



Vitalville – Construction Begins

Vitality In Action Foundation has entered a new stage in the construction of The Vital Community. "After 10 years of research, development, and planning, we are creating an empowerment program that enables individuals to mitigate the challenges associated with disability," according to Rusty Stout, President of the Foundation.

"Now it's time to build the learning community that capacitates a person with the knowledge and skills to graduate *from dIsability to Create-Ability.*"

It really does take a village to provide the support, assistance, and skills necessary for individuals to create ability. Teachers, mentors, friends and family all play an important role in the process that maximizes our individual vitality.

Those are the folks that shape our values and abilities. They form the foundation of one another's vitality.

Late last year, the Foundation began exploring the use of Improvisational Comedy Education to habilitate strategic behaviors that maximize

vitality.

We provided a grant to Griffen Davis, a talented and experienced improv instructor, to develop the concept into a workable program. By the end of the year, we had the prototype course outlined and ready for a test run.

We scheduled a *Vitality FunRaiser* (not fund raiser) to present our approach to the public for March 29 at the Voodoo Comedy Theater in Denver.

Organization was going well when Covid-19 drove the whole world into a state of disarray **and disability.**

It did, however, provide us the opportunity to find a creative workaround – and a much wider audience. Out of the chaos, we discovered we had created the infrastructure to build a virtual community. Now we possess the ability to conduct our program completely online.

Bill Gugerty (Foundation Board

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The Art of Improvising Ability

by Griffen Davis
(griffen@sandscreates.com)

Life is improvised. Improvisation is the art and practice of using what is available to us to create what we need in the moment. We practice that art in comedy, jazz, hip hop, and countless other activities and scenarios. We often use it to keep our cool during those edgy family Thanksgivings. We at Vitality in

Action, use improvisation to turn disability into **Create-Ability.**

Improvisation is a process we study in class, workshop settings, and everyday life. We focus on the practical life skills and abilities. The big "rule" we learn, the one that is agreed upon amongst all schools of improv, is the concept "Yes, and ...".

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Barrier Buster Betty Grandquist

by Harvey Siegelman
(harvey@sandscreates.com)

Betty Grandquist is one of my dearest friends and has been for more than forty years. We worked together as members of a planning team at the Iowa Department of Health. Betty was the mental health specialist and I worked with the hospital data.



We would play bridge during lunch hours and would meet Sunday mornings with friends for several hours of coffee and intellectual conversation.

We enjoyed these get-togethers because friends and discussions were a vital part of our lives.

Betty was born in 1928, in the southern Iowa rural town of Murray (population 756).

She was a sickly child and at seven years of age contracted what was later identified as polio. At that time it was a crippling disease that all parents feared. As a result, Betty could not walk for four months.

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member and former Treasurer) demonstrated that capacity by conducting a mindfulness course attracting 38 participants from various



Bill Gugerty

locations in the United States and one from Peru, establishing the international reach of the Foundation's capacity.

Vitality's *Ability Academy* is a community-based

resource where friends help friends maximize their collective abilities. Each of us possesses some special knowledge, talent, or skill that adds to the creative capacity of our communities.

When those abilities are required to accomplish a group objective, we guide one another through the learning and capacitation process that leads to the successful accomplishment of the objective.

The *Ability Academy* draws its Guides from the Foundation's members who demonstrate vitality in their daily lives.

We volunteer our time, knowledge, and skills to share vital information through course work, conducting workshops, and organizing activity groups.

Improv Comedy practice provides the training and skill development. Most importantly, it enculturates a spirit of cooperation and light-hearted vitality in group members (see *Ability* on Page 1).

Creating a vital and sustainable community is a cooperative effort that runs on the vitality of its members.

The virtual community structure for Vitalville enables the Foundation to provide courses and workshops with qualified Guides at a fraction of the cost industry incurs when undertaking similar efforts. We call it the **5¢ Solution!**

Vitality in Action Foundation spends 5¢'s to accomplish similar results industry spends \$1.00 to achieve.

Consequently, the Foundation is able to provide coursework, workshops, and training facilities at **no charge to members** and membership is **free** to individuals and families.

Vitalville draws vitality from its residents. We invite you to join us and find your Vital Space. It's free! It's fun! It's friends!

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It is the foundation of working together, of any cooperative activity. In order to create with one another in the moment, we must agree on this principle.

Imagine we're in a conversation:

Assume for a moment that **whatever** you say is true. If we do this, we eliminate disagreement and can move on. How we move forward is the "and" part.

I say: "I agree with you" AND I add something.

Del Close, the grandfather of modern



improv said, "Don't bring a cathedral into a scene. Bring a brick; let's build together."

If you bring a brick, I'll look at it and agree that that was the best place to put it, and then I'll bring a brick.

If we've agreed on this principle, then you will look at my brick, love where I placed it and use that to move on.

Life is our partner on stage with us. We can try to deny it all we want, but it is a stubborn bastard and will make its intentions known one way or another.

We move on by accepting it and add a brick of our own. We learn to play the hand we're dealt.

In order to improvise effectively, we need to have fun! As children, play comes easy to us. We create games with

friends, or by ourselves, and become fully immersed in those worlds.

No one needs to tell us to have fun; we do it because we like it. As we age, we begin to have more responsibilities. We must start a job -- which is work -- the opposite of play.

It is important for our vitality to take the time to engage in something simply because we like it.

We play by enjoying the moment and saying "Yes, I want to do this because I like this," *and* then we add something of our own.

We all know what a yes man is, and they're great; they make us feel validated and reassured.



Griffen Davis

Being a yes man does not work when collaborating. Nobody wants to play with this type anyway. They will sit there and agree to everything you're bringing to the table without contributing anything of their own.

The "Yes men" will let you tell a story without giving you any of the details themselves. This can also be dangerous; they can give you a thousand yeses in a row, but it just takes that one "no" to end all progress.

It takes a group to contribute; it takes a team to play together; and it takes a community working together to accept and adjust to what life gives us -- *and to have a little fun while doing it*.

Vitality in Action Foundation

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Her parents thought she would never walk again. She survived the polio, and in 1949 earned a registered nursing degree.

Following graduation she married and had three children. Today she has six grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

In the first 25 years of their marriage, while she was out of the workforce, Betty completed a degree in psychology from Drake University and a Masters of Social Work degree from the University of Iowa.

In 1977, Betty reentered the workforce as a health care planner and Assistant to the Commissioner of Public Health for the State of Iowa.



Betty Grandquist

That is where we met and worked together for the next three-and-a-half years.

In 1999, Betty lost her best friend and husband, Donald, to lung cancer. Readjusting to single life became Betty's second major barrier.

Her third barrier came on the day we had group tickets to see a touring musical production of *Les Miserable*. At show time, Betty's son-in-law arrived and informed us that Betty was in the hospital with a concussion.

After that, she told us she could take on any of life's challenges

Earlier in the day she was struck by a pickup truck as she was walking across an intersection in downtown Des Moines.

Her head hit the pavement and she was in the hospital with a fractured skull for nine days.

Betty survived that accident with her customary humor still intact when she joked about having survived being hit by a truck.

After that, she told us she could take on any of life's challenges.

Her fourth major barrier occurred in 2002, when the then 75 year old was told that a routine mammogram revealed breast cancer. After a lumpectomy and radiation, she beat that barrier too and is a cancer survivor of 18 years.

After she retired at the age of 80, Betty was appointed by Iowa's Governor to chair of the state's Commission on Aging.

She served in that capacity for ten years, until March of 2017.

For her commitment to the well-being of Iowa's seniors, in 2009, the Commission established the annual Betty Grandquist Lifetime Achievement Award.

It acknowledges those like Betty who have provided tireless efforts improving the quality of life for seniors -- and to make sure their voices are heard.

Today, at 92 years young, Betty serves on a number of boards and commissions and continues to be a barrier busting role model to her many friends.

