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Improv Wisdom: Don't Prepare, Just Show Up



Patricia Ryan Madson



Synopsis

In an irresistible invitation to lighten up, look around, and live an unscripted life, a Stanford University professor and master of the art of improvisation explains how to adopt the attitudes and techniques used by generations of musicians and actors. These secrets are currently being taught to entrepreneurs, engineers, and first responders in a crisis as well as housewives and Alzheimer caregivers. 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 Ryan Madson distills 30 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.

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Customer Reviews

The title may mislead some, thinking it's about drama, improvisation, written for and about actors. While that may be one audience, it's really a book about modern business and leadership. It's also a very personal book about living a full life and making a difference in the lives of others. I picked up the book about a week ago, I've read it twice, I know I'll keep coming back to it. It's appealing on so many levels--the plain spoken thoughts, the inspirational examples and stories, the practical

exercises to try things out for myself (Already, I've had a few Ta-Dah moments ;-). To say it will change your life is a little too much and probably not what Ms Madson has intended. To say it's a tool to help you change your own life--should you choose to show up is more appropriate. Kudo's and thank you to Ms Madson!

Ã In Turning Pro, Steven Pressfield describes an exercise from Improv Wisdom and says that this book is on his short list of indispensable books. Of course, I got it immediately. Anything that makes that list is something I'm going to read. :) And, here we are. Improv Wisdom rocks. So does Patricia Ryan Madson. Patricia is an Emerita of Stanford University where she taught for three decades in the Drama Department. She integrates the wisdom of two primary, extraordinary teachers/philosophies: Keith Johnstone's Impro goodness + David Reynolds' Constructive Living mojo. "A good improvisor is someone who is awake, not entirely self-focused, and moved by a desire to do something useful and give something back and who acts upon this impulse. My students wanted to know the password for joining the society of such people, to play fearlessly, and to work with greater ease. Here is the password--it is yes! Understanding the power of yes is easy; practicing that acceptance and affirmation in daily life becomes our challenge. I'm writing to encourage you to improvise your life, please. I want you to take chances and do more of the things that are important to you. I'm hoping that you will make more mistakes, laugh more often, and have some adventures... What is missing in your life? The paperweight on my desk challenges me to ask the bumper-sticker question: What would you do if you knew you could not fail?" What would you do? As improvisors we discover we don't need this unrealistic guarantee to begin. The only real failure is not doing anything. Why not explore, get moving on your life, kick-start your dreams, paint outside the lines? This book will provide inspiration and practical suggestions. Try them." ~ Patricia Ryan Madson from Improv Wisdom. This book is a down-to-earth, inspiring, quick-read featuring the thirteen maxims of improv living. It's packed with Big Ideas and practical exercises (Patricia calls them "Try this!" and they're great). Here are the thirteen maxims: say yes + don't prepare + just show up + start anywhere + be average + pay attention + face the facts + stay on course + wake up to the gifts + make mistakes, please + act now + take care of each other + enjoy the ride! To find 250+ more reviews visit <http://bit.ly/BrianReviews>

In his book, Turning Pro, Steven Pressfield references Patricia Ryan Madson. I love Steven Pressfield and I was intrigued by the title of this book, so I ordered it. I enjoyed every page, and even went back and re-read many sections. I love the playfulness of the approaches the author

advocates, particularly those that fly in the face of the messages we are so often bombarded with that lead us into a futile search to try to be perfect and unique. Using Patricia's methods has already helped me to take the pressure off myself, allowing me to try things my perfectionist tendencies would have had me shy away from or procrastinate doing to the point of complete avoidance. The results have been illuminating, and the experience freeing. I can't thank her enough for writing this wonderful book!

While the reviews for this book mention Patricia Ryan Madson's involvement with improvisational theatre, I was more familiar with her work as a teacher of Constructive Living - a Western adaptation of Japanese psychotherapies by clinician David K. Reynolds. Reynolds' aim is to help his students learn to live a fully present, action-oriented life in a world where problems are just as inevitable as successes and suffering just as much a part of life as joy. "Improv Wisdom" is actually closer in vein to a Constructive Living text than a book geared for improvisational theatre: the focus is not just on theatre, but on making the most of life no matter what one's circumstances. In Madson's words, this is "Saying Yes!" to life. Even just the IDEA that our lives are fully improvised - that we're making it up as we go along - can be a truly life-changing concept for many of us who have been brainwashed into micromanaging and planning every detail of every moment of our careers, family life and even our leisure time. Reynolds' classic *Constructive Living* (Kolowalu Books) is still in print. It is a concise, elegant little book that has provided me much help that I highly recommend. Madson's work, however, takes a creative and fascinating departure. Being a clinician, Reynolds' approach was aimed at outgrowing one's emotional obstacles, and while this emphasis certainly appears in "Improv Wisdom" (see in particular, Chapters 5, called "Be Average", and 12, called "Take Care of Each Other"), Madson's incorporation of Keith Johnstone's work on reawakening to spontaneity results in an approach that truly inspires an appreciation for every second of life. Like Reynolds' book, "Improv Wisdom" is realistic, engaging and extremely energizing to read. As a whole, Madson has a more joyful, exciting tone that is a welcome counterpoint to Reynolds' hard-edged pragmatism. The two books complement each other well. Some of the chapters are particularly refreshing: Chapter 1 ("Say Yes") thoroughly has the potential to open one's life up in surprising ways; Chapter 6 ("Pay Attention") wakes one up out of the trance of autopilot and self-absorption; Chapter 10 ("Make Mistakes, Please") is a welcome antidote to the art of not only making mistakes, but learning to use them in creative ways. There is a lot of important insight in this book that will improve one's relationship with life itself. It would make a wonderful graduation present as well as a great read before a trip. I read it before a yearly camping outing along the

Potomac River. It completely subverted my tendency to obsessively plan activities for every minute of the day and allowed me to be present and spontaneous in ways that I hadn't been since I was a child. My friends appreciated the change as well, as I was also more open and present for them than before. Highly recommended on its own, or as a compliment to Reynold's "Constructive Living."

I have given a dozen copies to my children and grandchildren because the book says so many of the things parents wished they had told their children.

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