The Rules of Improv for Educational Leaders

YES… AND… NOW WHAT?

IASP AP and Fall Professionals Conferences

Mr. Randy Maurer, Principal



November 2026

By Day:

- Mr. Randy Maurer, Principal at Eastern Elementary School
- 32nd Year in Education
- 20th Year as Principal
- 5th Year as an Adjunct Professor at IU Kokomo







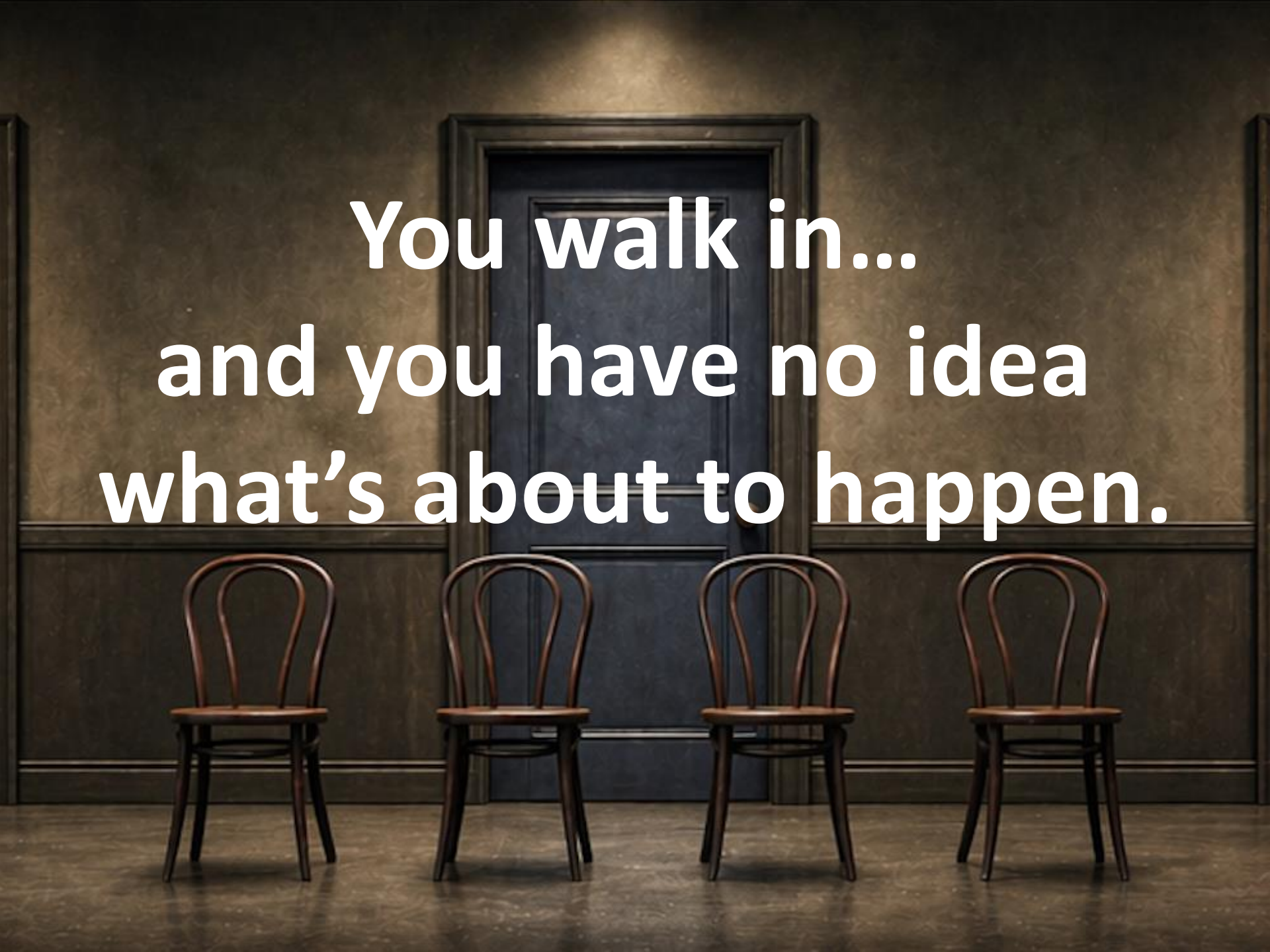
By Night :

- *Father of 2, Husband of 1,*
- Stand Up Comedian/ *Motivational Speaking /Educational Comedy*






This is basically what every day in school feels like…


You walk in…
and you have no idea
what's about to happen.


And somehow…
you're expected to
respond perfectly.


No script.
No warning.
Just… go.

The Myths

"Improv is only for comedy shows and actors."


TINA FEY
AMY POEHLER
THE SECOND CITY
ROBIN WILLIAMS
BILL MURRAY
DEL CLOSE
WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY?
VIOLA SPOLIN
STEVE CAREL
WILL FERRELL
KRISTEN WIIG
UPRIGHT CITIZENS BRIGADE
JAMES AUSTIN JOHNSON
KEEGAN-MICHAEL KEY
JORDAN PEELE
MAKING STUFF UP. TOGETHER. RIGHT NOW.
UPRIGHT CITIZENS BRIGADE
SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

The Myths

- Improv is only for comedy shows and actors.
- We have to bend over backwards for everyone who is upset with us and make them happy.
- Good leaders have all the answers.
- Randy's hair will grow back.

The Reality

- The script has a high probability to fall apart.
- You can use improv to deescalate, to be present, and to change the narrative to be positive.
- Some people just want to be heard.
- My hair decided to relocate to other zip codes.






OOL BOA
PRINC


TODAY'S PL
SUPPORT STA
VISIT CLASS
DATA REVIE
SURVIVE TH
RINCIPAL
ading with Purpose


I HAVE BEEN TEACHING FOR 20 YEARS WITHOUT SPREADSHEETS...
...AND THE KIDS ARE DOING FINE.
IT WILL MAKE DATA EASIER TO TRACK AND ANALYZE!
TEACHER LEGEND
Today:
• Bell Work
• Vocabulary
• Discussion
• Practice
• Exit Ticket
Reminder:
Be kind.
Be curious.
You got this.
OLD SCHOOL STILL COOL
NEW DATA TRACKING SYSTEM
WHAT WORKS:
RELATIONSHIPS
20 YEARS OF WHAT

The Rules of Improv for Comedy

1. Say “Yes, and…”
2. Don’t Block (or Deny)
3. Add New Information
4. Avoid Questions
5. Be Specific
6. Establish the Location & Relationship
7. Play in the Present
8. Change, Change, Change!
9. Make Your Partner Look Good
10. Don't Try to Be Funny

WHAT MOST PEOPLE DO:

Defend • Explain • Shut it down

WHAT IMPROV TEACHES:

Accept • Add • Redirect

The Rules of Improv Leadership in Education

Rule #1 YES…

Receive before reacting.

Rule #2 AND…

Add value instead of shutting down.

Create forward motion.

Rule #3 NOW WHAT?

What result are YOU wanting?

YES...AND...NOW WHAT?

"YES Does Not Mean Agreement"

YES acknowledges the concern.

AND introduces facts, boundaries, or perspective.

NOW WHAT identifies the next constructive action.

YES…AND…NOW WHAT?

Rule #1 YES…

Receive before reacting.

Acknowledge/Validate the concern.

Don’t dismiss their emotion.



Negates, blocks momentum, destroys collaboration before you even get started.

“When Your First Response Is Wrong”

1. Pause.
2. Name the misstep.
3. Restate the concern.
4. Try again.

There is only one thing worse than a mad Momma Bear.
A mad Grandmother Bear.

YES…AND…NOW WHAT?

Rule #2 AND…

Add value instead of shutting down.
Add administrative parameters, perspective, and detail.
Protect the dignity of the school, staff, and the one you are speaking with.

YES…AND…NOW WHAT?

Rule #3 NOW WHAT?

Move the school forward with action.

Educational pivot

Creative alternative

Outcome focused step

It is what YOU want to happen.

“Boundaries Without Blocking”

Examples:

“I can’t do anything until I investigate.”

vs.

“I understand why you want an immediate answer, and I need to gather information before I make that decision.”

Know Your Audience

What changes as you switch from

Teachers?

Parents?

School Board Members?

Students?

Community Members?

Same principle. Different audience.

Yes…And…Now What?
The Bus Delay



A parent corners you in the hallway first thing in the morning regarding a reoccurring busing delay.



YES: **“I understand how disruptive these repeated delays have been.”**

AND: **“Transportation is addressing a driver shortage, and families still deserve timely information.”**

NOW WHAT?: **“I’ll contact transportation and update you before the end of the day.”**

Yes…And…Now What?
The Field Trip



A teacher approaches you with a highly creative, yet operationally risky, field trip proposal for tomorrow.



YES: **“That sounds like a memorable opportunity for students.”**

AND: **“We still have to meet our approval, transportation, supervision, and safety requirements.”**

NOW WHAT?: **“Let’s determine what is possible now and what needs to become a future trip.”**

Yes…And…Now What?
The Resistant Teacher



You are introducing a new data-tracking software. A veteran teacher says, "I've been teaching for 20 years without a spreadsheet, and my kids are doing fine."

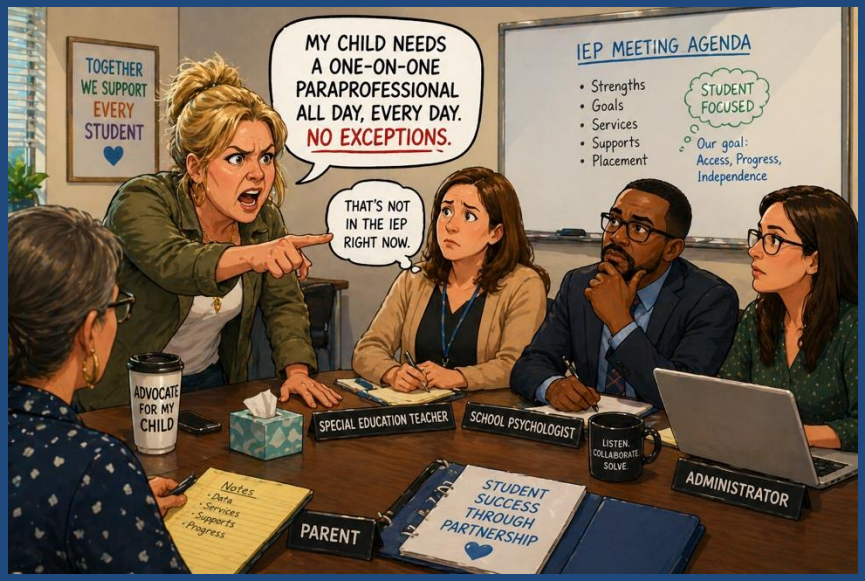


YES: **“You have seen programs come and go, and you are protective of instructional time.”**

AND: **“This tool is part of our current plan, and we need consistent implementation.”**

NOW WHAT?: **“Let’s begin with one useful feature and provide the support you need.”**

Yes…And…Now What?
The Support Request



A parent demands a one-on-one paraprofessional for their child, which the data suggests might actually hinder the child's independence.



YES: **“We share the goal of helping your child feel safe and successful.”**

AND: **“The data suggests constant adult support may reduce independence.”**

NOW WHAT?: **“Let’s identify when support is needed and review whether the plan is working.”**

Yes…And…Now What?
The Chewing Gum Rule



A parent says, “You made my child throw away gum four times and then punished him. There is nothing in the handbook that says students cannot chew gum.”



YES: **“You are correct that the handbook does not specifically prohibit gum.”**

AND: **“The consequence followed repeated refusal to comply with a reasonable teacher direction.”**

NOW WHAT?: **“We’ll clarify the expectation and help your child understand the difference.”**

"What Is the Request Beneath the Complaint?"

Examples:

- "Fire this teacher" may mean "Take my concern seriously."

- "Give my child a paraprofessional" may mean "Assure me my child will be safe."

- "Get rid of this software" may mean "Help me feel capable of using it."

WHAT'S YOUR "ANGRY PARENT" STORY?

What would your first sentence be?

Decide privately, type one sentence in chat, or volunteer aloud.

If the room is quiet, I'll show you how I handled it.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Conversation Starters

What is your go to when you need to break the silence?

“Hey, nice shoes.”
“I have two ears and they work together.”
“I’m not sure I’m qualified.
“I’m just an elementary principal.”
“How’s your youngest one doing?”

TIPS AND TRICKS

Reliable Responses

“Let me make sure I understand.”

“What outcome are you hoping for?”

“I want to give that a thoughtful response.”

“Here is what I can do right now.”

“What am I missing?”

TIPS AND TRICKS

Take A Drink To Think

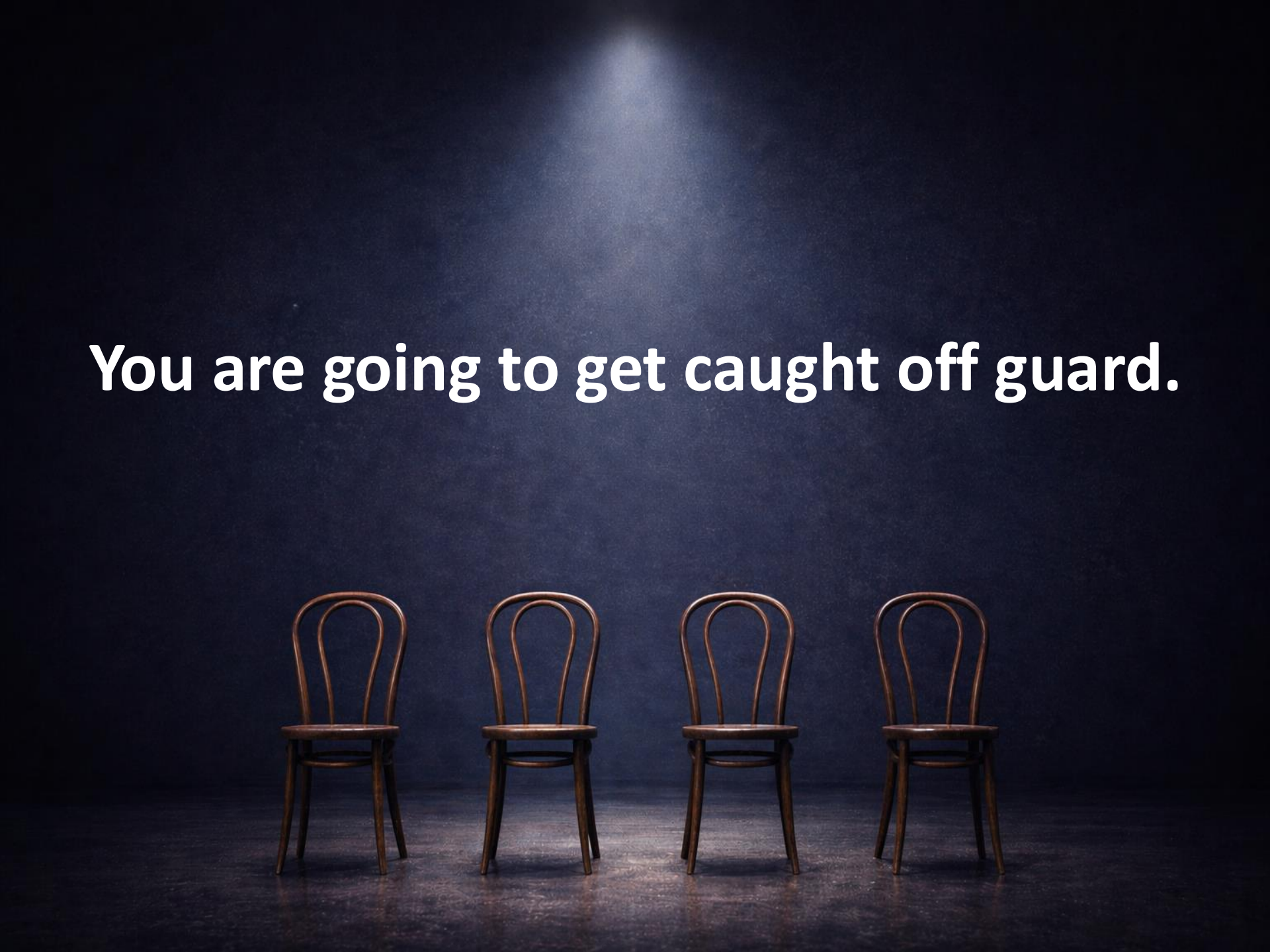
You don’t need time.
You need just a moment.

One drink of water
gives you 3 seconds to think.
(Assess, Plan, or Get Assistance)

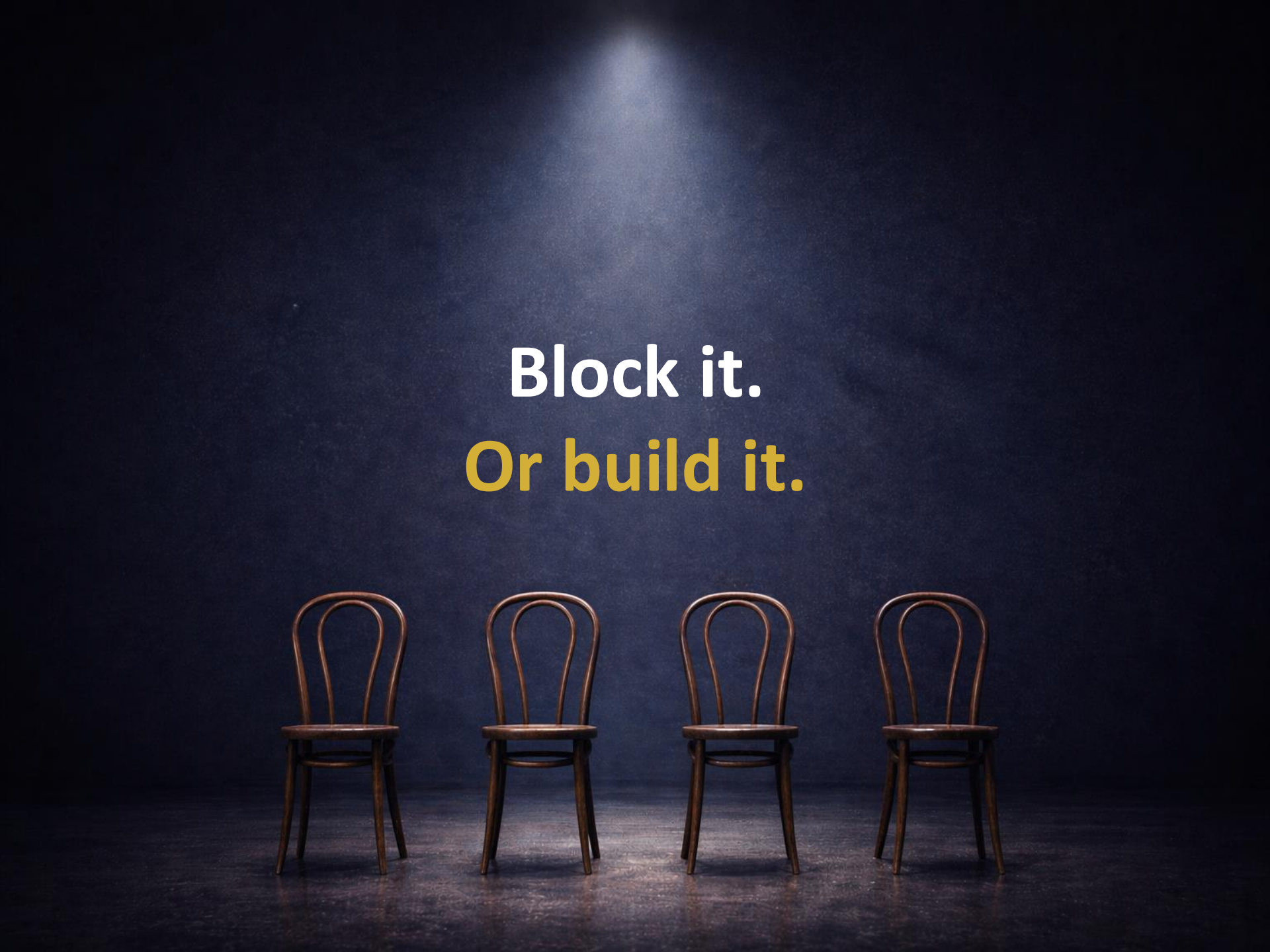
YOU CAN'T ALWAYS CONTROL WHAT COMES AT YOU.

You can control what you do next.

You are going to get caught off guard.




And in that moment...
you have a choice.


Block it.
Or build it.

Say YES.

AND…Add something.

NOW WHAT? Move it forward.



You can't control what walks into your office.
But you can control what walks out.

Now what are YOU going to do next?



The Rules of Improv for Educational Leaders

YES… AND…
NOW WHAT?

Thank you so much for attending this session. Have a great rest of the conference.

"Every day is what you make it. Make it a great day!"

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Shameless Plug

February 13, 2027

7:00 p.m.-$25 tickets

Fundraiser for a new playground.

- ***Headliner and nationally acclaimed comedian GREG HAHN!***
- ***Two other Indiana comedians and ME!***
- ***4th /5th Friday Funnies Champion***
- ***And MORE!***



Appendix A

Other Scenarios to Practice

- A student is sent to the office for breaking a rule that is “stupid.”
- A local business wants to sponsor a pizza party for every student getting an A, but you are trying to move away from food-based rewards and grade-centric motivation.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IMPROV RULES

YES! AND...

Acknowledge Concern.
Validate every concern with engaugement and active listening.

Don't Dismiss Emotion.
The emotion is equal to the reality perception.

Avoid the "NO."
Don't block momentum or a collaboration opportunity.

Add Direction.
Add the administrative parameters, perspective, and details.

Protect Dignity.
The audience, the staff, the students, and you.

NOW WHAT?

Move the School Forward.
What action, supportive step, alternative, or outcome are YOU wanting?

Stay Clam/Decide Confidently.
You hold all the cards. Don't throw them away by reacting badly.

OTHER TIPS AND TRICKS

POKER FACE

Watch your expressions.
They can give a different impression than your words.

Know your audience.
Don't add humor when it is not appropriate.

ONE IN THE CHAMBER

Distraction can show interest in them as a person.

- "Nice shoes. Are you faster in those?"
- "Are you taller than yesterday?"
- "How is that new baby at home?" (Family member)
- "Can I get you a water?"

1.

2.

3.

Take a Drink to Think
One drink gives you 3 or more seconds to assess and plan.

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