

Final Interview Report

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Executive Summary

Improve helps individuals and teams improve their personal and professional wellness using research-backed learning from improv, psychology and brain science (Improve Inc, n.d.). Through structured interviews, Improve wanted to find out more about how improv has helped people improve their lives, understand attitudes/barriers to trying improv and learn more about user preferences for participating in improv.

To accomplish these goals, we performed 4 one-on-one interviews and a client stakeholder meeting. Our interview protocol included questions aimed at discovering interviewee's wants and needs in wellness practices, their journey to using improv as a wellness practice and preferences for engaging in improv (See Appendix for Interview Protocol).

Methods:

- One-on-one interviews and a stakeholder meeting with the client
- Qualitative theming and affinity wall analysis
- Persona and scenario development

Findings:

- Interviewees value exploring out of their comfort zone.
- Interviewees are seeking meaningful connections with others.
- In-person sessions are preferred, but virtual sessions are appreciated.
- Interviewees enjoy activities that help relax and ground them.
- Interviewees enjoy having a creative outlet.

We discovered that interviewees used improv as a tool to challenge themselves, face their fears/anxieties, as a means for social connection and as a creative outlet. Additionally, we found that most interviewees prefer an in-person format when engaging in improv exercises over virtual exercises, however, some participants appreciated that attending virtually allows for more flexibility and is more inclusive of their schedules/travel/etc... Interviewees were also looking for meaningful connections, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and reported they found a community of individuals who had common interests and goals when engaging in improv. Finally, interviewees enjoyed the creative outlet that improv provided them and reported that it energized them for future tasks.

Recommendations:

- Include Reflection Components within Improve.
- Consider Enhancing the Social Component of Improve.
- Provide In-Person Sessions More Often with Through and Transparent COVID-19 Safety Protocols.
- Build Mindfulness Component of Improv Practices.
- Include Additional Creative Opportunities in the Improve Method.

Based on our findings, we have five main recommendations. Many of the interviewees are looking for opportunities to challenge themselves and grow personally and professionally - we recommend adding reflection exercises so that participants can reflect on their progress and see their progress (this could also potentially help with retention). Interviewees expressed an interest in forming meaningful connections within the improv community and fellow participants. We recommend capitalizing on this interest with a virtual community-building component - potentially a community forum where participants can interact with each other and provide tips or encouragement. There was also a large preference for in-person wellness events over virtual events, to which we recommend Improve consider offering more in-person group improv events (with a thorough and transparent COVID-19 protocol). Interviewees were also looking to improv as a mindfulness tool, creating an opportunity for more mindfulness based exercises, including interviewees' interest in using nature within their wellness practices. Finally, interviewees expressed an interest in more activities that allow them to be creative. Improve could incorporate other artistic/creative formats, such as drawing or painting, in their exercises to help satisfy users' need for creative outlets.

Introduction

Improve is an organization that aims to enhance people's lives by using improv comedy techniques backed by research (Improve Inc, n.d.). They offer many different mediums with which to spread their improv techniques, including emails and virtual class sessions (Improve Inc, n.d.). Through these techniques and activities, users can improve communication, creativity, connections, and more (Improve Inc, n.d.).

Our goal was to gain a detailed understanding of their target population by asking them a series of interview questions. These questions were structured to find out details about people's journey to using improv as a wellness tool and how it has affected their individual and professional growth. By answering these questions, we would gain a clearer picture of what users need most out of a personal wellness and professional development service.

Methods

To gain the necessary insight, our team conducted 5 one-on-one interviews which included one stakeholder interview and four user interviews that were demographically diverse.

Stakeholder Interview

Our initial interview was conducted with our key stakeholder: Mary Lemmer from Improve (Appendix A-Initial Client Meeting). The purpose of this interview was to understand the scope of the product, the targeted audience and gain more clarity into the company's mission and vision.

Target Population

We followed the age group guideline mentioned by our client, and so focused on the population within the age bracket 25 to '40s. We targeted individuals who are going for or have experience with any kind of wellness tool for their professional or personal development.

Recruiting Method

Our team recruited participants from within the client's social group and acquaintances. Since wellness is a border topic, and everyone has their ways to cope with issues, we did not interview a border section of people and stick to the suggestions provided to us by our client. However, with the list of people provided to us, we did some initial screening to understand if they are fit for our study or not.

Demographics of Users

To obtain different views and perspectives we choose four users from the list of participants provided to us, each one of them having different educational backgrounds, demographics, and experience of using wellness tools in the past. The table below (Table 1.) provides a summary of the interviewed users.

	Gender	Age bracket	Occupation	Description
01	Male	Late 20s	Marketing Analyst	Tried meditation, yoga before improv. Lives a balanced life by eating healthy.
02	Female	Early 70's	Healthcare worker	Seeks out mindfulness activities that provide a sense of feeling grounded.
03	Female	Mid 40's	Interviewee did not give occupation information	Big believer in therapy, nature, and all encompassing wellness.
04	Male	Interviewee did not give age information	Business Owner	Interested in holistic wellness, schedule keeps him busy, interested in improv for team building and fun.

Table 1. Participant's Brief Information

Interview Instruments

Our team took the approach of having an interview protocol (Appendix B-User Interview Protocol) constructed before interviewing the users. This gave us a guided direction, as to what questions need to be asked and in what sequence, to get more insights into one's wellness journey. We constructed an overarching question that highlighted the overall goal of the interview, followed by some warm-up questions about the interviewee's previous journey of wellness. At the end of the 30 mins, we thanked the interviewees for their time and their participation.

Interview Analysis

Post interviews, each one of us went through the handwritten notes as well as the transcriptions of each interview conducted (Appendix C-Interview Notes). We highlighted important points, content that we felt were valuable insights under the broad headings of 'Demographics', 'Motivations', 'Pain points', 'Wants', etc, and added those on post-its. We created an affinity wall using the post-its notes, which helped us in constructing our deliverables, set of personas, and scenarios (Appendix D-Personas & Appendix E-Scenarios). The constructed personas and scenarios represent a set of the population in the wellness domain.

Findings and Recommendations

Overall, we found that the target population for Improve values a number of things when it comes to their wellness. Their responses to the interview questions highlighted their improv preferences, need for individual growth, and personal satisfaction.

Key Finding 1: People value exploring out of their comfort zone.

- We found that new faces and activities can be intimidating to the participants at first, especially if they had fears of public speaking.
- The participants reported that attending the improv sessions helped lower their anxiety about social participation.
- Once they completed an improv session or activity they reported feeling accomplished and proud of themselves.
- "It bonded us and we all felt good getting out of our comfort zone" (Interviewee 4).
- "What is great is that you learn to overcome it, and you learn just that the other person probably feels the same" (Interviewee 1).

Recommendation 1: Include a Reflection Components of Improve

A reflection exercise will allow participants to recognize their personal growth as a result

of joining Improve. The reflection exercise could be presented as an open-ended question to participants at the end of every group session. For example, asking participants “how has today’s session helped you reach your goals?” will allow participants to take an account of how their participation has impacted their objectives of joining Improve. Providing participants an opportunity to share their reflections could provide opportunities for increased social bonding.

Key Finding 2: People are seeking meaningful connections with others.

- Participants cited that this has been especially prevalent recently due to COVID-19.
- Participants enjoyed how improv helps to create a community of like-minded people who are all focused on personal growth.
- Improv has helped participants connect with others outside of Improve by reducing social anxiety and by improving their overall conversational skills.
- “I like it in the sense of bonding for my community members” (Interviewee 4).
- “I think interacting with people and doing improv gives me continuous affirmations” (Interviewee 2).

Recommendation 2: Consider Enhancing the Social Component of Improve

Further research is warranted to determine whether there is a need to increase the social opportunities provided by Improve. For example, it is possible participants would be interested in attending non-improv related events to interact with members of Improve. An additional possibility to enhance the social component of Improve is to establish a community forum for the company’s web-based product. The community forum could serve as a base for members to share techniques and encouragement.

Key Finding 3: In-person sessions are preferred but virtual sessions are appreciated.

- Some participants feel that improv activities and benefits are best when in person, citing better interpersonal connections and more interactive activities.
- Virtual sessions, while not preferred, provide a number of benefits that participants enjoy.
 - Travel is eliminated with virtual sessions.
 - No set location means people can participate from anywhere.
 - Virtual sessions are easier to fit into participant’s schedules.

Recommendation 3: Provide In-Person Sessions More Often with Thorough and Transparent COVID-19 Safety Protocol

Improve currently offers virtual sessions only. As participants have indicated an interest in meeting up in person, it is warranted for Improve to consider providing an in-person session. In order to do an in-person session safely instead of the COVID-19 pandemic, a

protocol must be established for whether or not participants will be required to show proof of vaccination status and wear masks. In-person group sessions have several potential benefits. First, meeting people in person allows for a chance of deeper social connection amongst participants. A second benefit is for an interactive element with stage props during sessions. Improve should consider the potential benefits of in-person session opportunities and assess the logistical feasibility.

Key Finding 4: Participants enjoy activities that help relax and ground them.

- Participants enjoy being in the present during improv activities because it takes them away from the stressors of everyday life.
- They report feeling “grounded” in the moment instead of worrying about any past or future problems.
- Participants report turning to certain improv techniques when they are overwhelmed.
- “So if my brain's kind of ruminating on something else, something that I can't do anything about in any way, I can pull out one of those things, and I can distract myself” (Interviewee 3).

Recommendation 4: Build Mindfulness Component of Improv Practices

It is well known that mindfulness practices are beneficial for mental health. Incorporating a mindfulness practice at the start and end of improv sessions could provide participants with a feeling of ease and calm. Additionally, Improve currently only offers virtual group improv sessions. Several interviewees discussed how nature helps them feel more connected and relaxed. Based on this interest, Improve ought to consider whether an outdoor session or outdoor improv retreat would be logically feasible for their members.

Key Finding 5: Participants enjoy having a creative outlet.

- Most people interviewed mentioned a desire for more creativity in their everyday life.
- Participants value the creativity that improv sessions offer and find that this creativity follows them throughout the rest of their day or week.
- “I liked the improv 45 mins session exercises, felt like it just gave me energy for the day and had me thinking creatively” (Interviewee 2).

Recommendation 5: Include Additional Creative Opportunities in the Improve Method

Improv is creative by nature; it requires participants to think creatively quickly and respond to the reactions of the other participants. The exercises offered by Improve are either reflective or verbal activities that follow a traditional improv format. However, there are additional exercises that Improve could consider to expand the creativity of their program. One such activity Improve could offer is improvisation drawing exercises.

Discussion

Our team tried their best to conduct a comprehensive study, yet there are some shortcomings and open questions which needs to be addressed :

Limitation of Interview Sample Size

While the findings and learnings of this study are straightforward, it is based on interviews with only four people. This is relatively a smaller user group that is interviewed as compared to the vastness of the wellness domain. Therefore, it may be possible that our findings may not apply to a broader set of populations. Our team also feels that the participants may have biased our results since they were introduced to us through Mary, and were already aware of improv as a wellness tool.

In-Depth Questionnaires

A broader audience with more questions related to their understanding of wellness, their needs, and their reason for choosing any wellness tool, could have given us a bigger picture of all the options which people choose when it comes to maintaining their wellness.

Next Steps

During our initial stakeholder interview, Mary from Improve raised a concern that many of their users are not regular in completing the daily challenges which they receive via emails. Although the interview methodology did not help us in addressing this question, we are hoping that surveys might help us to find some answers to it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we found that interviewees generally used improv to help them get outside their comfort zone, connect meaningfully with other people and have a creative outlet. Many participants were introduced to improv from social connections and said that improv helped them feel energized and stay present in the moment. Many also preferred engaging in improv in-person, but some like the flexibility virtual classes provided. Based on our findings, we recommend adding more opportunities for reflection and mindfulness as well as a mix of in-person sessions with through and transparent COVID-19 safety protocols and virtual events.

We recognize the limitation of a small sample size ($n=5$) for interviews and that an increased sample size from a diverse group could help validate/refute our findings for the larger target audience and uncover more useful information. As we move into next steps, we hope to gather quantitative and qualitative insights from a larger sample size using a survey.

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Appendix A: Initial Client Meeting

Attendees: Megan Rigney, Neha Kumari, Robin Kocher and Mary Lemmer

Absent: Bryan Flowers

About Improve:

- Individual wellness improv component - web app, improvisations that can help with mental health (i.e. focus, anxiety)
- Can help with blood pressure, sleep health heart rate (there's neuroscience behind it)
- They've worked with other companies (company names redacted)
- During the pandemic, there was a pause and opportunity to offer employees wellness opportunities
- At 1.5 years, Improve added individual classes
- Improve also built a tool for improv exercises
 - The tool would ask members to choose an improv exercise for a category i.e. focus and would give a tool for that
 - The process for getting to and using this web tool could be investigated and possibly improved
 - Software engineers hired to create the web tool
 - Considering if the emails should include the tool right away or after 10 emails or after 80 emails
 - Email for day 1 has a survey asking them why they joined and what they want to improve, emails for days 7, 30, 60 have a check in component
- User flow
 - Sign up
 - Come to live session
 - Engage with content
 - Engage with emails
 - Engage with tool
- Flow for signing up from Mary's POV
 - Member subscribes on website >> Mary gets a notification from Squarespace >> she adds them to Mailchimp >> get emails daily (before the web app, that's how they got the information)
 - In the emails, there are invitations to the live virtual sessions via zoom
 - The customer gets 80 total emails, once they get through 80, they get "choose category" web or mobile email that directs them to the tool
 - [pain point] Legacy system issue with email to app transition
 - ~2 months is usually when conversion occurs
 - More women use the product than men ; men drop off earlier than women

Confidentiality and Housekeeping

- Confidentiality
 - Show drafts to Mary before sharing things publically or with the class

- Information that is confidential
 - Personal information of interviewees and testers
 - Financial information
 - Content we'll see - don't replicate and distribute
- Mary is available by email most days except for Sundays
- Email is preferred means of communication

Additional helpful notes from client meetings:

- Target audience:
 - People who are already seeking out ways to improve their well-being (meditation, read books about psychology, practice yoga, interested in wellness, and proactive about it)
 - Majority of people are early 30s through mid-40s (there are also people in their 20s and 60s)
 - Age isn't a good definition, life-stage is a better indicator. People who don't have kids yet or have kids who are older.
 - Non-profit partner is based in Toronto
 - Geographic location of users is a bit sporadic, not specific.
 - Predominantly english speaking areas
- Research/Survey Question generation:
 - Want to understand people that have done improv before, how improv helped improve their life?
 - Which parts of their experience with improv, have helped them
 - For people that haven't tried it, what are peoples preconceived notions about improv
 - Why haven't they tried it?
 - Where else do they go to seek support in their lives?
 - Helpful to learn from people in their target audience
 - Can you ask people how they prefer to participate in Improv?
 - Get to the bottom of what their users would want

Appendix B: User Interview Protocol

Primary Interviewer: "Hello, my name is ..."

[If applicable] Secondary: "And my name is..."

Primary: "And we are both graduate students at University of Michigan School of Information. Thanks for taking the time to meet with us today. Our job today is to listen and learn about your experience of using improv as a wellness and self/professional development tool. We expect this interview to be 30 to 45 minutes long. If you need a break or there is a topic that you are not interested in discussing, please let us know."

While we are on the topic, we should mention that our whole team has signed NDAs and that we are fully committed to keeping your responses confidential. Your responses will remain anonymous (no name or other identifying information will be associated with your answers). As we are working on this project for our SI622 class at the University of Michigan, we may need to share anonymous quotes to our teachers and the rest of our team. With that said, any and all feedback is helpful and appreciated.

We also want to mention that you are not required to answer anything you do not want to and you are always free to leave at any time. After this interview, if you have any further questions, please feel free to reach out to us at: wolvertyped@umich.edu.

Is it okay with you if we record this call so we can better keep track of the conversation?
[interviewee response]

Before we begin, do you have any clarifying questions you would like to ask?
[interviewee response]

1. To start off, can you tell us a little about yourself?
2. How do you define wellness?
3. Before joining Improve, how did you maintain your personal wellness?
 - a. What did you like about [wellness practice they do]?
 - b. How did you engage in these wellness practices?
 - i. Did you prefer group or individual wellness practices?
 1. Why?
 - ii. Did you prefer virtual or in-person wellness practices?
 1. Why?
4. What factor(s) are most important to you in selecting personal well being / self/professional development tools?
5. Can you describe to me your journey of using improv as a tool for wellbeing and self- and professional development?
 - a. How did you first hear about improv?

- b. What were your impressions of improv before you first tried it?
 - i. [If there was a barrier] What encouraged you to first try improv?
 - c. [If they haven't said how they got to Improve, ask:] Can you describe to me your journey of how you came to Improve?
6. How does improv impact your personal wellness and self/professional development?
 - a. What do you like about improv?
 - b. How do you engage in improv activities?
 - i. Do you have a preference for practicing improv individually or in a group?
 - ii. Do you have a preference for engaging in the virtual live-sessions, in the daily email prompts or the web app?
 1. Do you sign up for monthly live sessions?
 - a. [Why or why not?]
 - c. Are there any barriers to you participating in improv?
7. What haven't we asked you today that you think would be valuable for us to know?
8. May we contact you if we have any other questions or for possible further research for this project?

Appendix C: Interview Notes

Interview #1

Interviewer: To start off, can you just tell me a little bit about yourself?

Interviewee (abbreviated to I for the rest of the transcript): Well, I mean this whole improv I got to where I'm a healthcare provider. And who calls with the work, giving free courses. So that's how I got introduced to this, so I work in a downtown hospital until I know. And while I'm a mom, I have three children. So going to university as well so of course I'm always pulling to hit those, you know, I think this is great. I'm originally from Germany and I emigrated to Canada. I mean, way back now, 16 years ago. And, yeah, that's the basics, I think I like theater, I like theater, so that's how I got even into this so yeah, I always loved being on a stage as a kid.

Interviewer: Did you do improv before?

I: No, not like in a setting like this and was entirely new for me . There was one evening I was in Berlin, and you know how they have those restaurants or something where they have implants, and they will see it and get people from the public. Oh yeah, to participate. So that's what I did. So yeah, and I loved it. And so, we got like before coming to choose and profit humor feel comfortable with it because I experienced it in Berlin.

Well, I always loved it and I could see that I always liked it. I mean you know I love what would play as a dating back as a kid, I love it as in nursing I think it's a great way of getting case studies done. And that's the thing in the hospital that you do to learn how to, you know, to clients and that care and this was just amazing and again there was a workplace, so I do like this. So when I then saw that this was offered because I didn't know I didn't look for it I saw it. Whoo-hoo, for my work. I thought, wow, you know, it clicked, and I said yeah, I would like to do that, and I said, Yeah, I got it good rejuvenating if you want.

Interviewer: How do you define wellness?

I: Well, it is taking care of yourself. So, for me, as it says wellness, you want to be well. So that means that you need to take care of your sleeping and your mental health, that you need to take care of that so that you.

Interviewer: Before joining, how did you maintain your personal wellness?

I: I mean having a good life work balance, like I like I love to swim I go swimming a lot. I love outdoor activities like paddleboarding so in the summer I'm out there a lot. Camping so really looking at them is a time off that I take time being with friends going for a walk.

Interviewer: And what did you like about what you did for your wellness? You said you talked to friends, spent a lot of time outdoors like with paddleboarding and camping.

I: Oh, it's reconnecting with nature. I really am very yeah; I really like it a lot like even walking through the woods are just you know so that you can. I think it's really calming you down and putting on makeup. I mean like you know the busy lifestyle that we have, and especially with what's been done now the last, it's been ongoing that to ground you again I think that is very important. So, I liked it. I looked for opportunities to do that, like now, and just being outside in front of the campfire was just so basic, you know, water, fire, earth. For me that is amazing, like you really feel your life at those moments. Yeah. Yeah, like swimming in the cold water I love to go in the lakes, it doesn't matter where it is because you feel life. Yeah, we have to do this kind of thing because our mind can get all crazy sets you align again. Um, yeah so for me, like improv and choosing doesn't give you that like sometimes like being grounded and yes so it came into really good time that's impossible for me in my life.

Interviewer: Is improv a grounding experience for you?

I: Yeah, it came at a good moment in my life, and I mean, it was really taking a different spin and I love the atmosphere with this I love the again the role play I left this being all of a sudden, we were laughing, and we were just you know it's not making it so heavy. And I still I mean, certain things I mean the one the big one, it was like 185, and, you know, and there's this one thing that did one lady. Let us do and I'm still using it and using it when I, when I drive my car and I get it, you know, like I'm anxious I get, you know, something not going to age, but that means you know sometimes you get. Have you said it like you know if you have? If you need more if you are pressing for time. So, using this could just relax me, so I'm calculating what I learned into my daily life, which is really nice. Improv is a mindfulness technique then. I think about a situation that I had at improv and I'm like going back to this and so this is for me grounding.

Interviewer: What factors are most important to you in selecting personal well-being and self-professional development tools? A person is a safe being and professional and professional development tools.

I: I'm starting with a second one first, so that the professional being scores, so when they need to. I mean, knowing what target they are, what kind of audience they cater for, in a way, what kind of audience they want to capture, what is that, that they are aware of their main goal, out of this and that they constantly book, then, toad and as well. We are adjusting it like you know when they do it like asking the audience back you know how, like feedback and wanting to improve the techniques and I really love this would say that they have people who, who went through events and, you know, so that it becomes more personal. And I think this is huge, that it is not you know oh yeah you need to do this bum Is it okay there's no humanity with this. So, I think that having seen the human always having the human in the minute and going, going from there and having, and so that's from the professional side like talking about a story. So, I'm big on those things. And the personal one it was so the personal wellbeing is knowing that life is challenging at times and then thinking about it as ways that you can go back and ground yourself so that your mind is not going in all kinds of areas, is that kind of when you were getting too.

Interviewer: How do you prefer to engage in improv activities? Do you prefer engaging in the virtual live sessions or the daily prompts from the emails?

I: I don't have as much experience with a daily prompt because I have. And I also cannot comment on this, but I can already see I mean now that I mean I'm getting a good them and I'm like this is a good way because I can look at other experiences which I think are great reminders, but I cannot talk about the content as of yet. I do like workshops a lot, and I like engaging. It is a little intimidating at the beginning, because you have to. I mean, connect with people that you know and that especially now virtual it's not the same white then of course, being in a room and. But what is great is that you, you learn to overcome it, and you learn just to, you know, the other person probably feels the same. So, I like the setting, I like it. The way they, they, they do it with a bleak home, and having the one to, you know, the two people or three people together and then coming back and discussing so I was really impressed.

Interviewer: How long have you been with Improve?

I: Well, as I said, I just got it. I mean I started last year because of them, I was introduced to it, and I think it is funny so then I did a few courses, and I was like yeah, I need to stay with it and then often. If you don't book the next one, you fall off the Wailing. And so now, the other week I was saying oh yeah you know what I really want to go back and then the email came up. So, um, yeah so, I cannot be pulled from a long-term basis. Hello. Oh yeah, it is , it's like wow okay that is a sign, they're like.

Interviewer: Were there any barriers for you participating in improv?

I: I felt like a little bit nervous at the start yeah but that's it that's Bailey that was just really just saying okay challenge to do something new. Mm hmm. Yeah, that's that and once you overcome it or if you have the first, then that was okay and it's almost like a challenge for you to say, you know, to do something new, the Bay Area is just time. Because I'm a shift worker. And so, some works up for example so that's when the virtual I can, I could see that the virtual emails would help me. Because the workshop works well if it falls on a day that I'm working, and I have 12-hour shifts.

Interviewer: Is there anything today that we haven't that I haven't asked you, that would be valuable for me to know?

I: I really think it is great I think they could cop and cooperated completely different even they can and you know another setting would be like I think about the health care of course that you would have that they would offer, like, the hospitals would buy into it and then offer it because like you know little, little things just half an hour something has an influence I mean we now get meditation at work. Just, you know once in a while and it's so 15 minutes during your workday. That makes it different. Oh yeah. Yeah, so I mean if hospitals would buy into this that would be awesome.

Interview #2

Interviewer: Just to start off, can you tell us something about yourself?

Interviewee (abbreviated to I for the rest of the transcript): So I am a video producer and marketer and photographer. Usually I do B2B work so as part of a B2B marketing team that's my full time job, and then I do a lot of freelance as well.

I: And improve kind of ties into that because I started in 2019 and it's been incredible like the transformation that I think has taken place since I joined it to kind of get better on my feet.

I: Both in a business context but also just inner personally and it's amazing like I feel so much more comfortable with kind of the discourse of every event in my life if that even make sense but Before that, I think I would look back and be like Oh, I regret that how I dealt with that social situation, but there's much less of that.

I: Post improv and, actually I shouldn't say post improv, because it's very much ongoing but yeah it's been a big change, so I guess that's kind of a long answer for that question but there's that.

Interviewer: How would you define wellness if you had to like have two three lines for wellness How would you go about describing it.

I: So defining wellness for me would be about feeling constantly gratified and fulfilled With a healthy balance of kind of a healthy balance of I'm not there yet, but enjoying the journey, because then, I believe that we're never going to have it all figured out but being comfortable with the journey.

I: And just yeah really feeling healthy like I'm living a balanced social life and also feeling like I'm making progress professionally while not feeling overly stressed, but feeling excitedly accountable so that's how I believe people get better is with excited accountability.

Interviewer: So before doing improv how did you maintain your personal wellness.

I: I mean, I had started eating healthy years before that. I had been on an exercise regimen. And just kind of already living a balanced life but I felt myself thinking about social interactions too much before actually just.

I: Like going out and experiencing them like now with improv, like I felt fine going into a meeting or a social gathering and not knowing what was going to happen and just felt like way more comfortable and navigating that and staying present throughout those situations.

Interviewer: So there weren't any tools or any other method which you did before, apart from eating healthy and maintaining a good lifestyle.

I: yeah nothing organized anyway.

Interviewer: Do you prefer a group wellness practice or more of an individual wellness practice.

I: I mean I enjoy meditation as far as an individual wellness practice goes, but I prefer the group because. I think interacting with people and doing improv just helps me feel okay with what I'm doing on the spot and it's like continuous affirmations. And that was something to like. I always had this feeling that I was never like that everybody else had it figured out or like that they were just better writers, or better or something and then. But that was never the case, and then I realized like what people and what people like in comedy to I realized like it's just such a great study on that being an improv and so yeah there's that and then now i'm in a sketch writing class which is different but it feels similar in that way that you're it's like continuous validation on that front just experiencing whether people find funny and what I find funny and being tasked with putting that into words on a weekly basis so yeah.

Interviewer: So this class you're attending in person, or is it virtual.

I: So this one's in person.

Interviewer: Okay yeah So what is your preference you prefer in person or virtual something that suits you.

I: So I definitely prefer it in person. I enjoyed the live sessions with Mary in choose-improve, so I felt like I just feel like you can't quite replace in person improv something about that in person experience just really completes the experience. And I feel like it has more healing and wellness properties, just because you're moving around your consciousness of 3D space more than just interacting with people on a 2d screen.

Interviewer: So you mentioned meditation, so is it something that you are still doing or you used to previously did.

I: it's something I wish I did more. I haven't made as much time for it lately, but I feel like improv is the kind of improv sketch writing has. Almost not taken away the need for it, but I have made it, so I don't need meditation as often.

Interviewer: Like you mentioned that improv has advantages over meditation So is there any factor which you actually look into when you're selecting any of these personal development tools, or any of these wellness tools.

I: You said any factors I look into when I'm selecting. I mean, I guess, I didn't I wasn't aware of it. yeah I guess it depends what you mean by factors because.

Interviewer: So is there any particular thing that you look into like you know meditation will help me into these areas, but as improv helped me develop under

these areas So is there anything in particular you look for why you're choosing, what I should go for.

I: So I felt like improv was able to help me with social situations and just being more comfortable on my feet and becoming a lot more present in my daily life and just not thinking about the past or future as much. Meditation helps me feel focused. But they both kind of helped me feel focused meditation is about relaxing or like being relaxed and focused versus there's some overlap with improv but improv helps me be more on my feet in social situations and just more present.

Interviewer: Okay, so is there any other thing which your friends recommended you or any of your colleagues recommended you that you thought that maybe I should give it a shot, but then you would like no improv is good for me.

I: um I guess it didn't seem like it had any alternatives. I was, improv is what I need there's really nothing else. And then I had always been planning on taking a sketch writing class even before improv but then I ended up starting improv first. I knew I wanted some sort of group activity that met on a weekly basis and I'm sure, a lot of you know I'm sure book clubs serve that as well, even though I have never been part of a book club, but yeah like now that I think about I'm sure there are alternatives, but no, no friends had recommended me to anything else, it was kind of just a conscious decision that after having seen a number of improv shows and personnel, I was like I want to pursue this.

Interviewer: Okay, so let's talk about improv like when was the first time you heard about this.

I: So the summer of 2019. It was becoming more and I had met somebody in particular, who was like this is, I just started this a couple semesters ago and I've really enjoyed it and then as like you know what I mean I give this a shot, I feel like it's Beyond like far beyond just the reasons for wanting to perform and be on stage. The whole fundamental purpose for me was just as I said before, like getting more comfortable in all sorts of social situations and being more present. So yeah and then I started in fall 2019.

Interviewer: So you mentioned that there was a period where you very first tried and then you again picked it up later, so what were your first impressions about it, I mean.

I: It seems so much harder at the beginning, then well before I started it seemed like it was going to be like an impossible labyrinth of a task to do like I'm like How do people think of this stuff on the spot, and then I slowly started learning the techniques and what and then it just became so much more palatable and possible. So yeah I mean that's mostly it and yeah just learning the technique slowly over the course of eight week classes, I did it go comedy in ferndale I don't know if you're familiar with it, but yeah so I did the first two improv eight weeks sessions, and then the pandemic hit I was about to

start intro three eight week session and then that didn't start up again until fall of 2021 and we did that and then I did, three and four, and then there's a whole advanced one three and four and Then, now I'm in sketch writing so yeah.

Interviewer: You mentioned that the first impression which you had was that improv is difficult, so what was your driving force, like what encouraged you to try it.

I: I guess, I was just looking for new experiences and looking to get better as a writer for video especially and yeah I kind of wanted to what set me over the edge was that I wanted to get better as a creative and start and then something it got me better at was just writing more things down to document my thoughts. So journaling a bit more and not letting things bottled up inside my head just staying present but getting better professionally so.

Interviewer: So, based on whatever you mentioned, is it that improv is helping you more on a professional grounds, or is it like an equal balance between personal and professional grounds.

I: I would say it's kind of an equal balance but it's great because it just feels like arbitrage in that way because I'm getting better so much faster both professionally and personally that it's just a slam dunk choice to do that.

Interviewer: Okay, so now regarding the improv session, did you try any other places, apart from choose improve or choose improve was the first place where you actually got introduced to improve.

I: So I was introduced to improve you know yet at go comedy in ferndale in person, and then in I think it was April 2021 I started with choose-improve and then continued through October, November and then. We just didn't have the small groups anymore, those were those that had stopped happening so yeah so, and then I was the crossover with go comedy as well, so I was doing both in September and October.

Interviewer: So, how was your experience at go-comedy compared to the experience which you're having now.

I: um let's see. With yeah I mean with choose-improve it was great we had that 45 minutes session at lunchtime on Mondays. And I liked the exercises that felt like it just gave me energy for the day and had me thinking creatively. At go comedy I mean it's hard to compare because it was in person and also it was three hours long every Monday so yeah both of them were on Mondays for a while. And so it was kind of a lot I wish there were on separate days, honestly, but. See yeah it was just different I guess it was kind of a cool challenge like having to follow, along with the Games virtually and I felt like there was it just wasn't quite as interactive just inherently like I appreciate virtual sessions, but I just don't quite think it replaces in person sessions.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that there are daily activities or challenges which you do so just wanted to know is it something which you prefer having a daily challenge, or do you prefer something more of a weekly thing and again have a monthly live session or something of that sort.

I: Yeah I mean I like it. I was never able to not often anyway, like I forgot that the daily challenges were happening like I was getting the emails for a bit and then just I feel like stopped seeing them, for some reason. So I mean that's the thing that I wish I had tested myself with a little bit better or made time for on a daily basis, because I liked the accountability of meeting on the zoom or in person, so I think that's a huge part that keeps me on schedule. yeah there's so many different things I know it only takes like 5-10 minutes to do those activities, and I wish I had done them more often. I find in person or just checking in with people virtually or in person helps a lot.

Interviewer: Okay, so I guess there are monthly live sessions as well, so just wanted to know like do you sign up for those or is it something.

I: Too hectic to do for a monthly basis. Right now, I would love to but I'm just so busy with freelance on top of my full time work, and you know I told Mary this too, and so I just temporarily canceled my membership. But they all fall on Tuesdays, which is when my sketch writing classes last for three hours on Tuesday nights. So that's why I haven't been able to do any of those sessions. And so yeah it's kind of a bummer because I would be into it too. I've done those monthly sessions, before I did one in December. And yeah it's always great. But it's like just right now I feel like I don't have enough time.

Interviewer: sketch sessions which you said, which are scheduled on Tuesday, are these part of Improve or this is something external which you do.

I: This is something external, yeah.

Interviewer: Just to understand, is it something which is again helping you for your professional development or it's a mixture of personnel, as well as professional development, I mean the impact of those classes.

I: Oh yeah they definitely have a great impact on both personal and professional. And it just tasked me with writing a coherent piece each week. With kind of a certain broad theme in mind and it's really cool just because I don't know if I would have I would make the time for it without that in person, accountability, or even if we met over zoom I think that would be enough accountability. But yeah I just feel like so much more. Creative and discerning with how I put together narratives so just being challenged with that week to week is great, both personally and professionally.

Interviewer: So just one last question from my end like compared to before doing improv sessions, and after doing improv sessions what changes do you actually notice in yourself.

I: Just being able to formulate coherent thoughts, be more present. Just it's helped with charisma. It's helped with really everything just being more personable, understanding people and their motives and what drives them and yeah it's just helps with so much like I can't even fully comprehend or explain it so it's been a total game changer yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything which you feel I haven't asked, and you want to add it on your own thing just to make sure that it's not missed out.

I: I feel like I have expressed everything that I wanted to. Yeah I mean I guess you know I never thought I would want homework back, but it does help kind of get better and keep your mind on, only keep you accountable, but it keeps your mind on challenging yourself creatively so maybe that could be a recommendation for choose improve like maybe some more task I know there's the daily challenges so that's. They already kind of are doing that from yeah I'm trying to think of maybe some sort of assignment that's I think they're already doing pretty well on that so maybe not.

Interviewer: If we have to contact you again with any questions or possible research is it fine for me to like to get in touch with you again.

I: Absolutely yeah.

Interviewer: cool I guess I'm done with my questions. Is there anything that you want to say?

I: Yeah just for some reason totally forgot about them and it's like at the beginning, I was doing them a little bit of the daily challenges, but I overlook now so like I looked forward to the weekly sessions and then yeah so it's I haven't really no explanation for why I forgot about those or didn't task myself with the five minutes, they took so. yeah but I'm now very cool. I like to hear it, and I hope you guys have several revelations that come from it, and that leads to refining the study and improving strategy on it.

Interviewer: Yeah, thank you for your time. It was lovely talking to you and knowing more about you and your journey, so thank you for your time.

I: Thanks [interviewer name], great to meet you.

Interviewer: bye.

Interview #3

Interviewer: Awesome, to start off, can you just tell us a little bit about yourself?

Interviewee (abbreviated to I for the rest of the transcript): What would you like to know that it's a very big question

Interviewer: Let me see. Your age, any family members, maybe more on your background, stuff like that?

I: So I'm in my 40s. I'm trying to think about what background information would be of assistance to you. I think it needs to be broken down a little more, because that's a lot for my brain.

Interviewer: Okay, well, we can just move on to the next one. How would you define wellness?

I: You're gonna make me think today, wellness is all encompassing, I would describe it as something that is physical as well as mental, so mind, body, spirit. I think for this to be true those systems have to function as much in tandem, as well as possible. Given whatever constraints someone might have in different areas.

Interviewer: Before joining, improve, how did you maintain your personal wellness?

I: I'm a big believer in therapy. I'm a big believer in nature, being very good for one's soul. So watch lots of nature based activities. Meditation sporadically, I will add. I would say creative endeavors. You know pre-pandemic, I would have said spending time with friends and those kinds of things, which has been really skewed through the pandemic. But being able to still have connections with people is important, genuine connections.

Interviewer: You don't have to talk about all of them but, what did you like about those things? You can pick a few things in particular, what brought you to them?

I: Ah, oh, for nature. It's just where I feel the most grounded, the most content the most in the moment. So that very naturally becomes something you want to return to. In terms of creative endeavors. Same it's, the same kind of thing. I think it takes you out of the ever thinking mind and puts you more firmly in the present moment. And the feeling of creating is very fulfilling. So from a wellness perspective, it definitely adds to life.

Interviewer: Would you say you prefer group or individual wellness practices?

I: It really depends on what the practice would be. Some I'm very solitary and some, like obviously, improv in a group. It's much better.

Interviewer: Do you prefer virtual or in person wellness practices?

I: In person, that said, I think that the beauty of having virtual wellness practices is that you can also do the in person things that you're already more self established with, for myself anyway. Whereas the virtual pieces are things that I wouldn't be able to access during this time anyways, if there wasn't an in person option for the measures that I'm taking during the ongoing pandemic. So it's really really lovely to have that virtual option. Plus, you know, when you combine travel and those kinds of things, you're not able to be there in person if something is location centered, so it's nice to be able to definitely have that as an option. And I would say that Yeah, for a lot of things I think it's a really important option.

Interviewer: What factors are most important to you when you're selecting a wellbeing practice like that? What are you looking for?

I: I gotta tell you, I don't think that I necessarily am consciously going out and looking for new wellness practices, I think it's more of a spontaneous thing where something comes into my sphere, and it clicks. And I think to myself, this is worth exploring further. And there's something about this that I gravitate towards, and something about it that feeds my soul and spirit in some way.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about what grabs you, so to speak?

I: Yeah, I'll use an example from improve, for instance. I was on the list for one of the wellness organizations in Canada, and they had sent out a series of workshops that improve was hosting, kind of in combination with them. And it just sounded interesting. It was totally outside of my wheelhouse. It grabbed my attention from a creative perspective and well, this seems kind of interesting for pushing my personal, you know, comfort zone, in terms of what I'm already doing. And a great way to have interactions with other people during a very solitary time. So all those things were very appealing. And also very appealing was the fact that because I was a member of the other group, there was an offer that you could do any two of the workshops. I think it was for the price of one. And it was kind of like it was very low cost. And it was maybe 20 of us, which is more in Canada, which is where I'm based, but I'm still very low cost for two workshops. And so it's just it seems like a very, you know, very minimal cost for trying something new that seemed very interesting.

Interviewer: How did you first hear about Improve?

I: It's just what I said I got an email from another group that they had partnered with. I believe it was maybe during Mental Health Awareness Month. They're a mindfulness based wellness group. So I got the newsletter and such and so they had talked about their partnership at that time. Having Improve come in, and co-host these as part of what they were doing during that month. So that was my first introduction was literally just signing

up and attending that first online workshop, I was hooked. Like, that was the first one online workshop and it was great. I loved it.

Interviewer: So what were your impressions of improv before you first started trying it?

I: I know many comedians get their starts in improv and, and the concept of improv and just basically in life in terms of, you know, whether it's in your personal life or at work, you know, coming up with new solutions on the fly type thing. That was really, I think kind of my overall I didn't really think about it. It wasn't something that occupied a lot of my brain space.

Interviewer: Okay, well, now that you're in it how does using improv impact your personal wellness?

I: Ah, I believe it definitely helps you in terms of coming up with things. Being able to take skills and applying those to different situations in real life, like creatively, I really like wordsmithing. I really like songwriting. Creatively, there's different creative elements I like, but I really love words. So there's a lot of rhyming and word type games as well, which is just a small piece of it. But I love having those in my toolkit. So if my brain's kind of ruminating on something else, something that I can't do anything about in any way, I can pull out one of those things, and I can distract myself, but also, you know, I feel like it helps your brain, it helps your overall creativity. And, yeah, I find those tools really powerful. As well as there's a lot of scene work. And that's not not something that I usually acclimated to at the start. It's still the trickiest part of improv for me. So, and that's really interesting, because you know, it, I think it really lends itself to, again, in real life, real life situations, being able to respond quicker, and it's less of a reaction and it's more of a response, which I feel is really important in life, especially during these times when there's a lot of polarized views and people are quicker to react, to be able to kind of quickly process information and create a response instead of just a pure reaction. I think that's a really helpful life skill that improv really helps with.

Interviewer: So how do you engage in improv activities? Do you go to virtual live sessions? Do you do the daily email prompts?

I: Yeah, I don't get the daily email prompts anymore. But yes, so those were great. I think they were like, 30 for 30 days? I don't know. I'm not really sure. But, yeah, so those were great. That was a great introduction piece. At the same time. At that point. It's not being offered anymore, but just continuing the last few couple of my times there were weekly meetups as well. So it was I think Monday at noon, Eastern. But there would be these weekly meetups. So we'd meet up and it would generally be a lot of the same faces. And sometimes new faces could join in. And it was great because it was, you know, an hour where you could work through different exercises, just kind of get some creativity, creativity to start your week flowing. You know, have that connection with people that were also interested in using these tools and getting stronger in them. And then I think

they're usually monthly more or less workshops, which are always great. typically have a bigger turnout than the weekly meetups because I think it's hard with people's work schedules and things.

Interviewer: Right, and do you sign up for those monthly live sessions?

I: Mary signs me up for them. So I just get my link.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what you like about those?

I: Ah, yeah, I love that. They're always a bit different. Like, there's the top three topics. So there's always one tonight, I believe it's improv for relationships, right? Last month, I think I wanted to say for accomplishments, but that might not be quite right. Something along those lines. Last month there were two parts that were two workshops. So they're always very specific topics that the workshops centered on. And then there's exercises throughout that, that help facilitate tools towards that particular topic. And, you know, you usually work with different partners throughout his work as a group. It's a great way to connect with people. You know, there's always new and different faces on those ones as well. And it's a great way to continually take yourself outside of your comfort zone, especially when there's new faces. I found with the weekly meetups, they were fantastic. And I do miss them. Since they were the same faces, I didn't realize how comfortable I was. So it was much more comfortable to put yourself in any of the exercises and not really think twice about having any kind of subconscious response to it. As soon as the faces change, or suddenly that I've heard from some of your background on it, you know that one of the core principles of improvement and improv is like you have to fire that inner judge. So that was an interesting piece of that is when things switch out, and there's a lot of new faces, I find that pops up for me a lot more. So it's a really useful tool in getting better at that too. Because that's something that in life we get great at doing that in one area, we can take it into our lives as well. Shush that voice.

Interviewer: Are there any barriers to participating in improv now?

I: Um, I can't think of any. Usually, no, I'm in eastern time zone. So usually, the time works fairly well for me, because it's at like eight o'clock tonight. So, you know, if I was in a different time zone like Pacific, it would be a little more challenging. But they fall on nights that I typically don't have anything else. I've just gotten very lucky with how things pan out. So I wouldn't say that I do.

Interviewer: Well is there anything I haven't asked today that you think would be valuable for us to know or anything that you want to emphasize?

I: I guess my curiosity is Mary said that you were specifically looking at website functionality. Was that incorrect information?

Interviewer: That's correct. Yeah. We're getting to learn a lot of things about the website, the business, and the user base.

I: Okay, so is there anything that you want to ask about website experience or anything like that that would help you from that perspective?

Interviewer: We are actually going to be doing more interviews later on in the class for those. And sort of lead into that, can we contact you with any other questions?

I: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Of course. Whatever can help move it forward. Because I think it's a fantastic resource. And I'd love to see it be able to reach more people and create a bigger impact.

Interview #4

Interviewer: Before we begin, is it okay if I record the interview?

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: My team and I - we're team Wolvertyped, it's kind of a play on 'prototype' and Wolverine. We're all grad students at University of Michigan School of Information. Again I wanted to thank you for meeting with us. My job today is to listen and learn about your experience using improv as a wellness and self/professional development tool. I expect this interview to be 30 to 45 minutes and if you need a break or if there's anything you don't particularly want to talk about feel free to let me know and we can move on to the next thing or take a short break.

While we're on that topic, we should mention that our whole team has signed NDAs to work with Mary and work with Improve so the information with me and with us is going to stay within our team and Mary so that's where it'll stay. As we are working on this project (this is for our class of course) we may need to share anonymous quotes to our teachers and the rest of our team - just so you're aware of that up front. With that said, any and all feedback appreciated.

We also want to mention that you are not required to answer anything you do not want to and you are always free to leave at any time just let me know. After this interview, if you have any further questions, please feel free to reach out to us at: wolvertyped@umich.edu.

Interviewee (abbreviated to I for the rest of the transcript): Yeah, I might head out in like a half hour because my grandma wants to watch TV and she doesn't stay up very late.

Interviewer: Yeah that's not a problem. So before we begin are there any clarifying questions you might have?

I: Uh no, so is this for like a school project?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah so my team and I, we are in a class together and yes, we're working directly with clients to help the client improve their products and understand the problem space, but also for us to practice doing UX research.

I: Gotcha and how many do you have to do?

Interviewer: We are doing 4 interviews for this stage, but we'll do more interviews later on..maybe 10-12 total?

I: Ok, yeah I went to Michigan undergrad

Interviewer: Oh nice!

I: I went to get my MBA at UCLA and we had to do a capstone project where we had to do 25 hours each person on the team, 25 hours of interviews on the topic.

Interviewer: Oh nice, so you're very familiar with the interview process.

I: Yes [laughs] I am

Interviewer: Maybe to start off, could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

I: Yeah, I'm from New York originally, went to Michigan for my undergrad and then was an equity trader in Manhattan for 4 years after that. That was when I had my first psychedelic trip with magic mushrooms. I realized I no longer wanted to be in finance as an equity trader so I quit that role, went to go visit UCLA grad school to see if I wanted to go. I realized coming from New York and Michigan there's a place where you can scooter to the beach in the middle of February and I really liked that so I moved out to L.A. in 2019 to go to that school. That was a 2 year program so I graduated that, took an improv class there that my really good friend who I in tandem with him made a school satirical newspaper called the Andersonian, cuz UCLA's school is called the Anderson. He made like an improv 101 class that I took, that was my first class that I've taken in any capacity for it. And then graduated, started a psychedelic community for people that are interested in the topic to get together with other people that are the same so that's my full time job right now. Yeah, that's pretty much the personal side of things.

Interviewer: Great, thank you, I appreciate you sharing that. To start into the interview questions, how would you define wellness - like what does it mean to you?

I: For me wellness is a combination of mind, body and spirit. Taking care and giving proper time and attention to all of those things. For me personally, that looks like having a morning routine that I'm able to do as frequently as possible. That usually includes some breath work, some meditation, some gratitude journaling, 20ish minutes of exercising every day at some point throughout the day, social time with other people to not you know be holed up in my apartment and not seeing other human beings. Time to rest and relax, whether that's an episode of TV or reading articles or watching clips of whatever - so keeping balance in all of those three parts of life and always trying to get better and trying to improve them. So constantly tinkering with what works for you, your personal cocktail, to be in the best state that you can be. Yeah, I think that's it.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great. I think you also kind of touched on some of the next question too, which is, before joining Improve, how did you maintain your personal wellness. It sounds like you talked a little bit about that, is there anything you'd maybe want to expand on, or any practice in particular?

I: Yeah, this is why I had a question about if there was anything I was supposed to do before? I haven't joined Improve or done anything with Improve yet.

Interviewer: Oh, that's ok.

I: So what's the question then?

Interviewer: So I guess, and you kind of touched on this a little bit maybe in your previous answer, but how do you maintain your personal wellness, or if there are specific practices that you really identify with or help you maintain your wellness?

I: Yeah, the breathwork for sure. Meditating, gratitude journaling. Physical exercise, social interaction, like one episode of TV every night before I go to sleep. Some yoga before I go to sleep. The ceremony around those things, so like when I do my yoga and watch TV at night, I'll light candles and kind of wind down for the day. I won't look at my laptop or phone past a certain time so kind of keeping things sacred is something I think is important in all this. That stuff, writing satirical articles every once in a while is a good release for me, cuz I fancy myself good at it and I enjoy the creative outlet. So extrapolating on whatever hobby people have that they enjoy doing, that's kind of mindless that's good too every once in a while. And then traveling, getting out of--not being in the same place for too long and every once in a while just going somewhere new, experiencing something different. Yeah, I'd say that's a pretty good snapshot of it.

Interviewer: Great, do you have a preference for group or individual wellness practices?

I: Most of the time, individual, for things like breathwork and meditating and stuff like that. If it were easy and convenient to have a group of people do breath work together every weekday morning, like sure I'd enjoy that, but for practicality sake, individual. But then for things like just social interaction and that kind of human need obviously with people is important and in-person ideally - avoiding the virtual component as much as possible.

Interviewer: That was actually my next question too - virtual vs in-person preferences. So would you say mostly in-person versus virtual then ?

I: In-person is ideal just because the rest of the day is already virtual, so just to change it up like i mentioned before...and you can just connect more in person than you can through a screen.

Interviewer: Ok great, thank you. What factors are most important to you when you're selecting these personal wellbeing or self/professional tools, or practices?

I: I think the most important is how it makes me feel, like if I feel like it's contributing to my overall holistic health and other factors are whether I enjoy doing it or not, like

meditation and the gratitude journal I don't enjoy doing that much, but it's definitely helped with my health so I continue doing it. So whether I like it, whether it's helping, how intensive it is in terms of time and energy, how easy it is to fit into my calendar, and whether or not it's scheduled is gonna affect whether I do it or not. If it's not in my calendar, I'm probably not going to remember to do it. So even just accessibility in that regard. That's probably it.

Interviewer: I'm curious, you said about the gratitude journal, that it's not something that you necessarily like to do, but you feel like it's helping your health - could you expand on that a little bit more?

I: Yeah, usually I'll, if it's about a person, I'll take a picture of it after and I'll send it to them and people always love to get that note and it costs me nothing to do, so knowing that I'm making other people happy is a positive thing so if it doesn't cost me anything then i'll do it, but actually like it feels like it takes a lot of brainpower to do now because I've done it enough days where I'm running out of stuff, like I'm repeating or running out of things. I don't know, it's a good question, why...it's only 5 minutes, but often it'll get cut out of my morning routine, almost like I schedule my morning routine purposely to not have that 5 minutes. Yeah, I don't know why that is, even on this trip that I'm on at my grandparents right now...I've brought my gratitude journal but I haven't opened it the 5 days that I've been here. So, I haven't done any of my morning routine, so it's not just that, but it definitely does take some extra willpower to do it, but like many things in my life, I just feel better after I do it, but that doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to do it again.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like being in the new space kind of disrupted your routine and just trying to figure out what works and what doesn't.

I: Yeah, but even back at my apartment, in my routine, I was still skipping that more often than I should've.

Interviewer: You talked a little bit when we first started talking about your journey to improv, could you tell me a little bit more about it and how you decided to use it -- maybe what your journey to using improv was and if you do use it as a tool for wellbeing or self/professional development what was that process like?

I: So I enjoy improv, I've seen Middle Edition shorts a bunch of times and they have really good shows so I enjoy that. Sometimes I go to a random improv show with no-name people, but it's usually free so why not? Then we have the Improv 101 that my friend convinced me to do, I'm normally not a person...I get uncomfortable on stage and wouldn't typically do that, but he was throwing the event and I wanted to show up and support him and I figured it'd be fun and why not? And I'd heard that it helps with being a business leader and a team and stuff like that. I think like 8 of us showed up and did some games and stuff like that, I was relatively good at it, I just kind of have a skill with the satirical writing and stuff - I can kind of think on my toes and the other 7 people who

were there I didn't know that well, but it bonded us and we all felt good getting out of our comfort zone. So after that, I was like yes let's definitely do that again and a lot of us were excited and couldn't wait for the next one and then it just never got planned..but I definitely would've done it again and still would've been nervous going into it again and then would've enjoyed it again. So that was my in-person one. Then I went to this company called Laughter On-Call which I think, do you know them?

Interviewer: No, I have not heard of them.

I: I'd check them out, from the very brief thing that I saw from Improve, they seem very similar. Laughter On-Call will send 2 trained comedians to lead your team to a couple improv games on Zoom for a period of time. I did one of those for a holiday party for my psychedelic community and we had 7-8 people show up and played some improv games via zoom and people enjoyed it and it was fun. I like it in the sense of bonding for my community members to get closer together and then I don't have a team, I'm a one-man-job right now, but as I pick up people, I definitely see us using an improv night or something like that or a quick game to start off our meeting to set the tone of the meeting type of thing in the future when that is the situation.

Interviewer: Just to kind of expand on that - is there any particular reasons that you feel like you want to use those tools when you're expanding your team? Or to maybe facilitate that atmosphere that you're looking for?

I: I think it gets you much more comfortable with other people way quicker than anything else, makes you proud of yourself for getting out of your comfort zone, you learn new things about people that you probably wouldn't otherwise, so fosters relationships. It gets you in a good headspace to be creative and bring energy to whatever meeting or whatever's happening. So that's probably the biggest, it changes what you're bringing to the room, your presence and energy.

Interviewer: Great, thanks. I know you also said that you also kind of heard about improv through friends and social situations. I'm curious about your impression of improv before you tried it?

I: I admired people that could do it like put themselves out there to do that. I thought most people weren't that good at it. I have a relatively high bar for sense of humor and it was infrequent that I would laugh so like Middle Edition shorts are great...the pros are good, but you know like the Laughter On-Call comedians are like eh. So yeah, I think it was like an admirable skill, I admired people that did it and enjoyed it and were good at it. I wish that I was someone who could just kinda put myself out there like that. Yeah. I don't know what else.

Interviewer: I know that you'd mentioned that you felt like you're not the kind of person who could like get up on stage and that was something that...was that a barrier maybe to you trying improv? Can you talk a little bit more about that kind

of perception of yourself and how that played into trying or not trying improv before?

I: I think probably why I didn't try it was like anything else, like I'm not going to put in the, i don't care enough to like find a place that's putting on a class and then sign up for the class and then go 6 weeks in a row for the class. It's like a whole big commitment - it's the same reason I don't take boxing lessons or anything like that. Yeah, I don't like public speaking, I don't think I have anything that important to say and that people should spend that much time listening to whatever I'm saying. So yeah I think it was kind of in the same vein as that I just don't like attention on me. I don't like attention on me for something that I don't think I'm highly skilled in. So I quit soccer growing up and I was a pretty good goalie and I enjoyed people coming to our games and watching that cuz i thought i was pretty good at it. But if it's something that I think i'm low skill in, then yeah i don't want attention on me for that. So maybe if it was something I did a ton of times then I would actually enjoy the being on stage bit of it, if I got good at it. Yeah that's probably it and maybe that's why I enjoyed it after cuz out of the 8 people at that one in-person, I was one of the funnier people, so maybe that was what contributed to liking it.

Interviewer: Yeah, like we all like things we're good at [laughs]. You'd also mentioned/touched on that having something that's a long commitment or like a weekly commitment wasn't something that was very attractive for you - is there like an ideal - like when you do invest in like hobbies or different activities, is it more short-term or can you describe what are the things that would be, would kind of help you to have that kind of commitment or there other structures that you favor for those hobbies or other kinds of activities?

I: I think just like the science on habit formation is relevant here. Where if you want to start playing guitar like 20 minutes a day, don't just pick up and start doing it. The first step is take the guitar out of your closet and put it next to your bed every day and then eventually you'll pick it up and strum it a few times and then that'll turn into wanting to learn a specific song and that'll turn into... so it's what is the smallest baby step, like 30 seconds that I can do today? So if it kind of built into something, yeah today I'm not going to sign up for a 6 week hour long improv thing, but if it started with an email newsletter, like here's your improv tip of the day, and that turned into a two minute video you watched every day and that turned into a 15 minutes a week that you're meeting with a small group to talk, I feel like that's more manageable than a big jump off the ledge commitment. There's this company called COA that does 'Mental Health Push-ups' and it's 15 minutes sessions here and there, it's not even a weekly thing and the one I tested was on procrastination so it was a 15 minutes lesson on, here's what it is and here's what you can do to get better at avoiding it and I popped in and out between meetings and it took zero time and I really liked that component of it. Speaking as someone who's running their own business and always, like I said, slave to the calendar, the more efficient it can be, the better for sure.

Interviewer: Yeah, having something more flexible and able to fit into your schedule when you do have time sounds like it would be a good option.

I: Anything that doesn't need to be live being recorded cuz then I can watch it on 2x speed and save myself half the time. That's what I've learned, I'm not going to go to anything live that's going to be recorded that I don't need to be at live cuz I can still get all the information at half the period.

Interviewer: You kind of again touched on some of these points throughout our chat together, but just to directly ask it, what is it that you like about improv?

I: It's a good challenge to have to think of something funny that you couldn't prepare for in advance and relatively quickly. And it's also a challenge to keep it in the parameters of something that the other person can respond to and build off of. SO the challenge is fun. The teamwork component of working with someone especially if they have a similar sense of humor so you can build off each other, but even if they don't, you have the challenge of saving the ship. So yeah teamwork, challenge, out of the comfort zone because that's how you grow in anything. It's a good workout in a sense because if your adrenaline is pumping and you're uncomfortable in a sense, so it's a good emotional workout - which I really think is just getting out of your comfort zone in another way of saying it. When other people say something funny, it's funny. Those are probably the things.

Interviewer: Definitely, it sounds like challenging, mentally stimulating, got that social aspect to it, and then just touches on multiple aspects of wellness basically - physical, social, mental, and yeah. You get those endorphins as well. A couple other sub questions for that, do you have a preference for practicing improv individually or in a group? And why?

I: I don't even know how you would practice improv individually. So no for that one. It would be in a group. I don't think I'd care if it was people I know or not, I'm already going to be out of my comfort zone, what do I care if it's people I know or not. So, in a group, but that's pretty much it. But that's also probably because I don't know about what you would even do individually.

Interviewer: A follow up question to that, you were saying that maybe you wouldn't care if it was people that knew or people that you didn't, is that kind of the same thing whether it's a professional setting versus a personal setting? Do you have a preference for those? You said you've used it in both a personal and professional setting, maybe can you talk a little bit about the differences in how you would approach those or preferences that you would have for those kinds of settings?

I: Yeah, I don't know if I can really because my personal and professional networks are so meshed. My family's in the community and my friends are too. So everything I do is a mix of personal and professional. It's more or less the same to me.

Interviewer: I know you said you prefer in-person versus virtual, but I do have a few virtual questions. Improve also offers virtual live sessions and we have some questions about (if you haven't engaged in that, that's fine), maybe just a hypothetical question - do you have a preference for engaging in virtual live sessions, or there's also the daily email prompts and a web application. Do you have preferences for how you might want to engage or what would be your preference.

I: It would depend on what I'm trying to accomplish. If I'm trying to learn a new skill, then probably an email or web app, a video on here's what it is - maybe with some homework and accountability for that to make sure I actually do it. Like you can't watch the next one until you prove you did...I don't know.....If it's like actually do some improv scenes, I would imagine that has to be live, virtual with other people. So yeah it really depends on what you're trying to accomplish in terms of what the best medium would be.

Interviewer: Are there specific goals you have when you're engaging in improv? Maybe it's currently, or in the past?

I: Usually to strengthen connections between the people I'm doing it with, if I'm the one putting it on for my business. If it's just one I'm going to as a participant, it's to get out of my comfort zone, flex that muscle, so yeah those are the two scenarios that I would be looking into improv in some capacity. Otherwise I'm not really like doing anything around improv.

Interviewer: A similar question with you were saying, those two kinds of goals, do you have preferences for, if they were virtual, what those might look like, like how would you prefer to engage when you're trying to get out of your comfort zone versus help bring a group together?

I: The connections would be a live game or it could be, in our community app a thread story, one of those story games where people put together a story one word at a time or something, so that could be done asynchronously. So if there was directions on how to lead a game like that for your community asynchronously , then that could be interesting to potentially try out cuz it would still you know bring the community together even though it's not live. But I would think that by and large, it would be in-person everyone get uncomfortable situation and then for my own getting uncomfortable, probably also the same. It would have to be some element of hands on doing it so that could be in a zoom room with a bunch of people or it could be here's today's lesson, video yourself doing it and submit your video, that would be equally as uncomfortable. So I think it would still flex that muscle, but even then, I still think I'd want feedback on my performance to get the validation or the feedback on whether I did it right or wrong.

Interviewer: So having that flexibility and then still having, yeah, it sounds like accountability is a key thing too.

I: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: I just have two more questions if that's ok, I know we're at 8:05pm and you were saying you want to skedaddle soon. [Interviewee nods to go ahead] I guess in general, and again you kind of touched on some of these things in our chat, but are there any particular barriers for you participating in improv? I know you'd mentioned scheduling, are there any other things that you can think of?

I: I think just accessibility, if something's not directly in front of me or I'm not VERY interested in pursuing it, it's not going to happen. So if I was on a newsletter where I was getting constant updates on how to get involved in a very easy, low friction way, then I might be more involved, but it's not something that I'm interested in enough to be pursuing ways to get involved. So the barrier is my indifference and it not being right in front of my eyes.

Interviewer: Is there anything that I haven't asked that you think would be valuable for us to know?

I: I think it's good that you're doing these interviews because I do a ton of them for my community too. They're helpful. I think something that we learned from our research is really focusing on the last time someone did improv, what was it that made them sign up for that class or attend that zoom etc..? What led up to it and then influenced the decision where they clicked register for event or signed up for a class because that information will probably be telling - because that's where your target audience is and that's how you get in front of them and capture them. That's some of the research we've been doing, is to focus on what made people join our community and click submit application. So some digging in there - it's hard, we've done like hour-long interviews to get to the bottom of it, but if you can get that info, it's probably helpful.

Interviewer: I would ask this question back to you, but I know you're not a member, so I guess kind of that question back to you is, why did you decide to take Mary up on her offer to engage in Improve now?

I: I like getting feedback from people, so if I get asked to give it, I'll usually return that favor and my friend that tagged me in her post was the one who did the Improv 101 class because he tagged me I wanted to respond to his request. Yeah, so those reasons.

Interviewer: The last thing is if we have any further questions or further research comes up, can contact you?

I: Yeah for sure.

Interviewer: Great, well that's all the questions that I have, I really appreciate you taking the time, especially when you're visiting your grandparents, to chat with me, and thank you for our conversation.

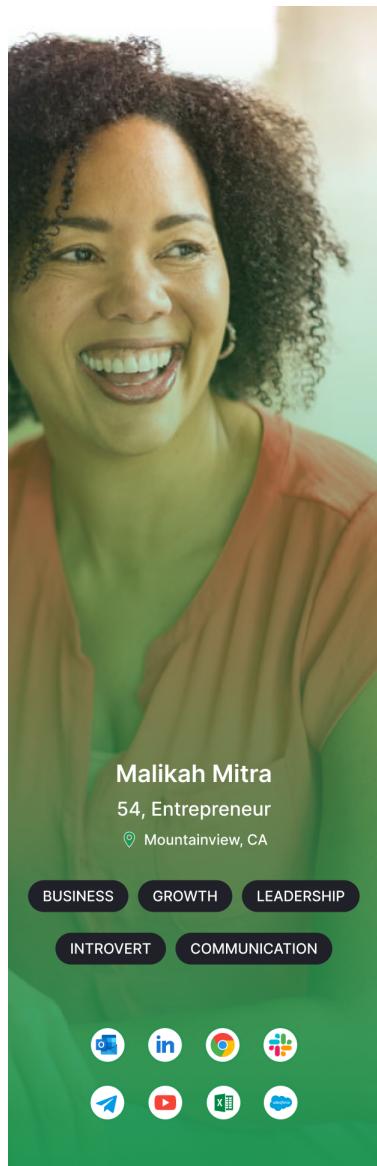
I: Yeah, no problem. Good luck with the project. I'm interested to check out the platform and if I have any additional feedback once I do, I'll let you know.

Interviewer: Definitely, appreciate that. Enjoy your show!

I: Thanks [Interviewer name]

Interviewer: Bye, thank you!

Appendix D: Personas



Malikah Mitra
54, Entrepreneur
📍 Mountainview, CA

BUSINESS **GROWTH** **LEADERSHIP**
INTROVERT **COMMUNICATION**



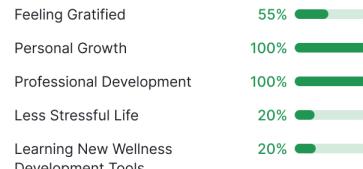
Bio

Malikah is an entrepreneur and loves meeting new people. However, she becomes riddled with anxiety when presenting her business plans to a large audience. She enjoyed theater as a kid, and it helped overcome her shyness. She believes that a playful and interactive speaking activity in a group will help her develop public speaking skills and become more comfortable speaking in front of crowds.

Goals & Interests

- Wants to practice speaking on the spot without the opportunity to prepare a script
- Wants to be in a group setting
- Wants to learn techniques from people who are good at public speaking
- Is intent on challenging herself
- Wants to participate in a fun and creative experience for improving her skills

Motivations



Pain Points & Concerns

- Is nervous and wants there to be a good facilitator to lean on in the group activity
- Does not like going in-person to activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Feels exhausted when she thinks about how much her voice shakes during presentations
- Feels that she is not able to communicate her ideas accurately
- Is concerned that she is not funny enough for improv

Software



Personality



“

Taking risks is scary, but is the key to self improvement and getting the most you can out of life.

Steve Rogers
25, College Graduate
Marketing Analyst
Freelancer
📍 Ann Arbor, Michigan

PHONE LOVER **INDOOR PERSON**
SELF CONSCIOUS **INTROVERT**
DIGITAL MARKETING **VIDEO PRODUCER**

Bio

Steve works full-time in a B2B marketing company, and loves do photography in his free time. He is also involved in few freelance work, and likes to produce short videos. He prefers to be indoors, when not at work and enjoys binge watching popular series. Being introvert and shy, he avoids going to parties and gatherings and enjoys company of his pet.

Goals & Interests

- Boost self confidence and step out more often to be more social.
- Exploring different ways to help reduce anxiety when facing new people at professional and personal front.
- Interested in finding different methods/tools that help him overcome fear of conversation and provide personal advancement.
- Interested in discovering new experiences, preferable in a group.
- Wants to explore wellness apps which are beyond meditation and yoga.

Motivations



Software



Pain Points & Concerns

- Having anxiety and nervousness thinking about social interaction.
- Having to encourage and push myself in order to express more out in public, and not feel tongue tied.
- Concerned that his behaviour of taking constant validation from others is taking a toll on him.
- Tried different tools/apps like meditation, Headspace etc but those only help to relax mind for that given time.
- Afraid that he might not overcome his shortcomings, which is hindering his advancement at professional and personal front.

Personality



“ I am trying not to let things bottle up inside my head, look for new experiences, stay in the present, document my thoughts and get better facing new people.

Barry Foster
36, Financial Advisor
📍 New York, NY

FINANCE **GROWTH** **LEADERSHIP**

EXTROVERT **ADVENTUROUS** **BUSY**

Social media icons: LinkedIn, Google+, Microsoft Teams, YouTube, Telegram, and Excel.

Bio

Barry currently works as a financial advisor in New York City. He works odd hours and is always busy, however he does enjoy his job and would like to become closer with the people he works with. Barry is social, and is open to any new adventure. He enjoys improv and has even attended shows and classes in his younger years but he can't seem to find time for it nowadays.

Goals & Interests

- Wants to engage more in activities that fuel his creativity
- Needs to become a better leader in the professional world and beyond
- Wants to strengthen the connections between him and his co-workers
- Is not afraid of meeting others and participating in new things
- Constantly trying to improve aspects of his personal and professional life

Motivations



Software



Pain Points & Concerns

- Works strange hours so it's difficult to make plans for anything he would like to do
- Has not been able to participate in any improv activities because there are none near his location that are accepting new members
- Thinks his voice is not being heard enough in meetings at work
- Feels his job does not provide enough of an outlet for him to express his creative side
- Does not get as many opportunities to be social outside of work as he would like

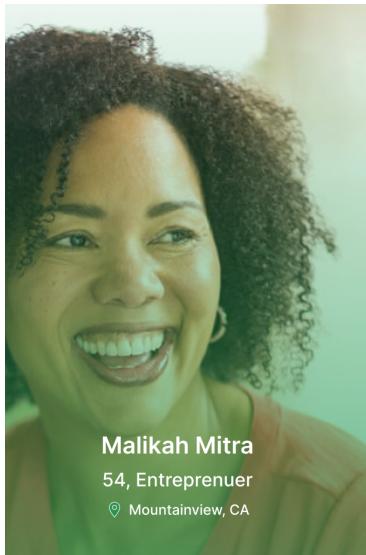
Personality



“

In order to be successful you always need to be looking to improve yourself. Whether it's professionally, socially, or creatively.

Appendix E: Scenarios



Malikah Mitra

54, Entrepreneur

📍 Mountainview, CA

Scenario

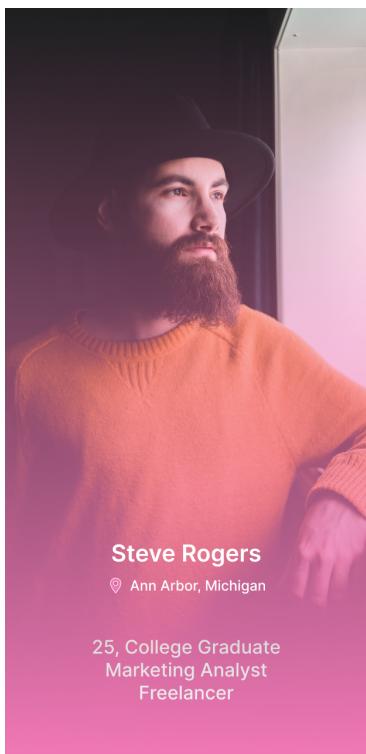
Malikah has been an entrepreneur working in Mountainview, California for the past thirty years. Her strong social skills have helped her network and create a successful career for herself. As she has advanced in her career she has found herself invited to more public speaking opportunities at universities and conferences. While the prestige of speaking at large events makes her feel proud and excited of her accomplishments, she tends to freeze when she takes to the stage. Her voice often trembles as she talks and sometimes draws a blank at what to say next. Malikah knows that she needs to address her fear of public speaking. She has thought of participating in presentation competitions, such as TeaCups; however, she would like to practice her skills in a more fun and playful manner. When she heard of the company Improve and how they use improv to help professionals gain public speaking skills, she knew it was the right fit for her.

BUSINESS

GROWTH

LEADERSHIP

COMMUNICATION



Steve Rogers

📍 Ann Arbor, Michigan

25, College Graduate
Marketing Analyst
Freelancer

Scenario

Steve recently completed his undergraduate degree from the University of Iowa and is working full-time as a marketing analyst in a B2B marketing firm. From a very young age, he's been a reserved person and had a limited set of people with whom he felt comfortable. He was hoping that college could help bring some changes to his personality, which did happen but not to that extent. He still feels tongue-tied in social gatherings and hesitates in speaking his mind. Based on one of his friends' suggestions, in summer 2019, during his last semester, he attended an improv session. And after a few shows, he made a conscious decision that he wants to pursue this. In the beginning, it was hard for him to be on stage and talk about a topic that he wasn't prepared for. But slowly he started learning the techniques and over 8 weeks he became comfortable with the process and everything looked more palatable and possible. This gave him a whole new experience, which increased his confidence in public speaking. He wanted to continue these improv sessions even after moving out of college, and that's when he heard about "Improve". Since Improve was designed to help people with personal and professional wellness through improv, Steve was automatically able to connect with them. He enjoys the 45 mins group activity sessions, followed by a few at-home challenges. These sessions and exercises gave him energy for the day, made him think more creatively, and formulate more thoughts. It's been a game-changer for him personally as well since improv has helped with his charisma, given him ways to present his thoughts and be more personal while understanding people and their motives.

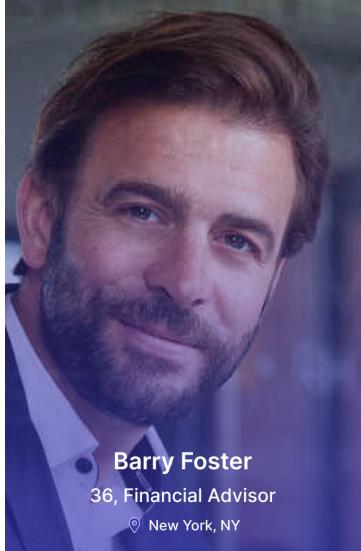
DIGITAL MARKETING

VIDEO PRODUCER

INDOOR PERSON

INTROVERT

SELF CONSCIOUS



Scenario

Barry has worked as a financial advisor for 3 years in New York City. He loves living in New York and going out with his many friends to concerts, art exhibits and Broadway shows. At work Barry likes working with numbers and using his analytical skills, but he is also looking for ways to express his creative side at work. About 3 months ago, Barry's company went through a merger, adding many new employees to his team. As team leader, Barry wants to help his team to manage the stress of the merger, build relationships between team members and also wants to build more leadership skills to impress his new boss. Barry's colleague mentioned an improv retreat his team did with a company called Improve when they hired a few new employees and he decided to give it a try. Barry contacts Improve via their website, schedules a consultation and books the activities with Improve. After the activities with Improve, Barry's team feels closer, feels less stressed after the merger and Barry feels better able to think on his feet at meetings.

FINANCE

GROWTH

LEADERSHIP

EXTROVERT

BUSY