Use of Improv to Engage Clinicians in Communication Skills Training

Presented by

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Objectives:
1. Participants will recognize the purpose and value of improv techniques in facilitating experiential communication skills training.
2. Participants will be able to identify facilitation strategies for future application in communication skills training.

Schedule:
10:15-10:35 Introductions & overview of the principles of improv
10:35-11:15 Participate in Improv Exercises
11:15-11:30 Q&A, Wrap up

Background:
Effective communication is vital for improving the safety, quality and experience of healthcare. Clinicians must practice and reflect on communication skills to become more effective using them. Communication skills facilitators have recognized that learning is often accelerated in a safe, supportive environment that fosters participant spontaneity and honesty. Actors who practice the art of improv engage in regular and deliberate exercises that foster spontaneity, honesty, and more effective listening, communication, and team building skills. As such, many improv techniques are being incorporated into training a multitude of professions.

We have incorporated the use of improv exercises throughout our foundational and advanced communication skills curriculum at a large academic medical center as an innovative technique to further engage adult learners. Preliminary data will be shared regarding the effectiveness of improv in the courses we offer.

Improv Exercises
1. **Paired Conversations** - e.g., “Yes but, no, Yes and”
   - Instructions – Pair up with someone next to you. I’m going to give you a topic to discuss for no more than 1 minute. As you converse, every sentence except the first should start with “yes, but...” Ready? I’d like you to discuss your favorite vacation spot.
   - Now, staying with the same partner, I’d like you to discuss your favorite dessert. This time, every sentence except for the first starts with “no,...” Go ahead and begin.
   - Alright, last one & then we can discuss it, I’d like you to discuss sports. This time, every sentence except for first, starts with, “yes and...” Go ahead and begin.
   - Debrief – Which was easier? How come?; Summarize learning points of group
2. **Rip Van Winkle aka 300 Year Gap Conversation**
   - **Instructions** – Pair up. I’m going to give each pair a modern day item. Both of you may look at what the item is, but one of you will be from today and the other will be an intelligent person who has been asleep for 250 or 300 years. The person from the present will have 3 minutes to explain the item to our Rip Van Winkle in terms that s/he will understand. Rips - Help the person explaining things know what you don’t understand.
   - **Debrief** – Rips, what did you hear? Is this something you’d like to have? People of present day, what was your experience? How does it feel to hear back what you told someone? All, how does this relate to the real world?

3. **Story Exchange**
   - **Instructions** – Each of you is assigned a #. Pair up. Take turns telling a story from your life, Must be true, no more than 60 seconds, and from any aspect of life (e.g. recent or childhood). Listener – no questions or interruption. After each has turn; exchange cards.
   - **After time is up:** Now pair up with new person (making sure you haven’t seen their number yet) & repeat the process. Tell story JUST HEARD in 1st person; REPEAT with the same words, gestures, & inflection.
   - **Debrief** - How did we do? Which elements were easiest to recall (e.g., facts, feelings, or intentions)? What was your experience of listening to the stories? How did your experience change when you knew you’d have to repeat the story?

**References:**

**Additional resources can be found online at:**

Cleveland Clinic Center for Excellence in Healthcare Communication: [healthcarecommunication.info/](http://healthcarecommunication.info/)

Medical Improv: [www.medicalimprov.org/](http://www.medicalimprov.org/)

Mayutica: [www.improvdoc.org](http://www.improvdoc.org)