

Improvisation: Using Art and Science to Transform Teams

AIAMC 2020 Annual Meeting

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Three Questions







“The rules of improvisation appealed to me not only as a way of creating comedy, but as a worldview.

Studying improvisation literally changed my life. It set me on a career path toward Saturday Night Live. It changed the way I look at the world, and it’s where I met my husband.

What has your cult done for you lately?”

- Tina Fey



A promotional image for the Netflix event 'My Next Guest Needs No Introduction with David Letterman'. The image shows a woman with dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt, sitting in a chair and gesturing with her hands while talking to David Letterman, whose back is to the camera. The background is a dark studio with some lights.

NETFLIX

A MONTHLY NETFLIX EVENT

MY NEXT GUEST

NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION

WITH **DAVID LETTERMAN**

Merriam Webster definition of *improvise* (verb)

1: to compose, recite, play, or sing extemporaneously

2: to make, invent, or arrange offhand; the quarterback *improvised* a play

3: to make or fabricate out of what is conveniently on hand; *improvise* a meal

A leader who is constantly improvising...



Me: HELLO

You: HELLO

Me: HOW ARE YOU?

You: I'M FINE

Me: IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU

You: IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU TOO

Me: GOOD-BYE

You: SEE YOU LATER

YES, AND...

Y
E
S

Yes yourself

E

S

FEAR





“My feeling is that the best argument may be a testimony to the skill of the presenter, rather than to the excellence of the solution advocated. Also the bulk of the discussion time is visibly taken up with **transactions of status** which have nothing to do with the problem being solved.”

- Keith Johnstone, IMPRO

10



9

8



7

6

5

4

3



2

1

Yes yourself

Establish yourself in the present moment

S



IN

OUT

SMILE

RELEASE

PRESENT
MOMENT

WONDERFUL
MOMENT

Center

Face

Extend

Enter

Blend

Lessons from
the Leadership
Dojo

by Richard Strozzi-Heckler

Yes yourself

Establish yourself in the present moment

Shut up and listen

SCENE II. The island. Before PROSPERO'S cell.

Enter **PROSPERO** and MIRANDA

MIRANDA

If by your art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.

The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish'd.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallow'd and
The fraughting souls within her.

PROSPERO

Be collected:

No more amazement: tell your piteous heart

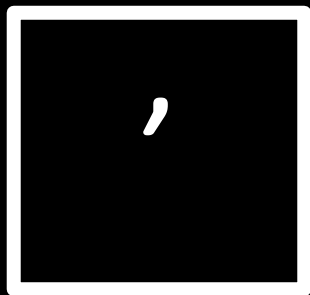
There's no harm done.

MIRANDA

O, woe the day!



SHAKESPEARE.
The Tempest
MIRANDA
The enchanted island, before the cell of Prospero, Prospero's daughter.
The scene is taken from the play, and is a representation of the scene as it is described in the text.
The scene is taken from the play, and is a representation of the scene as it is described in the text.



A

N

D

Add your brick

N

D



NOT



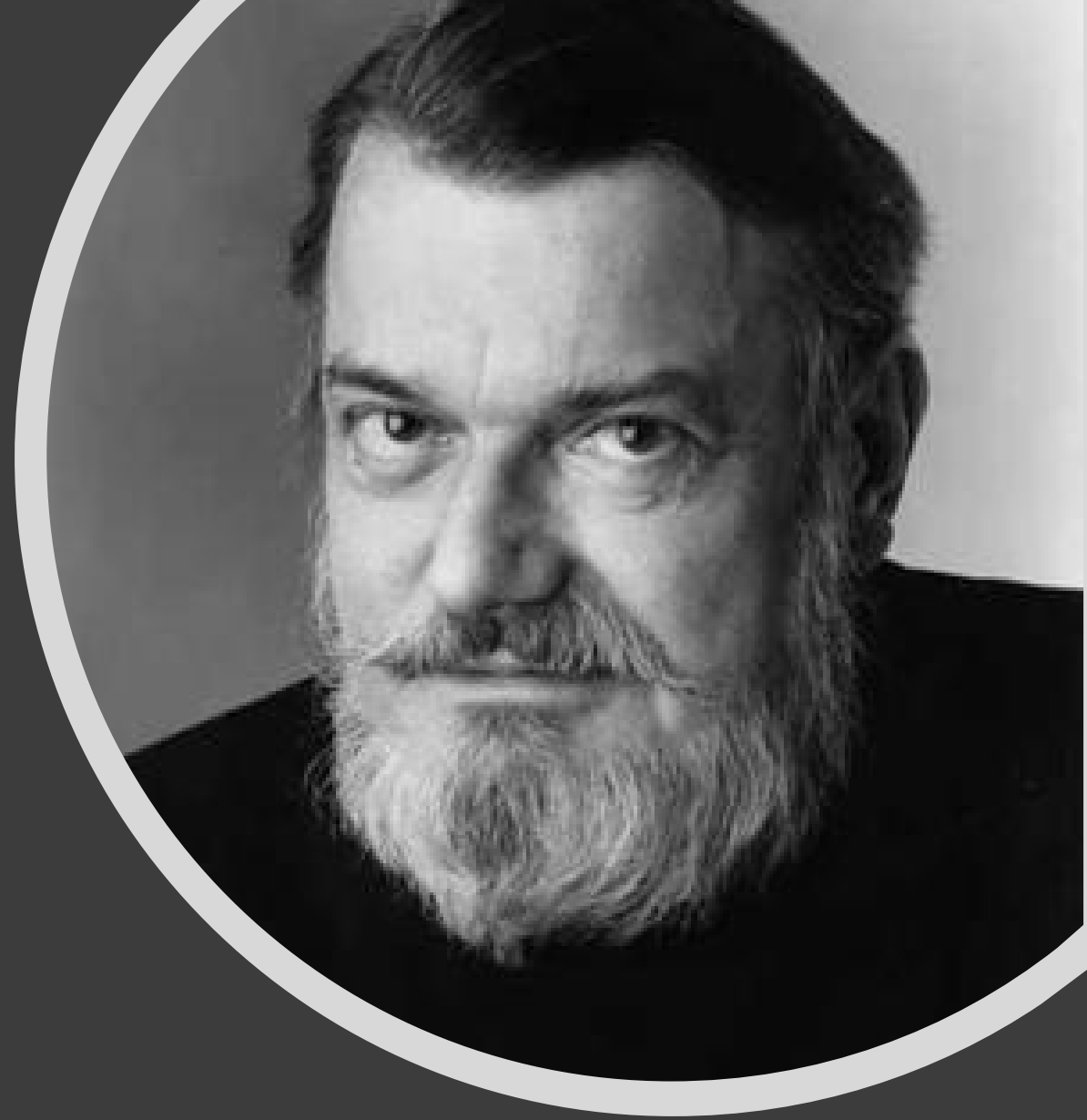
Add your brick

No mistakes, only gifts

D

“If we treat each other as if we are **geniuses, poets and artists**, we have a better chance of becoming that on stage.”

-Del Close





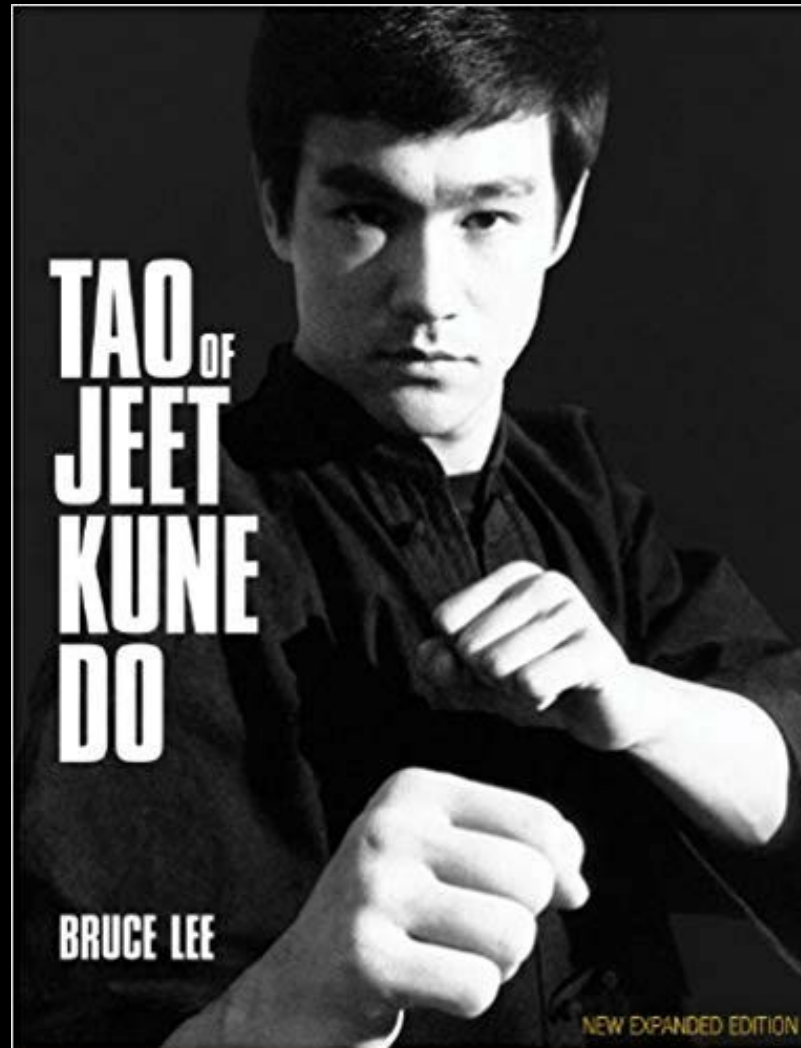
Add your brick

No mistakes, only gifts

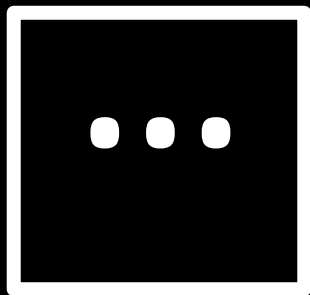
Do something



“In Jeet Kune Do, all technique is forgotten and the unconscious is to be left alone to handle the situation. **The technique will assert its wonders automatically or spontaneously.** To float in totality, to have no technique, is to have all technique.”



“The great mistake is to anticipate the outcome of the engagement; you ought not to be thinking of whether it ends in victory or in defeat. **Let nature take its course, and your tools will strike at the right moment.**”



Yes yourself

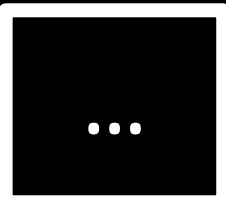
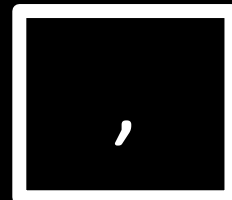
Add your brick

Establish yourself in the
present moment

No mistakes, only
gifts

Shut up and listen

Do something



“The ‘yes to what is’ is **not always a yes on the verbal external level.**

It is an inner attitude, an inner state that you bring to the situation.

You will see the situation and you will act.

Nobody can predict what you will do out of presence, but it will be right.”

-Eckhart Tolle

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Improvise (v): To demonstrate
Activated Mindfulness

A leader who is constantly improvising...



Opening

(Invocation, Monologue, Pattern)

Scene A1

Scene B1

Scene C1

Group Game

Scene A2

Scene B2

Scene C2

Group Game

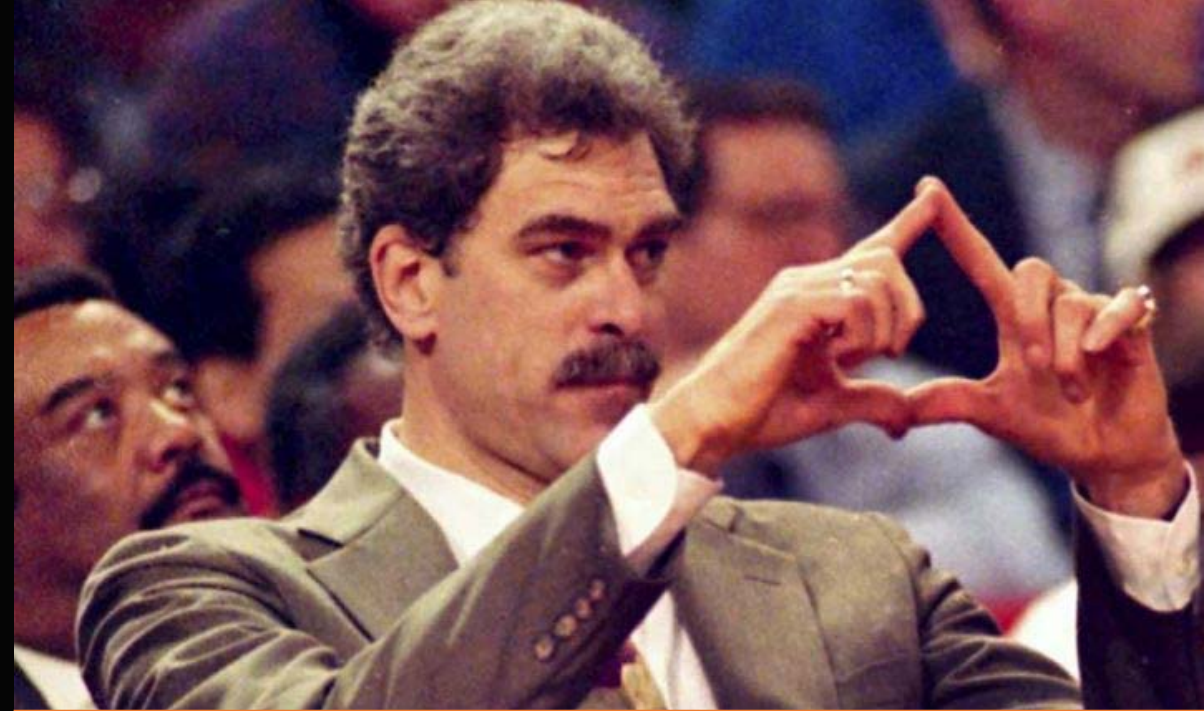
Scene A3

Scene B3

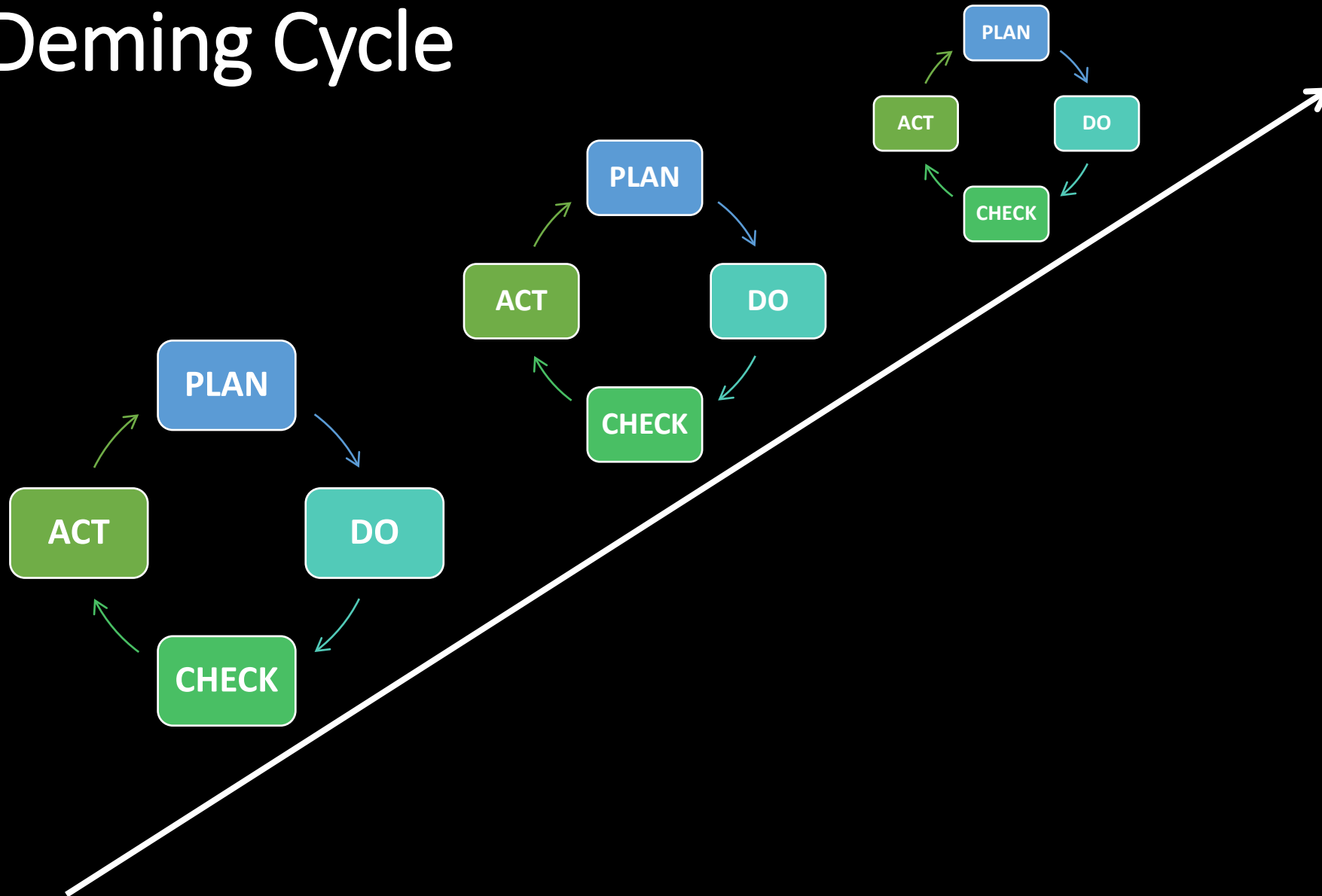
Scene C3

The triangle offense is best described as five man tai chi. ... The point is not to go head-to-head with the defense, but to toy with the defenders and trick them into overextending themselves. That ***means thinking and moving in unison as a group and being acutely aware, at any given moment, of what's happening on the floor.*** Executed properly, the system is virtually unstoppable because there are not set plays and the defense can't predict what's going to happen next."

– Phil Jackson, Sacred Hoops



The Deming Cycle



Drive out

Fear

so that everyone
may work effectively
for the company

W. Edwards Deming
14 Points for Management

Fearless Leader

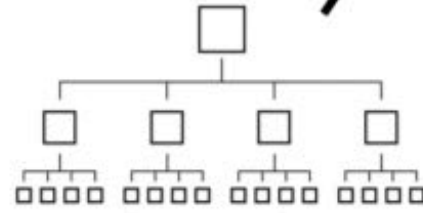
Fearless Organization

Shared expectations and meaning
Confidence that each voice is welcome
Orientation toward continuous learning

Amy Edmondson
The Fearless Organization

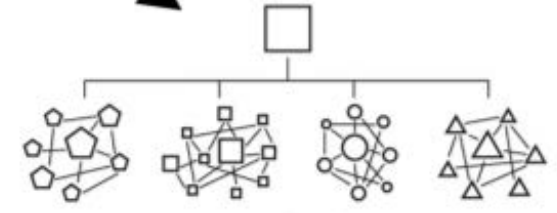
How do you teach a leviathan to improvise?

– Gen. Stanley McCrystal,
Team of Teams



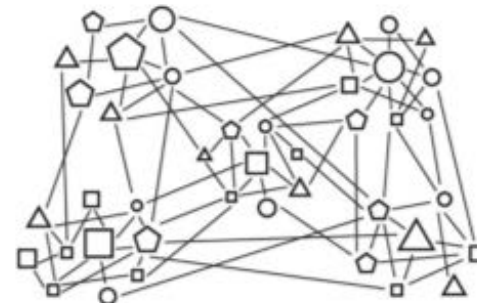
Command

A traditional top-down structure. The connections that matter are between workers and their managers.



Command of Teams

Small teams operate independently but still within a more rigid superstructure



Team of Teams

The relationship among teams resembles the closeness among individuals on those teams.

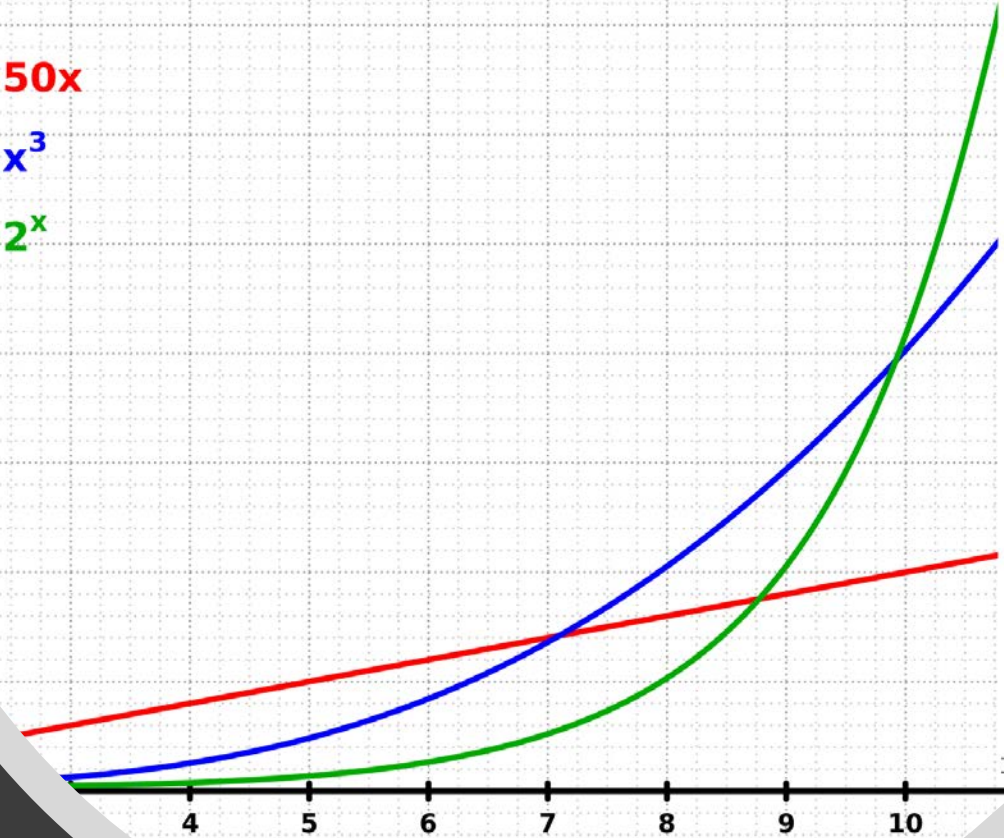
“Multipliers aren’t necessarily comedians, but they don’t take themselves or situations too seriously. Perhaps because they don’t need to defend their own intelligence, **Multipliers can laugh at themselves and see comedy in error and in life’s foibles.** Their sense of humor liberates others.”

- Liz Wiseman, Multipliers

$$f(x)=50x$$

$$f(x)=x^3$$

$$f(x)=2^x$$



“Improvising makes visible some truths of daily life that we experience but seldom think about: that we can navigate our way through complex systems in the simple act and art of listening and responding; that creativity is the property of everyone and not just the chosen few; that the ordinary, everyday mind is expressive and creative. From this magical interaction the work is born.”

- Steven Nachmanovitch, *The Art of Is: Improvising as a Way of Life*



THANK YOU