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How to Harness the Power of Positive Collaboration

Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness.

– Carl Jung

In the beginning, it was dark. Literally, we couldn't see a thing. There we sat – Frank Ford, David Wilk, Troy Grant, and David Ahearn – in a dingy, rundown apartment. The electricity had been cut off, and so too had our dream of the future. Hours earlier, three of us (Ford, Wilk, and Grant) had been fired from a comedy club where we had worked for two years for little to no pay to bring an essentially unknown comedy club from obscurity to a citywide hit.

But that night, we were asked never to come back. Ahearn, for his part, had one month earlier walked away from a career in stand-up comedy due to his own issues with management. On the surface, this might sound like a cast of whining, unemployable troublemakers who just couldn't get along with the powers that be. But there are two sides to every story. And this is our story of how a few Happy Accidents and the power of the philosophy of “Yes, and” changed our lives and led us down a path that might sound almost too good to be true. As comedians, the four of us would go on to create one of the most successful improvisational shows in the country.

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But in this dark room on this rainy night (yes, it was a dark and rainy night; the pun is not lost on us), we were exceptionally close to the unemployment line and a hell of a long way from the president of the United States. And you know what? We were genuinely scared. The thing we all loved the most was taken from us, and nothing makes you feel more disempowered than when something you love so much, that is so dear to you, is snatched from your very grasp. It's awful.

We have learned quite a few truths since that night, one of which is a tenet of improvisation: we don't know where we're going; we only know where we've been.

We didn't really know this at the time, but where we were going was somewhere divine. It would lead us all over the world performing comedy. Yet for the moment, we were a ship out at sea without a captain, without a compass. And it was storming outside. No kidding, it was really raining hard. The windows in the apartment were not weather-treated, so it was storming on the inside of the room as well. We were waterlogged.

If you've ever been fired from a crappy job, then you know it's even less fun to be fired from a job you love to do. There we were, a group of unemployed friends sitting around a darkened, furniture-less apartment with no prospects in the world of entertainment. It's very hard to see the future when it's so dark, and the lack of lighting made it next to impossible to see anything.

Darkness, in the figurative sense, can either be a great motivator or it can destroy one's hope. In the literal sense, it can cause bruises on your shins from bumping into things, which we would have been doing this dark night had we been able to afford furniture. In our case, being broke and almost destitute saved our shins a lot of agony.

The great thinker Carl Jung once said, "Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness, and the word

happy would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness.” Spoken like a true philosopher.

George Carlin, also a great thinker, once said, “Some people see a glass as half-full; some see a glass as half-empty. I, on the other hand, see a glass as twice as big as it ought to be.” Spoken like a true comedian.

That’s one of the great things about being a comedian: the ability to see everyday things from a different perspective and make something uniquely funny out of it. At this point in our careers, the glass wasn’t just half-empty, it was broken, and the wine had stained the existing stains on the 20-year-old carpet. Life was a bit of a mess. But a mess can sometimes lead to great things.

Getting Into Comedy 101 ---

It’s very easy to get started in performing comedy. Want to tell some jokes? Simple. Just hop up on stage during an open-mic night somewhere, make sure to invite every friend you have, and rest assured you’ll be an enormous hit – the first time you perform.

The next ten performances, after you’ve worked your way through all your friends, will be painful. The silence you hear will be your constant reminder that the road to success in comedy is a long one.

All of us started as stand-up comedians, and on many a night we would take to the stage without one person in the audience. On these nights, a well-known comedy club owner in Dallas would tell us to hop right on that stage and perform. In show business, as in life, the show must go on, and on those nights when no one was there to see us perform we plodded on. This is the industry equivalent of research and development.

This brings to mind a very famous story about the legendary artist Pablo Picasso. One day, Picasso was sitting with a friend and the friend asked Picasso if he would draw him a picture on a cocktail napkin. The friend even offered to pay Picasso for the picture. Picasso, being the artist that he was, quickly scribbled a beautiful picture on the cocktail napkin in less than a minute. When he was finished, he handed the picture to his friend and said, “That will be one million dollars.” The friend was exasperated. “One million dollars! It took you less than a minute to draw that.” Picasso smiled and then said, “Yes, but it took me thirty years to learn how to draw it that fast.” Becoming an artist or an expert at a craft takes a lot of time and dedication, and often rewards in the form of payment take a long time to materialize.

In our case, when we are asked how we were able to be paid so well for doing something we love to do we always respond, “We aren’t being paid for only this show we are being paid for all the shows where we didn’t get paid that made us this good.” Becoming an artisan at anything takes time and most times the financial rewards don’t come until years later when mastery has occurred.

Now let’s say you want to improvise? Simple. Just get a group of people together, take a group headshot, print some flyers, and schedule a time when the local coffee shop will allow you to ply your trade. In both instances of stand-up comedy and improvisation, it helps if your audiences are a little drunk. It greases the wheels for your lack of experience.

The point is that to get into comedy there’s literally no criteria. People at work think you’re funny? Good enough. Are you a hoot at your family reunion? Done. Can you make the waitress laugh at the local Applebee’s? Here is the mic, have at it.

A person doesn’t need good grades, references, or any proven track record to get started. Anybody can do it, so everybody “thinks” they can do comedy well. But that doesn’t

mean a person shouldn't try. One has to believe they're capable of anything and not let choices in life be dictated by fear.

Look at the case of the aforementioned George Carlin. There were two distinct Carlin personalities that arose throughout his career. In the 1960s, Carlin was doing much more mainstream comedy, such as the "Hippy Dippy Weatherman." His comedy was by all accounts safe for television audiences, and he made a very good career of performing in that manner.

As Carlin grew as a performer and became more authentic, a new voice arose that changed a generation. Carlin became a hysterical voice of dissent. The amazing thing about all of this is that it didn't happen until Carlin was almost 40. This is evidence that we can and should continue to grow throughout our lives. We may have several different career shifts, and this is what makes life so exciting: the prospect of pursuing new avenues that are brought to us when we least expect it.

When our improvisational comedy group, Four Day Weekend, conducts a workshop and we ask a group of adults to raise their hands if they can paint, about a third of the hands go up. Notice that we don't ask, "Who here paints very well?" The interesting thing is, if we ask a group of children the same question, all of the hands go up.

That's because life hasn't beaten out of children the possibility of being, doing, and accomplishing great things. Children have a belief that anything is possible, and in fact they will collaborate with other children to make anything possible. As adults, we lose our faith that anything is possible, and our willingness to collaborate with others diminishes.

Only as an adult do we question our ability to be good at something. We're afraid of being told no or looking stupid. Our greatest fear is that we will look silly or dumb in front of our peers, and this paralyzes us from taking chances in our lives. Our fear prevents our creativity because we would

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rather sit on the sidelines and have the perceived acceptance of our peers than to take a chance at greatness on the off-chance that someone may judge us. We like to call this the *prevent defense* of creativity. Take no chances, get no grief. Avoid humility or rejection.

At what expense, you might ask? Creativity and progress. Imagine if Steve Jobs had been too frightened to take the chance to change the way we communicate using mobile devices. Congressmen would have to send pantless pictures of themselves via snail mail. It would take ten times the amount of time for their careers to implode!

But it's important to remember that all great innovation comes from one brave person bucking the opinion of the masses in favor of creative genius. We all have this possibility within us – if we only have the courage to follow our own authenticity.

This is what George Carlin did when he cast aside his sure-fire act that continually pleased the masses in favor of comedy that was much more challenging and insightful. It takes a brave person to move against the tide of public opinion, but those who do stand the greatest chance of personal fulfillment.

In our craft, improvisation, we strike the word *no* from our vocabulary, and there is no such thing as looking stupid or dumb. It doesn't matter how we look. Can you imagine a world where everyone felt like they could do anything? Imagine what could be accomplished. Anything is possible! Need more money? You got it. Want to be a better communicator? Done. Want to have more fun collaborating with your professional peers? Check. Want to improve your listening? Easy. The truth is, anything is possible, and this is a phrase you may want to consider carrying with you. "Anything is possible" is a rallying cry for all great ideas, and the first essential seed for anything worth doing.

Additionally, with each new person's belief that something is possible, the chances of it becoming a reality rise exponentially. One person believes something and they convince another and another, and before you know it, nearly half the population has a smartphone in their hands and it becomes our new standard for communicating. Incidentally, this is how cults are formed too, but we'll save that for another book.

In Four Day Weekend's case, we, as four budding performers, all started in stand-up comedy before we discovered the power of improvisation. And even though we all came from very different backgrounds, it was our shared love of comedy that drew us together. Consider our seemingly disparate backgrounds as performers:

David Wilk: He grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and worked as a cruise director on a ship before moving to Texas. Dave is the "life of the party" and loves to have a good time. He's the kind of person who can talk his way into or out of anything. It's freakish.

David Ahearn: He grew up in Iowa and then came to Texas to pursue stand-up comedy. His dream was to host the *Tonight Show* someday, and he saw Dallas as a stepping-stone to a television career in Los Angeles. He may still host the *Tonight Show* at some point. Anything is possible, remember?

Troy Grant: He was the only group member originally from Texas and fell into stand-up as a hobby. Naturally funny and talented, Troy approached life with a very laid-back attitude. And he's become a successful actor as well.

Frank Ford: He grew up in Ohio, studied product engineering, and was recruited out of college by Texas Instruments, a company that hired him to work in its

consumer products division. Having performed a stand-up set on campus before graduation, the comedy bug bit him early – and infected him for life.

We were four different people (no, that is not where Four Day Weekend came from, keep trying) from four different walks of life who got to know each other through a shared interest in comedy. Our bond was formed from a desire and a willingness to create the very best comedy show we could. We took tremendous pride in our work, and we constantly challenged each other to become the very best performers we could be. The end result? We succeeded far better collectively than we would have individually. Our collaboration allowed us to soar.

We discovered we had similar sensibilities, and although we all came from different part of the country, we shared the same comedy heroes: the early cast of *Saturday Night Live*, Johnny Carson on the *Tonight Show*, Richard Pryor, Carol Burnett and Monty Python, just to name a few. These common interests were the thread that created the fabric of Four Day Weekend Comedy.

Over the years, we discovered what each other's strengths and weaknesses were, and we figured out how to use those individual strengths to complement our own personal weaknesses. We believed that by relying on each other, trusting each other, and getting one another's back, we could go much further than if we set out as individuals.

This one lesson was the single most important lesson we have learned: we will go to greater heights as a unit than we will individually. This same lesson is true for you, your team at work, your family at home, and your friends and colleagues who surround you.

A professional comedian or performer doesn't choose to do comedy – comedy chooses them. One feels passionate about

it and sticks with it because they are compelled to do so. Whether you call it passion, desire, or just plain delusional, we felt we had enough talent to become very good at it. And, over time and through hard work, we did.

After some minor success as stand-up comedians, we decided to try our hand at improvisation. We had similar sensibilities; we were very good friends; and the thought of working together appealed to us. With no prior experience in improvisation, we eventually joined a fledgling comedy group that was struggling to keep its doors open. At the time, we were not concerned with the financial solvency of the club, we only wanted the opportunity to perform together so that we could continue to grow as comedians. It was an opportunity to collaborate with each other on stage for the first time. But making the transition would prove challenging at times.

In comedy, the world of improvisation is very different from the world of stand-up. In stand-up, it's all about the individual. It's a very "me, me, me" type of approach because one is acting as a monologist with a single point of view. In improvisation, we build together as a cohesive unit. No one's ideas are any better or any worse than anyone else's idea, and all ideas are honored. In improvisation, we succeed together and we fail together. We never have a show where one person does well while another performer has a bad show. It is and always will be a group effort.

In improvisation it's more of a "we, we, we" culture because people work as a team with multiple points of view that sound like one. This is known as the *group mind*. In improvisation, we use whatever the group comes up with as a collective to succeed, and no idea is associated with any one person. If the group succeeds, we all succeed. The environment of improvisation is very supportive and open-minded, with everyone sharing knowledge and ideas to make them better.

Transitioning from one style to the other can be hard to implement for some people because you must retrain your brain to think positively. Improvisation is all about possibility. It is the ultimate “what if?” scenario. And this “what if?” scenario is precisely what anyone can take into their own daily lives. What if I began going for a walk each morning before work? What if I put down my phone and helped my children with their homework? What if I started writing the book I always dreamed of writing? What if I started that business? What if I applied for that promotion? “What if” is the first step on the road to manifesting your greatest dreams and desires.

In improvisation, a performer has to be a good listener, work well with others, and subscribe to the philosophy of “Yes, and” – a philosophy that is predicated on building on an idea, regardless of the origin, without judgment. This approach leads to creating unique ideas, scenarios, and scenes in an entertaining, positive way through a series of Happy Accidents.

The philosophy of “Yes, and” is a paradigm shift from one of control and negativity to one of acceptance of other’s ideas and inclusion. The greatest gift a leader or entrepreneur can give to those working with them is the forum to express their ideas openly. We say “yes” to the ideas of others and in return we are allowed to say “and” and provide our input to the idea. The word *and* allows everyone into the arena of ideas, and it takes my idea and it makes it our idea. Once the idea becomes our idea, everyone is going to work harder to manifest it into reality.

This is the heartbeat of improvisation: acceptance, harmony, and collaboration.

As we have said, in improvisation we don’t know where we’re going; we only know where we’ve been. It’s the embracing of diverse ideas through collaboration that will

take us to places we could have never gone to by ourselves. “Yes, and” works in all facets of life.

Our First Happy Accident: Discovering the Power of We ———

If we think about human history, we have evolved as tribes and teams working together, in caves and on the hunt for food in the past and in classrooms and corporate workplaces hunting for good ideas in the present. Our diversity within these tribes and teams is what makes us special, and when we honor that diversity, we discover what we come up with as a group is far better than what we come up with individually. When we choose to value this wide spectrum of diversity, it takes the pressure off one person having to come up with all of the answers. Each person’s unique perspective allows that person to have that one perfect component that makes the whole better. This is “Yes, and.” It is building on the pertinent information or idea and adding to it to make a better end product.

Everyone in your organization is an expert in something you’re not. From the accountant, to marketing, to sales, to the administrator or the janitor – each person adds value to complete your puzzle. Honor their value because thanks to it there’s one less thing you have to do or have to know at an expert level.

The same is true of your personal life outside of work, with your family and your friends. Each person is unique and offers perspectives and experiences that differ from yours. In recognizing this simple truth, that we all offer value, and in being open to helping each other, you have an opportunity to add value to others and to receive value from others every day.

It’s a mantra worth repeating: *You don’t have to do or know everything.* There are people around you who are there to help you and make you better. Your job is to add your piece

to the collective puzzle, thereby creating the landscape of the whole. You might add the corner piece or one of the pieces in the middle to the puzzle, but when that puzzle is complete you'll see the totality of your picture and you won't recall which piece you added. You'll only know that you were a part in creating the whole and succeeding as a unit. The whole is better than the sum of its parts.

This approach brings organizations together because everyone feels valued. Everyone contributes, and everyone becomes emotionally invested in the outcome. Inclusion makes people work harder, and it fundamentally makes people more dedicated.

In "Yes, And" We Trust ---

In *The Art of War*, a text written in the sixth century B.C.E, Sun Tzu writes, "Loyalty is above all based on appreciation." Here's a man who understood the value of "Yes, and." Inclusion breeds loyalty. Exclusion breeds exclusion, which ultimately leads to contempt.

Now we know that in the rough-and-tumble world of corporate America, this goes against the current paradigm. We live in a world where it's dog eat dog, and everyone does everything they can to get recognized while simultaneously trying to squash anyone in our way.

Climbing the corporate ladder often means stepping on someone on the way up. This is flawed logic. Ultimately, it's only hurting you and your company while you do this. Yes, you may get to the top, but at what expense? If rising to the top means putting out an inferior product to do so, who really wins? No one. Not you, not your company, and certainly not your customers or clients.



FIGURE 1.1 This is what the corporate ladder looks like at Four Day Weekend. Notice how we're helping each other up? From top to bottom: David Wilk, Frank Ford, Ray Sharp, David Ahearn, Oliver Tull, Josh Roberts

This is also true in your home. How often have you fought with your spouse and continued to fight only in the hopes of being right. Being right is purely subjective, and it's often at the expense of your peace. So in each instance of your life, do you want to be at peace or do you want to be right? You can choose either, but you can't have both.

Trust is also the key to any successful partnership or working relationship. Without trust, a person has the tendency to try to control the direction of the idea because they feel their idea is better. Control is the enemy of improvisation and brainstorming. There's an old knock-knock joke about control that illustrates this point:

Joke Teller: "Knock, knock."

Participant: "Who's there?"

Joke Teller: "Control Freak."

Participant: "Control Freak, who?"

Joke Teller: (frustrated) "Wait a minute. You need to speak louder." (starts the joke over) "Knock, knock."

Participant: "Who's there?"

Joke Teller: (still frustrated) "Again, you're not answering loud enough and you need to stand up straight." (starts the joke over again) "Knock, knock."

Participant: "Who's there?"

Joke Teller: (very frustrated) "No, no, no! You're doing it all wrong. Never mind, I'll do both parts."

An interesting thing happens in the workshops when the members of Four Day Weekend ask people to do the "Yes,

and” exercise; the people lower down on the totem pole at work tend to do the exercise much more easily than a CEO or company president. Why? Well, people in positions of power are used to saying no and controlling things. It’s difficult for them to relinquish control and go with the flow.

Now we know what you’re thinking: “But sometimes a person has to say no in life depending on the situation.” This is true, however, a large percentage of people make “no” their default response thereby closing off possibilities. At Four Day Weekend we make “yes, and” our default and then when we are faced with saying “no” we choose to make it a considerate “no.” This is where we listen closely to an idea in a mature, open, and supportive way and then “yes, and” the “no” into a new course of action.

There may be a time where someone suggests something that has been implemented before with little success. A considerate no is one that listens to the proposal and then takes the time to explain why we may not want to take that course of action again.

A reactive no is simply saying no without any thought or consideration to the possibilities of what might be.

We are aware that sometimes you have to say “no” in life. As parents, if one of our kids came to us and said, “Dad, I’m going to go play in the highway.” We wouldn’t reply, “Yes, and, wait until midnight and wear camouflage!” What we would do is offer a considerate no by saying, “No, the highway is too dangerous and you could get hurt” and then “Yes, and” a solution by saying, “‘Yes,’ playing is a wonderful idea ‘and’ let’s play ball in the park together because it’s safer.”

The point to all of this is that saying “Yes, and” in life leads to infinite possibilities, whereas “No, but” leads nowhere. BUT is an acronym for “Behold the Underlying Truth.” Listen to someone the next time they use *but* in a sentence. What

you will notice is that everything they said before the word *but* can usually be discounted. What they proceed to say after the word *but* is what they really mean to say. “But” is simply a very polite “no.”

For instance, if you accompany a friend to dinner at an obscure restaurant that’s a two-hour drive, and have a meal that’s far too spicy, overly salty, and where the service leaves you with a bad taste in your mouth, you might say, “I really loved spending time having a meal with you ... but ... it was not my favorite type of restaurant. There are likely better options.” That friend will understand completely that it’s best to go elsewhere next time.

The world is full of “No, but” people who only offer up criticisms with no alternative solutions. You can be respectful and supportive in your feedback.

It’s incumbent on you to retrain your brain and try saying “Yes, and” to things – and as Dr. Seuss would say, “Oh, the places you’ll go.”

Chapter 1 Intermission ---

And now it’s time for our first chapter intermission. Just like in our live show, we’re going to take a brief intermission midway through each chapter so we can return to talking about how these ideas will work for you.

As we mentioned early in the chapter, we took a chance on ourselves and we followed our dreams. This is admittedly harder than it looks. There will be many skeptics who will tell you all of the reasons why you shouldn’t take the leap and pursue your dreams – whether it’s improving your career; engaging your team and doing more creative work together; starting a business; becoming a better teacher,

parent, partner – but we know you picked up this book because you're a dreamer, a believer, and a doer. Take a moment and think about a dream you've had that you've yet to embark on or realize.

Is it that nagging “what if?” scenario that you play out in your head that may also have fear swirling around in your brain? It could be taking a dance or painting class, starting a business, or working out until your body is a temple of near perfection. You know the idea, you think about it when you are dreaming. Take the chance, and if possible find someone who shares your dream and leap in together. There's strength in numbers, and the power of the group allows things to manifest even quicker. Why dance with yourself when you can dance with others? Why eat alone, travel alone, or work alone when, if we can simply gather up the courage and the enthusiasm, we can achieve our dreams together?

Four Day Weekend did it together as a team, and you'll find others to help you too. We have nothing special inside of us that you don't also possess. We're likely no more intelligent or talented than you are at certain vocations. Take the chance on your idea, find someone to share your dream with you, and before you know it you will embark on a magical adventure. Now, back to Chapter 1, we have so much more to share with you.

When One Door Closes, Opportunity Knock-Knocks

There's a quote that says, “Dying is easy. Comedy is hard.” There should be another quote that says, “Crying is easy because comedy is hard.”

Wilk, Frank, and Troy found success in their early years performing improvisation well before Four Day Weekend became an entity, and they began to grow as performers. Wilk had helped build the once fledgling comedy club where he was working as the director of sales and marketing, while all three of them turned into standout players in the show. The houses were packed every weekend and life seemed pretty good ... for a while.

With the success of the club, the owner had become more controlling. Greed seeped in, and he went back on his promise to pay the performers a percentage of the door once the club was profitable. In addition, the style of improvisation became more competitive and the backstage environment turned toxic. Some of the other performers started to sabotage others onstage to make themselves look good in the eyes of the audience. They didn't realize that by selfishly making a fellow cast member look stupid for a cheap laugh they would undermine the credibility of the entire show.

In improvisation, there's a saying, "If I make you look good and you make me look good, then we all look good." Far too often in life, people act out of insecurity to put someone down to make themselves feel superior. This is what we came to realize when people would say, "How is your 'little' show doing?" Their subconscious intention was to diminish and minimize the accomplishment of others in order to make themselves feel better about their own insecurities.

This would serve to be a valuable lesson for the members of Four Day Weekend. Nowadays, when someone comes up to a cast member after a show and says something like, "You were great!" or "You were my favorite!," the cast member politely nods their head and says, "thank you." But in the back of their mind they are thinking, "I need to work harder because those other guys are really making me look good."

That is the difference between being a selfish performer and an unselfish performer.

This also holds true in your organization or in your personal life. Our jobs are to make each other look good. We make our spouses look good, we make our children look good, and we make the people we work with look good – and by doing so we look good in return.

In a relatively short time, fate would step in and send the trio in a very different direction. For starters, Frank had always watched *Saturday Night Live* growing up and knew that his idols on the show studied at the famed The Second City. The group that he was in was fun, but he had stopped growing. He felt that he had plateaued from a creative standpoint and thought it might be worthwhile to expand his horizons.

One of the fundamental lessons we have learned is that life is about the leap and not the landing. When we have the courage to move forward toward our dreams, the universe has a way of aligning circumstances to make those dreams manifest. We must take the first step in the process to get the ball rolling, and this is what taking the leap is all about. In improvisation, we take the leap knowing we'll be fully supported by those around us and together we will accomplish things we could never do alone.

In addition to improvisation, Frank had gotten into acting, signed with a talent agent, and booked a series of McDonald's commercials that paid very well. He cashed his checks wondering what he would spend his money on when a bolt of inspiration hit him – "What if he used this money to train at The Second City?!" He decided to take the leap.

It was a good idea, but how? Frank worked at a full-time job during the day at Texas Instruments. Besides, The Second City was all the way up in Chicago. He couldn't just quit and move there and start all over again. He had just started to

build a life in Dallas. Maybe there could be a workaround solution to this problem. After some research, he found that classes were offered on Saturdays. He would have to fly up every weekend and come back in time for work on Monday. Logistically, it could be done, but it would cost him all the money he made from the commercials and then some.

After much internal back and forth, Frank finally decided to go for it and see where it led. He was living the theory of “Yes, and;” however, he just didn’t know it yet. That first yes was a catalyst to Frank realizing his destiny. He didn’t know how it was going to happen, but he opened the door to opportunity and the rest became storied history.

Frank attended several classes, and returned more inspired with what he was learning. He told Troy and Dave about the philosophy of “Yes, and,” and how everyone at The Second City was being so supportive. Inspired by Frank’s bold leap, Troy and Dave followed suit and soon began studying in Chicago at The Second City as well. This newfound experiment would begin to cause trouble at the club where they were working.

The philosophy of moving outside the comfort zone was in direct conflict with the owner’s approach to creativity and acted as a threat to his livelihood. What if other cast members learned about this? Would they start demanding a more supportive and open-minded environment? Instead of fostering learning and being open to new ideas, he tightened his grip on everyone and tried to control everything. He would assign plum roles to those who stepped in line and then ostracized anyone who was pursuing personal growth. Once again, control reared its ugly head, and control is not only the enemy of improvisation but of life as well.

Students must allow themselves to be students. At first glance, this concept might seem too painfully obvious. You’re taking a class, so that makes you a student by default. But that thinking

should apply to the rest of one's life at all times. Hopefully, we will be a student in life until we take our very last breath. There's always something new to learn if you are open to ideas. Once a person stops learning in life, they plateau. Plateauing is very much like a flatline on a heart monitor. If you're creatively plateauing in the comedy business, your career is dead.

During his time going back and forth to The Second City, Frank enthusiastically began suggesting going to The Second City to all who would listen to him. Troy and Wilk soon joined Frank on the quest for knowledge by making their own treks to The Second City in Chicago. The improv bug had bitten all three of them and without their knowledge their future was unfolding before their very eyes

This did not come without some growing pains. Their trips to Chicago taught them that there was a better way to improvise and they tried to discuss these ideas with the club owner. But as they became more vocal, the owner became angrier and angrier. He preferred things to stay exactly as they were, but what he didn't realize was stagnation eventually leads to death. The three newly inspired improvisers were at a crossroads and the path they were about to take would no longer include a show that they had helped to make a citywide hit.

One chapter was closing and a new one was about to be revealed with the turn of a page.

Conscientiousness

As we mentioned earlier, it's not only what you do in this life but HOW you do it. Niccolò Machiavelli once said, "It is better to be feared than loved." Now does that really sound like the healthiest way to interact with people in this life? If you applied this philosophy to your management style in the

business world, we're sure that your coworkers or subordinates would do what you asked them to do, out of fear. However, you ultimately will be reviled and hated behind closed doors. Unfortunately, in our dog-eat-dog world, this seems to be the method of choice.

Now let's look at it the opposite way: Maybe, just maybe, Machiavelli had limited vision and it's actually better to be loved than feared. Think about it, if you approach your management style this way, you might actually inspire people and get the same work done! In the end, they will have done something because they wanted to do it and not because they're afraid of losing their job if they don't.

The former approach comes from a very negative place, whereas the latter comes from a very positive place. This approach also helps to empower people around you, and that's really all people want.

They want to feel empowered, appreciated, and inspired. At the end of the day, they will be singing your praises in the break room and talking about how much they love working for you.

The Origin of an Idea ---

People overlook the fact that we improvise every day of our lives. We don't think of it that way or call it improvisation, but that's exactly what it is.

We improvise in every conversation or when we drive down the street. We are often asked to think on our feet. Whether we are making a last-minute decision on a Halloween costume or making an excuse for being late, rest assured that we are improvising.

And now, in a darkened apartment, the newly formed "Band of Brothers" had to improvise yet again. But, this time,

the stakes were much higher. Wilk had given up his income when he quit his job at the comedy club. But what would we do? We had no jobs, no stage to perform on, and no one else who wanted to do it the way we wanted to do it.

And then, in the darkness, a light bulb went on. It was then that we asked ourselves our most important “what if?” question. What if we started our own show and we implemented an environment that celebrated the power of “Yes, and”? Our destiny was about to unfold with that one question. In some ways, we will forever be indebted to that first show that brought us all together as performers; without it the next 20 years would never have unfolded the way they did. At that time, however, it was scary leaving to set a path of our own.

Sometimes, when a person has an idea, it's good to be a little naive and delusional. If we knew how much the odds were stacked against us, we might have quit before we even began.

For instance, take this particular idea of starting a new comedy show. The year was 1996 (a leap year!) and according to the US Census Bureau, roughly over 600,000 new businesses were created that year. According to Forbes, seven out of ten new businesses survive at least two years; half of those are around after five years; a third made it at least ten years; and a quarter stay in business 15 years or more. Thank God we didn't know those numbers back then or we may have never considered what we were about to embark on.

Wow! If you look at those numbers it's daunting. There are no guarantees in business. The only things we could count on were each other. Our success would come with a combination of three things:

1. Working hard at something we loved to do. Check.
2. A trust in each other and our talents. Check.

3. Being ready to seize on an opportunity when Happy Accidents came along. Check, check, check. (Seriously, make all of your checks payable to Four Day Weekend. We thank you for it.)

Whether you call it luck or a Happy Accident, a person or a business needs to be ready when a window of opportunity opens. Louis Pasteur once said that, “Chance favors the prepared mind.” In other words, you create your own luck through perseverance and hard work.

But there was one more component that was needed – a supportive community that came in the form of the city of Fort Worth. The business community, the mayor’s office, and the fans of the show stood by us to help ensure our success. They are all every bit a part of this success story as we were about to embark on our new experiment.

As we, the newly formed members of Four Day Weekend, began our journey, we would remember these lessons from the past few years that would prove to serve us well.

Chapter 1 Highlights ---

- The power of “Yes, and” and positive thinking.
- How we build strength through trust, teamwork, collaboration, continuously sharing ideas, and making our collective ideas better.
- The promise that, “If I make you look good and you make me look good, then we all look good.”

Chapter 1 Exercise

“Yes, And” Positive-Mind-set Recalibration Exercise

The first exercise is quite simple. Say, yes to three things throughout the day that you might normally and instinctively say no to. Then, document and trace back how saying yes affected your day.

For instance, maybe a friend asks you to lunch. In most cases, you would find a reason to say no to that person. Instead you say yes today. What happened during the lunch or whom did you meet that you wouldn't have met had you declined the invitation? As you trace back the events of the lunch on paper, and follow the thread, you can see where it led you. Maybe someone you met at that lunch offered you a new opportunity, mentioned a home for sale in the area of town where you have wanted to live or offered you tickets to a play or concert you have been hoping to see? By saying yes to lunch, the universe rewards you with unexpected opportunity that you otherwise would never have been offered.

Keep your “Yes, and” activity in a journal. Try it for one week, and then another, and yet another. Practice saying yes and “Yes, and.”

