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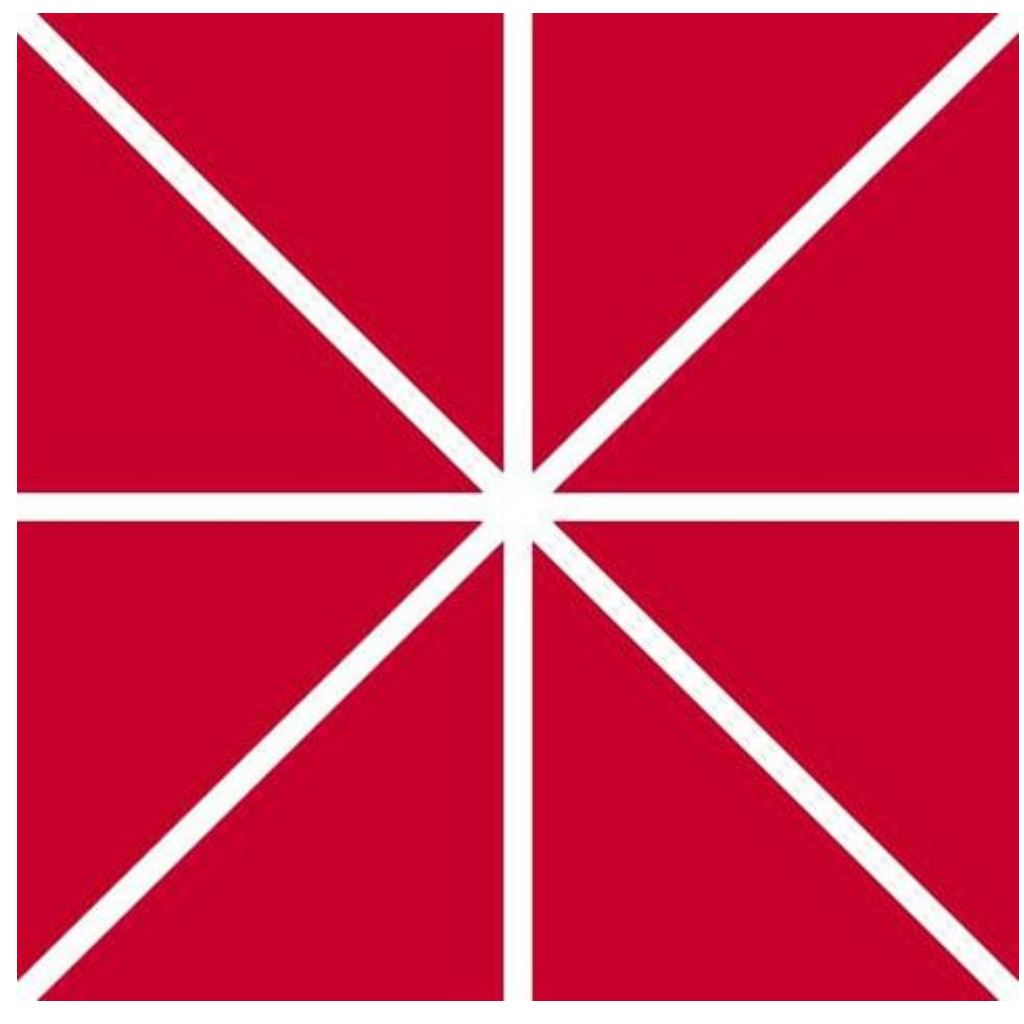
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# The Business of Theatre: How Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration Infiltrate 'The Real World'

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## Abstract

Too often ridiculed as a "dying art", theatre endures a ceaseless struggle for validity among educators, employers, and citizens alike. However, the skills garnered by performers, technicians, and designers through theatrical education span far beyond the final curtain, and are significantly more relevant and impactful than we think.

A theatre education means learning about the human condition, communication, gaining self-confidence, expressing creativity, problem solving, and thinking on your feet. In addition, drama techniques have been enormously effective in improving self-esteem and building community. A theatre education is a highly successful catalyst for the development of a "soft skill set." Because our education system is largely geared towards fostering a career path, it becomes crucial that soft skills are developed alongside hard skills. Beyond education, however, the pillars of theatre teaching have firmly stood their ground in the workplace.

The Second City, a comedy theatre and improvisation school, emphasizes the often overlooked benefits of utilizing theatre in business. Second City Works, the business arm of the company, highlights the importance of "Yes, And" rather than "No, But" thinking, and enhances confidence, creativity, and collaboration in the office. Through interactive improvisational workshops, Second City Works has taught these principles to thousands of corporate clients, showing leaders how to apply the tools of improv to common business challenges. By utilizing the pillars of theatre education, we can foster creativity, collaboration, and communication in leaders and employees alike, and apply these skills to create the strongest, best possible workforce.



## Statistics

A theatre education means learning about the human condition, communication, gaining self-confidence, expressing creativity, problem solving, and thinking on your feet. Coupled with a well-rounded academic curricula, it is no surprise that these skills are complementary in the classroom.

The American Alliance for Theatre & Education notes that students engaged in drama performance coursework or experience outscored non-arts students on the 2005 SAT by an average of 65 points in the verbal component and 34 points in the math component. This statistic comes as no surprise considering drama activities have been known to increase reading comprehension, as well as both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Theatrical education has also proved to be effective in academic life overall: it helps to improve school attendance and reduce high school dropout rates, can advance skills and academic performance in children and youth with learning disabilities, and those involved in drama typically stay more engaged in school than their non-arts counterparts.

In addition, drama techniques have been enormously effective in improving self-esteem and building community. A study published in *Champions of Change* (1999) cites theatre arts, including performance, classes, and participation in a drama club, as a source for "gains in reading proficiency, gains in self-concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance towards others."

## Introduction

Why is this so necessary in our modern educational system? Because a theatre education is a highly successful catalyst for the development of a "soft skill set." Our education system is largely geared towards fostering a career path, so it becomes crucial that soft skills are developed alongside hard skills.

While there's nothing wrong with the quantitative, strategic, and analytical skills traditionally taught at business schools, those alone do not guarantee success in business, where things tend to be messier and more fluid, and where success often rests on the ability to form winning coalitions that will back a good idea. Ultimately, implementing theatre teaching into the education system benefits an individual beginning in their formative years, and proves highly advantageous in fostering a career path. Moreover, the cornerstones of theatre teaching obtain remarkable applicability in multiple fields.



## Methodology

My thesis illuminates the ways in which theatre education can be used in a business setting, and largely focuses on the industry of Second City Works: the business-to-business side of The Second City, the world's leading comedy theatre and school of improvisation. Not only is The Second City at the forefront of comedy education, but Second City Works excellently emphasizes the often overlooked benefits of utilizing theatre in business.

For the last thirty years, Second City Works has taught the same theatrical principles of their comedy school to thousands of corporate clients, showing leaders exactly how to implement the tools of improvisation in order to solve common business challenges. This is accomplished by creating a specialized theatre training session that caters to the specific goals set each company. Second City Works has collaborated with an impressive variety of clientele, from local business to large corporations such as Nissan, Secret Deodorant, McDonald's, Google, Old Spice, Motorola, and Nike. The cornerstone of my thesis research is centered around the book *"Yes, And": How Improvisation Reverses 'No, But' Thinking and Improves Creativity and Collaboration* by Kelly Leonard and Tom Yorton. The book was developed in response to an overwhelming increase in interest in Second City Works' program in the last few years, which has seen a phenomenal amount of success. I have compiled numerous examples from specific case studies to illustrate how and why their work is so lucrative in today's market.

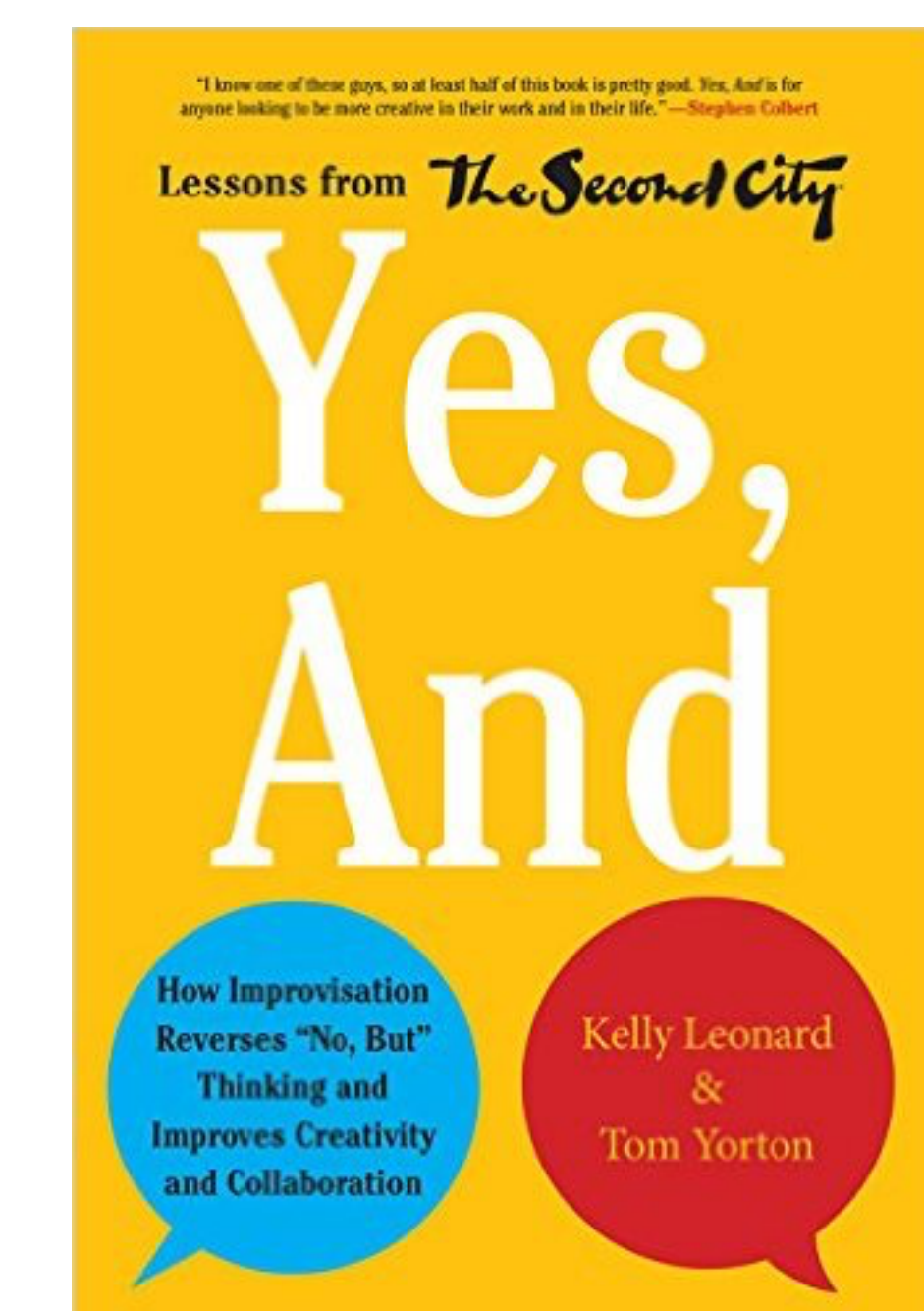
My findings will be paired with commentary from various project leaders at Second City Works' flagship office in Chicago, Illinois, and I will provide examples of the exercises and programs that are developed for each company's goals. I will prove and demonstrate the benefits of improvisation and theatre education for the crucial development of the "soft" skill set, and its vital role in the office. It is my hope that readers can begin to understand the function that theatre plays in our day-to-day life, and perhaps even how he or she can implement these tried-and-tested practices in the conference room.

## Significance

Second City Works, at its most basic level, synthesizes education with entertainment in a revolutionary and personalized way. This "make 'em laugh, make 'em think" approach is a winning formula for the millions of professionals whom The Second City has reached over the past three decades by reformulating venerable theatre teaching methods into cutting-edge business training programs for the twenty-first century. Second City Works knows that these methods have a place in every office, proved time and time again by the variety of clientele and the fact that so many of the companies are "returning customers", looking to Second City Works when they experience turnover or drastic changes in company image.

Second City Works has revolutionarily paved the way for innovation, guiding the creativity out of typically strictly analytical, logically thinking "Type A" personalities that proliferate the business world, and encouraging them to think without limits. The more The Second City works with people from the business world, the more they have come to understand that despite all the planning, processes, controls, and governance, business is one big act of improvisation, and for anyone who has spent time working in or running a business, you know that a great deal of your time and energy go to dealing with the unplanned and the unexpected, with the curve balls and grey zones that typify corporate life.

When leaders and employees learn the how to apply the pillars of theatre education to their business, the best possible workforce can be created. Second City Works has become a training ground for individual professionals and teams increasingly confounded by the amount of information they are expected to process, the speed at which industries, technology, and markets change, the volatility of the workplace, and the new standards for transparency and customer engagement. In our ever-changing world where communication, collaboration, and creativity are paramount necessities to a good business model, companies can take a nod from the world-renowned theatre and training center, and build a company network that is stronger, more resilient, and more prepared for the next big thing than ever before.



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