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USING CHARACTER CONFLICTS

Life is filled with conflict. We may try to escape it, but sometimes conflict is unavoidable, especially when the other people involved have agendas completely different from our own. It's in those situations that we must find a resolution in order to accomplish our objectives.

A strong conflict can provide the foundation for an excellent improvisation. This chapter contains two hundred scenarios that include characters with conflicting beliefs, motivations, wants, or needs. Situations are provided for two or three players, but many of the situations for two players may be adjusted to involve three or more.

The instructor should conduct the improvisations in the following way:

- Ask the players to take the stage or playing area. The stage or playing area should be bare, except for two or three chairs and possibly a small table the players may wish to use during the improvisation.
- Assign each player a role, and read the improvisation situation aloud to both the players and the audience.
- Immediately after doing this, provide each player with the background information given for his or her individual role. This should be done by whispering it to each player privately. *It is important that the players do not know in advance the back-*

ground information provided for the other character or characters in the scene.

Before beginning, review the following guidelines with your players:

- Develop a strong character objective before you begin the scene, and keep it in mind during the improvisation. Everything you say or do must be directed toward accomplishing that objective. If you find what you're saying or doing to accomplish your objective is not working, then try something else. However, the objective itself should not be changed. Your objective provides the energy and focus necessary to keep the scene moving.
- Focus only on the other actor(s), not the audience. All outward expression should result from an honest reaction to the situation, not from what you think the audience should be seeing. Don't play emotions; just become involved in the situation. Don't try to be "dramatic." You're not writing a play, you're simply trying to reach your objective.
- Go along with any new element introduced by your partner. If your partner says he is married, don't question it (unless, of course, you believe he is lying).
- Pantomime the use of any props that may be necessary.
- Continue trying to accomplish your objective until the instructor tells you to stop. Remember: If you think you're getting nowhere with one line of action, try another.

After each improvisation, you may wish to discuss the performance with your players and the audience. You may use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- How closely did the players stick to their objectives?
- What specific strategies did the players use to try to accomplish their objectives? What specific actions did the players choose to carry out those strategies? Did each player use an original or creative approach?

- Did the players do anything that seemed phony or contrived? Were any guilty of playing to the audience instead of to each other?
- Did any character element seem to be stereotyped?
- Did any of the players break concentration during the scene?
- Was there too much talk and too little action?
- Did the players use their imaginations well?

IMPORTANT NOTE: Unless a specific gender is required, the roles described in the following improvisation situations may be played by either males or females. You may replace *he* with *she*, *man* with *woman*, *girl* with *boy*, *daughter* with *son*, etc.

School Days

Two Players

1. THE SITUATION: A girl meets a boy in a hallway of their high school. The week before, the girl had accepted the boy's invitation to their senior prom.

GIRL: You accepted this boy's invitation only because the guy you really wanted to go with didn't ask you. Yesterday, the boy you were hoping would ask you finally did ... and you said yes! Now you need to find a way to tell this boy you no longer want to go to the prom with him.

BOY: You're very excited about going to the prom with this girl.

2. THE SITUATION: A high school principal sees a student sitting on a bench outside the school in the middle of a class period.

STUDENT: Earlier, you asked your teacher for permission to go to the restroom. You actually just wanted to take a break from the class because you were becoming bored.

PRINCIPAL: You're wondering why this student is sitting on a bench outside the school instead of sitting in his class.

3. THE SITUATION: A Spanish teacher pulls aside one of his students just after the class period ends.