

Can Improv Improve Agent Performance?

I spend a lot of time surfing the internet for interesting news about contact centers. It's one of the fun aspects of writing for a blog. I recently came across a novel skill to train agents - improv.

Improv (short for improvisation) is an acting technique in which actors perform without a script. Instead, they make up their lines as they go, feeding off each other for inspiration. The result is hopefully an authentic and coherent story line. While improv is often associated with comedy, it doesn't always have to be funny. And in case the words "without a script" make you nervous, you can actually set a lot of boundaries when doing improv.

Many companies now use improv in employee training because of the unique benefits improv offers. Some of these benefits are highly relevant to call centers. Because one of the rules of improv is that the participants have to feed off each other, it teaches people to really listen to what others are saying. Additionally, the unscripted nature of improv can result in numerous, unexpected scenarios, which trains people to better think on their feet. Something that teaches agents how to be better listeners and to think on their feet sounds promising.

Even some medical schools are using improv training to improve doctors' bedside manner. In a recent [article for The Atlantic](#), author Anu Atluru describes some of these efforts and sums up his own experience with improv: "I discovered that skilled improvisation is merely the interpersonal equivalent of having insight and being adaptable."

Having insight and being adaptable are definitely qualities we all want to nurture in our call center agents. But is improv a good way to teach these skills to agents? [Evan Watson](#) of the AICPA thinks so. A finalist for the ICMI's Global Contact Center Award for Best Agent in 2015, Mr. Watson credits his improv background with giving him better listening and problem solving skills. And he's used improv exercises to improve the skills of his teammates.

In fact, training agents to use improv techniques seems to be gaining some momentum and there are [online resources](#) available to those who want to add improv scenarios to their own training. In addition to the benefits already discussed, improv exercises can be fun and are also suited for team building activities.

Overall, improv training seems to have some merit and is worthy of a closer look by organizations who are looking for new and creative ways to teach their agents some core skills.