



Course Title: Think on Your Feet: An Improviser's Guide to Business and Communications

Course Code: COM 66

Instructor Names and Bio: Debra Schifrin and Dan Schifrin

Debra Schifrin

Debra Schifrin teaches two courses she co-created at [Stanford Graduate School of Business](#): "Creativity and the Business Ecosystem" and "Spontaneous Management," the school's first improv-based management course. Through her [consulting company](#), she leads innovative, interactive, improv-based corporate training sessions for business teams nationwide. Her focus areas include leadership, communications, collaboration, and storytelling. Debra was a reporter for National Public Radio and received an MBA from Harvard Business School.

Dan Schifrin

Dan Schifrin founded [StoryForward](#) to help organizational leaders reach their communications potential, improve team creativity, and develop a more collaborative team culture. Dan has worked with companies and cultural institutions across the country, and taught at UC Berkeley, San Francisco State and Stanford Continuing Studies. His writings have appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *McSweeney's*, and other publications.

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times:

- Saturday, April 29, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm
- Sunday, April 30, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm
(These times include a lunch break and smaller breaks throughout the day)

Meeting location: On-Campus (details will be shared with registered students prior to first class meeting)

The class sessions will not be recorded

Course Features

- Live session
 - Requires interaction and active participation
 - Brief Lectures, demonstration, practice time for students
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas

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 teaching and consulting for leaders and organizations in the areas of storytelling, creativity, and conversation design.

**Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

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.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
 - Students must attend both sessions and read the material.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
 - Students must attend both sessions, read the material, and participate actively in the class discussions.

****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.*

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
 365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
 continuingstudies@stanford.edu
 650-725-2650

Textbooks/Required Materials

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, students will be asked to read excerpts from two books, which will be presented as PDF documents. The readings are:

Day One

“Improv Wisdom,” by Patricia Ryan Madson (pages 17-25; 53-59; 67-76).

Day Two

“Impro,” by Keith Johnstone (11 pages). [This excerpt does not have page numbers].

This chapter on status behavior has been seminal reading for theaters for decades.

First Assignment

By **Tuesday, April 25**, please submit a 30-second video in which you pronounce your name and share something that you enjoy doing outside of work.

Before coming to class on Saturday, April 29, please watch other people's videos (approximately 12 minutes total).

Outline

Day One

Spontaneity and Agility

With so many uncertainties in the world and in business, 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.

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.

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.

Day Two

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 learn about status, become more self-aware of the status you are projecting, and practice techniques for modulating your status to create better connections and grow your influence.

Storytelling

The ability to tell compelling stories about yourself, your company, and your product 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.