right now*. If you just keep your attention on the things you can control, you will consistently take action and move forward. The more time you spend focused on things you can't control, the less energy you have to put into getting things done now.
3. **Adaptability:** Being nimble, flexible, and adaptable is an increasingly important skill in our ever-changing world. When you focus on things you can't control, it makes you upset, stressed, and rigid. When you focus on what you *can* control, you realize that things are going to change and not work the way you expected, and you will be able to respond to it the best you can. This is the definition of adaptability – simply responding to everything that goes around you by focusing on what you can control, and doing the best you can.



## How to develop it

1. **Create a mantra:** A mantra is simply a phrase that you repeat to yourself over and over to refocus your mind and energy. For example, use the mantra, “Focus on what you can control and let go of the rest.” Then when something happens that frustrates you, stresses you out, worries you, or is not what you planned, by repeating that mantra, it forces you to refocus on what you can do.
2. **Practice asking, “What can I do right here, right now, with what I have?”:** All we have is this moment. Your entire reality is right now. By asking this focusing question, you force your attention on the only thing you can control, which is your actions in this moment.
3. **Delegate and accept the results:** This is going to be hard for some people, but you cannot control what others do, even when they’re doing something you want them to. In fact, the greatest stress for both of you comes when you try to micromanage and control. Start practicing this idea by delegating some tasks. It could be a work task, it could be a home task, but delegate it out to someone – a coworker, a family member, your assistant, a contractor, etc. Then accept whatever results they create. If they do it in a way you wouldn’t do it, accept it. If the result is not exactly what you had wanted, just accept it. Now, in some cases, you might have to fix it and that’s fine. But again, you fixing it is simply saying, “I’m going to do what I can, which is fix it.” Practice letting go of worrying about how they’re doing what they’re doing, and just focus on what you can do.



## How to apply this right away

1. Pick one task and delegate it. Don't delay on this. When you get good at this, it will make your life much better in the long run.
2. The next time ding happens to you, ask the focusing question, "What can I do right here, right now, with what I have?" and repeat your mantra until you find yourself able to focus on the only thing you can control.



## 5) BEING PRESENT

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Being present is a powerful idea from the world of improv comedy. It simply means, when you are on stage, rather than thinking about what your next idea or response will be, or worrying about anything going on off the stage, (with the audience, or backstage) you put 100 percent of your attention on being in this moment, *on* the stage, connected with your partner. You're not thinking ahead, you're not thinking behind, you're just there in the moment.

### Why this is important to improv comedy

1. **It helps you connect with your partners:** When you are this present, you are able to put all of your attention on listening to your partners, and being there with them. This creates a tremendous connection and synergy between the performers.
2. **It allows you to gauge the response from your partners and the audience:** Because we are creating as we go, as improv performers it feels like a series of experiments. When you are wrapped up in your head about other ideas, you may completely miss whether your ideas are working or not. When you're right there in the moment, it gives you the ability to get the feedback from your partner and the audience, which helps you decide what your next step will be.
3. **It helps avoid rigid thinking:** When you are present, you are not thinking ahead and pre-planning, which allows you to be very flexible. Since you aren't worried too much about your future plan, you are able to be in the moment and respond. When we are not present, and thinking too far ahead, no matter what curve balls come our way, we are going to be very rigid, and try to stick on the same path, which is the opposite of adaptability and improvisation.



## Why this is important off-stage

1. **Being present is what allows you to really listen to and connect with your partners:** Whether it's teammates, your staff, customers, family members, etc., being present puts your attention on *them*, lets you listen to *them*, and makes them feel connected to *you*.
2. **This mindset makes it easier to flow with the unexpected:** Things are constantly changing in our world. By being present, we're able to put all our attention on understanding, analyzing, and adapting to the change – not like the preset improviser, who adheres to a rigid plan and tries to stay on the same path.
3. **Lowering stress:** Being present is a very Zen, meditative type idea. The whole point is to empty your mind and be very focused on this moment. Because your mind is quiet, it calms you down and lowers your stress. Think about it. When you're stressed, your mind is probably racing and you're not connected to the moment.



## How to develop it

1. To develop the skill of being present, try using simple meditation. Nothing fancy. Just sit in a chair, close your eyes, and focus on your breathing for a few minutes. If thoughts come up, don't get upset, just try to let them go.
2. When in conversation, quiet the little voice in your head that is formulating a response while the other person is talking. By simply quieting that voice and putting all your attention on the other person, you are connecting and being very present with them.
3. Go for a "noticing walk." Simply go out in the morning, in the evening, or on your lunch break, and walk around your area. The key here however is, rather than throwing on some headphones, or letting ideas race in your head about things you have to do, just focus on noticing everything you see and hear as you walk around. The people, the trees, the cars... Noticing is a byproduct of being present. So, by practicing this type of walking, you're forcing yourself to be present in the moment.

## How to apply this right away

1. The next time you're in any kind of negative conversation — an argument, listening to someone complain, talking to someone with whom you disagree — apply this mindset. Turn off the voice that wants to argue back and just be present and listen.
2. When you're struggling with an issue or a problem, rather than continuously banging your head on your desk, take five minutes and try simple meditation, or go on a noticing walk to get yourself back to being present, so you can open up your creativity and attack the problem in a new way.



## 6) STEP BY STEP ACTION

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Step by step action simply means that rather than waiting until we have an entire plan figured out, we just take one step, see what happens, make an adjustment, and then try again. It's okay to have a rough plan, and it's a good idea to have a goal. But it's about being flexible along the way, and moving things along one step at a time. Think of it as an experiment, rather than execution. With execution, you're following each step precisely. With experiment, you're taking steps just to see what you can learn and how you can change and improve in the future.

### Why this is important to improv comedy

1. This is how improv comedy is created, one step at a time: I say something on stage, and then my partner says something. I respond to that and take the next step.
2. This allows collaboration. If I'm truly moving step by step, then I'm just simply going to give one idea, and then I'm going to let you give an idea as the next step. Then, we both build off of that. This way, I'm truly working with you and collaborating to create comedy.
3. This opens up your creativity. Because we're moving one step at a time, we are consistently being forced to use our creativity to come up with the next idea. Rather than having a rigid plan, which turns our creativity off, our creativity is constantly flowing, which opens up the greatest possibility for mojo, excitement, innovation, and problem solving.



## Why this is important off-stage

1. This creates collaboration. Rather than me coming up with a plan and forcing everyone else to implement it, I'm increasing investment and collaboration by moving step by step and having everyone participate.
2. It gets things going sooner. The world is getting faster and smaller. We don't have time to sit around and wait for everything to be figured out. Taking small steps gets you moving, while others get stuck in analysis.
3. It lets you adjust and improve as you go. So often we don't know what we don't know. By moving step by step, we're able to continuously tweak and improve what we do. So, where we end up may be different than where we thought we were going, but it will almost always be better.



## How to develop it

1. **Practice stepping into uncertainty:** When you are uncertain about an idea, try to switch your mindset from, “Let me have it, I’ll figure it out” to “Let me just try and see what happens.”
2. **Change how you argue:** When you’re disagreeing with someone, try switching your mentality from, “How can I convince them of my point?” to “How can I build off their idea?”
3. **Let an unexpected result be the springboard for creativity:** Often when something doesn’t work out the way we expected, our first thought is, “How can I go back and change what I did to get the result I wanted?” And that’s fine in many cases. However, to really open up your creativity in these situations, ask yourself, “How can I build off *this* result?” or “How can I use *this* result to make something even better?”

## How to apply this right away

1. Pick a goal or project you have been dreading, procrastinating on starting, or don’t really want to do.
2. Take one step to move that project forward, and then take a minute to analyze what happened.
3. Consciously think about whether you should continue taking that action, or whether you need to adjust and slightly change what you’re doing. Then, repeat, repeat, and repeat.



## 7) YES, AND

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The concept of “yes, and” is fundamental to the world of improv comedy. It simply means that in every moment, you have the choice of responding with either “yes, and” or “yes, but.” “Yes, and” is a stronger, more collaborative, more creative response.

### Why this is important for improv comedy

1. **“Yes, and” improves collaboration:** When I’m working with someone on stage, if I reply to what they’ve said with “yes, but”, I am blocking their idea and stopping their progress. When I say, “yes, and”, I am accepting their idea and building off it, which improves collaboration.
2. **It opens up creativity:** When I say, “yes, but”, I am staying in my comfort zone and blocking whatever new idea might be out there. When I say, “yes, and”, I essentially have to step out of my comfort zone, which forces me to be creative. And that will generate new ideas – which is the heart of great improvisation.
3. **It forces flexibility:** “Yes, but” is a sign of a rigid mindset. If my partner has an idea I don’t like, I can say, “Yes, but I want to stick to *my* idea.” However, saying “yes, and” forces me to veer off my original path and be flexible and adaptable. I’ll end up in a brand new place, which if I’m doing it correctly, will be better than where I originally wanted to go.

## Why this is important off-stage

1. **This improves relationships:** We all hate hearing “yes, but.” It’s disrespectful and makes us feel like the person isn’t trying to understand and listen to us. If you can start responding to people with “yes, and” or have a “yes, and” mindset, you will immediately improve your relationship with them.
2. **It creates a positive culture:** Can you imagine what a work environment would be like if a team always started by responding to each other with “yes, and” instead of “yes, but?” It would be a positive, collaborative, and creative environment which would be a joy to work in.
3. **It promotes action and ideas:** “Yes, but” is the language of not doing anything – of excuses, denial and blocking. When we say, “yes, and”, we’re saying, “Yes, I like that, and here’s what we can do.” Or, when responding to something negative, it could be, “Yes, this bad thing happened, and here’s what we (or I) can do about it. “Yes, and” is a forward moving mindset that’s going to get you taking action, implementing ideas, and moving things ahead.



## How to develop it

1. **Pay attention to yourself:** See how many times you say, “yes, but”, either literally or just in spirit. This means you are stopping progress, not listening to other people’s ideas, or trying to stay in your comfort zone.
2. **Start saying “yes, and” to yourself:** You don’t need to immediately start saying it to everybody else. But just in your head, start responding with “yes, and” and see how that would change the dynamic of the conversation. When you start saying it out loud, until you understand the nuance, you may feel like you are constantly giving in and getting run over. Take baby steps (refer to skill #6).
3. **Pick a small number of people to start using “yes, and” with:** Practice on some low hanging fruit – people you see semi-regularly who won’t necessarily take advantage of you or run rough shot over you. But choose people, who you tend to disagree with and find yourself “yes, butting” a lot. See how you can change the relationship by saying “yes, and” out loud or responding in a “yes, and” way.



## How to apply this right away

1. On a sheet of paper, make a two-column list. On the left side, list your “yes, buts.” Most people have a bunch of them which they commonly use pretty consistently. So, start by identifying what those are for you.
2. On the right side, write out some more positive “yes, and” responses you could use instead of those “yes, buts” you typically say.
3. Practice swapping these responses over the next few days, so you’re responding with “yes, and” instead of “yes, but.”
4. Try for 24 hours internally saying “yes, and” to everything – every single idea that’s put in front of you – just in your head so you can start seeing how things might be if you use “yes, and” instead of “yes, but.”



## 8) QUICK EVALUATION

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So often, people hem and haw about making a decision, and when they finally make a decision, they spend an inordinate amount of time wondering if they should have made a different choice. Quick evaluation is about making fast decisions and letting go of all the other choices we didn't make.

### Why this is important for improv comedy

1. **You can't always say the first thing that comes to your mind:** When you're performing improv, there are different audiences. And not everything that pops into your head is appropriate for every audience. Although with creativity, it's very powerful to develop the ability to say the first thing that pops in your head, an improviser who can perform well for every audience needs to be able to quickly evaluate and decide without ruining their creative flow.
2. **Dig deeper than initial ideas:** Nothing kills a comedy show as much as popping out a cliché or saying something totally expected. Surprise is at the heart of comedy. So when you're creating in the moment, the first idea that comes to you will probably be the most obvious one. And if you go with that obvious response, it will often lead to something that's not super creative, or not very funny.
3. **This improves the speed of response:** I found that people who get stuck not being able to think quickly on their feet really get stuck when deciding or letting go on stage. They either come up with multiple ideas and can't make a decision on one of them, or they come up with an idea, decide that it's not worth pursuing, but then find themselves unable to stop thinking about that one idea. Not being able to make that quick evaluation paralyzes them on stage, and they're unable to perform.

## Why this is important off-stage

1. **This is how you avoid analysis paralysis:** More time is lost from indecision than anything else — even more time than taking an action you eventually realize was not the right way to go. So by making a decision, even if it ends up not being the right one, you keep the ball rolling.
2. **It opens up room for new ideas:** When you are struggling to make a decision, you have multiple ideas in your head that stay there until you decide. Once you decide and let go of the other choices, you have room for new ideas to form.
3. **It improves focus and productivity:** Again, time is wasted and lost while not making a decision or not moving on from a decision that has already been made. To improve your focus and get more done, get in the habit of making strong decisions, letting go of the other choices, and moving forward.



## How to develop this

1. **Start by practicing with small decisions:** Again, you don't need to pick the biggest, most challenging thing in your life. Start with something simple like, deciding what to order at a restaurant. There are people who sit there staring at a menu and can't figure out what to order. And then, when they finally do, they lament, "Oh, I should've gotten *this*." Simple decisions like that are a great place to start practicing making quick evaluations and letting go.
2. **Catch yourself looking backward:** Whenever you find yourself looking back and second guessing yourself – "Should I be doing this or should I have done that? – catch yourself, and then make a commitment. Are you going to reevaluate that decision or are you going to stick with the decision you've made? It's not horrible to go back and reevaluate a decision if you're doing it intentionally. But if you're just getting lost in doubt, you're only wasting time and energy.



## How to apply this right away

1. Pick a decision you have been putting off, and make the decision right now. We all have things we need to decide, big or small. Make the decision right now.
2. If necessary, set a calendar reminder to reevaluate the decision later on – maybe one or two weeks from now. The entire premise of this guide is about how to be flexible. So I'm not suggesting that you make a decision now and stay married to it for the rest of your life (unless of course, the decision was to get married!). What I'm saying is you need to let go. When your reminder comes up, sit down and take a very strategic look at the decision you made and ask yourself if it was a good decision. Should you keep on this path, or should you adjust? The challenge however, is for you to not second guess the decision until that calendar reminder comes up. That gives you the freedom to really put your attention on implementation, and not get bogged down in doubt.
3. Write down one decision you have made that you still look back on and doubt or regret. If you can't change that decision now, if you can't change your course, then do whatever you need to do symbolically to let go of regretting or doubting the decision. For example, you can cross it off your list, write it on a piece of paper and crumple it up, or you can symbolically burn it (just be safe if you do that).



# How Avish Can Help

Avish has a variety of ways of working with organizations. If you would like to bring the ideas of “Ding! Happens,” creativity, improvisation, adaptability, and “yes, and” to your team, department, association, or company, consider having Avish:

## Speak at Your Annual Meetings

Presenting these ideas to a large group of people in a short period of time (45-90 minutes). Avish’s presentations are fun, engaging, interactive, motivational, and designed to open-minds and get people started down the path of adaptability and innovation.

## Train at Your Workplace

Working hands-on with a smaller group of people for a longer time where the focus is on skills-transfer. Giving your team the skills and practice to implement these ideas in the real world.

## Mentor Your Business Leaders

Avish leads the “Business Innovation Accelerator,” an 8-week online group program that is a deep-dive into the ideas of his program. The focus of the program is on applying and doing, so attendees not only learn the ideas in depth, but also take meaningful, consistent action throughout.

# Contact Us Now

To get started creating a more creative, agile, and innovative organization, give us a call (484-366-1793) or send an email to [avish@avishparashar.com](mailto:avish@avishparashar.com).

Check out our website, [www.DingHappens.com](http://www.DingHappens.com) to see results our other clients have enjoyed.

