Improving Our Businesses with Improv

by Brent Brotine
photos by T. J. Hine

The study of improv may be crucial for future SNL stars, but it’s equally important for creatives who want to pitch better, shine more at meetings, and hit home runs with clients. At our February 17 meeting, Expose Yourself: Break Out of Your Shell, two dozen C3 members and guests were introduced to improv techniques for speaking better in front of people and more effectively selling services.

Leading the evening were two well-known specialists in the business side of improv. Mark J. Carter, the founder of Chicago’s ONE80, teaches businesses how to use conversations and storytelling to create opportunities. Greg Werstler, Director of Creative Sales for the famed ComedySportz Chicago, extends the theatre’s reach to corporate training, trade shows, workshops and more.

For most of the evening, Mark and Greg led the group in a series of improv games that helped us understand the golden rule of improv: “Yes, And...” It means listening to what your partner has given you, building upon it, rinse and repeat. When it moves from stage to the boardroom, Mark calls it Idea Climbing™ and explained why it’s such a powerful technique for keeping conversation going.

Improv training can help creatives know how to ask the right questions, know what to listen for, spontaneously think on their feet, and be able to tell compelling stories. The evening was just a taste of this training, but many members indeed left wanting more. We also bid adieu to meetings at T. J. Hine’s photo studio, and gave T. J. a well-deserved round of applause as well.
The Creative Cycle

Though I write these words in early February while the ground is still covered with snow, I’m aware this will reach members when spring is around the corner with trees budding and early flowers making their first appearance. We have the great privilege in the midwest of witnessing the drama of the seasons. The bitter cold days of snow and ice slowly fade as the earth gently bows on its axis to the warmth of the sun and the transformation into spring. Were it not for the cold of winter, we could not see the greening of our city.

I’m reminded of the ways we each emulate the cycles of nature in our work and play as creative people. Whether you arrange typography and shape, compose photos through a camera lens, put paint to canvas, craft words into beautiful prose, the cycle of death and rebirth is an implicit part of the creative process.

The confrontation of a blank canvas or computer screen can feel like the loneliest of places. There can be desolate moments when imagination is confronted by pure potential—something waiting to happen. Other times, it may feel as though the painting has painted itself, the poem has written itself, the design has done all its own arranging. The important thing is this—to be there for whatever emerges.

Mary Oliver, the famed and beloved poet of our time, writes eloquently of this process in her poem “Wild Geese.” An excerpt—

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

A unique program Chicago Creative Coalition will offer in May as part of Chicago Art Mart at Superior Street Center for the Arts will be a unique demonstration of the creative cycle. We will host a series of creativity stations where we’ll take used and recycled items and turn them into something new—something as yet unknown. Only those who engage in the process will know what will emerge out of the old and become new.

Being free from stunning results is a luxury many may feel is not part of the process when we engage with clients. Expectations run high. Much is at stake. But that is indeed what we are called to do—engage with vision and intention in the conversation at the heart of the creative process; let go of preconceived ideas and assist with the birth of something new.

The opportunity to engage in the creative cycle is one that Chicago Creative Coalition wholeheartedly supports. Our programs and events offer creative professionals and artists of all stripes a place to engage in the creative conversation. Join us for the adventure. You will discover a vibrant group of people “announcing your place in the family of things.”
From the Board
by Mary Badinger

It’s a bright new year for Chicago Creative Coalition. Your dedicated C3 board is spinning plates on sticks in an effort to keep things interesting. Besides ongoing review and tweaking of our website, monitoring our financial health and membership, they dedicate their “extra” time to making sure our programs run smoothly, all the while collecting news and content from members for this newsletter.

As I write, they are not only hard at work pinning down the details for our March event, “Makey Makey,” they are stirring up contacts and organizing events for the entire year. Our strategy is to provide programs that have real value and will grow our membership to include fresh new faces.

We want to hear from you, so drop us a line and let us know how we’re doing. Or better yet, join us at our next event and share what is great about you. While you’re at it, bring a friend. Ugly sweater optional!

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Programs by George

Spring has sprung! And after getting all wound up inside during a rough winter, what else would we do really?

We’ve got all kinds of fun for you with our new cache of programs—making art, showing off, and playing music!

In April, we’ll take our “Expose Yourself” series on self-promotion to its natural conclusion: “Fully Exposed Finale!” Join us at a local watering hole for eats and drinks to strut your stuff for a kick-ass show ’n’ tell of all the cool things you’ve done this year! Bring visual aids, websites, physical objects, crazy contraptions, rubber chickens—whatever you’ve got.

In May, we’re joining Chicago Art Mart at Superior Street Center for the Arts to make cool “up-cycled” art from leftover holiday cards, corks, and all kinds of reclaimed bits and dooddads. We’ll be making stuff and guiding attendees from all over making mosaics, sculpture, some papercraft and maybe even a surprise digital play space, too. Mark your calendars!

We’re really finding our groove in June with a world percussion/instrument educational tour at Andy’s Music, followed by a group drumming circle! Don’t worry if you’ve got no rhythm, the master drummers there will help you find the beat. And then, my friends, it’s summer!

Remember that?

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Annual Holiday Party

Ready For Our Close-Ups
by Brent Brotine
photos by Cindy McEwen and WTTW

Decked out in our smashing purple C3 T-shirts, two dozen C3 members and guests took our seats in WTTW’s Studio A on December 6 for a Holiday Party all about giving back. Over a four-and-a-half hour period, we collectively enriched Channel 11’s coffers by thousands of dollars in membership pledges while we garnered valuable publicity for C3 with every pledge break.

In place of our usual pot luck dinner, we were treated to the very finest cuisine that the WTTW cafeteria could offer (actually catered Mediterranean food, but perfectly acceptable.) Once we manned the pledge set and phone calls started, we quickly gained proficiency at entering information on laptop computers while reading from the on-screen scripts. And between the breaks, we enjoyed the evening’s concert programming featuring Tony Bennett, Joe Bonamassa and Brit Floyd.

Of course, we all received incoming calls from viewers that were either stoned, on another planet, or simply dialing numbers at random—an occupational hazard that added some merriment to the evening. No, Lady Gaga is not here to take phone calls. No, the on-air host isn’t able to put down her script and come tell you where she bought her sweater.

It was a late evening, but definitely fun and something we’d all recommend to those who weren’t able to join us. And while it’s nice to participate as a group, WTTW is more than pleased to welcome solo volunteers as well on future pledge nights. You can sign up online at interactive.wttw.com/volunteer.
Speaking of the big wide world, you’ve travelled a bit?
I love to travel! I did my final year of University in London, where I received my “real” art education. I love art museums, stately homes and historic sites, but also getting lost and finding hidden gems.

What’s your favorite period art-wise?
I used to be embarrassed to say it, but I freakin’ love Rococo—it’s some of the most emotional and passionate art I’ve ever seen.

What are your thoughts about the future of the arts/creativity in our culture?
I feel like we are in need of something big… to see the art world shaken up like when the first Impressionism paintings started popping up. I want something to knock our socks off.

Madeline, what motivates and inspires you?
Art is in constant motion, and sometimes even one step ahead of reality. It is constantly responding to the world, thus it never tires…. I am motivated by the world; the things that need to be questioned, experienced, and contemplated.

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How to join C3

The easiest access to a C3 membership application is through our website: www.chicagocreative.org/join-c3/. Pay online through PayPal or contact membership@chicagocreative.org for a membership application to fill out and mail with a check to: Chicago Creative Coalition, P.O. Box 578477, Chicago, IL 60657-8477, Attn: Membership Director.

E-mail questions to: C3@ChicagoCreative.org or to the Membership Director: membership@chicagocreative.org

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CREATIVE PRACTICE

Giving Our Work the Credit It’s Due

by Brent Brotine

photos by T.J. Hine

We all like to think our work speaks for itself—but in truth, it needs us to talk it up. And one of Chicago radio’s legendary voices told C3ers how to do just that at our January 15 meeting, “Expose Yourself: Speak For Your Work.”

Catherine Johns, well-known for almost twenty years on the air as news anchor and talk show host at WLS and WJMK, now coaches entrepreneurs and executives in the fine art of blowing one’s horn. Nearly thirty members and guests heard Catherine savvy advice at a fitting location for the evening: recording studio Various Things Live on North Clybourn.

Catherine presented ideas for improving our elevator speeches by telling stories about how we solve problems and what we can do for the people listening to us. She advocates learning how to employ strong eye contact to lead within the room and connect with individuals. We all participated in an exercise to find our grounded voices, coming from deeper in the body to amp up our commanding presence.

Many of Catherine’s tips are explained in greater detail in her recent book Show Up And Shine: Simple Steps To Boost Your Confidence And Charisma. She also invited everyone at C3 to sign up for her free newsletter at www.catherinejohns.com.

I can help you craft a clear, powerful message that will engage, delight and influence your audience. Let’s talk!

Catherine Johns

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www.CatherineJohns.com
Karen Ovington

Artist Statement
By using colored glasses in various forms I hope to take you on a journey. Rich textural colors to depict the earth, seas, and skies. Delicate tones to delight your senses. Come travel with me. —Karen

While attending an art fair I came across an artist offering stained glass classes. I signed up and the rest is history! Someone said if you like doing puzzles you’ll like stained glass! It is very exacting with no room for error.
The movement to fused glass gave me some wiggle room. I could feel more freedom of expression, it was even more motivating once I found lamp-working. My work is now very spontaneous. I never know how a bead will end up. If the bead wants to go in another direction than I imagined, I never fight it. I love texture, I love color.

1 I had made a group of felted beads and a knitted and felted “rope.” They were sitting patiently on my work bench waiting for direction. Behold! I must have been having a happy day or was it the martini? This piece was created!

2 I don’t like to give my work a “name.” I would rather the owner develop a feel for the piece instead of me dictating one. However, with that said, this piece with the organic bell shapes reminds me of a rain chain.

3 Example of a stained glass grouping commissioned for a Victorian home. The use of flowing curves and lighter glass shades represents the era.

4 Organic free form glass shapes have a Zen feel to me. The muted sounds with movement are very soothing.

5 This piece has bead crochet as a part of the design. The patterns and colors are structured, yet playful.
T. J. Hine was a featured artist at the Ferment Table Culture Underground Eats and Arts Event January 29 at Superior Street Center for the Arts. The one-evening event brought together a dozen or so artists and artisan-made table crafts. T. J. also had an image chosen by the 4th Fridays at The Starline Gallery event held on February 27 in Harvard, IL.

George Berlin wowed the crowd at Hairpin Arts Center with a world-premiere interactive projection art sculpture created for “Crystal Palaces in Cockaigne,” a group show on the nature of utopias. Adventurers were encouraged to play with the art and choose their own utopic mixture of the 64 different animations around the face of the giant, jewel-like cardboard heart sculpture.

Through the month of February, Stan Kotecki exhibited landscape and floral prints from the Midwest at the Des Plaines Library.

Cindy McEwen and husband Gary Adcock celebrated the 85th birthday of Gary’s mom Jo. Friends and relatives from across the world including California, Oregon, Virginia, Illinois and Peru gathered in Indiana for a weekend of fun, food and laughter. It was the first time that all 4 of her grandchildren had ever been together, and a complete surprise to Jo.

New Members

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**C3 Talks with Thomas Kepler**

**Company**  Adams Press and Tom Kepler, Graphic Designer  
**Occupation**  Graphic Designer/Web Developer  
**Current Project**  With Adams Press, I just finished typesetting and designing the cover for a historical novel for a client who has published 10 previous books with us. We’re also revamping our very dated website. On my own, I’m building a few sites for clients in L.A.

**Dream Client**  One who has an idea of what he or she wants but is (truly) also open to suggestion.

**Family/Kids/Pets**  I’ve been married to Lizzie for 16 years (we met in high school and started dating in college) and our daughter Nora is 13. We have two crusty old-but-wonderful cats, Lovecraft and Jenny Linsky. We just adopted a puppy over winter break—a shepherd/lab mix named Mira who is really stinkin’ cute. Oh, and two fish that are far more resilient than we banked on.

**Hobbies/Interests**  I don’t draw nearly as much as I used to, but I’m always planning to get back into that. I play passable guitar, bad mandolin, and really bad accordion (insert joke here).

**Three Words that Best Describe Me**  goofy, earnest, scattered

**Gadget I Can’t Live Without**  Right now my MacBook goes almost everywhere with me.

**Favorite Movies**  Charade; Raiders of the Lost Ark; Arsenic and Old Lace; selected Bollywood movies and almost any Hitchcock.

**Favorite CDs/Recording Artists**  With bluegrass often way too frenetic for work music, I’ve been getting into ambient music. I’m embarrassed to say that the album I’ve been listening to most frequently is Music for Airports by Brian Eno.

**Favorite Web Site**  I spend a load of time on Facebook.

**My Fantasy Is**  This has changed over the years, of course (it used to be being a rock star and before that it was to be a children’s book illustrator), but now it’s probably to be set up enough to be able to work on a couple of interesting things and do a lot of traveling without fretting about money or time.

**I’d Give Anything to Meet**  There are a bunch of historical figures, of course, but I think they’d all probably be too different from the ideals they’ve become (Thomas Jefferson, Leonardo da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, and so on). It sounds like my great-grandmother was quite a character—I think she’d be as much fun to meet as anyone.

**Prized Possession**  A little pewter heart that my daughter gave me for Father’s Day ten years ago that I have in my pocket every day.

**My Inspiration Comes From**  Other designs and designers, plus the occasional coffee stain or mayonnaise swirl that makes it into something I do.

**Favorite Restaurant**  We just discovered the Curry Bowl on Devon. I also like Laschet’s (German) on Irving Park and the Publican. And Ted’s Snack Shop in Evanston.

**Favorite TV Show**  The Daily Show is always good.

**Places I’ve Traveled**  The most exotic place I’ve been to is Montreal—we need to travel more.

**The One Thing Nobody Knows About Me**  I like babies quite a lot.

**Three Things in my Medicine Cabinet**  expired prescriptions, expired antacid, expired aftershave.

**I Always Find this Funny**  So far, I haven’t stopped being tickled by how goofy this puppy of ours can be when she’s all amped up.

**Favorite Way to Chill Out**  The grocery is a big part of my day. It gets me out of the house and thinking in very practical terms.

**If I Won the Lottery, I’d**  have a little place somewhere (maybe Marshall, MI, or out near Seattle) where I’ve can go for a change of pace. And maybe a suit of marshmallows, if there’s any money left.