



Cause & Effects:

Volume 2: *"Comedy Magic Routines"*

by Cris Johnson, CH, CT.NLP

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Published by Event Horizon Publishing
8310 Lockport Rd.
Niagara Falls, NY 14304

Tel: 716-940-8963
E-mail: crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net

Printed in the United States of America

Dedication

For reasons I'm not going to get into, I feel my wife Libby is the strongest person I know or have ever met.

I know I do what I can, but my wife's pretty stubborn and prefers to shoulder the load herself.

She's amazing and all I can say is I'm glad I know her.

Libby, you're the BEST.

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Introduction

Life is weird.

I never originally planned on having two volumes of “Cause & Effects” to put out. However, at the time I was eager to release the first volume, I just didn’t have time to finish it, so two of the routines in this book were left out with the idea that I’d come back and finish the book, meaning I had to write enough material to fill an entire second book.

As I looked over my original scripts, some of which (as you’ll discover) have taken me over 10 years to fine-tune.

I’m really proud of this volume as everything in this book comes right out of my current set lists. This is stuff I currently use all year long to make a nice \$100,000+ yearly salary, so I know it works.

There’s been a lot of discussion on some Internet forums with some folks heavily criticizing people who buy someone else’s material and perform it.

I have a few responses to this. First, if you are able to create all original material and do it well, that’s great. Not everyone is a gifted writer and even those who are often simply don’t have the time to fully develop a script sometimes...we’re too busy making a living.

Secondly, I personally would rather buy someone else’s routine and then use it to ‘springboard’ my own creativity. It’s not my intent for people to copy my routines exactly. Granted, by purchasing this book, you certainly have the RIGHT to do so. We’re all individuals, so there’s always going to be tweaking needed to make any script fit the individual. Even mega stars like David Copperfield buy scripts – at the end of every one of his TV specials, he’d have a list of credits...and several writers listed.

Some people may have charisma and performing skills up the wazoo, but without scripts, they’re not going to get anywhere. No one is good at all things. I’m quite good at writing scripts. I am NOT good at designing the mechanics of a new trick or prop. If it weren’t for the generosity of those who came before me, I’d be screwed, quite frankly.

One more argument to those people who look down their noses at magicians who buy scripts. What about all of those gifted actors who choose to perform Shakespeare to sell-out crowds all over the world? I mean, really, the guy’s been dead for HOW long???

Let’s have some fun.

- Cris Johnson, July 2010

‘Cuddles,’ The Trained Snake!

“A laugh-out loud 5-minute routine for the Pro Viper!”

The Basic Effect

A card is selected and signed by a volunteer and lost in the middle of the deck. The audience’s attention is turned to a wicker basket sitting on a stand. Claiming that there’s a snake inside, the performer claims he will give the volunteer the snake’s favorite toy, a fluffy dog squeak toy, to draw the snake out, allowing the snake to wind up with the signed card in its mouth. The snake eventually does indeed jump out of the basket and while the snake is fake, it does indeed wind up with the signed card in its mouth!

Introduction

Many performers, myself included, often talk about how hard it is to write a truly original routine and how it can often take years. Most of the time, that’s been the case for me. As you’ll read later in this book, I have taken roughly ten years or so to “find” all of the jokes and bits of business for my Arm Chopper routine.

For the Pro Viper routine, it’s a little weird – it actually came together very quickly. I sat down and wrote a script in about a day...though I’d been mulling over the routine weeks before I actually bought the prop. It’s funny – often I have a basic script in place before I even buy a prop – it’s a good way to know whether I’m actually going to use the thing!

Anyway, I’ve performed this “rough draft” version of the routine for 200 or so shows so far and it plays great. I believe many of the bits and jokes are completely original, it plays great for both children and adults, and really stretches the routine – something I don’t even think creator Terry Lunceford’s routine on the demo DVD included with the prop really did all that well.

I also did away with the tearing of the card, as I really didn’t think it strengthened the routine all that much at all. I switched the card tearing with simply signing the card, which accomplishes the task of clearly marking the card as one-of-a-kind without the wasted and clunky business of going out into the audience.

I’ll cover the card business later, but in terms of physical handling, there’s not a lot to this routine – buy it and get used to the electronics, remote, etc. I will have a few notes about certain ‘bits’ after the actual routine.

Oh, and for those folks who bought this book but are not familiar with the Pro Viper effect, in a nutshell, a card is selected, and in my case, signed. The card is lost in the deck and the deck is placed on a table next to a wicker basket. Eventually, after some jokes and gags, a fake spring snake jumps out of the basket and after all of the hysteria dies down, it is found that this snake has actually managed to come up with the selected card in its mouth!

The Pro Viper snake jumps upon your command, through the use of a wireless remote control in your pocket, allowing you to 'spring' it at the perfect moment.

Fun effect, one I fell in love with the first time I saw it performed.

On to the routine!

The Routine

When the show starts, I have the small, handheld Pro Viper remote in my right pants pocket. As I begin to perform this routine, I tell the audience I need a volunteer. Naturally at this point, the hands of dozens of kids go up. Here, I pull back a bit by saying...

"Before you raise your hands, I have to tell you: the person who volunteers must be very BRAVE..."

More hands shoot up.

I continue: "The person who volunteers must love animals..."

The kids get even more excited as they frantically wave their hands in the air.

I add, "The person who volunteers must love reptiles..."

The excitement in the audience builds!

Finally I say, "The person who volunteers must love snakes..."

The excitement from the audience is near it's peak! I finally call on a volunteer, usually a girl of around 12-16 years old...that's my ideal choice.

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: This business of adding more and more qualifications to the selection process came from the fact that when I first started doing this effect, I truly did not want to terrify a child, nor did I want someone standing there smirking. I wanted someone I could 'jolt' a little to get the desired reaction out of for maximum audience enjoyment, but I did NOT want someone cowering in a corner when it was over. My ideal volunteer would jump a bit and then immediately start laughing. After years of

performing, I'm pretty good at "reading the audience" for the best volunteers.)

As the volunteer makes her way to the stage, I will then either wait for her to come up before I go get the prop or I will get the prop as she's making her way to the stage – it all depends on how long it takes her to reach the stage.

In this case, I'll assume she's on stage very quickly, so first I introduce myself, get her name, and politely ask her to stand to my left. The prop is going to be placed on stage to my far right, so I want to give her enough stage for "the walk of doom," as she makes her way to the basket, before the snake jumps out.

After she's situated, I say, "Wait here...I have to go see if it's awake." I don't bother to explain what 'it' is, though most of the audience assumes it's going to be a snake because of what I said earlier.

I walk behind my curtain, reach inside the basket, and flip the motor to 'ON.' To cover the few seconds it takes me to do this, I say something like, "Hello? Are you awake, little fella? I think he's going to be fine..." Because I have a wireless mic on my head, I can at least speak to the audience to hold their attention for the few seconds I'm out of view. I then bring the basket on the stand I use out to where the audience can see it. I then place it to my right, so, again, the volunteer has a ways to walk for the build-up.

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: Although it would certainly be 'cleaner' to have the prop already onstage when the show begins to prevent my having to leave the audience's sight, I don't like to have the prop in view until the routine because I really prefer to have a 'clean' stage, with no other props on display except what I'm performing. I don't like the clutter and I feel the audience can lose focus easily. Secondly, by having it offstage, I can quickly turn the unit on and save the life of the batteries – that's important as I usually perform this piece roughly halfway into the show and if I do three shows a day – which I do often enough – I'm going to burn through batteries quickly.)

After I set the basket down, I turn toward my volunteer and say, "We'll get back to the basket in a moment, but first, let me ask you: have you ever seen a magician do a card trick before?"

Here, I now have the opportunity to go in either direction with my script depending on how she answers. If she says "yes," I immediately slump my shoulders and say, "Darn, that raises expectations." If she says "no," I happily declare, "Good! That lowers expectations!"

Either response is a fairly subtle joke and if the audience laughs then I know they're REALLY tuned in to my style. ***(AUTHOR'S NOTE: I first became aware***

of this idea of planning responses to what a volunteer says from Eugene Burger. He's long been an advocate of really LISTENING to what your volunteers say and reacting as though you're interacting and not treating them as "human props." It's great thinking. Buy anything by Eugene Burger – you'll be a better magician.)

I then take the cards off of the small stand my basket is resting on and put the card case back onto the stand. At this point, I should also mention that I have both a large tip Sharpie and the boxed deck of cards on the stand, to my left of the basket. Both the cards and the pen are there to hide the little "something" that facilitates the method of getting the signed card into the snake's mouth. I hate to be cryptic, but you'll just have to trust me that this all makes sense in terms of blocking.

I display the mixed-up cards to the audience and then to my volunteer. The cards are jumbo indexes, for increased visibility. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I use Bicycles. Do you?***) I don't bother asking her to mix up the cards – it's a stage effect and I feel the mixing simply slows down the effect. If you're working for teens, they may want to mix the cards. You may let them, but again, I don't bother.

After she selects a card – either by me fanning the deck and her removing one or by her taking the cards and pulling one out – I take the card and show it to the audience.

I say, "I'd like you to sign your card in BIG letters, so we'll all know later when we see the card again that it's the SAME card and not just a second Two of Hearts." I hand her the Sharpie as I continue holding the deck.

To keep things moving while she signs her card, I tell the audience, "While she's doing that, I do want to tell everyone that inside this basket I have a great big python. I named him Cuddles!"

At this point, the audience laughs at the absurdity of the name.

"I call him Cuddles because when I brought him home, he wrapped himself around me and gave me a BIG hug!" Generally, there's more laughter.

"Then I had trouble breathing... and I don't remember anything else that happened that day." Wait for laughs. "And now I'm not allowed to play with Cuddles anymore without adult supervision." More laughs.

"But Cuddles can do card tricks!"

At this point, my volunteer should be completely done writing her name. I take the pen, cap it, drop the pen in my jacket pocket, as I continue speaking.

I say, “Cuddles is going to jump out of that basket, dig through the cards, and come up with YOUR SIGNED card in his mouth! It’s gonna be amazing!”

At this point, I take the signed card and slowly show it to the entire audience, stating, “Notice how Stacy’s name is now on the Two of Hearts, so we’ll all recognize it later when the snake has it in his mouth.”

Now I drop the card facedown on top of the facedown deck and apparently very slowly and fairly mix it into the middle of the deck, but in actuality, I am simply controlling the card back to the top of the deck using Rick Maue’s wonderful technique, “The Classic Pass False Cut,” from his terrific book, The Book of Haunted Magic. In my opinion, this is about as fair as it gets when it comes to controlling a selection to the top of the deck. The technique is easy, can be done slowly, can be done while someone is ‘burning’ you, and can be surrounded. It’s on page 117 of that book. Buy it and thank me later. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Of course, you can always choose to use that ubiquitous method known as Y.F.M...I’m just sayin’...***)

I take the deck and place it face-up on the table, right on top of the secret ‘dodad’ of the Pro Viper. Owners will know what I mean. As I place the deck down, I stress, “Now, I’m not going to put my hands in the basket, because sometimes he can be...cranky. I am, however, going to take just a peek into the basket and see what kind of a mood he is in.”

At this point, I carefully and slowly lift the lid of the snake basket out of the way, slowly, as I peer into the basket. I wait just until the audience feels something should happen...and then I wait a moment longer. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: As Eugene Burger says, the reality is we never wait long enough, regardless of how we feel!***)

Finally, I scream – loudly! This always causes most of the audience to jump and then burst into laughter. I wait just a moment for the laughter to subside and then I look up and innocently say, “What? Oh, I’m sorry! He likes it when I go – AHHHH!” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Essentially, here I’m screaming a second time.***)

After everyone laughs again, I look out into the audience, shrug my shoulders, and nonchalantly say, “I should have warned you beforehand...would’ve saved us all a lot of needless suffering.” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: For some reason, the whole above exchange is probably my favorite part of the routine...and nothing ‘magical’ has happened.***)

I turn to my volunteer and, as I ditch the lid of the basket in my side table, say to her, “Stacy, I had to train the snake. I did it by using – “I grab a bright blue fuzzy dog’s squeak toy from my roll-on table – “this.”

I then proudly hold the squeak toy out toward the audience in my left hand, grinning like a fool. Here I pause, allowing the audience to laugh at the absurd notion that I'm training a snake with this silly squeak toy. Once the laughter dies down, I squeak the toy a few times, which garners further laughter. (**AUTHOR'S NOTE: It was after my first 20 or so times performing this that I realized that by holding off on the actual squeaking of the toy that I could get a separate laugh. There's a cool lesson there.**)

I hand the toy to Stacy as I explain, "You see, Stacy, snakes have terrible eyesight, so he can't see the bright blue color of the toy. And snakes don't have very good hearing so he can't hear the sound of the toy. But snakes DO have a great sense of taste and smell, so before I got here today, I poured hot dog juice all over that toy."

This gets a nice laugh, as often the girl looks at the toy in disgust. (**AUTHOR'S NOTE: It's important to get that toy into her hands to set up the juice line. Also, the line used to be "raw meat," and I ad-libbed "hot dog juice" one day. Needless to say, 'hot dog juice' is funnier so I kept the new line. Incidentally, the little factoids about snakes are all true. See? Magic books can be educational!**)

I say, "Stacy, I'm just kidding! There's nothing wrong with the toy! But I need you to hold that squeak toy out in front of you, toward the basket...and squeak it once." As she does so, I hit my music remote, turning on my music which at this point is cued up to play the Jaws movie theme. (**AUTHOR'S NOTE: In my choice of music, I admit I'm a bit of a hack.**)

The audience chuckles a bit as I begin backing away, with my body turning to match Stacy's profile. "Move one step close," I say, as the audience chuckles. Stacy moves just a bit closer. She's profile to the audience, with this toy held out in front of her, as though she's walking toward the gallows. What the hey, makes me laugh.

"A little closer," I say, wincing, in anticipation of when the snake jumps out. The audience starts collectively squirming because I'm openly, yet non-verbally, telegraphing my own fear, thereby transferring it to the audience. (**AUTHOR'S NOTE: INNLP terms, I'm eliciting a state. NLP is GREAT stuff.**)

By now, I'm completely profile to the audience, so my right hand can freely drop into my right pants pocket and pick up the Pro Viper remote. (**AUTHOR'S NOTE: Easy.**)

Stacy keeps inching toward the basket as I keep wincing and encouraging her...until, as the appropriate moment, I finally hit the button and the snake jumps out. When the snake jumps, I scream again, which usually increases the reaction from the audience.

As the laughter dies down, I casually turn the music off, advancing the track to the next track. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I've used Jim Kleefeld's Sound controller for around 100 shows as of this writing and I LOVE it. Highly recommended as a cost-effective way to easily control your music.***)

I then pick up the remaining cards on the table and put them into the basket, and this action gives me cover to turn the Pro Viper unit to the 'OFF' position.

I then focus the audience's attention back on me as I openly pick up the spring snake with a clearly empty hand as I say, "Okay, Stacy, obviously that was just a fake snake...but even though it was a fake snake, it still was able to find YOUR card from the MIDDLE of the deck, and grab it in his MOUTH!"

At this, "I've flipped open the snake's "mouth" and displayed the card to the audience. There are gasps of surprise that this whole silly stunt actually had something baffling in it. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I've made good on my promise...something I try to do with my stage character.***)

I remove the card from the snake's mouth, hand it to the volunteer, and escort her to the stage stairs, leading the audience in another round of applause for her.

Closing Comments

Obviously, since the Pro Viper is a marketed item, I cannot talk about the actual "secret" other than to say that it's electronic (I think most people know that and besides, it's in the ad copy) and that I've found it to be extremely effective.

As far as age groups go, I do play it differently depending on the age. Non-verbally, I'm able to change my character and convey through changing my vocal tonality for young kids that the snake really is a nice snake and when everyone sees him, he's gonna be so cute.

That's all non-verbal, but if the schools I perform for insist on bringing in the pre-school age kids (3 or 4 years old) for my assembly programs (which are geared for grades k – 5) I will drop in the occasional line about how shy and cute the snake is.

When I pick the volunteer, other than preferring a girl (because they don't usually try to be "Joe Cool" up on stage) I'm looking for someone who is very reactive and outgoing. This is one of the rare times I will pick a child who is waving their hands frantically because I will say that a non-reactive, withdrawn child would make me look like a prick for 'scaring' her with this prop!

As far as the overall structure of the routine itself, I was essentially striving to create an original presentation that garnered several additional laughs as well as

stretched out the routine a bit in terms of time. For me, this routine plays about 5 to 6 minutes and that's what I look for in an audience volunteer routine.

I only bring up the issue of time because I believe Terry's routine on the DVD only ran about 2.5 minutes long. It played well and was funny, but I felt it really did not take advantage of the wonderful prop.

I also openly tell the audience that the snake is coming...they just don't know when. It's a big difference between suspense and most magicians do as far as 'shock' magic. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: A recent issue of my FREE ezine, "Cause & Effects," addressed the difference between shock and suspense in the works of master film director Alfred Hitchcock. Shoot me an email at crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net if you want to get on the free ezine list.***)

Finally, the idea of the squeak toy came from my desire to give the audience volunteer something to wave at the basket. The traditional approach would naturally be to use a magic wand. I didn't want to use a wand because, when I do this routine, I'm using 12–16-year-old girls and they would be insulted if I handed them a magic wand.

Pro Viper's creator, Terry Lunceford, as well as other magicians, often use the empty card box as the object the person must wave to draw the snake out. I just didn't like that either, so to me a dog's toy made sense in terms of story. Absurd as it is, it makes sense to draw an animal out with food or a toy, so the squeak toy fit nicely.

Oh, one other thing – I don't know how many audience members actually catch the appropriateness of naming a constrictor snake "Cuddles," but it makes me laugh...kinda like naming a huge German Shepard something wimpy, like "Fifi."

Other than my admittedly less-than-creative music choice of "Jaws," I think this routine is original, commercial, and most importantly, an audience pleaser.

The Very Funny Tossed Out Deck Routine

“The Mind Reading Raccoon”

The Basic Effect

A ‘mind reading raccoon’ is introduced to the audience by the performer. Despite the fact that it’s an obviously fake animal, the performer insists it will read minds!

A deck of cards is tossed into the audience and two volunteers each take a peek at one card in the deck. One volunteer tosses the deck onstage, eliminating the possibility of the performer ‘peeking’ at the selections.

After some amusing by-play, the raccoon ‘whispers’ the identity of the two cards to the performer. He’s absolutely correct!

Introduction

In essence, what makes this routine ‘play’ is the fact that Rocky Raccoon reads the minds of two people in the audience...or three, depending on your routine of preference. Any Tossed Out Deck handling or gimmicked deck will do, so you can take my routine and hitch it right to your own physical handling.

This is something I’ve held onto for over a decade and after ten years, it PLAYS and plays well. It’s a silly idea, but the fact is, most corporate audience, once you shave away the power ties and bluster, are just big kids. People of ANY age want to laugh. I’ve seen the elderly laugh out loud at the latest Adam Sandler-fart-joke-infested movie, so the idea of a stuffed raccoon doing a card trick really isn’t that far-fetched.

As always, whenever someone releases their pet routine (pun intended) I ask myself, “Self, why is So-And-So releasing this? Does it suck?”

It definitely doesn’t suck, but the fact is, this is intended primarily as a corporate effect and I now work primarily in schools, so I feel putting this out

is a good thing to do, if for no other reason than people who see it performed will know it's my creation and I want the credit. :)

I first came across the idea of a mind reading raccoon from Dave Dee, the magician from Atlanta, GA who started the marketing-for-magicians craze back in the mid '90's. Anyway, Dave had marketed his "mind reading raccoon" routine as part of one of his bigger marketing packages.

Rather than pony up the several hundreds of dollars necessary for the marketing, I decided to just take the idea of a "mind reading raccoon" and see where it led me. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: While he was/is a terrific marketer, most of Dave Dee's actual magic routines weren't very good anyway.***)

As it turned out, it led me straight to the famous Tossed Out Deck principle.

I'll cover the routine and also give you some tips, suggestions for different Tossed Out Deck handling resources and more.

The real strength of this routine is not about the cards but about the interaction between the performer and the raccoon and especially between the raccoon and the participants. The routine script also allowed me to make a comment on an absurd TV show that was on the airwaves at the time.

Additionally, this routine, while no breakthrough in terms of methodology, perfectly illustrates something I strive for in everything I do in performing – and that is make the journey interesting!

Let's face it: by necessity, much of the Mentalism or mental magic out there is very procedural...that is, there's a lot of 'stuff' one must do before the revelation and in the case of the Tossed Out Deck, there's a lot of deck handling and VERY specific instructions as to HOW to handle the deck and then there's this business with the rubber bands, and then if you use a fishing system to find out the specific card someone is thinking of, then the routine is even more drawn out...

That's a LOT of burning time on stage just to ultimately get to "You're thinking of the 6 of Spades." There's no emotional connection to a card. No one outside of the magic community cares about cards.

It's not like you're doing a personal mind reading bit here. If it's personal, like, "You're nickname when you were three years old was Puddles because you peed all over the minister at church," well, that would be surprising indeed.

The strength of any routine is context, so in this case, the context is absurd...I have a stuffed raccoon that can do a card trick.

I can certainly see why some mentalists shy away completely from card effects, but I feel Tossed Out Deck routines, when done well, serve as a nice early effect in a program. Let's face it: if you bust out Doug Malloy's Prediction Chest as your FIRST effect, you're not going to 'build' to any crescendo in your act unless you set yourself on fire...which I have done...accidentally. **(AUTHOR'S NOTE: Yes, I'm serious. Drop me an email to crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net and I'll sign you up for my free ezine and you can hear about what a bone head I was!)**

To look at it another way, I like using Tossed Out Deck routines because I personally like the theory of building a Mentalism program from the ground up, working your way up in terms of difficulty and/or believability.

Once I made the decision to use the trick, it then became an issue of how to make the procedure more interesting, which then in turn led my thinking back to the Rocky Raccoon-in-Mentalism idea I'd bet pondering for a while.

Here we go...

The Routine

I introduce the piece, usually the second or third in my show...

"Folks, as you can tell, I take this mind reading thing very seriously and I really hate it when someone tries to take advantage of what I hold dear. I'll give you an example. How many people here watch Animal Planet?"

(A few hands go up.)

"My wife loves Animal Planet. All of it...except for Snake Week." A few people chuckle at this.

"Well, one time they had this talent show kind of thing and they had the Pet Psychic...ever hear of her?" More hands are raised.

I watched this and she claimed to be able to 'read the minds' of people's pets. I thought, 'you have got to be kidding me!' So they bring in a little puppy and the pet psychic lady goes into convulsions or whatever fake psychics do as part of their schtick and she says, "oh, poor Ginger...Ginger feels neglected whenever YOU, Helen – "

At the "YOU" I lunge toward a woman sitting in the front row, thrusting my pointer finger at her in an accusing manner as I continue.

“- or whatever that woman’s name was, leaves for work each day. No, in fact, it turned out that Ginger the dog was pregnant and didn’t feel well because of that.

“Then they bring in this cat. ‘Oh, Fluffy, ‘the bogus psychic starts, ‘I can tell Fluffy is not a happy kitty because YOU – “

Here I once again lunge at a nearby spectator, this time a gentleman, pointing in an accusing manner.

“- are not feeding her the food she REALLY likes...’ and later it turns out that Fluffy really had an intestine infection or whatever it was that was bothering the cat.

“And they continued like this and every time the pet psychic went to read the mind of the pets, she was always 100% wrong. So you know what they did? They gave the pet psychic her own show.’

Here, there are chuckles of disbelief.

“After seeing this, I thought, ‘I gotta get in on this!’ So, tonight, ladies and gentlemen, I Cris Johnson, bring to you the world’s only...Mind Reading Raccoon.”

At this point, I reach into my case and pull out my trusty ‘Rocky Raccoon.’ I cradle him in my arms as I continue the script.

“This is Mr. Bigglesworth...everyone say, ‘hi Mr. Bigglesworth.”

Again, when I was performing this a lot, I usually put this piece in the second slot, right after my opening. Being this early in the show, if the majority of the audience actually says, “Hi Mr. Bigglesworth,” then I know they’re ‘with’ me and they get my sense of humor. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: In case you’re wondering, Mr. Bigglesworth is Dr. Evil’s cat. How could I NOT put an Austin Powers reference into my show???***)

“Believe it or not, tonight, this psychic raccoon is going to read the minds of two of you! Oh, what?”

At this point, I look down at the raccoon. I manipulate his head so he’s looking at me and ‘talking.’ He scurries up my shoulder and whispers in my ear. I roll my eyes and explain,

“He wants a snack.’

I reach into my pocket and offer the raccoon an invisible snack, which he eagerly gobbles up. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: There aren’t a lot of instructional videos out there on manipulating Rocky, so watch a lot of David Williamson. Don’t steal his routine or jokes, but you can definitely learn a lot from him in terms of physical movements.***)

The raccoon finishes his snack, scurries back up to my ear and whispers again. I look surprised and turn slightly to look at a woman near the front of my audience.

“Her? Okay...ma’am, he’d like you to scratch his neck.”

With that, I offer the raccoon to her, with his head arched up. Just as the woman scratches the raccoon’s neck, he leaps into the air, landing near someone’s feet. Several people yelp in surprise while the rest of the audience laughs and claps. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Yeah, I’m a hack in this instance. You know what? It plays. End of story.***)

After picking up the raccoon, I apologize profusely, saying, “I’m really sorry. He’s awfully ticklish.”

I make my way to the front of the audience and continue.

“Folks, as promised, he’s going to read two of your minds...but first, I must put him into a deep trance.” With that, I swing the raccoon by the tail and whack him onto my tabletop. I then look worried and begin giving him CPR. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Again, it’s an old bit – whacking the raccoon – but at least in this case, it’s slightly motivated by the necessity of putting the little guy into a trance in order to read minds.***)

“We’ll just set him here for a second.” I set the raccoon down and as an afterthought, pick him up again and hold him out to the audience tummy first as I add, “Don’t worry, he’s not to get anyone else...he doesn’t have any legs.”

Amid the laughter, I then pull out a deck of cards, showing them to the audience in a fan to be different, a well-mixed deck.

“Since he’s just a raccoon, we’ll keep the mind reading thing easier for him. We’ll get back to these rubber bands in a second, but we’ll need someone to mix up the cards first. Sir, I’ll need you to fulfill your civic duty.” I hand the deck of cards to a man in the front row. As he mixes the cards, I continue.

“We’re going to have two people here tonight each look at one card in the deck and believe it or not, the raccoon will pull that information right out of

your mind. He may struggle at first – he’s a raccoon after all – but he’ll get it. And you’ll go wild. And you’ll cheer. And you’ll throw cash.”

As I’m saying those last few lines, I’m glancing at the guy mixing the cards and it becomes obvious to anyone watching that I’m just adding line after line, stalling, as I impatiently wait for Mr. Happy Hands (the guy) to finish mixing the cards. I then take the cards from him in an impatient manner. (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I first learned of a similar bit from Whit Hayden’s wonderful “Mongolian Knot” video. It’s a great routine with some real fantastic lessons in scripting. Additionally, this helps set up my next line of script.**)

“Well, now that someone here is FINALLY satisfied that the cards are mixed enough, we can continue. Are you sure you don’t want to lick the cards too?”

People chuckle a bit at this and more importantly, they start gently chiding their co-worker (I usually use this routine for corp gigs only) which covers my next motion...John Archer’s wonderful deck switch as I ring in my trusty three-way forcing deck.

“All right...I know so MANY of you are just DYING to get involved- (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: Tongue firmly in cheek with that line. Anyone who’s done more than six corp gigs know that most people at these events would rather have hot oil poured on their naked bodies than get onstage with the magician, even if it’s friggin’ Mr. Rodgers.**) “-that I think I’ll bind the deck together with these rubber bands and just fling them into the crowd! Whomever the deck smacks in the head, you’re it!”

I finish binding the deck with bands as I continue. “I’m kidding about flinging the cards into the air, but I do need the cards banded together for a good reason later. First, Miss would you stand, please?”

I indicate a woman to my left, a couple of rows back, and ask her to stand. As she stands, I explain, “I’ll need you to hold the deck in your hands facedown, like this, OK?” I wait for her to nod.

“Then, take your right hand and just peek at one card like this – “I demonstrate exactly what to do. She nods.

“I need you to remember the card you look at. Don’t take it out, don’t look at more than one card because you might confuse the poor little raccoon! Got it?” The audience laughs at the silly notion of confusing...a stuffed animal.

I then continue, then you’re going to let go of the cards with your right hand and just hold the deck in your left. If the card isn’t taken out of the deck, Mr. Bigglesworth won’t have a chance to peek at it.”

(AUTHOR’S NOTE: The standard ‘control’ script for instructing someone to properly peek at a tossed-out deck is pretty standard stuff, but two quick points: first, the little throwaway line about ‘not confusing the poor little guy’ is a nice little way of –comically, at least – helping to justify why you’re being so anal about how someone looks at a card. Truthfully, you need to be. When I was first breaking this routine in, I can’t remember how many times someone, despite being instructed NOT to, would try to tug their card out of this bound up deck of cards. This brings me to point #2: After you give the person a line of instruction, pause. Wait for the glazed look in their eyes to pass. Get confirmation that they are ‘with’ you. Deliver the next line, then pause. Rinse and repeat. It’s an NLP thing – communication – in that some people don’t ‘hear’ that well...that is, they don’t process auditory information quickly...pausing will allow them to ‘catch up.’ Just food for thought.)

Finally, I hand the cards out. She gets her peek and when she’s done, I instruct her to hand the deck to someone else several seats away...if it’s a corp gig and everyone is sitting at those typical banquet round tables of eight, I’ll just have her hand it to someone at the next table over.

I go through the same process with him and if I ‘read’ him correctly, I’ll be able to tell right away if he’s ‘with’ me and I can give a more abbreviated version of those instructions, allowing me to speed up this part of the routine.

“Okay...I will need both of you to stand up and remain standing...Oh, Sir- “(I motion to the second selected spectator. “Just toss the deck over to my left on stage. He tosses the deck, and it bounces around for a little while and finally comes to rest.

“That’s why I used rubber bands...if I touch the cards, people are weird. They think I sniff the card you touched or something. People are weird.”

(AUTHOR’S NOTE: I ad-libbed this line at one show, and it got a laugh, so it stayed. It also reinforces that I never touch the deck after the selection process.)

I pick up the raccoon and hold him vertically, tummy facing the audience once again, tail hanging downward, in preparation for the sight gag that follows. I say, “This may sound ridiculous, but I need you both to look into the eyes of the raccoon.” Right after I deliver this line, the raccoon’s head bends at the neck (remember, he’s being held vertically) and he ‘states’ at first one person, then the second. At the exact same time, I have positioned my head so the audience can only see my eyes – the rest of my face, nose, and mouth, are obscured by the

raccoon. At the exact same time this is going on, I bug out my eyes and raise my eyebrows as high as they will go.

This is a very silly picture, and the audience completely cracks up at the absurdity of it all. If the audience is very receptive, I keep going back and forth between the two. Once the laughter subsides, the raccoon scurries up my shoulder and whispers in my ear.

I then turn to the first person and say, “The raccoon feels that you are thinking of...a red card, is that correct?” If the person says ‘yes,’ I play it straight and continue, eventually naming their card.

I personally feel Max Maven’s handling of the Tossed-Out Deck, which he named Tossed Out Tech, is a wonderful handling as it allows users to pinpoint the exact card the person is thinking and, in most cases, allows you to individually name each card. It’s great stuff and is available on Max’s DVD series, **VideoMind**. It’s the ‘Stage’ DVD where you can find this. Since the ‘fishing methods’ are Max’s, I will not cover them here, but again, this routine plays so well that the standard “blurt out all three cards and everyone sits” standard handling will work just fine.

You can use ANY Tossed-Out Deck revelation / handling / fishing technique you like. I simply dressed up Max’s handling with the raccoon, adding humor and making the journey more interesting, more ‘me.’

Just to confuse you more and give you options, my good friend Cody Fisher has a terrific Tossed Out Deck where you never get a single ‘no,’ and yet you can name each card precisely, which to some performers is a preferable thing. You can check out Cody’s work on this subject at www.ProfessionalMiracles.com

However, regardless of the handling you use, I encourage you to, when speaking to the first person, call out a color, red or black. If you get the color right, you can play it straight and just jump to your finish of the card revelations, but if you get the color wrong, you can pause, allow the raccoon to scurry up to your shoulder and whisper in your ear again.

Then, with the minor failure of the color on everyone’s mind, you can then triumphantly announce, “He feels you are thinking of a BLACK card, is that correct?” Upon confirmation that you...excuse me, the raccoon, is now correct, you’re giving the routine a VERY big laugh. It’s kind of like the NO/KNOW gag or the barcode gag in Mentalism.

What you’ve also done at this point is lower the bar REALLY low so when you ultimately name the cards and your volunteers sit down, it really raises the level of this silly, absurd routine to everyone thinking, ‘Gosh, this is actually something amazing!’

Back to the routine....

Once the two volunteers sit down, I then happily toss the raccoon over my shoulder, often clearing my backdrop. Often, a few women in the audience will make sympathetic sounds - "Awwwww!" kind of thing. I then immediately turn to them and say, "Don't tell anyone, but...he's FAKE!" Nice laugh.

Even in the event that I don't get that exchange, I 'button' the end of the routine by telling this brief and TRUE story. Feel free to use it.

To the entire audience, I say: "I have to tell you, I was booked a few years ago for a health fair. They had different 'booths' set up sort of like a trade show. Well, I'm doing this routine and at the end, I went to pick up the raccoon after I threw him and as it turns out, he landed on the table of the SPCA stationed right behind me."

Big laugh, and as I said, a nice end to the routine.

One more thing – Earlier in the script I mentioned the idea of handing the cards out to be mixed and then I mentioned having a scripted exchange with the guy to 'cover' a deck switch I made. For a while I was using John Archer's deck switch from his wonderful educating Archer DVD, available from most dealers. It's a great switch, but I did not notice any additional 'wows' from the audience after I added in the deck switch, so honestly, I'll probably drop it and just go with the standard "Look at these cards that I'm only letting you see for a nano-second" type of card displays that Max Maven and others talk about in their routines.

The Mental Corridor

“A Commercial Way of Presenting PK Touches”

The Basic Effect

Two people are invited on stage, typically a husband and wife. After a few comedic tests to gauge their psychic potential, it turns serious with an amazing feat in which the husband is touched on his shoulder by the performer and his wife indicates she felt something touch her shoulder...the exact same spot as where the performer touched the husband...yet no one is anywhere near the woman.

Introduction

This routine, which plays about 5 minutes, developed from a strong desire I had to have two spectators apparently send thoughts back and forth to each other. For years in my corporate magic shows, I had been using a simple Jumbo ‘Split Deck,’ with rough-and-smooth force half-cards. It was adequate, but as I learned more and more about Mentalism, I just felt as though pulling out a Jumbo deck, cut in half screamed “trick” for adult shows. (The Split Deck trick was eventually added to my elementary and middle school shows in an entirely different fashion and plays great, as you’ll read in the next section.) These are just my feelings and opinions.

Eventually, I stumbled upon Banachek’s wonderful “Psychological Subtleties” book and all the wonderful treasures inside. I soon realized that I could easily achieve my dream of having a thought transfer routine between two spectators with psychological forces. The only problem is such forces are rarely 100% foolproof and I didn’t want to use cards or anything like that as a backup.

The “touching” aspect of the effect, which finally gave me the sure fire ending that I wanted, is obviously borrowed from Banachek’s incredible “Psychokinetic Touches.” While I love the effect, Banachek’s presentation really wasn’t something I wanted to use. Banachek weaved his effect around a story involving a dead relative and while I’m sure it’s brilliant in his capable hands, It’s not for me.

Regardless of how I feel about Banachek’s printed routine, the ‘work’ itself, along with the psychology involved, is breathtakingly effective, simple and guarantees

you can always do something amazing anywhere. Plus, it's only \$12, so I'm not going to discuss the work here.

Rather, my point with including this routine is show you how very different you can present this effect rather than simply copying the routine of Banachek. As the sub-title suggests, this is very commercial...in other words, audiences love it. I'm not sure how many audiences would like the 'communicating-with-a-dead-guy' presentation Banachek printed in his booklet, but by his own admission at a recent lecture, he explained that he really did not intend for that presentation to be viewed as the 'definitive way' to present PK Touches.

I also want to credit the very funny John Archer, for the concept of separating two spectators onstage, with the performer in between, as a way to add a certain psychological element – the idea of “coming between” the two people. Archer also talks about the value of being able to generate comedy out of such a set up. Both of these aspects are discussed on his wonderful “Blindfold Tips” DVD.

This routine certainly is not any breakthrough in terms of methodology, but it certainly proves the point that a script does not have to be a long wordy mess in order to achieve my goal...in other words, no drawn-out explanation of psychic occurrences here.

I'll cover the simple scripting and then offer a few quick thoughts at the end.

The Routine

When I call the people up, I have the male on my left and the female on my right. If it's a big audience and I'm using large foam boards for the gag predictions, I have a \$20 tripod stand on my left, behind the male. The stand I use folds up neatly to about a foot long and travels very well. For these bigger audiences, I printed the gags (KNOW and a BARCODE) on two 20" by 30" foam boards which rest, backs to the audience, on the tripod presentation stand.

If I'm performing for a smaller group, I am using just work out of an open briefcase and have the cards, drawing pad, and marker readily available.

After I get everyone on stage, I explain what's going to happen – mind to mind transfer between these two people. Usually this will cause laughter, especially toward the husband. There are usually comments like, “*Oh, you're in trouble Dave!*”

At a corporate event, this is nearly unavoidable. It also slightly turns the male against you, I guess. That doesn't matter to me. I'm not picking on him at this

point and I'm always very polite to my helpers, but just by hearing co-workers joking around, he may feel "against" me a bit. As I said, I work mostly with the female, so the guy can be a stump and the routine will still go just fine.

I personally enjoy working with females as they're usually more into what I'm doing and cooperative. As I said, be polite to everyone, but on very rare occasion, the male will challenge a bit, possibly because of the "separation" dynamic I alluded to earlier.

If I sense this guy is going to be slightly against me (It's never overt), I will play back. I'll ask him how long they've been together. If he hesitates, I remark, "*Oh, you took too long with that answer,*" or if he answers right away, I'll remark how impressed I am that he remembered. For older couples who have been married for 25, 40, 50 years, I'll lead some genuine applause.

I will also ask a few questions of the female and usually she will good-naturedly pick on her husband and some real fun can be generated at this point.

In other words, I'm just playing around, generating some rapport, and fleshing out the characters of my helpers. It makes for a richer experience rather than simply turning your helpers into prop holders. Again, a big thanks to John Archer for this.

At this point, I get into the comedy psychic gags – two old Mentalism bits that are as old as the hills, but still play well.

I turn to the wife and say, "Helen, we're going to test your psychic powers. On this foam board- "Here I indicate the stand. "-I have in big letters a word in the English language. Concentrate! Answer this question truthfully. Do you know, without a shadow of a doubt, what word is written on this board?"

"No," Helen says.

I flip the board around so the audience can see it says 'KNOW' in huge letters.

"Oh my God, she's right!" I exclaim as the audience bursts into laughter and mock applause. (AUTHOR'S NOTE: After doing this bit for years, I found that dropping in the phrase "without a shadow of a doubt" virtually guaranteed me that she'll say "no." Before that, sometimes she'd try to guess a word! People are weird.)

I then turn to the husband. "Phil, I have a test for you too. I'd like you to close your eyes and imagine...you're in a grocery store, going up and down the aisles...you can see hundreds of household products at great savings...oops, watch your step, cleanup in aisle 4! Cleanup in aisle 4! Okay, Phil, imagine...you're in which aisle? It can be anything..."

Phil responds, “Snacks.”

I respond, “Great! Now, in your mind’s eye, reach up onto the shelf in front of you and remove one snack, one goodie.” Very often Phil will actually raise his hand, which causes a few chuckles from the audience.

“What are you taking, Phil?”

“Pringles potato chips.”

“Perfect! Now you’re making your way to the checkout counter. You hand the cashier – who’s cracking gum really loudly – the chips. The cashier scans it – beep! – the price comes up on the scanner...What price do you see?”

“\$1.95.”

“Okay, Phil, open your eyes. As you can see, I have one more board here. How freaked out would you be if I turn this board around and on it was printed \$1.95?”

Regardless of his answer, I spin the board around to reveal the BARCODE.

There are groans and laughter.

“Does anyone have a scanner?” I ask innocently. I then glare at the audience and explain, “I’m TRYING to raise their confidence levels!” The audience chuckles and I continue on with the routine.

To lead into the touching part of the routine, I use this script:

“Ladies and gentlemen, I feel that both of these folks would make excellent subjects, so I think we’re going to try to open up between them...a mental corridor.”

I don’t bother to explain what a mental corridor is. It sounds almost like it may make sense...but not completely. I like it – it’s goofy-sounding, and this way I avoid all of that scientific-sounding mumbo-crap. I’m there to entertain, not lecture!

If one or both of my tests “failed” in the previous parts of the routine, in other words, if the woman says anything other than “no,” which does happen on occasion, I use this scripting:

“Oh I know what’s wrong! I forgot to open the mental corridor!” I turn to the male. “How in THE WORLD could you POSSIBLY let me forget to open the mental corridor?!”

Laughter will ensue. It's just silly because the male has NO idea what he's being jokingly chastised for!

From here, I instruct both to face the audience, stand upright, arms at sides, and close their eyes. As Banachek advises, I tell them not to react to anything they may experience or feel because "we wouldn't want to break the Mental Corridor." I then walk over to the male and begin making what could only be described as vigorous two-handed waxing motions. Think Mr. Miyagi on crack. I circle the male, taking care to "wax" about 12" or so away from him, around his face, shoulders and back. I never explain what I'm doing. I'm silent during all of this from when I clap my hands right up until I ask both to open their eyes.

Author/performer Luke Jermy talks about using the Power of Silence to enhance routines. It definitely does here.

Plus, the sight of me making goofy hand motions around my helpers, with NO explanation, narration, or apparent justification, ensures that every eye is riveted to me, and other than the occasional bits of laughter, I've got everyone's attention.

Most performers are scared to death of silence, but personally, I find it really enhances this routine.

Once I'm finished doing my "Mr. Miyagi Happy Dance," I proceed to apparently do the same thing to the female.

Then I move to the male spectator again and in a very large, open, overly showy motion, I slowly poke him in the right shoulder twice. I hesitate just a bit between pokes, so the audiences appreciate the fact that I poked him twice.

Also, I usually look at the female in between pokes and frown before the second poke. Occasionally, the lady will say she felt only one poke rather than the two I'm looking for. I don't know if her mind wandered or what, and I jab them pretty hard, but once in a while they claim to only feel one poke.

By looking at her and frowning between pokes, I'm nonverbally saying to the audience that I'm not sure if she really felt the first poke.

It also has a nifty side benefit – on very rare occasions, I've had the female's weight shift with her eyes closed, almost as if she were pushed by an unseen force. The audience gasped out loud at this! It was really cool.

In reality, she just lost her balance with her eyes closed.

But I take advantage and try to recreate that moment every time!

By this point, you're done. I return to center stage, ask both to open their eyes, and ask her if she felt anything.

"Did you feel anything?" I ask.

"Yes," she says.

"Did something touch you?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"On my shoulder."

I'll usually ask her to motion with her hand which shoulder, especially if it's a large crowd.

"How many times were you touched?"

"Twice." Or I'll get her to raise her fingers if it's a large audience. I could hand her a mic, but at this point, I don't want to be anywhere near her. I want the audience to experience her revealing that something touched her with the strong visual of me being at least 10 feet away.

At this point, the audience is already reacting. I then say, "That's fascinating! I did NOT touch you, but I did touch Bill. He must have sent that information over to you. Please give them both a huge round of applause!"

I then gesture for both to return to their seats.

Closing Comments

Obviously, in terms of set-up, you only need to have the KNOW card and the BARCODE card ready for the comedy bits. The actual touching part of the routine is prop-less, and again, the actual working and psychology can be found in Banachek's wonderful "Psychokinetic Touches" booklet, available for a way-too-low \$12 from most magic dealers.

I also want to touch upon the routine in terms of placement of the gags. My good friend Doc Dixon wrote about the idea that starting off by making a claim that you are going to predict any word in the universe, then showing the KNOW card, and then going on to actual perform a mind reading effect that's less impressive than it would have been with the "any word" plot is bad theater.

I completely agree with him. In other words, he's saying not to use those gags if you're going to follow those gags with an actual effect that isn't as good.

In this routine, I'm following the gags with an effect that defies explanation – the transference of a physical sensation from one person to another... apparently without me doing a thing. If you've never performed Banachek's "Psychokinetic Touches," you're missing out on one of Mentalism's strongest possible effects.

In other words, I'm following the gag predictions with something that is a LOT stronger.

Another thing I wanted to touch on here (no pun intended) is the idea that I do not explain what I'm talking about when I say we're going to open up a Mental Corridor. It's an intriguing, wonderfully ambiguous phrase.

I first came across the idea of using interesting terminology and/or gestures in "Building Blocks," by Luke Jermy. In it, he references 'the witchcraft effect' or something like that, which is basically the idea that you're doing something or saying something (incantation? Waving of a wand? Scribbling symbols?) that is very important to you and the success of whatever you're doing, but it's never communicated how important it is.

In other words, you're not going into a long, boring speech about PK activity, ESP cards, and the background info that so many performers jam into their scripts in an effort to make what they are doing sound believable.

This idea of explaining everything - It's called plot exposition by writers in the TV and film industry, and it's regarded as the lowest form of life in a script and most film makers do their best to keep it at a minimum.

To state it differently, I'm simply dropping in an intriguing phrase and acting like it's important. I further this idea by slapping my hands together and rubbing them before I go into the "wax on / wax off" hand movements around the husband and wife's heads.

I never explain what any of this has to do with anything, but it works because I ACT like it matters. Plus, it's amusing and there are always chuckles when I do it. Remember, the process is the thing, not just the destination.

Teaching Someone to Read Minds

“A Hilarious Presentation for the Split Deck”

The Basic Effect

Two people are called up to the stage, one on the performer’s right, the other on the performer’s left. A deck of cards is introduced and shown to be cut entirely in half, diagonally, so each card in the deck is now in two halves.

After showing each half of the deck to be well mixed (and obviously comprised of different cards) one person selects a half card. That half deck is put away.

The second person is instructed by the performer on the proper way to “read minds.” The performer demonstrates and then asks the second volunteer to do the same thing. After some general silliness, the second volunteer chooses a card half out of the second half of the deck.

When both pieces are held up to the audience, they are shown to be both halves of the same card – success!

Introduction

I’ve always been fascinated by routines where two people apparently send thoughts back and forth to each other or read each other’s mind, apparently independent of anything on my part.

I’d been using the split deck of cards for a long time. This version had a lot going for it – it was a Jumbo version so large audiences could see it, the handling was clean and angle proof so I could do it anywhere, and the working was simple – it’s based on the old ‘rough and smooth’ principle. Nothing to it.

Eventually, when I started doing shows professionally, I set about creating a routine for the Jumbo Split Deck. Up until that point, the entire “script” if you could call it that was simple stage directions of ‘do this, do that’ until the outcome.

Not very compelling.

I eventually dropped the effect from my adult Mentalism shows, feeling the prop was too suspect. I added it to my elementary and middle school shows because

the simplicity of the effect played much better than just about any other mental magic or mind reading type effect.

The presentation that you are about to read was developed, like much of my stuff, over several years from a series of ad-libs.

This routine is a prime example of the value of realizing that the journey to the outcome is often more important than the destination itself. It's a great example, if I may say so myself, of how to generate a lot of laughter and fun from a throwaway trick that most magicians roll their eyes at.

To do this effect, you'll need a split deck for parlor audiences (available for about \$8.00 for a regular sized deck and about \$32 for a jumbo deck. I personally have always used the jumbo deck because I'm often in front of 400 or so kids at a time.

Again, it operates on the 'rough and smooth' principle, so from a technical standpoint, you should have this up and running in no time. As far as the working, each card in the deck that appears different actually has a duplicate of one card 'stuck' to the back, but a light touch allows your fingers to separate any of these duplicates from the back of any of the indifferent cards in the deck. Looking at the faces, the audience sees all different cards. Touching or pointing to any card while looking at the back means you can only select one of the duplicate force cards. In my deck's case, I always wind up with two halves of the Ten of Clubs.

The Routine

"Let's get an adult up here!" I announce to the group of mostly kids. I pick a teacher off to one side and invite them onstage. "Don't worry," I reassure them, "I won't do anything bad to you." (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I add this line because very often I'll do this routine after my Arm Chopper routine, and I don't want a teacher to think I'm going to 'cut off their arm.'***)

As they approach, I introduce myself and get their name. Let's say it's Mr. Smith. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I hate coming up with names for these imaginary helpers in books. Generally I go with names that are easy to spell and fast to type, so chances are you'll never see a spectator named Hildebrand in any of my books.***)

"Mr. Smith is going to do something amazing...he's going to read the mind of one of YOU!" Kids excitedly start raising their hands in the air. I eventually pick one – I'm generally going for an older girl as they react well and 'giggle' when I need them to in the routine.)

“Great! Mr. Smith, please stand on my left, Katie, please stand on my right.” I’ve positioned the two helpers roughly 15 feet apart.

“Mr. Smith, have you ever read the mind of someone on stage before?” I then listen for his answer and react appropriately. (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I try to remember these are people. When I ask a question, I try to remember to fully engage in their answer. It’s too easy to just run over their response on your way to your next scripted line! If Mr. Smith says “no,” he’s never read minds, I’ll reassure him and explain I’m going to show him how I do it. If he says “yes,” I say great, maybe he’ll like how I myself do it. Either way, I ENGAGE.**)

“Mr. Smith, we’re going to do this in a very easy way – using a deck of playing cards. I have right here - “Here I reach into my case and take out the jumbo deck. - “a BIG deck of cards.’ Sometimes kids react. A jumbo deck of cards is not commonplace to laypeople.

I continue, “Not only is it a BIG deck of cards, but this deck of cards has been...CUT IN HALF!” This line is timed so that as I take the cards out of the case and hold up the halves, I am doing so right as I say, “CUT IN HALF” and I dramatically split the halves. Very often there is an audible gasp from the audience, even middle schoolers. (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I noticed this a few years ago. The idea of cutting cards in half sometimes gets a reaction. It’s a ‘moment,’ so if the audience wishes to treat this as a ‘moment,’ who am I to argue? Filling the routines with ‘moments’ adds flavor, interest, and texture. I never intended the revelation that the deck is split in two to be a moment, but it evolved as such and now I play into it.**)

“For some reason, that gets a response,” I reply to Mr. Smith. I then put one of the halves down and spread the other half out to the audience and back and forth to both Katie and Mr. Smith.

“As everyone can see, all the cards are different. I’m going to let Katie pick one of these half cards. Then, Mr. Smith is going to try to pick the matching half card out of the other half of the deck, forming one whole card. Got it?”

After I receive confirmation, I continue. “Mr. Smith, I don’t want you seeing what Katie is picking, so I’ll need you to turn your back for a moment. Don’t worry, I’m not going to do anything to you. No peeking!” Mr. Smith turns his back and I turn to Katie. (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I used to, once Mr. Smith’s back was turned, wave my hands frantically near the back of his head and all kinds of other silly sight gags that admittedly played well and got laughs, but I ultimately dropped them as I truly did not want the teacher to hear the laughter and wonder what in the hell I was doing.**)

“Katie,” I say as I lower the cards in their fan to a horizontal position, parallel to the floor, backs of the cards up, “Just put your finger on any card you like.”

Katie puts a finger on the back of a card. “Katie, keep your finger right where it is...I’ll cut the cards there and put yours on top...keep your finger there...” I cut the cards where Katie has touched, bringing her card to the top. I then square the deck and hand Katie the card she’s touched. It’s a very innocent, natural action to do this and because of the rough and smooth nature of the cards, Katie can only touch the back of one of the force cards. I’ll repeat this procedure with Mr. Smith using the second half of the deck.

“Katie, hold onto your card. Keep the face tight against your tummy so no one sees it just yet. I’m going to put this half of the deck into my case – I will not touch it again.” I do indeed put the first half of the cards away and then turn to Mr. Smith. “Mr. Smith, I continue, “you say you’ve never read minds before. I tell you what, I’ll show you how I do it and then after I’m done, you can try it to read Katie’s mind and figure out the half card you need.”

I then turn to the audience and say, “The first thing I do when I read minds is this: I open up my eyes REALLY wide...” I open my eyes bug-eyed style, as wide as I can and say, “...in a big FRIENDLY stare!” This effect is comical to the audience, and they always start laughing.

“Then,” I say, “I turn to the person who’s mind I’m going to read in a slow, comforting fashion.” I wait a beat and pivot abruptly and robot-like to my right, so I’m now facing Katie, causing the audience to laugh, as I’m not exactly being comforting!

“Then, I walk toward that person in a calm, reassuring manner!” I then bring my hands up and hold them in front of me, slightly below my eye level, claw-like, kind of like a Michael Jackson zombie from the “Thriller” video. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: If you’re under the age of 30, you can certainly find it on YouTube! In this stiff position, I then begin walking toward Katie, zombie-like and the entire effect is really funny!***)

“When I get to right about here,” I say as I’m about 5 feet away from Katie, “the person starts to GIGGLE uncontrollably!” As I say this, I also nod to Katie very slightly as a subconscious cue. She’s already starting to crack, and my little suggestion of giggling along with the nod usually gets her to let go and start laughing at the absurdity of the whole situation. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Oddly, the kids ALWAYS try to ‘hold it in’ until I give them the little suggestions to laugh. Seeing them try like heck to not laugh only to bust out really is funny.***)

“When I’m just a few feet from Katie (she’s usually started backing away from me) I wave to her and say in a silly, high-pitched voice, “Hi!” This also gets a laugh.

I then turn around to face Mr. Smith. “Okay, Mr. Smith, take it away! Give it your best interpretation!” Mr. Smith usually looks at me with doubt in his eyes and eventually goes along with it. The teacher always gets the bug-eyed thing and the hands raised...and as they start to ‘stalk’ their way toward Katie, I stop them about 5 feet away and say, “Oh, look, he’s stalking her like a Velociraptor! Better not get TOO close, we don’t want to send Katie into therapy!” I then re-position Mr. Smith back to his starting point on my left.

“Mr. Smith, by now, on a subconscious level, you should have a good idea of where the matching half to Katie’s card is in this half...” “I hold up the second half of the deck, fan it and show it to both Katie and Mr. Smith and also to the audience en masse.

“Mr. Smith, hold out your first finger...and allow your subconscious mind to draw you to any card...” I then hold the deck out to him and look at him. If I look down, people might think I’m ‘cuing’ Mr. Smith. Once he touches the back of the card (via the same handling / selection process as Katie, I say, “Great, hold that card facing you against your tummy so no one can see it.”

I turn to address the audience as I put the rest of the cards away. “There are 52 cards in a deck of cards. Cut them in half and you have 104 half-cards. Mr. Smith only has one chance in 103 of picking the SAME half card as Katie.” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: This is not really true if you think through the logic or lack thereof of what I’m claiming, but it sounds good and makes what we’re doing more impressive!***)

“Therefore, I’m sure if these two cards match that you’ll give them BOTH a HUGE round of applause! Katie, let me see your card...” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: The line of script I underlined is something I say with more emphasis. It’s actually an embedded command – a subconscious cue or strong suggestion to the subconscious buried in the middle of the sentence. This helps increase the amount of applause. I try to inject NLP, or Neuro-Linguistic Programming, into many of my presentations. Contact me for more details if this kind of stuff interests you. Email: crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net***)

I take Katie’s card in my right hand without showing it to Mr. Smith or the audience. In fact, I keep it pressed against my chest as I turn to Mr. Smith. “Mr. Smith, let me see your card...” I take his card and again, using my left hand and holding it against my chest. I then face the audience, both cards held tightly against my chest. I smile nervously and take a big breath and exhale, as though I’m really nervous.

I then take a peek at both cards, freeze for a full second, and then let my face fall and my shoulders slump, hinting to the audience non-verbally that the two half cards in fact do not match. I hold this pose for maybe two beats and then I dramatically whirl both halves around and hold them together diagonally, showing that they do form, completely, one whole card. At the same time, I exclaim, "THEY GOT IT!"

The audience bursts into applause. The little false-ending of me non-verbally telling the audience that the trick did not go according to plan only to reveal that it did is a nice emotional dip in the road and that little embedded command from earlier helps to jack up the reaction.

Closing Comments

Please don't overlook this. This routine gets a great response and can be done anywhere, indoors, or out, surrounded, for many different ages. I routinely use this for school age audience from kindergarten through 2nd grade and from 3rd grade through 5th grade and also 6th grade through 8th grade. Teachers and students LOVE the comedy, it's interactive and you're involving a teacher or adult. Great stuff indeed.

Balloon Animal Psychology

Technicolor Prediction...Now with More Balloons!

The Basic Effect

This is based on Martin Lewis' wonderful prediction effect using three different colored envelopes. Two spectators, a male and a female, are each given a completely free choice of which color balloon animal they'd like. You, as the performer, are left with the third envelope.

For example, the lady may select the red balloon animal, the man may select the yellow animal and you, the performer, are left with the green. The audience's attention is called to the nature of the balloon animals and short comedic "readings" are given based on the animals selected.

Three colored envelopes matching the three balloons are introduced. The two spectators who chose animals are asked to take the envelopes that match their colored balloon animals.

The first two envelopes are opened, only to reveal a slip of paper in each saying something to the effect of "I Predict You Will Select the Red Balloon" or something like that.

This happens with both of the first two envelopes selected and the entire audience believes that the whole thing is a big joke. Finally, the third envelope's slip is handed to a third spectator, and she reads it, revealing a paper that reads, "The lady would select the red balloon, the gentleman will select the yellow balloon and the magician will be left with the green balloon."

Introduction

I loved Martin Lewis' Technicolor Prediction effect. It was easy to do, colorful, easy for the audience to follow and to use a tired phrase, "packed flat, played big."

I built my own first version, because after watching Lewis' wonderful video (yes, it was a VHS tape at the time.) called "***Making Magic***," I knew that even I, who hates building his own props, could handle the construction process.

Years later, I bought one of the store-built models (under the name Technicolor Prediction from most magic dealers) for strength, but I actually prefer the one I built myself, but that's for another volume.

While I liked the effect, I have to admit, and this is no disrespect intended to Mr. Lewis, but the two gag predictions did not always play as well as I would have liked...in fact sometimes, they fell flat. Plus, it was only two comedy lines. It frustrated me because I've always felt it was a marvelous routine...you're leading the audience down a path of silliness, and then at the end you veer off and deliver an astonishing prediction.

I began thinking about what I could do to extend the routine a bit and at the same time, add some more humor.

Right around this time, I began reading on some forums different prediction effects using chairs. One effect in particular was getting rave reviews online in which, if memory serves, the old chair prediction effect was somehow combined with balloons to add a ton of humor to the routine.

I sent an email to the creator (whose name I forget) expressing an interest in the effect and buying the manuscript which he advertised heavily. I never received a response and never did hear exactly what the routine was, other than balloons and chairs were involved.

Still, I liked the idea of balloons in a Mentalism show. While serious performers and purists may scoff at the idea, I really don't care. For me, adding balloons to the Technicolor Prediction effect has been a godsend, transforming a routine from a ho-hum affair with two laugh lines that sometimes played and sometimes did not, into a sure-fire laugh-getter with three more additional laugh lines and PLENTY of room for ad-libs.

Plus, the balloon jokes are so funny that it gets the audience more "into" the routine. Laughter is a contagious thing: I'm sure many people reading this has seen a stand-up comic tell some really funny jokes and everyone is laughing and having a great time and then he tells some jokes that still get the big laughs but clearly aren't as funny, or worse yet, they're puns!

But everyone keeps laughing because of the contagious nature of laughter and because the momentum has been built up, so to speak. What this means in terms of this routine is that my earlier balloon gags are so funny that it keeps things rolling so the laughter continues through the Lewis envelope gags.

The best part of this whole thing? You don't need to alter your Martin Lewis Technicolor board at all, so I will not be discussing the secrets of that prop here.

You will, however, need to alter the actual predictions. The envelope gag predictions will need to say, “You have selected the green balloon” instead of “envelope” and so on. This will apply to the final revelation predictions as well. In other words, one final prediction may read: “The lady will select the red balloon first, the man will select the yellow balloon second and the magician will be left with the green balloon last.”

You’ll also need to make three balloon animals that correspond with the colors of the envelope. The animals you’ll need to make, to perform the routine as I do, are a rabbit, a mouse, and a wiener dog...basically a regular dog with an elongated body and stubby legs.

I also want to mention that I believe (it’s been a long time) that in Martin Lewis’ DVD (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Yes, it’s magically changed from a VHS tape to a DVD now!***) “***Making Magic***” – available from your favorite magic dealer...mine is www.hocus-pocus.com – that Martin uses the three colors of green, yellow, and pink. I have purposefully swapped out the pink for red envelopes and changed all of the predictions to reflect this. The reason is simple: despite being 2010 as I write this, I believe some men will still be hesitant to take anything from me that I’ve labeled as “pink.” There’s nothing wrong with pink and truthfully, I love the color, but by swapping it for red, I’ve assured myself that people won’t come up to me after the show and say, “I know how that worked – you used the color pink to make sure the woman selected it” or some such nonsense.

Better safe than sorry. :)

Each animal must correspond to one color of the three envelopes. In my case, I use a red envelope, a green envelope, and a yellow envelope. Therefore, I use a red balloon, a green balloon, and a yellow balloon. It doesn’t matter in my routine which animal is made of which color. In other words, it doesn’t matter if it’s a red mouse or a yellow mouse, just as long as you use those three colors and make one of each of the three animals I listed – rabbit, mouse, and wiener dog.

Incidentally, I should point out for non-balloon making magicians that you can pick up how-to DVDs or booklets on balloon animal making at any magic shop very cheaply. You can also pick up a simple hand pump from any party store along with colored balloon animal balloons.

Also, to further ease your mind, while some balloon sculptures are very complex, the rabbit, mouse and wiener dog are all very easy. They are simple variations of the same basic “doggie” form that is the building block of so many animals.

I don’t bother to blow up the balloons until I get to the gig to prevent premature popping and I always carry extras of each color to the gig.

I know Martin Lewis has recently released a “Pocket Technicolor Prediction” in which the envelopes are taken out of the pocket. I haven’t picked it up yet, so I don’t know anything about the gimmicks other than the fact that envelopes are gimmicked. Nevertheless, my routine will be sure to fit that version as well as long as you alter the predictions to say “balloon” instead of “envelope.”

One final point: Many magic websites list the nature of the gag predictions as well as the final revelation right in the ad copy for Martin’s effect, so I feel fine with re-printing the routine as a whole in this book, as I’m not revealing the ‘dirty work,’ so to speak.

On to the routine!

The Routine

I announce to the audience, “You can tell a lot about a person by the color of balloon that they select.” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: I’ve always studied a ton of Eugene Burger’s writings and he has a great point about your first line of script for a routine being provocative or attention-getting. Saying something about choosing balloons to a room full of adults will get their attention!***)

I continue: “With that in mind, I’m going to let a couple of you pick a balloon animal!”

I reach into my case and pull out three balloon animals.

“I have a rabbit, a mouse and a doggie.” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: I don’t call the dog a wiener dog yet as I do not want the audience to get ahead of me in the script.***)

I walk over to a receptive-looking woman near the front row, ask her name, and hold all three animals out to her. “Barbara, you can have any animal you want! Please take one.”

In this example, she takes the wiener dog. “The doggie! Perfect! Now, you sir,” I say to a man a few seats away, “Please take an animal. We’ve got the mouse and rabbit left.”

The man takes the rabbit as I get his name. Let’s say it’s Bruce. “Everyone, please take note that Bruce took the rabbit. And I was left with the mouse. These were all your fair choices.” I pause for a moment and make sure I have everyone’s attention and then continue.

“Take note of the fact that Barbara took the dog. Notice the very long body. It is in fact a WIENER dog. Barbara, I want you to be proud of the fact that you took the WIENER dog and ignore the childish snickers of those around you and enjoy your WIENER dog.”

I really stress “WIENER” the first time I say it and right on cue, everyone starts giggling like 4th graders. It’s great fun! Now I turn to Bruce.

“Bruce, take note of the fact that you have selected the rabbit. Notice, if you will, that the rabbit has very LONG ears. Psychologists would tell us that this means you’re concerned with the length of a certain part of the anatomy... (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I pause here for just a half-beat.**) “...but I’m not a psychologist so I wouldn’t know.”

Finally, I hold up the mouse. “And I was left with the little, tiny mouse.” Pause. “Well...size isn’t everything.”

At this point, the laughter is open and loud after those three “readings” I’ve given!

To not lose the momentum, I quickly set the mouse down and grab my Technicolor Prediction board (which has been sitting in plain sight the whole time) and go right into Martin Lewis’ handling and presentation, but I connect the colored envelopes to the animals.

“Barbara,” I say, holding the board to her, “You selected the red dog, so please take the red balloon.” Barbara does so.

“Bruce,” I say, moving to Bruce. “You’ve selected the yellow animal, so take the yellow envelope.” Bruce does so.

“I was left with the green animal, so I’ll take the last envelope, the green one.” I remove the green envelope and put the board away. “Both of you, please open your envelopes and remove the folded piece of paper inside, but do not open them yet...leave them folded please.”

I then take my folded prediction from my envelope and hand it to someone in the front row who looks friendly.

“Would you hold mine for a minute?” I ask sweetly. I then address the entire audience. “Notice, that these two folks made all of the choices. Would Barbara and Bruce please stand?” (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: Adults are often reluctant to stand up in front of the crowd – even from the relative safety of their seats – but it is easier for the audience to hear them if they are standing. Yes, a microphone would be good, but most of my corp shows are for about 70 people, so to drag these two people up on stage and get them to read these gag predictions and sit back down strikes me as silly. If I let them stay at**

their seats, we can get through the routine and maintain the momentum much easier.)

I turn to the now-standing Barbara. “Everyone’s going to be SHOCKED and AMAZED! Barbara, please read your prediction out loud!”

Barbara reads: “I predict you will select the red balloon!” Of course there is laughter. It’s always been a great bit, but now it plays better for me.

I ham it up, ad-lib however I can, and then turn to Bruce. “Bruce, please read your prediction out loud.”

Bruce reads, “I predict you will select the yellow envelope!” More laughter and very sarcastic applause!

I look sternly at the audience in disgust and finally say, “I can tell you’re not impressed, but I want to take note that Barbara, the woman, selected the red envelope first.” I then point to her balloon to emphasize it.

“Bruce, the man, selected the yellow balloon second,” I continue, pointing to Bruce’s balloon. Finally, I hold up my mouse.

“And I, the magician, was left with green balloon last.” I turn to the person to whom I gave my folded paper to. “Would you please read my prediction out loud to silence the critics?”

She stands and reads, “The lady will select the red balloon first, the man will select the yellow balloon second and the magician will be left with the green balloon last!”

There is suitable applause as I quickly collect the envelopes and predictions. I then offer my mouse as thanks to the last spectator who read my prediction out loud.

Closing Comments

I covered most of what needed to be covered in the “introduction” section, but I have a few quick things here.

First, as I said, it really doesn’t matter which color you make each animal, so I just grab the three colors I need before I head out to the show. Secondly, it doesn’t matter which animal either spectator picks.

In the example script above, I ended with me having the mouse as that's what happens to me 90% of the time. Obviously, the mouse "reading" of "size not mattering" is the last line of the three that I want to deliver, so if someone selects the mouse, I simply save their "balloon reading" for last.

I also usually deliver the rabbit balloon "reading" first, but at times I've delivered the wiener dog first and the script seems to play just as well with those two lines switched around.

Obviously, the lines as written are slightly – and I do mean slightly – risqué, so if you're really worried about it, don't use this routine for that church show. :) In all seriousness, I've used this script for a motivational event in schools, the stuffy corporate events where "repression" is practically included in the employee handbook, and other such conservative events.

I'm hinting at dirty thoughts but I'm not being overt about it. It's not like doing the "sponge ding-dong!" (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: Good lord, the inventor of the magic sponge ding doing should be beaten in the streets.***)

This is a fun routine. It's not a 'closer,' not that Martin's routine ever was, but I'm sure you'll find that with the addition of the balloons and the comic readings, the routine plays much stronger.

The Funniest Arm Chopper Routine Ever

“10 laugh lines BEFORE the actual prop is even introduced”

The Basic Effect

The Magician calls a boy and girl onstage to help him. He introduces a carrot, which the boy takes a bite of, showing that it is indeed real. An arm chopper is introduced.

Not to worry, it's fake, or so the magician promises us. He tries to prove it by putting the carrot inside, thinking the 'fake blade' will go right through the carrot and then the boy can put his hand inside!

Despite the fact that the blade does indeed cut the carrot, the boy is persuaded to put his hand in the chopper. After several false starts, the blade is pushed...right through the boy's hand, which emerges safe and sound.

Introduction

Yeah, it's the arm chopper. So what?

Like many young magicians, I was instantly drawn to the arm chopper routine, as I felt the supposed “danger” would rivet any audience.

These days, after...I don't know, thousands of performances, I now realize that the power of the arm chopper comes from how much comedy you can pack into it. Older kids don't REALLY think it's dangerous (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: Last year, upon completion of the routine, the boy whose hand was in the chopper said, upon realizing that nothing 'bad' had happened: “What a rip-off!” I thought that was hilarious.***)

Adults are drawn to the comedy of the situation – I never fail to hold the adults' and older kids' attention with this routine. Younger kids love it because it's “dangerous,” so with a well-crafted routine, you've got a winner.

Additionally, the chopper is, with most models, something you can do surrounded, indoors or outdoors, and plays HUGE.

This routine, from a comedy standpoint, is pure gold. It's taken me literally 10 years to write this routine. I suppose, like so many other magicians, that I made the mistake early on of going with standard and well-worn "comedy" bits of business with the prop: the bloody newspaper, the fake hand, and so on.

I guess I did this, believing at the time, that this was "easy" and thus, could devote more scriptwriting time to other routines. Then something interesting began to happen...

I should step in and explain that I've been doing the arm chopper for closer to 20 years, but as I began doing more and more professional (read: getting paid!) shows, I started coming up with funny bits of business for the routine about 10 years ago. It was never anything I planned, but like any decent professional, I listened to what my audiences told me...so if an ad-lib got a laugh, I made sure to keep it in. This was years before I actually started recording my scripts, so I'm amazed that many of these "bits of business" have stayed with me for so long!

In the "Closing Comments" section after the routine, I'll offer some more stories about how some of the bits of business evolved, offer some explanation of the psychology of the routine and why this routine side-steps the problems of these routines, enabling me to successfully play this routine for the difficult middle school age and much more.

Oh, one more thing: technically, this routine will fit nearly any kind of chopper. For years I used a \$70 cheapie model that I bought from Hank Lee's that started to fall apart the day I bought it (seriously!) and when I could not repair it anymore, I finally gave up and bought a Disecto. It looked nice, but the final 'slam' of the blade lacked drama because of the Disecto's drama-killing sideways swing of the blade.

These days, I'm using a Mikame chopper, which I like very much.

This truly is the funniest routine I've ever created. While I do use a few of the old gags that are as ancient as the hills, the BEST parts of this routine occur before I even introduce the prop and it's all original – at least 10 laugh lines before the prop is introduced and several more after it's introduced.

The ONLY reason why I'm releasing it is I've noticed more of my performances being caught on camera phones and sent to YouTube – so far, mostly my stage hypnosis shows but magic could be coming. Quite frankly, I want the credit for this routine, hence this manuscript.

Be good to this routine and it will be good to you.

The Routine

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’m a nice guy. I believe in the Democratic process, so I’m going to give you your choice as to what we do next. We can either do something CUTE, or we can do something with DANGER...”

Here, the kids almost always shout “DANGER!!” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: This example is a real study in the power of a single word. Many of us do not realize the power of word. It’s not just patter...we can create excitement with a single word! This is POWER! With a single word, my audience is eager, attentive, and excited!***)

“We’ll vote...if you want to see something cute, please applaud!” There is a smattering of applause from smart-alecky kids. I smile. “Wonderful! Okay...if you want danger, please applaud!”

There is instantly a rousing round of loud, hard applause from the entire audience. I wait for it to dissipate a bit then I hold my hands out in front of me, in hands-of-justice-style, moving them up and down while saying, “Gee, it’s awfully close....” The adults laugh a lot at this line, while the kids only show frustration.

I relent and say, “Oh, all right. We’ll have the DANGER.” Wild cheers from the kids!

“I’m going to need TWO people who are VERY brave!” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Volunteers here are crucial. Ideally, I want a 10- or 11-year-old boy and a 12- or 13-year-old girl. I’m looking for the older girl because the older they are, the less ‘skittish’ they are and for the boy, I want someone who is confident-looking but not too cocky. I want the boy to be compliant, but not defiant, not too old to be rolling his eyes, but not too young as to get scared.***)

Once the volunteers are onstage, I direct the boy to my right and the girl to my left. My roll-on table is to my immediate right. I’m standing just slightly in front of it, and the boy is further out to my right, past the table.

After asking their names, I then get their ages. Regardless of their ages, I then say, “Oh, you’re both 10 and 11 years old” (or whatever ages.) “So, you are not little kids anymore, you’re adolescents...blossoming in YOUNG ADULTHOOD!” As I’m saying this spiel, my voice has gotten louder and my actions broader until I’m striking a hammy, over the top Shakespeare pose, with my right hand held majestically over my head. The result is slightly comical...at least to me. :)

I continue, “Therefore, I have found that people your age tend to be a little FRIGHTENED at what I’m about to show you...be brave...be very brave...” As I’m saying “be brave” the first time, I hit my music by way of my trusty Sound Controller by Jim Kleefeld. The music cues up: it’s the theme from “2001.” If I was a true literate music fan, I would know the composer’s name and the actual title he gave the piece. I don’t however...so to prove I’m a total nerd, I’ll also say it’s the same music that famous pro wrestler Ric Flair walks out to. (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: Do you have any respect left for me??**)

Just as the music hits its main crescendo, I pull out, using my right hand, which is reaching into my table, a carrot. I hold it in front of me while the audience laughs at their confusion: what’s so scary about a carrot?

As a way of explaining, I say, almost in desperation, “It’s HEALTHY food!” I then begin thrusting the carrot toward them in much the same way Buffy the Vampire Slayer may thrust a cross toward a vampire, (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I’m a Tenth Degree Nerd of The First Order.**) while making ‘scary’ “AHHH!” sounds.

Many times, the first few rows of kids will recoil in mock terror, clutching themselves! It’s a thing of beauty. Other times they will just laugh. Either way, I look dejected, turn off my music and hand the carrot to the boy on my left. We’ll call him Jimmy.

“Jimmy,” I say once he has the carrot, “I need you to take a BIG bite out of the carrot!” Jimmy looks on in bewilderment...other times, he gleefully chomps on the carrot. Sometimes I have to coax just a bit. Either way, once he takes a bite, I quickly change gears.

“Oh geez, he actually did it! Jimmy, spit it in my hand!” I then QUICKLY – before he mashes up the carrot! – hold my hand under his mouth. Sometimes I have to tell him a second or third time, “Go ahead. Spit it in my hand.”

He eventually spits the chunk of carrot in my hand! The audience gives a collective “AhhhOhhh!” sound. I wait a beat for it to sink in and exclaim, “Jimmy, I didn’t REALLY want you to spit it in my hand!” The audience laughs!

I continue, “Did it taste good?” Jimmy responds with a yes or no (doesn’t matter) and then I respond, “Well, that carrot’s been rolling around my car for about a month!” BIG laugh!

I then look in disgust at the wet carrot bit in my hand. “Dude, you SLIMED me!” Another laugh. (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: Yes, the ‘slimed’ line was lifted from Ghostbusters. The kids don’t get the reference, but they find the line very funny!**)

I then turn to the girl on my left. We'll call her Sally. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I have to credit John Archer, in his "Blindfold Tips" DVD, for first introducing me to the idea of blocking two volunteers on either side of you for comedic effect: you get a lot of back-and-forth action which is great! I know the concept pre-dates John Archer by probably at least 150 years, but he was the first to make me AWARE of it.***)

"Sally, hold onto this...don't touch the GOOEY end!" With that laugh line, I carefully hand her the rest of the carrot. This is a great moment, as often Sally will hold it by the very end, as one might hold a dead skunk! This is very funny for the test of the audience. I the continue.

"Sally," I say, "Do you want to see something GROSS?" Sometimes Sally does, sometimes she doesn't. Regardless, I the take the carrot hunk in my other hand and swallow it! The audience freaks as I apparently chew and swallow it! I milk this for a moment and reveal the carrot bit in my other hand.

I say, "I didn't really do it – that'd be disgusting!" and reveal the carrot hunk in my other hand. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I use a simple French Drop to do this fake carrot eating business. Any 'false transfer' will do. It's a throw-away bit in terms of 'magic,' but a gigantic laugh!***)

I wait for the latest round of laughter to die down and then I say, "However, we'll just save this for LATER..." As I'm delivering this line, I drop the carrot hunk – for real this time – into my jacket's breast pocket using my right hand, patting it in a reassuring manner when I'm done.

When the audience reacts, I admit, "I do that just for me because I'm SICK!" More laughter! I then turn back to Jimmy. "Jimmy, was that a REAL carrot you bit into?"

Jimmy nods and I say, "Good, I want everyone to know that's a REAL carrot because I don't want anyone to be nervous when I bring THIS out..." I then reach behind my table (or curtain, depending on which table I'm using) and hold up the Arm Chopper.

"The Arm Chopper...or...salad shooter!" I hold onto the chopper and take the rest of the carrot from Sally and set it on the table while continuing to hold the chopper in my right hand.

To the audience I say, "You may have seen a magician use something like this before...perhaps at a friend's birthday party or whatever. Magicians, for years, have been trying to scare impressionable youth with this device. They may go up to you and go- "here, I change my voice, going higher-pitched – "-Look Sally, I've got my SCARY ARM CHOPPER! I MIGHT CUT OFF YOUR HAND SCCARRRYYY!" The audience laughs, conveying that they understand that with

my high-pitched voice, I'm actually mocking these other magicians...putting me, hopefully, further on their side. (**AUTHOR'S NOTE: Here is a critical point in the script. I'm mocking the other magicians and, in a moment, I'm going to 'reveal' the chopper has inside of it only a 'fake blade' that really can't cut anything. I'm switching things around and by saying it's a 'fake blade,' I cut off any snotty kids who might start shouting things out. I also show that I don't condescend to the older kids. In other words, I don't ask them to believe in the non-existent 'danger' of this silly prop. Good thinking, eh???)**

I continue, in my normal voice. "DUH!" I often roll my eyes for effect. "Do you want to know the truth? The truth is this is a FAKE magic prop with a FAKE blade. The blade can't hurt anything. I'm going to put the carrot inside and push the blade down. The blade will go right through the carrot, proving that it's fake, and then we can have Jimmy put his hand inside! Sound good?" The audience cheers at this point. (**AUTHOR'S NOTE: I have no idea if I thought up the idea of actually telling the audience that the blade is fake, only to have it actually cut the carrot. I may have thought it up independently, but I'm willing to bet I'm not the first. Nevertheless, this routine really fuses the psychology together nicely.**)

I put the carrot into the chopper and tell everyone, "Nothing bad will happen. On three! One...Two...Three!" I slam the blade down and the carrot falls on the floor, spit in two.

I pick up the pieces in horror and quickly fling them into my side table (on my left, behind Sally) and at the same time, I'm yelping to the volunteers, "Jimmy! Sally! Face the audience! Face the audience!" The second they are facing the audience, I QUICKLY set the blade to the 'won't lop off a kid's arm' mode and then I too face the audience as I deliver the next line: "Smile! Everyone's happy! Everyone's...happy..." My voice trails off as I try my best to sound 'soothing.'

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: The soothing line, "Everybody's happy...Everybody's...happy..." was something I stole from "The Simpsons." In the episode, Mr. Burns is in love with Marge Simpson. Knowing of Marge's fondness for singer Tom Jones, Burns' assistant Mr. Smithers kidnaps Tom Jones, holding him at gunpoint. As Tom nervously says, "Hi Marge!" Smithers is behind him, gun at his back, whispering, "Everybody's happy.... everybody's...happy..." I'm actually High-Priest Nerd the Fourth, Supreme Ruler of Narnia.)

As the laughter dies down, I say, "Dude!" in an overly friendly way to Jimmy. "I PROMISE I will NOT mess it up with your hand! C'mon over here!" As the audience reacts in amazement that I'm still going to do the trick, I direct Jimmy to stand directly behind my table, with the chopper facing the audience and Jimmy's face above the chopper. I shift my position to Jimmy's left. I'm now standing profile to the audience, my left side to the audience.

I say, “Okay, Jimmy, stick your paw in there!” As the audience laughs, I catch myself and stage-whisper to Jimmy, “Ummm...are you right-handed or left-handed?” (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Occasionally a kid, even a 12-year-old, will have no idea what I mean, so I shift to: “What hand do you write your name with?”***)

If Jimmy says, “My left,” and his left hand is in the chopper, I’ll say, “Better use your right hand!” Probably an older line, but still works.

If Jimmy says, “My left,” and his right hand is in the chopper, I look and say, “GOOD - leave THAT hand in there, just in case!” Either way, you get the idea. Now I turn back to Sally.

“Sally, I need you over here, right across from me, at the other side of the table.” Now Sally’s facing me, profile to the audience and the two of us are nicely framing Jimmy and the chopper. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: I have to thank my buddy Rodney Rash from Round Rock, Texas for suggesting the blocking. I used to keep myself in the center...it was wrong, all wrong. Thanks, Rodney!***)

“Sally, hold your hand right underneath Jimmy’s...just in case anything should – “I shift to a stage whisper once again – “Fall off.” The audience reacts.

“In fact,” I continue, “hold onto his hand so he can’t back out!” Yet another laugh. I haven’t counted them all. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Maybe around 17??***)

“Now Sally, I notice you’ve got a yellow shirt on (Or whatever color she’s wearing) and blood stains, so when I chop off...Jimmy, I’m kidding!” Here I start by talking to Sally but shift to Jimmy, wrapping my right arm around him reassuring him. I then continue, “Sally, if anything should go horribly awry, just...uh...fling it into the audience!” Another huge laugh. Now the build-up.

“On the count of three! One...Two...” As I count, I’m bringing my right hand up and down, corresponding with the counting. Right as I get to three but before I say it, I quickly turn to Jimmy, breaking the momentum. “Are you READY Jimmy??” Jimmy answers and I continue.

“One...two...” This time, before I get to ‘three,’ I shift to Sally. “Sally, are YOU ready?” Sally answers and we begin again.

“One...two...” and before I get to three, I turn my body toward the audience and say, “Are you ALL ready??” Of course the kids all scream “YES!” in their eagerness to see what’s going to happen.

I begin again: “One...two...” and before I can get to ‘three,’ I interrupt and ask about myself, “Am I ready??” The audience comes completely unhinged at this point, screaming “YES!”

Finally we count “One...two...Three!” and the blade comes down and Jimmy is unharmed. I lead the applause for both and escort them back to their seats.

Closing Comments

After committing this routine to paper for the first time (yes, I’ve been doing it from memory for all these years) I counted up 23 definite moments of laughter in the routine. I didn’t count one or two ‘groaners’ such as the “salad shooter” line which rarely gets a laugh but amuses me.

Twenty-three freakin’ laugh lines and the vast majority of them are original.

Before I get too far into this section, I want to comment on the whole “One...Two.” and interrupting the final count phase at the very end of the routine.

I’ve seen other performers do a similar type of joke, where they constantly interrupt themselves. In fact, I recently saw another performer’s version of the Head Chopper routine where he interrupted himself various times, but his were more of a play on words. One bit went like this: “I’ll drop the blade on the count of three. One...Two... Three weeks ago, I said to myself...” That kind of thing.

There’s nothing wrong with that, I suppose, but to me it plays as cheap, as though you KNOW you’re screwing with the audience. In my version, I’m also screwing with the audience, but my onstage character doesn’t realize it. His actions are strongly motivated. When he interrupts himself to check on the volunteers, the audience and finally himself, his constitution is doing what he naturally would do, which is check on the apparent comfort and safety of those around him before continuing with the stunt. It’s absurd, but it does have its own internal logic.

Because of this absurd logic, my interruptions don’t piss off the audience nearly as much as those bogus interruptions I’ve seen from other performers. Again, I’m sure it plays well for them, but it’s simply not the direction I wanted to go with my routine.

As I said before, the fact that I tell everyone that the prop is fake gets them psychologically on my side...no one is saying, “I hope this idiot doesn’t REALLY expect me to believe that prop is dangerous?” I’ve side-stepped all of that and when the carrot gets cut (as everyone probably expects) it sets up several laugh

lines, launches the ‘magician in trouble’ sub-plot and gives a whole new dynamic to the routine - a big 180 degrees from just a moment prior.

I mentioned before that many of the bits in this routine were ad-libbed, which is true: I’d be doing this routine, which always played well, so I’d mentally check out, knowing I had a sure-fire winner on my hands. I’d be “outside of myself,” so to speak, so I was in a perfect position to try new lines. Not all were winners, of course, but the good ones stuck with me and since I perform the Chopper a LOT during the year, maybe 150 times or so, I’m always reinforcing those new bits.

A funny story: One bit, one of my favorites, was the carrot being spit into my hand. That actually started out as a way out of a potentially bad situation. Here’s the story...

I was doing the routine one day, and, in those days, I asked the kid to bite the carrot to “verify it was real.” I simply played the biting straight, no comedy. One day, this kid bites the carrot and immediately has this look of disgust on his face...like he’s gonna puke!

I quickly reach over with my cupped hand and say, “I’m sorry, just spit it out” The kid does so, and the audience goes “AHHHOHHHH!” in mock-horror! I pick up on this and realize, that this routine which is designed in mind for 9–13-year-olds anyway, that the bit I’ve just discovered meshes in perfectly with the age group.

Important point: play to the audience! Older kids hate puns. Some kid performers use puns for younger kid shows as a way to curry favor with the adults. The puns sail over the young kids’ heads, the adults laugh and everyone’s happy.

Not so with older kids – they pick up on the puns and it pisses them off! Not always, but most of the time. They roll their eyes and think the humor that you’re trying to impress them with is ‘corny,’ to use an antiquated term.

I don’t know when I realized that, but that was the day (whenever it was) that I decided I would give the older kids the humor they were looking for. Granted, I’m not doing fart jokes or things that would offend adults, but I’m not pandering either. It’s a fine line, but I feel this routine is a perfect example of what I try to accomplish.

The origin of the pretending I was swallowing the carrot bit came almost immediately after the kid spit the hunk in my hand the first time. For three or four shows after, I worked out how to get the kid to spit the carrot in my hand EVERY time and now I’ve got it to a 99% success ratio. Literally 1 show out of 100, either the kid won’t spit it because he’s too polite or the kid refuses to spit it out of defiance – he just stands there, grinning, as he chews the carrot. There’s nothing I can do at that point but continue on and skip the other carrot bits...but most of the time, he does spit.

Oh, and for anyone who thinks this won't 'play' in conservative settings such as elementary schools, I've been running this routine in schools across the U.S. and Canada for years and the school officials and PTA/PTO moms always compliment me on how I appeal to the age level of the group of which I'm performing.

The bit where I swallow the carrot, getting back to that, came on the heels of the spitting thing. It was a total ad-lib. I can't for the life of me remember what prompted me to do it. I guess I was on a show "high."

On an episode of "Inside the Actor's Studio," Robin Williams tried to articulate just how he was able to develop his incredible ad-libbing skills and other than being a natural gift (of course) he also explained that when you try something and get immediate approval, the brain is stimulated, the connections start firing faster, and you're in a heightened creative state.

That's where I was, and not too many shows later, I found the perfect "button" to the whole carrot thing, which was dropping the bit into my pocket with the promise I was saving it to eat "later." It was like this little, tiny story had a beginning, middle and end. It came together beautifully.

The Simpsons reference was, I think, the only deliberate line I added in. Being a Simpsons nerd, I loved the Smithers character and the line I took was always one of my favs.

As I indicated much earlier, I'm really proud of this routine because I have stripped away many of the old chopper gags like the bloody newspaper. There's absolutely nothing wrong with old bits like that, but after examining this routine and sharing it to a few friends, I knew I had a real winner on my hands.

Take this routine, nurture it and above all, use it. It plays incredibly strong. This is not hype or B.S. – It truly is one the highlights of any show I do, and I get a rush each and every time I do it.

Dream Letter

“Confabulation: No Wallets, More Predictions!”

The Basic Effect

A sealed FedEx envelope is handed out to someone at the beginning of the program. At the end of the program, that person is told she will be the recipient of a letter of thanks for all of her hard years of work...but the catch is her co-workers will be choosing the details of the letter.

Several questions are asked, such as “the name of a celebrity,” a “yearly salary,” and many more – eight suggestions in all. Once all of the suggestions are made, the FedEx letter is brought by that person to the front of the audience.

The performer has written down all of the details of the audience’s suggestions. The person opens the sealed envelope. Inside is a smaller 6”X9” envelope, which is also sealed.

The performer removes from this envelope a small index card for the volunteer to read. She reads it out loud. Basically the card explains to the rest of the audience the fact that the performer has sealed his prediction inside the envelope, stapled shut.

The volunteer reaches into the opened envelope and removes a pair of 4”x 6” index cards, stapled all the way around the perimeter, so that nothing can get in or out. The person from the audience tears this open and removes a folded index card.

The index card is essentially the letter, thanking this person for all of their years of hard work...and all of the audience’s suggestions are incorporated into the letter, perfectly predicting everything the audience members have suggested moments ago...when the FedEx letter envelope was still in the audience, safe and sealed.

Introduction

I've always been fascinated by prediction effects in which the audience is allowed to suggest anything in the world and then you show you've predicted it beforehand in a most fair manner.

From David Copperfield's "Graffiti" to the Doug Malloy Prediction Chest, I've loved the concept. The key thing that appealed to me was letting the audience say ANYTHING. The prediction of cards or the choice of something from a list the performer provided did not appeal to me at all...it had to be ANYTHING the audience cooks up.

Additionally, I personally avoid headline predictions, which in many ways are actually easier to predict than something an audience member says in the middle of your show. The reason is simple: with a headline prediction, you can prepare everything the morning of your show in terms of your actual written prediction. With this scenario I've just laid out above, you have to write the prediction under the eyes of the audience, assuming you're a one-person show.

The reason I avoid headline predictions is that, for me at least, they play flat. I've used them and while they are absolutely amazing to most audiences, there really is no emotional connection and besides that, no room for comedy.

When I was first getting into Mentalism, I kept hearing about this "Confabulation" effect by Alan Shaxon. I then ordered the manuscript from Hank Lee's, but it never came, after months of waiting. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I recommend NOT shopping at Hank Lee's, but that's just my opinion.***)

I then purchased a program from Atlanta-based magician Dave Dee. Dee was the guy who essentially started the "magic marketing craze," giving access to hundreds of magicians to incredible marketing secrets, allowing guys like myself to actually make a living doing this stuff.

Over the next few years (until Dave and I had a bitter falling out) I bought a lot of his stuff. While the marketing stuff was terrific, most of his actual performance material was complete crap. His "reading" and "drug awareness" shows in particular were extremely poor. He really hit paydirt with his corporate motivational program called "Success Magic," which was a marketing and performance license for doing corporate motivational programs.

The program itself was so-so, but the finale was his adaptation of the Shaxon-style prediction. While the method was terrific, Dave's presentation was as dry as dirt and while it got a good response, it really needed a face lift in terms of presentation.

I then stumbled across a VHS tape series called “***The Desert Brainstorm Series***,” in which a series of mentalists including Lee Earle, Larry Becker and others got together and shared several presentations and methods to Mentalism and mental magic.

On one of the tapes, a guy by the name of Mark Strivings presented an effect called “*Confabulous Vacation*” in which he took the Shaxon prediction idea and used a Himber-style wallet to ring in his prediction amongst a stack of other mock index cards.

The method was good, but I really preferred Dave Dee’s. I like the innocent impossibility of the prediction being sealed in a FedEx envelope and out in the audience before the routine begins. While I’m sure it plays well for other performers, pulling the prediction out of a wallet that I’ve had on my person the entire time just lessens the effect in my eyes.

Still, in his handling, Mark had predicted several items, around six, increasing the impossibility of the effect, I think. The suggestions given by the audience members for details of this made-up vacation generated a lot of laughter from the studio audience. Judging by their honest laughter and true exclamations of amazement, it was by far the best effect of the whole series.

By comparison, Dave Dee predicted three items to create a fictional sale for a sales presentation. Again, it played, for me at least, incredibly dry.

I then decided to use Dave Dee’s method to predict up to eight items, increasing the ‘wow’ factor. I also decided to use a more light-hearted style of presentation, closer to what Mark Strivings used. I used Mark’s “vacation” idea and truthfully, it’s my favorite presentation. My “vacation” presentation is actually a lot different from Mark’s, but in the interest of not looking like a copycat in this manuscript, I decided to share another presentation I developed with this methodology.

I made up the plot of this imaginary letter of thanks that someone would receive in the room. Let’s face it – in any corporate group, some of the people are going to feel underappreciated. Since most of my work is for corporate holiday parties, this idea of honoring someone and giving the person this bogus ‘gift’ plays very strong. In fact, when I work for a corporate client for the first time, I always use this routine...always.

For repeat clients, I use my incredible “Mother of All Predictions,” (available at www.hocus-pocus.com) but first-time clients get what you are about to read. It’s been my closer for at least ten years.

I also noticed that Oz Pearlman used this idea of the stapled prediction idea in his “Into the Abyss” DVD, so this idea of stapling a prediction shut and finding a way around that has been used by other performers.

One final note: I added some psychological touches to Dave’s original method (which he himself culled from a number of sources) and changed one aspect of the physical handling quite a bit.

In the routine section, I am going to cover the physical handling of the routine during the show. In the following section, called Details, I will cover the construction of the gimmicks as well as finer points of the physical handling, thoughts on psychology and more.

The Routine

For this routine, I’ll write this as though I’m presenting it to a group of schoolteachers. This opens up the questioning in ways that will allow you, dear reader, to see how easily you can customize this for different groups.

If I have not done so previously in the show, I hold up the FedEx envelope and exclaim that “someone in the audience” will receive a letter of thanks for all of their hard work...but first, I want to give this envelope to someone.

Sometimes I pick a person at random, sometimes I’ll ask my client for a suggestion, either before the show or right during the show and still other times, I’ll throw a paper ball into the audience and select someone that way.

Either way, I approach the person and say, “Hi! What’s your name?” Let’s say she answers with Sheila.

“Great, Sheila!” I say. “I’ll need you to hold onto this sealed FedEx envelope. It is sealed, correct?” Once Sheila confirms it’s sealed, I say, “Hold onto it and don’t open it yet, because this will be needed at the end. That’s called ‘foreshadowing.’”

I then return to the stage and from my case I remove a small notebook (which also has a folded note card on it where I will be writing the details of the prediction) and pen. I explain, “Sheila’s getting that letter from a student in the future, thanking her for the great job Sheila has done teaching him or her, but I need everyone hear to help with the details of that letter. First, Sheila, is your name S-H-E-I-L-A?”

Sheila confirms this as I write down her name in the notebook. Each time I write down the suggestion or details of the prediction as dictated by the audience, I am double writing, meaning I am writing it twice – once in the notebook and once in the proper spot on the folded note card.

(AUTHOR’S NOTE: Double writing isn’t a sleight of hand thing at all...you just do it. It really comes down to eliminating your ‘magician’s guilt,’ and just doing it. To cover the second writing, I will usually ask a follow-up question of whoever just gave me a suggestion. It might be something like, “What made you think of that?” Of course, if the person gives a funny suggestion, I will ad-lib a funny response, or if the audience is really laughing, I’ll just do my double-writing as everyone’s laughing. Talk about easy! From here in the script, every time I write something, assume I am double writing and offering a comment or suggestion as needed to cover the double writing. This will save me more typing.)

I continue: “We’ll need a date that Sheila receives this letter. I don’t care about the year, just the month and day. Sir, would you stand, please?”

The gentleman I selected stands. ***(AUTHOR’S NOTE: Get a person speaking from the audience to stand up. Their voice will carry better.)***

“Sir, what’s your name?” ***(AUTHOR’S NOTE: Before you ask him for his suggestion, ask him his name or some other question. This loosens him up and gets him speaking more clearly. I picked up this suggestion from Richard Osterlind on the “Corrinda’s 13 Steps” DVD set from L&L. GREAT tip. Asking him his name first and THEN the suggestion increases the likelihood he’ll speak more loudly the next time. For the remainder of this presentation, assume I ask each person to stand and then give his or her name first or some other question before I get to the suggestion. This saves me quite a bit of typing.)***

“March 10th,” is the man’s suggestion.

“Great!” I say as I record this in the notebook. “Now we need a subject. Regardless of what Sheila teaches here in school, I need a school subject that Sheila has helped this student with...Miss, what subject has Sheila helped this student?”

“Psychology,” is the answer.

“Wonderful!” I say, writing that down. “Now we need a job title! What job is this fake kid gonna have when she grows up?”

“Guitar Player,” is the suggestion.

“Great! Jimmy Hendrix, look out!” (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: At this point, the laughter starts as the audience members may start ‘challenging’ some suggestions for being silly, not silly enough, or whatever. Usually, the further into the routine we go, the more outrageous the suggestions get. It’s a lot of fun and makes the ‘journey’ to the climax a lot more interesting.**)

“I need a yearly salary! But I want it to be very specific!”

“\$100,025.00,” is the reply. This by the way was a REAL suggestion. Here’s how I ad-libbed, just to give you an idea of how ‘loose’ this can play.

The audience is laughing, and I increase the laughter by looking exasperated. “100,025.00?” I say, “That’s very specific! I can picture this person talking to their spouse at home... ‘Honey, you don’t have to worry, I got that raise!’”

After the laughter subsides, I continue, “Now we need a celebrity! Because this person does their job so well, we need a celebrity who has hired this kid.”

“Brad Pitt!” someone shouts. More giggling in this room full of (mostly) ladies.

I sigh and dejectedly say, “No one ever suggests Angelina Jolie for me,” as I write down the name. I continue, “Now this student lives somewhere REALLY cool! It could be anywhere on the planet, anywhere in the universe, it could be someplace made up – we could send him to the Death Star with Darth Vader!” (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: Yup, I actually say that during the show. I am a NERD.**)

“Buffalo, NY!” This causes all kinds of laughter because the presentation was held in Buffalo, NY!

“Finally, we need a name for this child. Now, this child was given a really weird name...this child was named after a famous celebrity!” (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I added this in within the last year to encourage more creative names and more laughter. Until then, I occasionally got stuff like ‘John Smith.’ Really!**)

“Alfred Hitchcock!” comes the answer.

“Fantastic,” I say, writing this down. “Now, I have to tell you folks, I perform a lot. I might do six, maybe seven shows a year.” (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: Yes, that actually gets a laugh for me!**)

“As a result of my oh-so-busy schedule, I often forget just where I put that FedEx envelope or, as I prefer to call it, the Envelope of Mystery. In a

moment, when I count to three, I need the person holding the Envelope of mystery- “here I look right at Sheila – “to stand up and shout, “I’VE GOT IT, I’VE GOT IT, YOU FOOL, YOU FOOL!”

There is much laughter here as everyone starts to turn and look at Sheila, which is just what I want. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: I got this basic idea from a Renaissance Festival juggler who was getting a volunteer to hand him a bag of props. I can’t remember exactly what he said, but I got my “you fool, you fool,” from a very old Bill Cosby stand-up comedy routine.***)

“One...Two...Three!” As Sheila stands and shouts, I’m ditching the index card I’ve been doing the double writing on into my case and in one motion I’ve come back out with a pair of scissors. Everyone’s looking at Sheila, so no one notices a thing and even if they were to watch me, I’ve got it easily palmed. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Don’t worry, I’ll be going over the physical handling again in a later section, but I wanted to include the ‘ditch’ here for you to get a sense of timing.***)

“That’s great! C’mon up here Sheila!” Sheila joins me onstage and I position her carefully RIGHT in front of my case, so I use her body to block any view of me grabbing my folded index card. It also keeps HER from seeing what I’m doing, but her attention will be completely diverted.

Sheila takes her place and I say, “Now, you’ve been holding onto that envelope the entire time, correct? In fact, it’s been sealed, in your possession BEFORE I started asking anyone for their suggestions, right?”

“Right,” Sheila confirms.

“Sheila, I need you to open that FedEx envelope right now.... just pull that rip cord at the top with that tab, got it?” I carefully walk her through this because I really have to control her actions now.

Once Sheila has the envelope open, I ask her to remove the 6” x 9” envelope inside. Once she does so, I take the FedEx envelope and toss it carelessly into my case behind me. I’m at this point establishing myself as being “tidy” and eliminating trash, which is important when it comes to ditching the upcoming gimmick.

“Sheila, is that envelope also sealed?”

As Sheila nods, I nonchalantly remove the envelope from her hand and deftly put the notebook into her hand. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: This needs to be done without comment. Just do it.***)

I then casually direct her attention to the notebook in order to direct her away from the envelope. I engage her in the notebook as I say, “Oh, I almost forgot - before you open this envelope, I need you to read what I’ve written and make sure I actually wrote down everything everyone in the audience suggested...” I then read out loud, over her shoulder, a suggestion or two as I cut a ¼” strip off the top of the envelope. I then, using my right hand, ditch the scissors into my case (going behind Sheila) and immediately pick up the ditched folded note card. With it casually palmed, I then nonchalantly reach into the envelope, stuff the folded index card deep into the package and then remove the 3” x 5” index card that’s keeping the two rubber-cemented larger 4” x 6” index cards separated.

(AUTHOR’S NOTE: Again, I’ll go over the gimmicks later, but I wanted to include the physical handling in the script, so you get a sense of timing.)

By this point, Sheila is done reading the notebook notes. Here, by having her read these notes, not only does it distract her from what I’m doing with the scissors, but it also takes away a possible solution to the whole thing in the minds of the audience – ‘Oh yeah, he really did write down everything in that notebook!’ I also want to reinforce all the suggestions once again in the minds of everyone so the revelation will be more amazing: everyone remembers the suggestions clearly.

Once Sheila is done, I hand her that index card I just removed from the envelope.

“Sheila, inside the envelope are two things – the first is an index card telling everyone what I did yesterday. Please read this out loud,” I ask. As Sheila reads the card out loud, I am continuously running my thumb and first two fingers of each hand back and forth over the top of the cut open envelope, over the two pieces of cardboard, making sure that the rubber cement is now free to seal itself because the index card separating the two is gone.

To give you an idea of how this looks, imagine your finger positioning as you seal a zip lock baggie – you’re running both of your thumbs on one side and forefingers and second fingers of both hands on the other side, back and forth over the top of the bag, making sure it’s sealed. That’s essentially what I’m doing.

Done casually, the audience, if anyone notices at all, sees that I’m just “fidgeting.”

For completeness’ sake, here’s what’s written on the card Sheila is reading out loud:

“Yesterday at 9:07am, I, Cris Johnson, wrote down the thoughts of several spectators on an index card. I then sealed this card between two pieces of cardboard with a ring of staples so that nothing can get in or out.”

This has now done two things: given me ‘motivation’ for having that card in the envelope and explained the impossibility of the situation for the audience.

Once Sheila has finished reading the card out loud, I take it and the notebook from her. It’s time to do the big build up.

(AUTHOR’S NOTE: Time to step in with a couple of notes. First, the point in the script where I take the 6” x 9” envelope from Sheila and say, “Before you open the envelope, I need you to read the notebook...” Notice I say before YOU –as in Sheila – open the envelope. After that, I never mention again who, or when the envelope was cut open. Visually, the scissors are there, and their use is motivated, but by mentioning that she will open the envelope and then never addressing it, I’m increasing the likelihood that the audience will ‘skip over’ that in their minds.

Another important point: Although I had that quick gag about ‘foreshadowing’ in the beginning of the routine, I never once say that I’ve predicted anything nor does the envelope necessarily have a thing to do with this whole business.

The first time the idea of a prediction is directly addressed is by Sheila as she’s reading the index card out loud. By that point, the dirty work is done and I’m just holding the envelope waiting for Sheila to finish so I begin the big build-up. I feel that if I mention a prediction too soon, Sheila – and the audience – is going to be burning me big-time.

Granted, some audience members begin to put things together before that, but by me not mentioning anything early on, I’m not setting up a ‘challenge.’ That’s important. Back to the finish of the routine.)

“Sheila, inside this envelope is the stapled package described. Just to assure everyone, YOU are taking out the sealed package from the FedEx envelope that has been in YOUR hands. Please reach in and take the package.” As she takes it, I’m right at her side, making sure she doesn’t ‘get ahead’ of me in the handling.

“Sheila, look at it, the staples are all the way around, right? Flip it over, there’s no gaps or slits anywhere, right? Great, could you hold it to the light?” As she holds it up, I point to, but do not touch, the shadow we can both see of the rectangle inside.

“Okay, Sheila...you can see that shadow of something, right? That’s a folded something. Tear the package in half, right here.” Now I motion to her to tear the

package in half, roughly halfway through. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: I direct it specifically to the spot where I want her to tear because I don’t want her deciding on her own to tug on the top of the package and reveal the rubber-cemented staples.***)

She tears the package and hands me the half without the folded card. “Sheila, see that? I need you to take that folded card – I do NOT want to touch it. Later you can confirm with everyone that YOU tore open the package and YOU removed the folded card.” I then take the other half of the stapled package and toss it into the case behind me. Out of sight, out of mind.

“Sheila, unfold it. I am NOT going to touch it, but I am going to read this over your shoulder. Try to keep a poker face.” This line gets a laugh because by this time, Sheila has in fact started reading the card...and her eyes usually widen and her jaw drops.

I then read over her shoulder:

“I’m sorry it’s taken me so long to write to you, Sheila, but I’ve been really busy, so getting this on March 10th isn’t really prompt. Your helping me with psychology has helped me land my dream job! I’m a guitar player and because of that, I now make about \$100,025.00. guess what? I also have as a client the famous Brad Pitt! I also have moved to someplace very exotic – Buffalo, NY. Thank you again for your help. Sincerely, Alfred Hitchcock”

At this point, I pause and give the audience a smile. The room immediately explodes into applause. During the applause, I thank Sheila and escort her back to her seat. I then take my place back onstage, alone, deliver just a few closing words to close the show and that’s it.

Details

Materials List

To perform this effect, you’ll need the following items:

FedEx envelopes – these are the letter kind that you can pick up at Office Max or other FedEx locations. You’ll want the harder cardboard type rather than the Tyvek envelope kind. As an alternate, you can also, if you live in the U.S., use Priority Mail or Express Mail letter envelopes. They’re the same size – 10” x 13” I believe.

Quick Note: I like using these envelopes because it protects the prediction inside and it adds a sense of legitimacy. If for some reason you cannot find these envelopes, regular 10" x 13" manila envelopes will work just fine.

6" x 9" manila envelopes – available from most office supply stores such as Office Max, Office Depot, etc. I buy the self-sealer ones with the strip you just peel away to expose the sticky side. I get a much better seal using these rather than using the lick-n-stick ones.

Rubber cement

A pair of scissors – in Dave Dee's original handling, he instructed you to use a small letter opener a little bigger than a silver dollar. I personally found this to be a strange item that not everyone in the audience would be familiar with. I know I had never seen one until he mentioned it. Scissors seem more natural and besides, if you do a cut and restored rope routine earlier in the show, you've established the scissors as being part of your act.

3" x 5" index cards. - I buy the blank ones without any lines. I'm going to be writing VERY small on the card, so the lines would only add visual clutter.

4" x 6" index cards. - it doesn't matter if these are lined or not.

A stapler and staples

A small 4" x 6" notebook – This is spiral bound, preferably with the spiral vertical to the page orientation. I like this set up because I can put the ball point pen I'll be using in the routine right in the spiral, meaning I won't lose it as my case gets jumbled around.

A small bulldog clip

Preparing the Prediction Envelope

To prepare, take two of the 4" x 6" index cards. Take your stapler and across one of the 4" sides of EACH card, staple a single row of staples. I usually get 5 or 6 staples. There's no need to bunch them up. I usually leave a millimeter or so between each staple. These two rows of staples should start roughly an inch from the top of each card. Also, and this is important, the two rows must match. In other words, let's say on one card I wound up with 5 staples but on the other card, I squeezed in an extra staple. Not good. Both rows must match.

Also, if for some reason the staples are crooked or misaligned on one card, then make sure the staples on the second card are misaligned or crooked, too. I do this so much and so quickly that I'm pretty haphazard with the first row, so I then go back and make sure the second-row matches.

I think this is a nice touch, having the staples crooked. These two rows will be rubber cemented together to give the illusion of a single row of staples. If they are crooked (matching on both sides when Sheila flips the package over to look at both sides, a little detail like this will register in her subconscious mind.

Once that's done, take your rubber cement and apply a single coat to, on one of the cards, the "straight" side of the staples. Here's what I mean: when you staple a few pieces of paper together, the staple will have its ends poking through the other side and curled in toward the paper, in effect 'clamping' the paper together. Think of it like tiny metal claws. The other side is the "straight" side of the staple and is smoother to the touch.

Therefore, you'll apply a single coat of rubber cement to one of the index cards on the staples' "straight" side. On the OTHER card, you will apply a layer of rubber cement to the "claw" or "bumpy" side only.

Wait for this to dry...then add a second layer and wait for it to dry.

While the two cards are drying, take one of the 3" x 5" index cards and, from the top of the card (held vertically) down write the following in legible text:

**"Yesterday at 9:07am, I (YOUR NAME)
wrote down the thoughts of several spectators
on an index card. I then sealed this card
between two pieces of cardboard with a ring
of staples so that nothing can get in or out."**

This text should take up the majority of the single side of the card. Write neatly, as you'll be relying on a spectator to read this out loud as you finish your dirty work as outlined above in the routine.

Once you've written the text on the card, fold the top inch to two inches of the card back and forth, so that this top folded portion stays in place when folded over. This card will be used to keep the two rubber cemented rows of staples apart until you put the prediction into the package.

Take the card with its folded top two inches and lay it, with the top folded AWAY from you, over the now-dried rubber cemented "straight" row of staples. Then place the second index card with the rubber cemented "bumpy" side directly over the first 4" x 6" card, sandwiching the folded 3" x 5" card between the two. There

will be enough space between the edges of the 3” side of the folded card and the two 4” rubber cemented sides to stick the two 4” inch sides together.

Now take your stapler once again and staples the two 4” x 6” cards together along the perimeter of the three remaining sides. Once again, you’re going to keep about an inch space from the EDGES of the cards, making the perimeter big enough to give yourself plenty of room to eventually slip that folded prediction note card in during the show.

Once you’re finished stapling, using your fingers of your right hand (if your left-handed, use your left hand) you’re going to pry the cards apart at the rubber cemented opening. While in this position, you’re going to use your left hand to ‘buckle’ the cards against the sides, creating ‘creases’ of stress in the two cards, so if you’ve done this correctly, a gentle squeeze of the stapled cards along the long sides will easily force the cards to buckle open at the top during the show.

Now take a 6” x 9” envelope. Open it at the mouth and repeat the ‘buckling’ process that ‘creases’ the sides of the envelope. If you’ve done this correctly, you should be able to drop the stapled package, mouth side up, with that folded index card with the folded flap away from you, against the flap side of the envelope.

Now try buckling the envelope with the package inside. The stapled package should open up nicely for you at this point. I always test my packages to make sure they will buckle properly for me before I seal the envelope.

Carefully pull off the self-seal strip and seal the envelope. Drop the envelope into the FedEx envelope or whatever envelope you choose, and that part is ready.

I should point out that to date I have never mailed one of these packages to my client. I suppose I could – I have prepared these envelopes up to a month in advance without much of an issue at the show. The biggest reason why I don’t is simply the cost...plus, since this is not a headline prediction, there isn’t any need.

When packing for your show, I recommend putting this envelope in a place where it will not get crushed. In other words, don’t pack this envelope in your show case below your Kevin James bowling ball. :)

Preparing the Actual Prediction

Depending on your handwriting, you may need to practice this part a bit. First, get one of the 3” x 5” inch index cards. Fold it in half, creasing the edges back and forth, so it folds easily. Open the card back up and hold the card in front of you horizontally, with the 5” side uppermost.

Look at the right side of the card, past the vertical fold: this is where you're going to leave blank spots for you to record your specific audience suggestions in the show. I'm going to put the example from the show right here:

"I'm sorry it's taken me so long to write to you, **Sheila**, but I've been really busy, so getting this on **March 10th** isn't really prompt. Your helping me with **psychology** has helped me land my dream job! I'm a **guitar player** and because of that, I now make about **\$100,025.00**. Guess what? I also have as a client the famous **Brad Pitt!** I also have moved to someplace very exotic – **Buffalo, NY**. Thank you again for your help. Sincerely, **Alfred Hitchcock**"

I put the specific suggestions from the example in **bold**, so you could get an idea of where the suggestions will be written.

As you can see from above, this prediction has eight lines. You'll want your handwriting to be the size that will allow you to get all eight lines onto one side of the card. One of the strengths of this routine is the fact that I've predicted so much stuff. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: I get amazed comments after shows like, "I can't believe you predicted all that stuff!"***)

Practice writing the prediction so you get used to not only getting all eight lines in comfortably on the card but also leave yourself space at the end of each line for the predictions to be written in later, so the handwriting on the card looks like this:

"I'm sorry it's taken me so long to write to you, _____
but I've been really busy, so getting this on _____
isn't really prompt. Your helping me with _____
has helped me land my dream job! I'm a _____
and because of that, I now make about \$ _____
guess what? I also have as a client the famous _____
I also have moved to someplace very exotic – _____
Thank you again for your help. Sincerely, _____"

Obviously, the underlines are there for explanation purposes only. You can, however, write yourself a "master copy" on an index card and include underlines so you can have a visual cue to copy off of when you prepare for the routine. I've done this, as I currently use this prediction method for four completely different presentations and I use some more than others.

Now, when you're preparing this handwritten card, I highly recommend you write it out while standing, with the card being held against that little 4" x 6" spiral-bound notebook.

Why?

Simple – during the show, that's how you're going to be filling in the blanks, standing, with the card against that notebook. As a result, you'll need to make sure the handwriting matches. Obviously, if your seated, you'll write differently.

Practice this – notice how you press the pen, notice how your handwriting changes based on body posture. It's a small detail in the larger picture, but if you allow your "Sheila" to take the car with her, people WILL look at the handwriting, as this completely fries people so much that they are looking for any clue as to how this is done.

Put in the practice time – it will reward you later.

Oh, one more thing...depending on the size of your handwriting, you can certainly modify the sentence structure of the prediction to add or take away words as needed. Just leave yourself space for the predictions, without them looking cramped.

Another thing to keep in mind: The card will be folded with the right side folded out, so you can look at the spaces where you'll fill in the predictions. Having the sentences extend past the halfway fold ensures you have a visual cue as to where each suggestion is to be written.

Once you've written your prediction card and folded it, set it aside for a moment.

Notebook Preparation

Open the notebook and, while standing (consistency is key) write out little 'reminders' of the suggestions so you don't lose your place. I write mine on the page with them closer to the right side of the page like this:

- **name**
- **date**
- **subject**
- **job title**
- **salary**
- **celebrity client**
- **location**

- **name of student**

Once this is done, you now have a little ‘cheat sheet,’ letting you know at a glance not only what suggestions you need but also what ORDER in which they need to be written.

This is a big deal, as it’s really easy to lose your place in the heat of the action. During the show, you can just fill in the suggestions next to the dashes in the notebook and then immediately write the same suggestion on the corresponding line on the folded index card.

Once you’ve written in your ‘cues,’ take the folded card and using the bulldog clip, secure it to the notebook with the index card folded in half with the right half of the card facing you, writing side up.

The bulldog clip keeps everything in its place until it’s time to perform it.

Your preparation is now complete.

At The Show

Although I most often use a very special performing case built by David Charvet Studios, I’ve also performed this quite often out of a simple briefcase on a table of stand, situated so that the case is roughly waist level or a bit higher. You’ll have to experiment with whatever height works for you. I work this routine with the case to my right, with the briefcase opened, the opening away from the audience, obviously using the lid of the briefcase to give me cover.

Since my Charvet table is kind of an oddball thing, I’ll describe this being performed out of a briefcase as it will be simpler to explain.

The scissors are placed on the left side of the bottom of the briefcase where I can reach them easily. The prediction envelope is in one of the flaps in the lid of the briefcase. In other words, it’s “vertical.”

The prepared notebook, with the folded prediction card is on top of the scissors.

When it comes time to perform, I hand the envelope out and when I get back to my case, I pick up the notebook and, under cover of the lid, remove the bulldog clip and toss it aside.

I then face the audience, removing the pen from the spiral of the notebook as I begin verbally setting the stage for the routine. I hold the notebook vertically in my left hand, using my thumb to hold the folded card in place, situated just

slightly below the first line in which I need to write a suggestion. Then, throughout the routine, I move the card down with my thumb as I need to fill in the later suggestion further down the card.

As I mentioned in the Routine section, each time I get a suggestion, I fill it in on the notebook and as I get ready to fill it in on the note card, I ask a question or do it under cover of a good laugh.

While double writing certainly is not difficult from a technical sense, I have done this effect in VERY close quarters with people almost on top of me. Although my handwriting is very small, it would not be hard for some to discern that writing “Bob,” for instance does not need to take nearly as long as I’m apparently taking!

Another thing I use – when the person gives me the suggestion, I repeat it back to the audience (to keep them in the loop if the volunteer was soft-spoken) and it allows me to verbally mention the kind of suggestion.

As an example, after someone suggests “Buffalo, NY” for the location, I might say, “So Buffalo, NY is your idea for the LOCATION?” and I slightly verbally stress the word “location.”

Later, when Sheila is onstage with me, she can see and verify that I’ve written “Buffalo, NY – Location” on the notebook and I sometimes send her back to the audience with the sheet from the notebook torn out along with the prediction card. This may seem like overkill, but my thinking was that by stressing the word “location” verbally, it reminds people that I have to write that particular word too...justifying my additional writing time.

After all of the writing has been done and I start delivering that silly little joke to the audience about me only doing 6 or 7 shows a year, I’m using that line of script to fold the card into quarters along the pre-creased lines, which will allow me to easily palm this card later.

I simply reach in with my right hand and fold the card using my left to keep it secure. I then palm off the card and casually reach into my case, ditch the card, and pick up the scissors in one fluid motion as I get Sheila to shout the “You fool” lines to me, which is silly, but an amusing piece of misdirection.

To repeat what I wrote earlier, I use Sheila’s body to help shield me a bit as I retrieve the card and secretly stuff it into the opened envelope that I’m holding, with the top buckled open, thanks to the creases I put in earlier.

On occasion, when I open the envelope, I find that the two index cards are stuck together. Maybe the FedEx envelope got squashed, whatever. It doesn’t happen often – maybe twice a year and whatever the cause, I’m sure it was something I did.

When this happens, I casually reach in with the scissors I'm still holding, tuck the tips (in closed position) in between the two cards and simply open the scissors. Since the majority of the two strips of rubber cemented rows of staples can not physically touch, this little scissors trick easily fixes the problem.

For details of the routine, be sure to refer back to that section, but I'm pretty sure I've covered all of the details very carefully.

This truly has been my corporate closer for first-time clients for over ten years. It plays incredibly strong, and it lends itself to several presentational possibilities.

As I mentioned, I use a "Dream Vacation" presentation quite a bit. Although my suggestion, script and layout are different from Mark Strivings, I didn't want to replicate the "vacation" idea.

I use the script in this book quite often for volunteer appreciation banquets and school faculty in-service dates. Obviously, if you're not performing for teachers, you can alter the suggestions and script completely...the point is, I wanted to give you one example from my own working set list.

This would play well with a "Dream Date," "Dream House," or maybe a "Date from Hell," or even a "Crime of the Century!" Hey, I think I just gave myself a great idea. :)

This truly is a "worker," and is about the most amazing one-man, real-time prediction method I've ever come across.

Final Thoughts

Well, we've reached the end of the second volume of this series. Sometime in the future I plan on releasing one more volume, although it will be quite a bit different from volumes one and two.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns (or if you want to sign up for my FREE ezine, "Cause & Effects," shoot me an email to crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net.

I look forward to hearing of your success with the routines in this book. They are all right out of my own professional set lists and have served me VERY well over the years.

Thanks again.

- Cris Johnson, July 2010