

YOUR MOST VALUABLE LESSON

Someone once said of me that I have more degrees than thermometer. That may be true, but my most valuable lessons took place at a typing course.

It was a required course in middle school. I was 15 years old and I learned to type 65 words per minute.

With that skill, I helped support myself through graduate school by typing legal documents for a law firm.

When personal computers hit the market I was an early executive adopter: I knew I would not look foolish in front of others when handling the keyboard.

I was one of the first executives to be able to function without a secretary.

I was one of the first executives to purchase a laptop and grasp its significance as a tool to change my office-centric business model.

Typing was my most valuable lesson.

YOUR most valuable lesson might be a course in theatrical improvisation.

In improvisation, you begin with a “story line” and a set of roles. The only thing you know for sure is that by the end of the session, that story line will radically change. You must change as the story line changes but you must keep the integrity of the role you have been asked to play. You must accomplish this without being too awkward about the adjustments you are forced to make.

You must manufacture the appearance of grace when you feel yourself lacking it.

That is leadership in the first quarter of the 21st century.

Last week President Obama described a Cambridge, Mass police officer as “stupid” for arresting a man trying to break into his own home. A day later, he admitted that he “mis-spoke,” and telephoned officer to engage in polite banter. He then invited the police officer and the home owner to the White House to join him for a beer.

You are watching a master improviser.

This President gracefully regained his foothold after making a “stupid” remark that detracted the public focus from his health care initiative. He wanted to get the debate back on track and not look too awkward.

He tripped, recovered, and handled himself with grace.

Managing your business and managing your career is an exercise in improvisation.

The best leaders are not necessarily the best strategists. They are the best improvisers.

In the past, typing skills allowed me lead the pack.

A solid grounding in improvisational skills will keep you ahead.

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Larry Stybel is co-founder of Stybel Peabody Lincolnshire, a career management firm with a focus on senior leaders. There are 250 Lincolnshire professionals in 40 countries. He also is Executive in Residence at the Sawyer School of Business at Suffolk University in Boston. www.stybelpeabody.com