

Stage fright

A more 'dramatic' way to improve your public speaking skills is through improvisational theatre – improv for short – an approach to performing in which everything is made up on the spot. "If you're confident enough to get up and do something that's not prepared, imagine how confident you will be doing something that is prepared," says Kelly Agathos, founder of the ImproBubble improv school in Brussels.

Improv is built on a set of principles and guidelines that help nurture the creative process. "These are designed to bring you into a state of mind where you are able to create a story on stage without a script, and look to the audience like a quick-witted genius," Agathos says. "It's all about teamwork, acute concentration, being open to whatever comes your way and not being thrown by something you weren't expecting."

For example, when one performer makes a suggestion, it's important that the other players both accept it and add an idea of their own to move the story on. The answer to any suggestion should be 'Yes, and...'. Improvisers also learn how to quickly read and pick up on the verbal and non-verbal cues given by their partners to support them and make them look good on stage. Building trust is impor-

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Kelly Agathos



tant, as is a positive attitude to failure. Agathos: "Things will go wrong when you're creating something from scratch: take that as a given and embrace the places the 'mistakes' will take you. Often, they end up being wonderful gifts that inspire us to take the story somewhere new."

In addition to building confidence, improv can help public speaking by emphasising the connection with the audience. "Your audience is not here to see you fail," Agathos says. "They want you to do well, just like our audiences want us to do well and give them an entertaining night out."

And however much you prepare, you may also need to improvise as a public speaker. "You will be able to deal with unexpected things in other areas of your life a lot better if you are used to unexpected things coming from your partners on stage."

Brussels now has a vibrant improvisation scene, from which ImproBubble emerged. "We have monthly masterclasses with visiting improvisers and a weekly beginner's course starting again in September," Agathos says. "People can also come to our shows and find out more from our current students, many of whom once had a fear of public speaking."

improbubble.com