Jordana Cole’s TEDx Talk Reveals How Improvisation Can Help Leaders Navigate Uncertainty, Failure, and Change



Baltimore, Maryland Nov 12, 2026 (Issuewire.com) - Leadership rarely comes with a complete script. In a world defined by constant change, unexpected challenges, and uncertainty about what comes next, Jordana Cole is encouraging leaders and organizations to tap into a skill they already possess: improvisation.

Watch the full TEDx Talk here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsTTpx22imM

In her 2025 TEDx talk, **“What to Do When You Don’t Know What’s Next,”** Cole explores how the principles of improvisation can help people respond more effectively to uncertainty, strengthen their leadership, and unlock greater potential in themselves and others. Her talk currently ranks among the top 10% of TEDx talks globally by views.

Cole, founder of Ignited, draws on more than a decade of experience as an improv performer as well as her background leading enterprise learning and development functions across financial services, technology, and ecommerce. Her research into the intersection of improvisation, leadership, and well-being led her to a simple but powerful insight: **improvisation is not something people need to learn from scratch. It is something they already know how to do.**

“Every single one of us is a natural improviser, making it up as we go,” Cole explains in her TEDx talk.

Three Ways to Activate the Inner Improviser

Cole's talk introduces three practical “boosts” designed to help people navigate uncertainty with greater adaptability and confidence.

The first is to **play to the scene you’re in, not the one you want to be in**.

In improvisation, performers cannot control what their scene partners say or what the audience suggests. When an unexpected change disrupts an original idea, performers have a choice: force their original plan or accept the new reality and build from it.

Cole argues that the same principle applies to everyday life and leadership. Accepting reality does not mean liking what is happening. Instead, it means working with what exists rather than resisting or denying it. When circumstances change, the ability to adapt can create possibilities that were not part of the original plan.

Her second boost is to **make your memory short and your learning lasting**.

Cole shares a personal experience from her improv career when a joke she believed would succeed received no reaction from the audience. Rather than allowing that failure to affect her next performance, she learned to treat the following scene as a fresh start.

The lesson extends beyond the stage. People often replay their mistakes repeatedly in their own minds, giving failures far more attention than others do. Cole encourages people to leave the immediate failure behind, then return to it later with curiosity rather than judgment to identify what they learned and how they can grow.

Her third boost is to **co-create with strength instead of fixing weakness alone**.

Cole challenges the conventional belief that success requires people to become well-rounded by constantly correcting their weaknesses. Instead, she encourages individuals and teams to recognize and activate their strengths.

Drawing on research from Gallup, Cole notes that people who report using their strengths every day are more likely to experience an excellent quality of life and greater engagement at work.

For Cole, strengths become even more powerful when combined with the strengths of others. Improvisation is not a solo performance, she explains. It is a team sport, where different perspectives, skills, and experiences can be combined to create something that no individual could produce alone.

Turning Uncertainty Into Possibility

Cole also highlights the emotional side of uncertainty. When people do not know what happens next, emotions such as nervousness, enthusiasm, and frustration can take over, making it harder to access clear thinking and perspective.

During her TEDx presentation, Cole turns this concept into an interactive experience by inviting the audience to participate in an improvised “emotional symphony.” The exercise demonstrates how acknowledging and expressing reactions to uncertainty can shift the energy in a room and reconnect people with a sense of possibility.

She also offers a bonus strategy: **give yourself permission to play for five minutes.**

For Cole, play is not a distraction from serious work. It can interrupt an existing state, create a moment of joy and presence, and open the door to exploration and new possibilities.

Her message is particularly relevant for leaders navigating organizational change, evolving technology, new responsibilities, and situations where there is no clear roadmap. Rather than waiting for certainty before taking action, Cole encourages people to trust their ability to adapt, learn, collaborate, and create as they go.

“If we let our inner improvisers out to play a little more often,” Cole suggests, “imagine what type of future we might co-create together.”

About Jordana Cole

Jordana Cole is an igniter of leadership and team potential, helping spark behavioral change that doesn't just stick, but spreads. She is the founder of Ignited, where she consults on learning and development strategy, facilitates workshops, and serves as an ICF-certified coach for leaders and organizations globally.

Before founding Ignited, Cole led enterprise learning and development functions across financial services, technology, and ecommerce, including organizations recognized among the Fortune 50 and Fortune's Best Places to Work.

Cole combines her background in organizational leadership with a master's degree in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, translating research and best practices into accessible and energizing actions that individuals and organizations can put into practice.

Her 2025 TEDx talk, **“What to Do When You Don’t Know What’s Next,”** explores how improvisation can help people respond to uncertainty, learn from failure, leverage strengths, and co-create better outcomes.

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Source : Jordana Cole

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