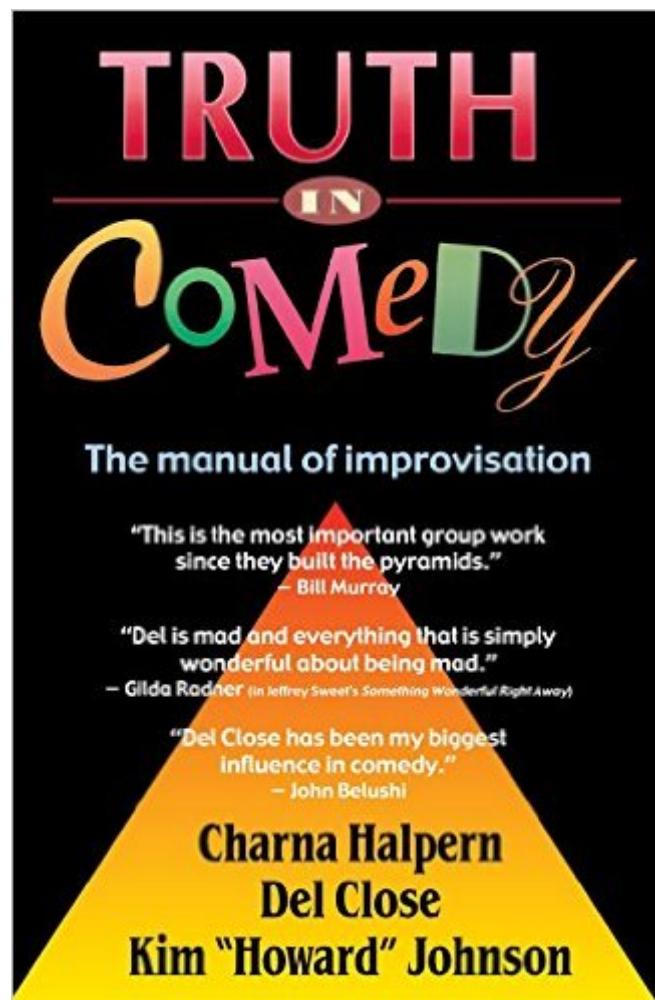


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# Truth In Comedy: The Manual For Improvisation



## **Synopsis**

Want to learn the improv techniques that helped Mike Myers, Chris Farley, John Belushi, and many others along the road to TV and film stardom? Then let two esteemed founders of long-form improvisational theatre, Del Close and Charna Halpern, teach you the "Harold." This groundbreaking acting exercise emphasizes pattern recognition and subversion of the audience's expectations, which are important factors for making people laugh without ever telling a joke. It involves six to seven players and many kinds of scenes: games, monologues, songs, skits and more, all of which are bound to keep both actors and audience members guessing. The Harold is non-linear entertainment that remembers everything and wastes nothing—the key to successful improvising and has become a standard in comedy clubs and improv theatres around the globe.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 160 pages

Publisher: Meriwether Pub; 1 edition (April 1, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1566080037

ISBN-13: 978-1566080033

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.4 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (118 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #7,642 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 inÂ  Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > Acting & Auditioning #20 inÂ  Books > Humor & Entertainment > Humor > Comedy #2332 inÂ  Books > Reference

## **Customer Reviews**

To be honest, I don't know why I wanted this book. I had been spending a lot of time at ImprovOlympic and was even thinking about taking classes there, but I feared my wit wasn't up to snuff. Maybe I thought the book was a surrogate method of learning. What I discovered is the book was a wonderful manual not only to 'how to improvise' but 'how to brainstorm', 'how to work in groups', and 'how to lead.' Little things like, never deny the reality being created and always add something, the 'Yes, and...' of the book, could be applied to many crisis management situations. Never debate what has been stated, always move forward. Where is the comedy? That was something I was amazed to learn from this book. Don't worry about it. Sometimes people won't laugh, what is important is what is being created right there at that moment on the stage with the

other actors.

So frankly, most acting books, or books that try to tell you how to "do" art make me want to hit myself over the head, repeatedly. The first half of this book is no different. It spends a lot of time initially setting ideas up, and talking about what a great guy Del Close was (which he was, but still, it gets to be a bit much). But it all starts to pay off in the second half, when we get into the specifics of the Harold. Harold is a form of improv unlike any that I've ever seen and participated in, and not to be glib, but it takes improv to the level of art. This book clearly sets out exactly how to perform the Harold: what the idea behind it was; how to interact with your teammates on stage; and how to put together the final product. It's no substitute for actually getting up and doing it, but it's not meant to be. The book is straightforward, easy to read, and pretty short. Its style is that of an elaborated outline, which makes it simple to follow, as well as to check back for relevant parts when you need them in rehearsal or class. Truth in Comedy is of course a must have for anyone taking or thinking about taking improv classes. For everyone else, it's a quick read that might make you think differently about improv as an art form. Also, it's pretty funny. Yeah, that too.

This is a great primer for anyone interested in improv. I had been in a few sketch/improv groups and the general rule was to always go for the cheap laugh. As far as "rules" we really didn't have any or knew that any existed. After finding and reading Charna's book, our little minds were blown. There were rules after all, such as "never deny" your fellow actor, no matter what subject or direction they throw at you. Sticking to the 'truth' is much funnier than going for the cheap laugh. Using the "Harold" made you grow in leaps and bounds in terms of your own creative thinking as well as learning how your fellow performers tended to think. We were all so blown away by this book that we invited Charna to town to conduct a seminar for us, which she graciously agreed to do. I highly recommend this book, not only for anyone interested in improv, but basic acting as well. That's the truth.

...This book is primarily dedicated to "The Harold," the standard of long-form improv. It's a difficult form to master, but one that can impress, entertain, and even touch both audience and actors profoundly on stage. There is a shortage of quick, easy games in this book. Even those that are detailed exist to help build on the Harold. This book is really meant for those who are ready to graduate to the next level of improv. Many people don't like the Harold, but all long-form comedy improv, at some level, uses some variant of the Harold. If this isn't what you want, spend your time

and money finding out more about Paul Sills' Story Theater (which is, of course, not covered in this book). Be warned, though, Story Theater often isn't funny, and appeals more to art aficionados than "WLiiA" fans, and isn't as renumerative. Most of the book is given over to an explanation, not of performance standards or guidelines, but of the philosophy underlying improv in general, and the Harold in particular. If that's not what you want, go get another book. The standards in this book, moreover, are really intended for larger groups. The four-player format of "WLiiA" would be unable to keep up with a full Harold. Be sure you have enough actors ready to do the next big thing before you sink your money into this book. This isn't a beginner's text for amateurs, it's for those who have a commitment to creating improvisational art. If that's you, this is your book. If not, you're in a bad way spending money on this puppy. Know yourself and your team before you invest your earnings on this slim volume.

While I read this book it became clear to me that all any improvisation text can really offer is advice. Halpern has a lot of excellent advice to share about improvisation that would be found most useful to novice and intermediate improv artists. And she very successfully pads her advice in funny examples and anecdotes to create a humorous and entertaining book. Although the book is funny and even inspiring at times, it won't help you improve at the hardest part of improv: thinking on your feet. The good news is that anyone can become quicker on their feet with a bit of practice. So if you're looking for a good introduction to the basic practices of improvisation, this book is what you're looking for. But don't buy it expecting it to turn you into an improv genius overnight. Overall, I recommend it.

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