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For Jeanne Fey:

Happy Mother's Day. I made this out of macaroni for you.
though. I was going to have to steal that. And that's where my college education comes in. I was going to have to steal that unfair advantage I'd been waiting for. I interviewed with Vicky. It was easy. Did I have the skills? Sure, I was twenty-two. Did I always answer the phone? Sure. What were my qualifications for this job to pay for improv classes?"

"I told her. As I watched her nervously take the steps to her interview, I knew it was Donna had been at the front desk too. I watched her nervously throw herself into that office job, determined to do it for the rest of her life. I stayed less than a year. When I got a job with The Second City, I found a new kind of life. I moved to Chicago in 1992 to study improv and it was everything I wanted it to be. It was like a cult. People ate, slept, and definitely drank improv. They worked at crappy day jobs just to hand over their money for improv classes. Eager young people in khakis and polo shirts were willing to do whatever teachers like Del Close and Martin de Maat told them to. In retrospect, it may actually have been a cult.

The most fun job I ever had was working at a theater in Chicago called The Second City. If you've never heard of The Second City, it is an improvisation and sketch comedy theater in Chicago, founded in 1959 by some University of Chicago brainiacs. There's a Second City theater in Chicago and one in Toronto, and between the two they have turned out some mind-blowing alumni, including John Belushi, Gilda Radner, Dan Aykroyd, Chris Farley, John Candy, Catherine O'Hara, Eugene Levy, Andrea Martin, Steve Carell, Amy Sedaris, Amy Poehler, and Stephen Colbert. I could go on, but my editor told me that was a cheap way to flesh out the book.

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There were three touring companies: Red Company, Green Company, and Blue Company. I was in the Blue Company, or BlueCo as we called it to be unbelievably cool. I still feel affection for the members of BlueCo like we served in the military together. Specifically the French military, because we were lazy and a little bit sneaky. For example, they once sent us on a tour of Texas and the Midwest, and the moment the van pulled away from the theater, we all agreed to throw out the “best of” sketches we had been directed to perform and replace them with our own original material. Amy Poehler in particular was tired of being handed dated old blond-girl roles where all her lines were things like “Here’s your coffee, honey,” or “Mr. Johnson will see you now,” or “Whattaya mean a blind date?!” Each night we’d pull out an old sketch and replace it with something of our own. My friend Ali Farahnakian, who is a genius in many ways, wrote a very funny monologue about the McDonald’s Big Mac. During the course of the monologue he would eat an entire Big Mac Extra Value Meal onstage. Because the meal was technically a prop, he made the stage manager buy it for him every night and he kept his twenty-five dollars. These were the kinds of skills you learned touring for The Second City. By the time we returned to Chicago ten days later, the “best of” show was completely gone and we were in big trouble, except we didn’t really care.
Improvisation is AGREE. Always agree and when you’re improvising, this means you are with whatever your partner has created. So if I say, “Freeze, I have a gun,” and you say, “It’s your finger. You’re pointing your finger,” the ground has ground to a halt. But if I say, “Freeze, I have a gun,” and you say, “The gun I gave you. Oh no!” then we have started a scene in fact a Christmas gun.

In real life you’re not always going to agree everyone says. But the Rule of Agreement what your partner has created and to at a for a scene. Start with a YES and see if improvisation is not only to say yes, but supposed to agree and then add something or a scene with “I can’t believe it’s so hot, say, “Yeah….” we’re kind of at a stand-still believe it’s so hot in here, and you say, “We’re in hell.” Or if I say, “I can’t believe you say, “Yes, this can’t be good for the way, “I can’t believe it’s so hot in here,” and we shouldn’t have crawled into this dog’s fat.

To me YES, AND means don’t be afraid to contribute. It’s your responsibility to contribute. Always make sure you’re adding something to the discussion. Your initiations are worthwhile.

The next rule is MAKE STATEMENTS. This is a positive way of saying “Don’t ask questions all the time.” If we’re in a scene and I say, “Who are you? Where are we? What are we doing here? What’s in that box?” I’m putting pressure on you to come up with all the answers.

In other words: Whatever the problem, be part of the solution. Don’t just sit around raising questions and pointing out obstacles. We’ve all worked with that person. That person is a drag. It’s usually the same person around the office who says things like “There’s no calories in it if you eat it standing up!” and “I felt menaced when Terry raised her voice.”

MAKE STATEMENTS also applies to us women: Speak in statements instead of apologetic questions. No one wants to go to a doctor who says, “I’m going to be your surgeon? I’m here to talk to you about your procedure? I was first in my class at Johns Hopkins, so?” Make statements, with your actions and your voice.

Instead of saying “Where are we?” make a statement like “Here we are in Spain, Dracula.” Okay, “Here we are in Spain, Dracula” may seem like a terrible start to a scene, but this leads us to the best rule:

THERE ARE NO MISTAKES, only opportunities. If I start a scene as what I think is very clearly a cop riding a bicycle, but you think I am a hamster in a hamster wheel, guess what? Now I’m a hamster in a hamster wheel. I’m not going to stop everything to explain that it was really supposed to be a bike. Who knows? Maybe I’ll end up being a police hamster who’s been put on “hamster wheel” duty because I’m “too much of a loose cannon” in the field. In improv there are no mistakes, only beautiful happy accidents. And many of the world’s greatest discoveries have been by accident. I mean, look at the Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup, or Botox.
Lesson #183: You Can’t Boss People Around If They Don’t Really Care

The producers tried to punish BlueCo by giving us the thom shows were held at one a.m. after a high and attendance was mandatory. It was basic to keep kids from drinking or having sex on and the performers hated doing these shows as the kids hated watching them. Imagine would be if you were missing out on a toothy watch some cult members make up a song election.

Other terrible shows. Brightly lit hotel ballbroken microphones. College shows where the drunk. Charity buyouts where the audience sober. Corporate gigs at eight a.m. for o were there to be told about reductions in re benefits. Basically, any time you were per a audience that was not there voluntarily, it

So, or eight months of touring, we started to of us actors would get promoted to one of panyes. The Mainstage cast and the “Second ect to stay in Chicago and earn a unionized. They would develop their own sketches by front of an audience, then keeping the ideas ed until they had a full two-hour show. It job. However, of all the places I’ve worked posedly boys’ clubs, The Second City was

the only one where I experienced institutionalized gender nonsense. For example, a director of one of the main companies once justified cutting a scene by saying, “The audience doesn’t want to see a scene between two women.” Whaaa? More on that later.

In 1995, each cast at The Second City was made up of four men and two women. When it was suggested that they switch one of the companies to three men and three women, the producers and directors had the same panicked reaction. “You can’t do that. There won’t be enough parts to go around. There won’t be enough for the girls.” This made no sense to me, probably because I speak English and have never had a head injury. We weren’t doing Death of a Salesman. We were making up the show ourselves. How could there not be enough parts? Where was the “Yes, and”? If everyone had something to contribute, there would be enough. The insulting implication, of course, was that the women wouldn’t have any ideas.

I’m happy to say the producers did jump into the twentieth century and switch to a cast of “three and three,” and I got to be that third woman in the first gender-equal cast. However, I must say, as a point of pride, that I didn’t get the job because I was a woman. I got the job because Amy Poehler had moved to New York with the Upright Citizens Brigade and I was the next best thing.

But this was the first time I experienced what I like to call “The Myth of Not Enough.”

When I worked at Saturday Night Live, I had a five a.m. argument with one of our most intelligent actresses. It was
Lorne was adding another woman to the cast irate. (In fairness, she was also exhausted. m. after writing all night.) She felt there was just enough screen time to go uhgh for the girls and that this girl was too old argument: How could this be true if we w? A bunch of us suggested that they collaborate. And, of course, that’s what they compete. And, of course, that’s what they success, once they were actually in a room where does that initial panic come from?

I tell young women who ask me for career advice that they’re going to try to trick you. To make you feel in competition with one another. “You’re option. If they go with a woman, it’ll be worse Barbara.” Don’t be fooled. You’re not in competition with other women. You’re in competition with courage them to always wear a bra. Even if you need it, just... you know what? You’re regret it.

My Honeymoon, or A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again Either*

M y husband doesn’t like to fly. He does fly now because he doesn’t want our daughter to grow up thinking he is a Don Knotts character. But when we were first married, he didn’t fly.

I made him fly once before we were married because

* If you get this reference to David Foster Wallace’s 1997 collection of essays, consider yourself a member of the cultural elite. Why do you hate your country and flag so much?!