

Karen Hough

Entrepreneur. Author. Improviser.



Meet Karen



Karen Hough is the Founder & CEO of ImprovEdge. She's the pioneer in using improvisational techniques to improve business outcomes. She has been using improv as a catalyst for business training and consulting since 1997. Following a hunch that integrating improvisational techniques in business training could vastly improve outcomes, Karen pursued research and testing and has been proving that hypothesis for over 25 years. Since 1997, the ImprovEdge principles and exercises have been vetted through research projects led by Karen with MBA students at: Wharton School of Business, the Ohio State University, University of Massachusetts, and Otterbein University.

ImprovEdge won the silver International Stevie Award for Most Innovative Company of the Year 2012 and in 2016, Karen was recognized as an Inspiring Woman by the WNBA's Indiana Fever. In 2020, Karen was the WBENC Pitch Pivot Award Champion, the first virtual competition of its kind. Karen's first book, "The Improvisation Edge: Secrets to Building Trust and Radical Collaboration at Work" (Berrett-Koehler) is a #1 Amazon Bestseller, a "Top 25 Business Books" by 800-CEO-Read. Karen has been featured in The Harvard Business Review, Inc magazine, Authority Magazine, HuffPost and Investor's Business Daily. Her second book, "Be the Best Bad Presenter Ever: Break the Rules, Make Mistakes and Win Them Over" (Berrett-Koehler) won the Benjamin Franklin Gold Award 2014 and has been translated into 4 languages. Karen's third book, "Go with It: Embrace the Unexpected to Drive Change" (Association for Talent Development) was launched in Taiwan in 2017 to a multi-national audience.

Karen is the recipient of the Athena PowerLink Award for outstanding woman-owned business and was named a Semi-Finalist in TechColumbus' Innovation Awards 2011 for Outstanding Service. She is the creator/author of the Yes! Deck, "Managing Tough Conversations: The Everyday Coaching Model," and numerous articles and blogs including publication in ASTD's T&D magazine, Mashable.com and BusinessInsider.com. She is a Certified Speaking Professional by the National Speakers Association and an international conference keynote speaker on topics such as the hybrid present and future, negotiation, leadership, executive presence, and sales. She is a Hogan Certified Coach and works with Chief Executives all over the world.

ImprovEdge is a government certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) and Karen served on the boards of Key Bank's Key4Women initiative, WELD (Women for Economic and Leadership Development) and The Matriots Ohio. She's currently a Board Trustee Vice Chair for CAPA (Columbus Association for the Performing Arts) and ImprovEdge is a proud sponsor of arts education in Central Ohio. Karen was honored as a Deloitte & Touche Wise Woman for their inaugural breakfast event, and she represented women entrepreneurs for the State of Ohio for the Saitama, Japan Women's Contingent.

Karen is a graduate of Yale University and La Sorbonne, Paris IV. She worked for many years as a senior sales executive in the network engineering industry in New York and Chicago. She originated and expanded the sales and management efforts for three separate technology start-ups, launched partner programs and assisted in East Coast and National expansions. Karen has been a professional improviser and actor for 30 years. Her improvisational training and performance credits include over 100 live productions with the Second City Chicago, Metraform/Annoyance Theatre, the Organic Theatre and the Purple Crayon of Yale, to name a few.

Karen is deeply committed to philanthropic activities and opportunities. She is a mentor for the Otterbein Women's Network Initiative and a portion of ImprovEdge profits each year go to support The American Heart Association, Computers for Youth, the Women's Fund of Central Ohio, kiva.org, The CAPA Marquee Awards and DonorsChoose. Her volunteer activities include teaching improv classes for high school students in rural Kansas and confidence-building workshops for Chicago City schoolchildren. She is a former board member of the Yale Whim 'n Rhythm Alumnae Association and is a volunteer for the Yale Alumni Schools Committee and the Yale Alumni Fund. She has three adult children and resides in Columbus with her husband and labrador.

