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Moment after moment we are creating something, and this is the joy of our life.

— Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Master

Foreword

My education was painful. It was competitive. It was based on grades, rather than the process of learning. Most teachers asked for regurgitation, not creativity. So, I found my haven in theater. It was fun. I was able to express all of the parts of me.

I'll never forget my first drama class in eighth grade with Mr. Strater. He is a large man and on the first day of class, he walks into the room and falls down as if he had died. I am shocked. Then he stands up and says, "Today we are going to learn how to fall on stage." It is now fifty years later and I have never forgotten that incredible moment. He created magic and surprise and I loved it.

Theater allows me to explore, risk and create. I went to college and majored in theater. It is my love. I trained as an actress. Although some of the acting classes are competitive, cutthroat and destructive, others are warm and supportive. I feel like I am part of a family. Acting in productions is wonderful. We are all working and creating together because we have a common goal. I find that the group process is just as important as the production itself. I enjoy the rehearsals more than the actual performance because in rehearsals we can risk, experiment and try anything.

Through my training as an actress and director, I learned to be vulnerable, to share and, most importantly for the purposes of this book, to create an ensemble. An ensemble is a group whose members have a deep connection to one another and to the work at hand. That's what is important to me in the work I do now, with actors, therapists, clergy, teachers, professional helpers and group leaders. That's why I form a circle at the first group meeting. The circle is a symbol of connection, unity and wholeness. These are the qualities I want to encourage and create in my groups.

My groups reflect how I believe life should be. The environment I try to create in the groups is the same kind of environment I want in my own life: creative, supportive and caring. I have found that in this kind of environment, attention is paid to the process and not to the results. The most important part about being an artist is becoming comfortable with the process of **creating** and **becoming**.

Besides my theater training, I have taken many kinds of workshops in psychology-psychodrama, transactional analysis, psychosynthesis, Gestalt and more. After each workshop, I took the crème de la crème of what I had learned in the group and applied it to my own teaching. The group leaders I have worked with were role models. They made each group experience a double learning experience. I learned

about my own process and also how to be a group leader. I watched many leaders handle difficult and stressful situations.

As a group leader/teacher/acting coach, I help people bring out their ‘sub-personalities’ or different parts of themselves. To do this successfully, I must trust, risk and be comfortable with the unknown. The purpose of this book is to help others who work with groups gain confidence in these areas.

Several people have warned me that these exercises could be threatening to some group leaders. At first, this surprised me. But then I realized that people come from different training arenas. Many people are taught NOT to risk or express themselves freely. We are not taught to be vulnerable with other people. Instead, we are taught to be controlled, safe and predictable.

Working with a group, be it at a workshop, in a classroom or on a retreat, should be one of the most exciting learning experiences in the world, for the group leader as well as for the participants. But our educational system can be full of judgments. Many teachers tell us there is a right way to do something and a wrong way. Many students as well as their teachers are frozen. They are unable to be creative or inventive. We carry this experience with us into group situations and this blocks our spontaneity and creativity. I hope this book will help you remove the blocks to spontaneity and creativity for yourself and for the people who are in your groups.

Many colleges and universities have artist-in-residence programs. The point of these programs is to allow students and teachers to see professional artists at work. This can be exciting, but I believe it’s far more exciting—and more important—for people to learn that ***we are all artists***. For those of you who feel timid about trying out these techniques and exercises, I want to say to you, “Go slowly. Be gentle with yourself and your groups.” Trusting the Moment means trusting the process, and most importantly, trusting yourself. You will be amazed at the excitement and joy you and your groups will experience—together. I love something a student of mine wrote in his journal when I asked him to explain what he thought teaching was all about: “My philosophy of teaching is simple. I don’t just want to teach that two plus two is four, but I want to teach that if one person has two and another person has two, ***together*** they have four.” We all work together to create an ensemble.

People often write me and say, “I loved your group and the exercises, but the most wonderful thing about the group was that I learned so much about myself.” In a journal I wrote in 1971, I said that one of my goals was to help change the educational system in this country. I haven’t done that, and maybe I won’t see any significant change during my lifetime. But, then again, maybe I will. If people come to understand themselves better, who knows what could happen? At least this is a beginning.

With love,
Jeannie Lindheim
Brookline, Massachusetts

*Faith is to believe what we do not see;
the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.*

— St. Augustine

Why This Book Is Valuable

The purpose of this book is to give you a set of tools that will make you a more effective, exciting and **excited** artist and/or group leader. It includes ideas on the art of group leadership, as well as specific suggestions for group procedures. The heart of the book includes fifty exercises that will:

- Break the ice when your group first meets
- Free people from the blocks and inhibitions that many people bring to one-on-one and to group situations
- Encourage your group members to be open, vulnerable and trusting with each other
- Build a warm and supportive environment where each person will feel free to express his or her own creativity and joy
- Develop a bond between group members that will allow each one to be spontaneous and take risks

When you use the exercises in this book you will help participants and/or yourself to:

- Build self esteem and confidence
- Get to know themselves in new and exciting ways
- Become more imaginative and sensitive to others
- Commit to new situations and follow through on impulses
- Take off their masks and express different parts of themselves
- Build memory, concentration and listening skills
- Become more comfortable with their bodies
- Learn to lead, as well as to follow
- Become more flexible, physically and emotionally
- Learn how to live in the moment
- Develop a greater sense of life possibilities that are open to them

These exercises combine movement, improvisation, guided imagery, symbolic drawing and other activities that open new doors. They require that you, and the members of your group, think on your feet because they demand spontaneity. The exercises will stretch you to your creative limits. Stereotypes and preconceptions will break down and empathy and compassion will grow. The environment you create by doing the exercises will let your group laugh and be silly together. There will be a freshness and excitement at each group meeting.

These exercises are excellent diagnostic tools for the group leader. By using these exercises you will see how each person perceives him or herself. Since the exercises are open-ended, they are flexible enough to be useful for many types of people. Once you get to know the members of your group, you will be able to use the exercises to help each of them develop their own unique creativity.

Watching your group grow as they do the exercises is the most thrilling part of leading groups. This book will provide the tools you need so that you and your group can really soar **together!**

To summarize, this book tells you how to successfully introduce these exercises into your group, how to maintain group energy, and how to ground the experience of each exercise. And it teaches you how to be open and vulnerable yourself, how to be *in the process* along with your group, while maintaining just enough distance to keep control and create the needed safety within your group.

When you become open and vulnerable as a group leader, the way is paved for your group to share their most valuable and treasured parts of themselves. These exercises and tools will allow each person's creative fire to ignite!

*Take life too seriously and what is it worth? If the morning wakes us to no new joys,
if the evening brings us not the hope of new pleasure, is it worthwhile to dress and undress?*
— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer

Who This Book Is For

People in the helping professions love doing the exercises in my workshops and on retreats. The exercises open up their own creativity and they discover parts of themselves that have been hidden for years. Even though the exercises were originally designed for actors, they are helpful therapeutic tools. You can do them one-on-one with your clients and patients.

Teachers face the challenging task of having to come up with new material for students, day in and day out. These exercises can easily be adapted to many classroom situations. They can be used to teach language arts, social studies, math, sociology, psychology, history, art, music, theater and more. You can integrate these exercises into your curriculum. For example, improvisation can be based on historical situations and you will bring history into the present by role-playing. Your teaching becomes exciting and experiential for your students. Physicalizing what they are learning helps students experience their creativity in new and exciting ways. The possibilities are endless.

Youth leaders face challenges similar to those faced by teachers of all levels. Often, students are apathetic or downright resistant. I once taught at a school of high school dropouts. There were sixteen young men and it was rough. They fought me tooth and nail for about three weeks and then a transformation occurred. They began to love the material and the process. The trust took longer to develop within this group because basically, they didn't trust anyone. But once they did trust me, and each other, miracles began to happen.

People who work with a physically disabled population will find it challenging and exciting to try these exercises. Believe it or not, I taught movement and improvisation to people who are paraplegics and quadriplegics. Many in the group had speech difficulties. At first it was challenging for me to understand them. But after fifteen minutes, the wheelchairs were moving and we were all communicating with each other in amazing ways. The exercises were effective in bringing people out of themselves.

Senior citizens love the exercises. They play, are creative, and have fun. While teaching in a Senior Center, I was excited to see how brilliant many of the participants are. They were grateful to have the opportunity to take risks and go into new areas of creativity where they had never been before.

People who work with people on a one-on-one basis can use these techniques effectively. As you read the Art of Group Leadership, you will see universal principles that apply to your work with just one client. The concepts, tools, and techniques will make your work with clients richer and more exciting. You will have more to draw on in your work with the people you see. **Coaches** can use these exercises with one client or with groups they facilitate. You can even do many of the exercises over the phone.

Writers, painters, dancers and other artists can do these exercises alone. Although creativity is wonderful when it is experienced in groups, it is just as rich when you create alone. You can open up and stimulate your creative juices with many of the techniques in this book.

The obvious audience for this book is **actors, directors, and acting teachers**. I have seen these exercises create marvelous transformations in the attitudes and work of thousands of actors and directors.

I believe that **people who work creatively with people** will gain a tremendous amount of joy from this book. The exercises, philosophy and tips for group leaders will give you the roots, foundation, and a feeling of safety so you can successfully introduce the exercises to your group.

Enjoy! You are about to go on a creative and exciting journey. . . .

I see my life as an unfolding set of opportunities to awaken.

— Ram Dass, spiritual teacher, writer

How To Use This Book

This book can be used two ways. You can either read it cover to cover or go right to an exercise that you might want to do with your group. The first part of the book provides ideas for successfully introducing the exercises to your group. You may already have this expertise.

In that case, you can scan the first part of the book and then go directly to the exercises. Or, you may want to intersperse reading the first part on leadership with the second part of the book, which are the exercises.

The first section of the book is called *The Art of Group Leadership*. There are suggestions on how you can be an even more dynamic and sensitive group leader. There are tips for leading the exercises, tips on leading your group, tips on how to handle problems, tips for coaching improvisations, and tips on how to take care of yourself as a group leader.

The second section of this book includes the exercises, the heart of the book.

I'd like to suggest ways that you might approach the exercises. One approach is that you read through **all** of the exercises. This will give you the flavor of the book. As you read them, you might want to take notes on the exercises that seem appropriate for the kinds of groups you lead. I've provided the *purpose* for each exercise, but by using your own creativity, you can come up with your own purposes for doing the exercises.

Depending on your time constraints, you can check Appendix F: Time Requirements for Each Exercise. The exercises range from ten minutes to ninety minutes each. Most of them can be adapted to fit into almost any time frame you have. You can read the exercise over and see what part of it fits into your group plan.

The Time Requirements are general. Most of the exercises have many parts. You can work with one part of an exercise. The longer exercises can be broken down into shorter exercises of 15-30 minutes. Some exercises, if done in their entirety, might take several hours.

It is helpful if you let each exercise percolate in your mind and body for a few days. As I created them, I allowed what I call *musings time*. Ideas came to mind, as I was washing the dishes or playing with our pet rabbit, on how I might best structure the exercise.

Please be aware that the part of the exercise under Procedure is written as if you were talking DIRECTLY to your group.

This means that you can read over the exercise and then paraphrase it in a way that feels comfortable for you. The exercises are adaptable, open-ended and evolving. You are free to transform them and make them your own. You will find your own creativity flourishing!

The Appendices have suggestions for improvisational settings and situations, suggestions for two, three and more people improvisations, suggestions for character professions you can use in improvisations and questions to help your group come up with imaginary autobiographies of their characters. There is a section on personal growth books and wonderful theater books. You will also see the Time requirements for each exercise.

I want to encourage you to use this book in the way that works best for you. Let your intuition be your guide. You have my approach here, the exercises I love doing with groups. Distill from it what is most valuable for you. You can use the techniques and exercises just as they are presented. Or you can use them as stepping-stones toward creating your own exercises. If you don't feel comfortable with an entire exercise, you can use just a part of it.

However you use this book, if you are loving toward the people in your groups, these exercises will work. I have done all of the exercises for twenty-five years and I know they work.

I offer you a guarantee. These exercises and philosophy behind them will change your group. This work is all about experimenting, taking risks and bringing out new energy and creativity. I know that once you try a few of the exercises, you will want to do them all.

One last suggestion. Go slowly, be gentle with yourself and trust that you can make these exercises work beautifully with your group. I know you will!

The teacher of the actor is like the teacher of small children. He looks for the right steps for each student, and when the student is about to make his discovery, the teacher must disappear. If the teacher looks for his own satisfaction at the point of discovery, the student does not fully discover. Take a child who has a pile of blocks but can't find a way to make what he wants out of them. If the teacher guides him in making the shape the child wants to make, he should disappear when the child is about to take the definitive step. By taking this step himself, the child discovers his own thoughts.

— Joseph Chaiken, stage director, founder of the Open Theater

How The Exercises Are Organized

The exercises are divided into three sections: Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced. The criteria for differentiating between Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced are as follows:

Difficulty: How difficult the exercise is for the group to accomplish.

Trust: How much trust you need in your group to do the exercise.

Ensemble and Connection: How well your group needs to work together to perform the exercise.

Risk: How much risk the exercise involves.

All groups are different. You could find an exercise in the Intermediate or Advanced section that you might want to use as a Beginning exercise. In my experience, the Advanced exercises are the most difficult. Again, this doesn't mean that if you find an exercise in this category, that you shouldn't use it earlier. Let your instincts be your guide.

Each exercise has the following headings:

Purpose: This says what group members will learn from the exercise and why it is valuable. This section is just for you. You don't need to share it with the members of your group.

Tools: Lists of any tools, i.e. drawing utensils, paper and so on, that you might need to do the exercise.

Notes to the Leader: Notes that would be helpful for a leader to read before working on the exercise.

Procedure: The exercise itself. The exercise can be done as written or adapted and changed to fit your needs.

Feedback Session: Advice and suggestions on how to process each exercise and questions you might want to ask your group.

Many of the exercises include headings entitled:

Movement: The movement part of the exercise.

Group Improvisation: An improvisation involving your entire group.

2 Person Improvisation: An improvisation involving two people.

Divide Into Pairs: A part of an exercise done in pairs.

Divide into groups of 3 or 4: A part of an exercise is done in small groups.

Variations: Ideas on how you might vary the basic exercise. You can add to it, change it and adapt it to fit your own personal circumstances and purpose.

Symbolic drawing: A part of an exercise, which involves drawing.

Assignments: Things for group members to do on their own that compliment the work done in the group.

NOTE: I have written each exercise the way that I present it to my groups. Please feel free to change the order, if that better suits your needs.