Course summary:

Improv training and business may not seem like an obvious pairing, but applying core improv communications skills at work drives engagement, connection, impact, and influence.

In this experiential and interactive course, you will learn the improv techniques, mindsets, and skills that improvisers use on stage when they make up scenes, songs, or even entire plays on the spot. Those include communicating in a clear, compelling, and engaging manner; thinking on your feet; quickly getting in sync with others; reading the room; and responding with agility to whatever the situation presents.

These are valuable tools to have when delivering a speech, presenting in the boardroom, sharing your ideas in a meeting, or having a critical one-on-one discussion.

The course is based on the Stanford Graduate School of Business improv-based management course Debra Schifrin created, *Spontaneous Management*, and her communications consulting work with businesses nationwide. The course also draws from Dan Schifrin's work in storytelling, creativity, and conversation design.

This is NOT an improv class, and students will NOT be asked to perform improv.

Note About Live Attendance and Recording:

The classes will NOT be recorded

Grade Options and Requirements:

- **No Grade Requested (NGR)**
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
  - We encourage you to attend as many of the class sessions as possible. You will get more out of the course, and we are creating a team that supports each other, bonds, and helps each other move forward in our learning.

- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)**
  - Students must:
    - Attend 4 of the 5 sessions
Complete the short readings for 4 of the 5 classes
Submit answers to the self-reflection questions on Canvas for at least 4 of the sessions.

- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)**
  - Students must:
    - Attend 4 of the 5 sessions
    - Complete the short readings for 4 of the 5 classes
    - Submit answers to the self-reflection questions on Canvas for at least 4 of the sessions.

If you know in advance you will miss a class, please email Dan or Debra through Canvas. If an illness or emergency comes up and you must miss more than 1 session (for those who selected CR/NC or letter grade), please reach out to Dan or Debra via canvas beforehand or after, if possible.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

**Course Grading:**

Your grade for the course breaks down by these components:
- Class participation **65%**
- Assignments (answering the self-reflection questions on Canvas) **35%**

**What to expect in the classroom:**

This fast-paced course is innovative, effective, memorable, and fun. There are no boring PowerPoint lectures. Everyone is constantly engaged in the process.

The methodology is a blend of interactive activities, targeted debriefs, group discussions, and mini-lectures. Each class focuses on a different communications skillset. Students do improv-based activities in small group breakout rooms to learn and practice a new skill. That is followed by a group debrief to discuss students’ experiences in the breakout rooms; what they learned; and practical applications to business. The debrief is followed by a mini-lecture with additional learning points.

This skill-building course also offers a team building experience. We will create our own “team” in a confidential, safe space that supports each other as we try out new skills and behaviors and take risks to stretch from our comfort zone into a learning zone.
An overview of the course, week by week:

Week 1: Spontaneity and Agility
With so many uncertainties in the world and in business in 2021, it is critical to be agile in responding to rapidly changing situations. In this module, you will engage in exercises designed to improve your ability to think on your feet and increase your comfort level with acting spontaneously.

Week 2: Working in Teams
Successful collaboration depends on effective communication. In this module, you will learn tools for communicating effectively with a team to generate ideas; build trust and inclusiveness; take and cede control; and respond as a collective when unexpected shifts occur.

Week 3: Listening
Being a great communicator is not just about speaking to a group or an individual; you must also actively listen. In this module, you will learn active listening skills that will enable you to rapidly connect with others and create more meaningful conversations and presentations. You will gain techniques for listening below the surface for what others truly care about and value, deepening your ability to respond effectively.

Week 4: Understanding Status
Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are always presenting ourselves in, and to, the world. An important dimension of this is status, which relates to our ability to influence others regardless of organizational hierarchy. In this class, you will do activities to learn about status, practice what you learn, and receive real-time feedback from your peers and instructors.

Week 5: Storytelling
The ability to tell compelling stories about yourself, your company, and your products is an essential skill in business. In this class, you will learn how to effectively structure stories, implement simple techniques to make your stories more appealing, and practice telling engaging stories when you don’t have the opportunity to rehearse in advance.

Office Hours:
Office hours by appointment. Please email Debra or Dan via Canvas to arrange a meeting time.
Readings and Assignments:

After every class, two self-reflection questions will be posted in Canvas. Please answer them by the Tuesday night before class. There will also be short readings assigned for each class on Canvas. There are no other required textbooks or readings.

Reading assignment **before Session 1**: Prologue of “Improv Wisdom,” by Patricia Ryan Madson (pages 17-25).

Reading assignment **before Session 2**: Excerpts from Chapter 1 of “Training to Imagine,” by Kat Koppett (pages 12-18).

Reading assignment **before Session 3**: Chapter 5 from “Training to Imagine,” by Kat Koppett (pages 63-77).

Reading assignment **before Session 4**: Excerpts from the Status section of “Impro,” by Keith Johnstone (pages 33-39 & 50-52).

Reading assignments **before Session 5**: Introduction of “Made to Stick” by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (pages 2-24). Excerpts from Chapter 1 of “Your Story, Well Told,” by Corey Rosen (pages 16-22 & 32-38).