a Haas Undergraduate Leadership Course

IMPROVISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Fall 2011 / Three Credits
Course Registration #: UGBA 196-5
Wednesdays 9:30am-12:30pm

IMPROVISATIONAL LEADERSHIP is a dynamic course in the theory and application of improvisational techniques to leadership communications and decision making. This class explores the broad principles of improvisation, a performing art form that has developed pedagogical methods to enhance individual spontaneity, listening and awareness, expressive skills, risk-taking, and one’s ability to make authentic social and emotional connections.

Such “soft” skills grow increasingly critical as leaders rise within organizations, and this course strives to develop students’ business communication leadership skills while enhancing both interpersonal intuition and confidence. No prior experience with improvisation or performance is necessary or presumed.

Specific topics include (1) introduction to improvisational theory, (2) speaking and spontaneity, (3) listening and awareness, (4) emotional intelligence, and (5) status and influence.

Lectures and discussions make up approximately one third of each session. In-class interactive exercises comprise the remainder, giving students considerable practice strengthening their own improvisational, in-the-moment decision making skill set. Outside assignments give students further opportunity to apply material from the class to real-world decision making and communication situations. Readings supplement each unit.

This class is designed to benefit any student, from those who characterize themselves as shy and introverted to type-A, outgoing extroverts. Anyone can learn to improvise, and thinking “I’m not clever or quick-minded enough” is a misnomer—improvisation is not about being witty, as students will soon find out. It is about being extremely present and alert to the moment—mental muscles that can be developed. The class atmosphere will be mutually supportive and interactive, requiring only a willingness to take expressive and interpersonal risks. No prior acting or improvisational experience is needed.

About the Instructor

Cort Worthington has taught business communication and leadership courses since 1987. He holds an MA in Communication from Stanford, an MBA from Columbia (finance), and an MBA from UC Berkeley (leadership). An active facilitator in the popular leadership course Interpersonal Dynamics at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business, his organizational client list includes Mobil Oil, Sumitomo Bank, the city of San Francisco government, Oracle, Kaiser, McKesson, and the United States Army.

Prior to work in leadership development, Cort was a documentary film director, a co-founder and Director of Operations of toy company Primordial, LLC, and also spent several years leading crews fighting wilderness forest fires as a parachuting U.S. Forest Service Smokejumper.

Cort has been actively utilizing improvisation as a methodology for enhancing personal communication and leadership skills since 1997. He can be reached at cort@haas.berkeley.edu or www.cortworthington.com