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# Sure They Have a Great Resume, But Can They Improvise?



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"You can learn more about a person in an hour of play than a year of conversation."  
-Plato

You know what you need: employees who are adaptable, flexible and collaborative, while still bringing their own talents and viewpoints to the work. But the standard ways of finding good people —interviewing, recruiting or even networking—don't always reveal these traits the way they'll show up in a real collaboration or crunch situation. And sometimes, we all know, people who are brilliant on paper and sparkling one-on-one have serious challenges when it comes to playing well with others.



*On Your Feet is a collision between business and the arts. We are a consultancy that uses highly experiential methods – including tools from improvisation – to help organizations like Nike, Intel, GE, Disney, Sony, Phillips and others with communication, creativity and change. For more information; [www.ouf.com](http://www.ouf.com)*

We have experience with a quick, simple way to screen prospective hires for adaptability, flexibility and an ability to collaborate (letting go of their own agendas and adding value to others' ideas). Improv.

In our work, we use improv as inspiration for our training, facilitation and ideation work. We believe it's the perfect laboratory to see how people will behave together in high-stakes situations. After all, improvisers get on a stage (yikes!) with an expectation to create something compelling (a story) with others under extreme time pressure (instantly). Isn't that a big part of what work is? Working with others to create something compelling under great time pressure!

Interviews are strange in that they often measure how impressively we can talk about ourselves, but they don't reveal as much as we'd like them to about behavior. Forty minutes of improv, however, is nothing but behavior and action.

Here are the tales of two clients who have worked with On Your Feet and improv to screen candidates for the behaviors they wanted from employees:

- 1. A few years ago, we were asked by a client in the advertising industry here in Portland, OR to help them evaluate incoming talent they had short-listed. We played and improvised with these candidates for half a day. And then we were asked by the agency "Who would you like to be on stage with?"*
- 2. What a perfect question!*
- 3. Recently, one of our more visionary clients was staffing up a new restaurant, which they want to be an incredibly interactive pillar of its community, so they held a hiring event, marketing it on Facebook and elsewhere with the hope of hiring all.*



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After multiple traditional interviews with each applicant to make sure that they met the baseline criteria to be good employees, the company threw the candidates in a room with us to spend 40 minutes improvising.

Almost instantly, we, along with our client, learned volumes about these applicants: who’s easy to interact with versus who seems uncomfortable in their own skin, even after a long warm-up period. We also saw who was charmingly inappropriate—and who stepped a toe over that line. Perhaps most importantly, we saw who sparkled while still “giving the story what it needs,” rather than trying to suck up all of the limelight, pulling away from the team.

Sure, a lot of people have a good resume, but maybe more organizations should be asking: Can my new hires improvise?

