



Stanford eCorner

Entrepreneurship and Improvisation

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Mike Rothenberg, CEO of Rothenberg Ventures, discusses how learning improvisation has taught him the valuable skills of avoiding saying "no" and finding the good in what others say, even if he disagrees. The art of improvising also demands you adapt to disappointing outcomes and turn them around, which Rothenberg says is important in business and life.



Transcript

One of the best classes I took at Stanford was improv. If you haven't taken that, please do. It is so insightful when it comes to business and life. And they teach you some very basic things that you should never ever not do. One of them is say, yes. You can actually always say yes. You don't have to let people manipulate you or make you do something, but you can find the good in what anybody is saying, because you should first of all be dealing with people that you have some modicum of trust for and therefore there is a basis there. When people say something, even when you want to say no, you can find a way to say yes. And so what we do is, even we have an instinct of saying no, we'll say yes and. We'll try to find the truth first, and then we will try to explore, and it's wonderful to the human ear to hear yes and it's really grating to hear no.

So I encourage people to find the yes and in everything. The other thing is with improv what's really cool is that you are having to figure things out as you go. If it doesn't go perfect, you are - that's still the world you're living in, so you might as well still adjust to that and move forward. And if you are talking and trying to share a very intimate moment to like a lot of people and somebody's phone goes off, you could actually not be happy about that, or you could say that happened, now we're going to make a lesson out of it, laugh together and move forward. And that's true with almost everything. And so we believe in improv and we believe in supporting each other. It's very rewarding to watch people support each other, that's why that's such a lesson in improv and when the attitude is how do we help each other, but everybody actually has that attitude, then you are way bigger than the sum of your parts.