



# CREATIVITY ENGINEERING

## YES ... AND!

Volume 1, Issue 1

### Promise Not To Bore Us Knowing What You Want From A Trainer

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**YES ... AND!** is both the title of this newsletter and the core organizing principle of Creativity Engineering. The title originates from an Improv training exercise that facilitates the installation of creative "Win - Win" collaborative structures in teams, workgroups and organizations.

The purpose of this newsletter is to create a forum about communication, creativity and teambuilding.

In a (novel) attempt to keep this newsletter content-driven, we will try to keep communication about our services and products to a minimum.

Accordingly, we value your input and look forward to your contributions. Contact us about articles, book reviews, training exercises, etc.

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**“Are you boring?”** the caller asked 15 seconds into our conversation. Frozen for a moment while re-expe-

riencing a bad first date in high school, I finally, emphatically, answered “No!”

“We’re looking for a keynote speaker as well as some communication training and teambuilding for a group of young adults,” she continued.

“Are you sure you aren’t boring?” Foolishly, instead of directly answering her, I began to regale her with the benefits of our training, its unique interactive qualities, and our client list.

“You don’t understand,” she quickly interrupted, “I don’t care about any of that. The kickoff keynote is critical in captivating these kids and setting the tone for the rest of the meeting. If you’re boring, we’ll lose them forever and we will have wasted our time and money.”



She was right. I didn’t understand. The caller was representing the Legacy Foundation, a non-profit group that has, as one of its missions, to enlist, motivate, and train adolescents and young adults to advocate against tobacco use in schools across the country. They understood their audience well: Boredom equals death.

Finally, “getting it,” I gave her a number of references who assured her

that we were the furthest thing from boring, and we got the job. But that’s not the point of the story.

Unlike this client, most of the people who contact us aren’t really sure what they want and that makes choosing the right trainer challenging. **How To Hire A Trainer** (page 5) can help.

### What Is Creativity Engineering?

Creativity Engineering offers an effective, interactive and fun training model that prepares individuals, teams and organizations to creatively collaborate within an environment of risk and rapid change. Combining organizational development and creative improvisation (“Improv”), our presentations maximize participant interaction while minimizing formal lectures.

**Programs are conducted within a framework of positive humor in which participants feel continually supported and learn while laughing**

All programs are conducted within a framework of positive humor in which participants feel continually supported and learn while laughing.

Our flexible, proprietary adaptation of the tools of Improv has enabled us to successfully address a broad range of organizations from Fortune 500 companies to nonprofit associations, including governmental, scientific, and

medical institutions. Our experience encompasses addressing rider demographics for Harley Davidson, facilitating business reprocessing for Kraft Foods, and teambuilding for the IRS. From Harley to the IRS - that’s how adaptable the Improv approach can be!

Nothing is more fragile or more powerful than a new idea. Successful, high-performance organizations do things faster, cheaper, and better because of their ability to protect, nurture and fully develop ideas. The anagram for reactivity is creativity, and it’s the interchange between these two that represents the core of our approach.

Creativity Engineering constructs compelling interactive presentations where creative collaboration flourishes and participants experience the transformative benefit of productive risk-taking. For more information call us at 877-394-5005 or visit our website (see below).

Visit us at: [www.creativity-engineering.com](http://www.creativity-engineering.com)

## A - Z: Featured Improv Training Exercise

Each issue of **YES ... AND!** will present an Improv training structure and more importantly, a description of its applications for training and organizational development.

### Introduction

Training exercises in Improv are referred to as “games” or “structures.” A structure typically includes obstacles in the form of rules or communication limitations that can hinder successful collaboration. The purpose of a structure is to present participants with the opportunity to playfully overcome these obstacles within a context that enables them to learn while laughing.

This issue’s featured structure is called “A to Z”. Although it is the simplest of Improv structures, it consistently ranks as one of the most useful training exercises in our client evaluations. We use it as our first or second training structure because it immediately creates discussion opportunities and sets a positive tone for the remainder of the workshop.

### The Problem - Nobody Listens Anymore

How many real conversations have you had lately? Do people exchange ideas any more? You, me and lots of people don’t listen enough. In the 18th and 19th centuries, conversation was considered to be one of the great pleasures of life.

The last 20 years, however, have been marked by a phenomenal saturation of communication mediums and messages that compete for our attention. Accordingly, our daily dialogues have become so agenda-driven that they have almost completely lost their collaborative quality and purpose.

Increasingly we engage in intersecting monologues that emphasize message delivery over human interaction. In turn, this emphasis results in our communication having a “broadcast” quality that ignores effective collaboration. Like desperate enemies blindly exchanging mortar rounds on a smoky battlefield, we’re so afraid that we won’t be heard that we talk directly past each other with complete disregard, a bit like one of those “Cross-Fire” types of cable television shows.

The increased multi-tasking rising from greater global competition dilutes our human interaction even further. Email and voice mail supplemented by cell phones and instant messaging make it even less likely that we will be able to engage in quality human contact. Ask your HR person about the most frequent interpersonal complaints they hear. Invariably they will respond that employees grumble, “No one listens to me!”

**Our daily communication has become so agenda-driven that it has lost almost all of its collaborative purpose**



### Method

A to Z provides an effective way to address these problems within a supportive context of positive humor. As with most interactive training, it is important that the trainer demonstrates the structure with a volunteer(s) prior to facilitating it with the audience.

The trainer begins by having the group break into pairs (or groups of three if there is an extra person). Then the audience is asked for an activity that two people might do together – baking bread, for example. The trainer also asks the audience for a letter of the alphabet – **M**, for example – to begin the activity.

The group is instructed that they are to engage in the activity (scene) with the goal of producing a finished loaf of bread. However, they are to conduct the entire scene one sentence at a time, using consecutive letters of the alphabet to determine the first word in each sentence – beginning with the letter **M**, followed by **N**, **O**, etc. until they have worked their way all through the alphabet – ending **L** in this case.

For example, the first player begins, “**M**ary, hand me the yeast please.” The second player might respond, “**N**o! You know that you’re allergic to yeast,” to which first player answers, “**O**h its OK, I’ve had my shots.” The second player might follow up with, “**P**lease show me your shot certificate and we can use the yeast.” Don’t worry that this isn’t Second City dialogue. The most important thing is for the participants to simply use the alphabet in an activity that emphasizes the completion of a specific task.

Rather than allowing them to initially complete the task or the alphabet, the trainer interrupts the activity (ideally before they get halfway through) and asks the key question: “Has anyone noticed the tendency to think ahead to the ‘next letter’ rather than listening what to their partner has to say?” Invariably, the vast majority of the audience answers “Yes.” The trainer immediately follows up this question by asking, “Did you notice your partner doing the same thing, not listening?” Again, the audience will answer “Yes.”

After discussing the “not listening” phenomenon (see below), the exercise is repeated using a different task and beginning with a different letter. The second version of this structure is fairly straightforward. The group proceeds (without interruption) emphasizing slowing down and listening closely to their partner rather than worrying so much about their “next letter.” Incidentally, adding movement to the scene (miming baking bread, changing a tire, etc.) will significantly enhance their experience while enabling them to slow down and listen.

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## Improv Saves Lives - A Life from Surprise

*Included in each issue of YES ... AND! will be "real life" examples of Improv. This extraordinary account dramatically demonstrates the power of surprise and the brilliant utilization of spontaneity in the face of certain death.*

**E**urope – 1944. In the closing days of World War II, the German Army engaged in a desperate assault and captured American divisions in the Battle of the Bulge. During this last major German offensive from December 16, 1944 to January 28, 1945, American forces were surrounded. One young captured American was a German-speaking Jew from New York. When Ernst Beier's family had fled Europe ten years before, they were painfully aware of the dangers posed by the Third Reich.

**When the American officers refused to answer, he would fly into a rage and have them shot**

Now Ernst, an intelligence officer, was in the hands of the enemy. He and his unit were transported to a POW camp that had been hastily set up to guard the American prisoners. His position was tenuous, since being both an intelligence officer and a Jew he was likely to attract unwelcome attention.

The desperate Germans began interrogating the American prisoners, trying to gain some advantage. The commandant of the camp would take part in the questioning, and when the American officers refused to answer he would fly into a rage and have them shot. The guards came to get Ernst.

As Lt. Beier entered the commandant's office he was full of fear. He scanned the office for something that might give him a way to avoid what looked like certain death. And his eyes fell upon a record player and a stack of German records. On the top was a Schubert piece that Ernst was familiar with. He quickly said, "That is a wonderful recording you have there. I remember it well, but it has been years since I heard it."

The Commandant was startled. He said, "Yes, it is a favorite of mine, too. Would you like to hear it?" They listened to the music and Ernst realized that by not following the expected behavior of a POW – Interrogator relationship, he had seized the initiative. He quickly realized that his survival might depend on keeping that initiative. He said, "You are a man of educated tastes."

The commandant agreed, saying he met few classically educated people in these dark days, and Ernst replied, "It must be very lonely for you." For the next hour they discussed art, music, and great German literature. When the interrogation ended the young, relieved lieutenant was sent back to the other prisoners unharmed.

Until the camp was liberated, the interrogations became a warm ongoing conversation between a German officer happy to be distracted away from the hopelessness of his army's position, and a young American officer happy to be alive.

**By not following the expected behavior of a POW / Interrogator relationship, he had seized the initiative**

Ernst Beier went on to earn a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and developed a unique approach to psychotherapy based on his realization that we are creatures of patterned behavior. He developed a way of helping patients by interrupting and redirecting dysfunctional or pathological behavior through the use of a "therapeutic surprise." Sometimes, the surprise helped the patient change a lifelong pattern in a single moment, what Ernst liked to call "single trial learning."

He studied all aspects of communication and developed a reputation for his research into nonverbal communication. He emphasized to his students the importance of understanding how verbal and nonverbal communication follows patterns, and, how, by interrupting those predictable patterns, new and more adaptive behavior can result.

You can read more about his ideas in his classic 1966 book, *The Silent Language of Psychotherapy*. He was a wonderful teacher and mentor. Lynn Johnson, Ph.D

### Lynn Johnson Joins Staff

Frequently mistaken for Charlie Johnson's smarter brother – they're not related – Lynn Johnson, PhD, is the newest member of the Creativity Engineering staff.

Author, lecturer, and psychologist, Lynn has excelled in the field of organizational psychology for the last 20 years. He has presented seminars and workshops all over the U.S. and in Asia, Canada and England on improving human performance in organizations and in personal life.

Key to his approach is his sharp focus on motivating individuals, teams, and entire organizations to effectively develop their own unique solutions to the daily challenges they face, whether at work or at home.

Writing a variety of professional articles over the years on quality improvement, communication and emotional intelligence in business, Lynn is also the author of the groundbreaking book, *Psychotherapy in the Age of Accountability*.

In addition to substantially enhancing the resources of Creativity Engineering, Lynn is the founder of Solutions Consulting, in Salt Lake City, delivering a variety of training and services to insurance, government, health care, military and heavy industrial entities.

Truly a Renaissance man renowned for his gentle wit, Lynn is an avid private pilot, fluent in Spanish, and actually built his own house – with the help of his wife and children, of course.



## A-Z - Featured Training Exercise

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### Discussion

It's almost impossible to engage in the first version of A - Z without ignoring our partner while we think ahead to the correct letter of the alphabet. Participants focus so much on being "right" that they ignore their partner. This is particularly true within organizational settings.

Exposing the universality of this tendency frees people of blame and opens up rich discussion possibilities about the personal and professional impact of not listening and not being heard. Before venturing into the audience's experience with their organization and / or team, however, it's good to obtain some daily personal examples outside the workplace - shopping, customer service interaction, even dealing with children at home.

**Key to maximizing the benefit of A - Z is the trainer's ability to transform the audience's experience from the complaint mode to a solution-focused mode.**

Initially establishing this phenomenon in a non-work setting will ease the transition to a discussion of specific examples within the organization.

While exposing these toxic phenomena is important, the key to maximizing the benefit of A - Z is the trainer's ability to transform the audience's experience from the complaint mode - "It's awful that people don't listen to me" - to a solution-focused mode where they take personal responsibility to remedy problem.

We have found that utilizing key constructive questions transform problem-talk into solution-talk. For example the trainer might ask the following: "When have you noticed people listening to you? What's different (for both you and them) when this happens? What are the different ways that you get people to listen to you? What, specifically, do you do to get them to pay attention to what you are saying? How would they know that you are listening to them? What difference does it make when they are convinced that you are listening to them?"

On the surface A - Z appears to be a deceptively simple, even childish exercise. Yet, in our experience it is its very core simplicity that makes it consistently successful. In last ten years we have found it to be our most effective entry into the inner workings of the collaborative processes of teams and organizations. Give it a try. Let us know your results. Call us. We're always available to listen.

**Make Contact**  
**877-394-5005**

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## Books

**I**t's ironic that many books on creativity consistently lack the very imagination that they purport to demonstrate. I bought *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A corporate fool's guide to surviving with grace* to read on the flight to a creativity conference in Canada. I was so impressed that by the time I landed, I decided to (significantly) change my presentation. From the title, to the format, to the artwork, to its inspirational content, this book distinguishes itself from the pack.



Author Gordon McKenzie worked at Hallmark Cards for thirty years ultimately achieving the (self-created yet thoroughly respected) position of "Creative Paradox." He uses the metaphor of a giant hairball to represent the tangle of impenetrable rules, procedures, policies, and historic processes that organizations devise to maintain their existence.

Far from an idyllic celestial body, however, the gravitation of this virtual "Death Star" is capable of sucking the life forces of creativity, imagination and vitality out of an organization. The hairball represents a vast wasteland of mediocrity that continually increases its own mass while generating a powerful force that kills the lifeblood of existence - ideas.



Rather than being tempted to generate enough escape velocity to flee to another planet, McKenzie suggests that we learn to orbit the hairball, stating that in his thirty years at Hallmark: "There was not a day when I was not subject to the inexorable pull of Corporate Gravity tug, tug, tugging me toward (and during one unhappy year, right into) the tangle of the Hairball where the ghosts of past successes outvote original thinking."

Utilizing anecdotes, strategies, and truly imaginative drawings, McKenzie inspires us to find a place of balance that will enable us to benefit from the resources of the organization without becoming "entombed in the bureaucracy of the institution." Hard to believe that this started out as a self-published book. Read it. It will change the way you think!

Charlie Johnson

## How To Hire A Trainer

Unlike the Legacy Foundation (see page 1), about half the people who initially contact us aren't really sure what they want. Like a hungry man (women don't seem to do this) visiting a supermarket without a grocery list, they look for what strikes them.

Understandable as this may be, preparing a list can protect you from "filling up" on something that isn't particularly satisfying. (Note to self: Get rid that five-gallon tub of Cheetos you bought last week!) The purpose of this article is to develop a framework that will enhance your decision-making when choosing a trainer or a speaker.

The first step in the hiring process is to think about what you want your audience to experience after the presentation. Is your goal to motivate and inspire them? Or, do you want them to acquire specific "takeaway" skills? We know – you want both! But consider the following criteria in making your choice.

**Think about watching a videotape of the participants after the event.**

**What would you see and hear them doing differently that would convince you that their experience had been a success?**

### Trainers Always Speak But Speakers Don't Always Train

Although great speakers and trainers share a number of traits, they differ primarily in the way they highlight performance and content. Speakers generally emphasize stage presence and audience-engagement over specific content. Speakers should motivate, inspire, and entertain. They are expert at capturing and maintaining the audience's attention. Just being in the same room with some speakers, (e.g. Rudi Giuliani, Christopher Reeves, Lance Armstrong) can be a powerful experience.

Audiences should walk away with a unique insight after hearing a great speaker. Frequently, this is embedded within the visceral, emotional experience of the presentation and their perceived personal connection to the speaker's personality and story.

Trainers tend to emphasize content over performance. A good trainer will have a wealth of proprietary material, a way to tailor the content to your specific needs (see below), and will deliver it in an appetizing package. In today's short-attention span world, great trainers — like great speakers — must be able to dynamically engage and maintain an audience's attention.

Unlike speakers, however, trainers often must hold an audience's attention over an extended time period. This means that they must be energetic, interactive, and capable of quickly making adjustments to participants' needs.

The importance of the trainer's ability to be flexible to your group's temperament and learning style cannot be overstated. As most OD and Training Directors know, by far and away, the vast

majority of training costs are represented by the participants' time away from their jobs rather than the presenter's fees. Focusing on tailored outcomes insures that money and precious time won't be wasted. The "Videotape Question" will help you with this.

### Using The Videotape Question

It sounds so obvious, but before you hire a speaker or trainer, you should have some specific goals in mind. Initially, we often hear general goals like "teambuilding, communication, creativity, conflict resolution." With these generic starting points, we suggest that clients focus on the specific desired outcomes of the experience after the event has concluded. This requires them to imagine a different future for your organization. To facilitate this we use the "videotape question."

Think about watching a videotape of your group after the event. What would you see and hear them doing differently that would convince you that their experience had been a success. Specifically, we like to ask, "Who (individuals, teams, departments, divisions, etc.) will be doing what (specific actions, processes, attitudes, etc.) differently after we've finished?"

We like to follow up this question by asking, "What difference would it make and who would notice this difference?" And, most importantly, "How would you find that (difference) useful?" In other words, "Is this a difference that would make a difference?"

Recently, one potential teambuilding client had the following answers to this series of questions: "I'd see marketing and customer support interact more positively in the future."

When asked to be more specific, imagining how that interaction would look and sound differently (on a videotape) than it does now, she replied, "Instead of bickering about 'turf' and roles, I would see and hear them proactively responding to each other in a supportive rather than competitive way. Their language would be open and engaging rather than the stagnating bickering." She continued, "Non-verbals would be important as well - eye contact, more open body postures, a kind of visual warmth of connection."

She went on to identify who would be talking to whom differently – both individuals and teams. When questioned about what difference such a change would make, she answered: "All the difference in the world! Managers would be less stressed because they wouldn't spend so much time 'putting out fires.' Our customers would notice a much quicker response, and, best of all, it would improve our bottom line!"



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## How To Hire A Trainer

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The “Videotape Question” worked perfectly for this client. It enabled her to progress from a typical vague over-generalization to a detailed description of specific bottom line training outcomes that would truly make a difference for her department.

### Avoid “Death By PowerPoint”

How a trainer facilitates your goals can be as important as the goals themselves. If he or she can’t successfully engage your audience, your goals will never be achieved. I remember walking by a mass of glass-walled classrooms at the campus of one of our large international clients. Looking into a darkened room with a brightly lit projector screen, I asked, “What’s going on in there?” Smiling, my sponsor answered, “We call that ‘death by PowerPoint Charlie!’”

The key question that a trainer should be asked about engaging participants is, “How do you get your participants to have a sense of ownership of the material? Virtually all trainers will claim to use interactive teaching methods, but it is important to get specific details of how these work in actual practice. Do they use games, exercises, and / or structured class participation? How do they use handouts, overheads, flipcharts, etc.?”

If the content delivery requires a great deal of lecture, how do they break up their presentation to avoid boredom and burnout? What are some of the things they do to get the audience energized? In other words, how does the trainer make the content come “alive?”

### Fees: Negotiate Outcomes First

First, try to keep in mind that choosing training solely on a cost basis reduces it to a commodity. This is an understandable mindset; after all, your favorite brand of toilet paper costs a lot less at Costco or Sam’s Club, so why pay more? Ah, but training shouldn’t be approached as a commodity like toilet paper. (We’ll pause while you make up your own joke to this pedestrian insight.)

Seriously, even if you are on a tight budget, there are several advantages to exploring training possibilities beyond their initial cost. And if you’re not willing to look beyond cost, you might consider finding a way to keep the training “in house” or take advantage the many online learning courses that are currently available.

In making your cost/benefit analysis, learning more about what’s available can help you further define what you want, especially if you use the principles outlined above.

Second, you might discover a program that is more appropriate for another time or department in your organization. Finally, getting the trainer to match his or her program with your specific outcomes will give you an advantage in negotiating within your budget.

### Stay Flexible And Get What You Want

Using this framework allows clients to negotiate outcomes rather than fees. This markedly expands the possibilities, enabling all parties to get what they want. Once you know who and what you want, exploration can center on ways to make the training experience fit into your budget. With this possibility in mind, consider the following choices when negotiating with a trainer and the purchasing department responsible for paying for it.

- **Location** – Can you save money by keeping the training onsite rather than renting hotel space?
- **Size** – Can you adjust the audience size and therefore the price of the training?
- **Duration** – Can you reduce the duration of the training and still come close to the outcomes you desire?

• **Timing** – Does the time of the fiscal year (the training will occur) make a difference to your budget? Can the training occur when the trainer is already in your geographic area reducing travel fees? Does the time of the week (beginning, end, weekends) make a difference in the trainer’s fees? Does the trainer have any “down time” he or she would like to fill?



• **Extras** – If you are offsite, are there some extras you can do without? – Bar fees, excessive SWAG, expensive catering service, etc.

• **Combining** – Are there additional departments that can profit from the training, further reducing the cost per person?

• **Enthusiasm** – Does your unbridled enthusiasm for the trainer’s service make a difference? It does for us. We have always found a way to make things work when clients share our enthusiasm for the possibilities that our training represents.

No matter what choice you make, don’t make any decisions on an empty stomach. Some basic preparation before will enable you to get a tailored experience that meets your specific goals. It will enable you to negotiate a “one size fits one” experience rather than settling for a generic presentation that fills time but really doesn’t meet your needs. After all, you shouldn’t let the vendor take you out to dinner and then tell you what to order.

Charlie Johnson