



The Three Biggest Leadership Misconceptions About “Yes, and...”

Many leaders I meet are aware of the first lesson of improvisation: say, “yes, and...”

It's encouraging that this concept is on their radar. Even better, numerous leaders have told me that “yes, and...” has become part of their organizational culture. This is often shared as a concrete example of a leader who has created a healthy cultural dynamic.

While I love to hear that the idea of “yes, and...” is more present across many organizations, I have also learned that the simplicity of the phrase can obscure the depth and complexity hiding underneath. When used too often without clear intention, the phrase can fall into the realm of cliché, at best, and do active harm at worst.

I've noticed three consistent misconceptions I've heard consistently from leaders. Those misconceptions may also create some signals about our opportunities to learn and grow.

Misconception #1: “Yes, and...” is simple to learn and apply.

Two of the simplest and commonly used words in our vocabulary. Yes. And.

Step 1: Say yes. Accept the idea that is offered. Yes is better than no...it's also better than but.

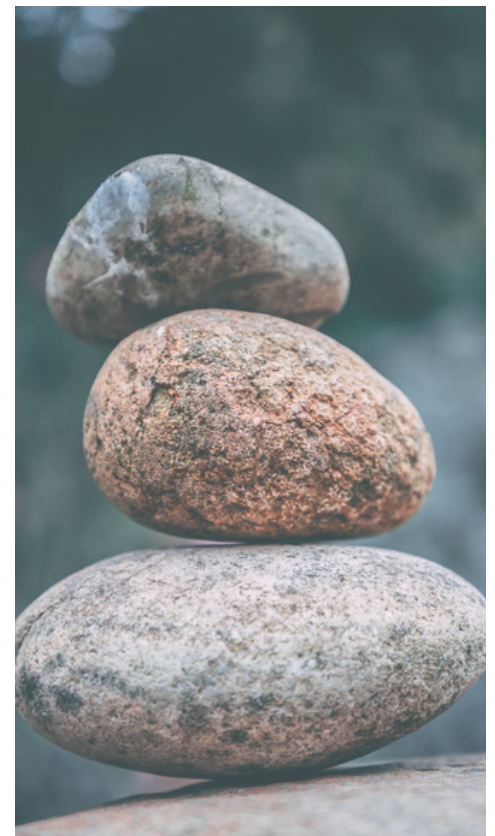
Step 2: Say and. Accept the offer. Don't negate it. Make your own positive contribution.

Step 3: Repeat.

Sounds easy, right? You can learn this in two minutes and then rapidly scale it as part of your organizational culture. As absurd as this sounds, I've increasingly seen leaders do something like this. The phrase is said frequently, often with a smile, but there is something off about the delivery.

You hear it used to interrupt, to redirect, to assert control. Worst of all, I've heard leaders use the phrase as a weapon – to silence challenges from those lower on the organizational hierarchy.

Two simple words that, when put together, may have more complexity upon further reflection.



The Three Biggest Leadership Misconceptions About “Yes, and...” (cont'd)

Misconception #2: “Yes, and...” means just go along with whatever is said.

My kids try this one on me all the time. “Yes, and... means you have to let us get the triple scoop waffle cone...right?”

Well...no, not necessarily.

If you're still looking at things on a surface level, “yes, and...” can seem like a fairly passive approach to work and to life. I must accept whatever is said and go along with it. I must prioritize agreement over any form of conflict. I must follow along with the direction being set even if I have concerns.

If we're being honest about some of the dynamics that exist in our workplaces, it sounds like an open invitation for the workplace bully to steamroll over us.

The good news is that leaders who embrace the concept of “yes, and...” aren't signing up to submit to the whims of whomever has the loudest voice. There's no automatic assumption of passively following the crowd.

In fact, the most effective improvisational leaders mix a perfect combination of flexibility and strength that is ultimately stronger and more durable than rigid command-and-control approaches.



Misconception #3: “Yes, and...” is a phrase that can be said in almost any situation.

The first rule of effectively using “yes, and...” is to not say the phrase “yes, and...” all the time.

While I acknowledge using the phrase repeatedly in this article, my curiosity is often activated when I hear a leader or team repeat the phrase in a work environment.

Simply saying the words again and again as a signal of openness and acceptance may not be a terrible place for a leader to start. Ultimately, the concept needs to move beyond the words that are said and shift towards a sense of how a leader shows up and engages.

If you say the phrase “yes, and...” repeatedly but you are...

... constantly distracted and checking your phone...or...

... sending signals with your body that you are not present and engaged...or...

...clearly missing the subtle messages being communicated in a person's tone and expression...or...

... prone to go on endless monologues without taking a breath...or...

... allowing the fear of making a mistake cause you to not take a needed action...

Then you might have an opportunity to dig into something deeper than the phrase.

The Three Biggest Leadership Misconceptions About “Yes, and...” (cont'd)

So what does all of this mean for leaders?

In my own experiences as an improviser, executive, consultant, and coach, I've discovered that there is tremendous depth within the simple phrase of “yes, and...” that has a great deal to offer leaders today.

These lessons are even more urgently needed as leaders are challenged to face their fears and uncertainty and show up in ways that enhance collaboration, engagement and belonging across the teams they lead.

This learning has led me to create the YES, AND... Improvisational Leadership Model which breaks down this simple concept into an eight-step process for how leaders can show up and engage more effectively:

- Yes Yourself**
- Establish Yourself in the Present Moment**
- Shut Up and Listen**

- , Embrace the Pause**

- Add Your Brick**
- No Mistakes, Only Gifts**
- Do Something**

- ... Let It Go**

This is one of the many approaches we are using to engage and support leaders through ThreefoldYes. We dig below the surface of common approaches and help leaders to say YES, AND... to their full leadership potential.

Are you looking to transform your leadership approach and magnify your impact?

Do you want to see a greater sense of collaboration, inclusion and results-orientation across your teams?

Is your organization on the brink of a major disruption or change?

I would love to hear your leadership story and share the exiting work we are doing at ThreefoldYes.

Please reach out to me at mike@threefoldyes.com or check out the work we are doing at www.threefoldyes.com.



*Cheers,
Mike*

ThreefoldYes.com