



# Cause & Effects:

Volume 3: *"Unique Routines for Classics"*

by Cris Johnson, CH, CT.NLP

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## Introduction

Well, here we are – volume three of this series of routines and effects. I honestly had no intention of making the original “Cause & Effects” a series of books, but things just kind of took off. As is the case with every volume of “Cause & Effects,” there will be “Author’s Notes” sprinkled throughout the book to expand upon certain key passages, explain something or simply for those cases where I want to make an obscure or bizarre reference!

I also want to stress that the material in these pages is not “the stuff dreams are made of” but are in front real-world stuff. It’s not meant or intended to be Shakespeare but simply put, these routines fulfill my desire to provide a framework for many classic magic effects.

I was lucky enough to meet Eugene Burger in person during one of the Invocational bizarre magic conventions in Chicago (hosted and put together by the late, great Tony Andruzzi) when I was a teenager. Eugene was incredibly kind to me that entire weekend and always more than willing to chat with me about a number of different subjects.

In his books, Eugene was and is very passionate about providing frames for a magic effect – that is, some kind of theatrical presentation or ‘hook’ for the effect. He believes it gives meaning to each effect, so the magic takes on more meaning.

Moreso than anything else I’ve learned in magic, this one critical lesson has stayed with me for all these years.

Another, more recent, lesson I learned from one of Eugene’s DVDs was the idea of editing a performance script...that is, reducing the number of words in a script until just the bare necessities are there, an economy of words. Of course, this economy of scripting is not meant to sacrifice the entertainment value of a routine...rather like omitting “um” and “you know” from your scripting.

With that in mind, some of the scripts in this book are intended to serve as a ‘lead in’ to a music effect, a way to provide framework to a performance piece so that I am never just performing disembodied sleights or ‘tricks.’

I owe so much to Eugene Burger and would not be where I am today without his wisdom. Thanks, Eugene.

- Cris Johnson, CH, CT.NLP  
June 19, 2012

## Snowstorm in China

**Effect:** The performer shows some tissue paper, tears it into a few pieces and puts them in a glass of water. Once again removing them from the water, the performer squeezes the tissue paper – the audience can see water dripping away. Using a large, ornamental fan, the performer begins fanning under the hand holding the wet tissue...and soon from his hand erupts a shower or more accurately, a “storm” of confetti, looking very much like a “snowstorm.” Beautiful effect – it’s another one I’ve been doing for over 12 years. It can close any show, for large or small audiences, kids, adults, all ages.

**My Thoughts:** This is, simply put, one of the most powerful effects in all of magic. There’s a ton of different books, DVDs, machines, etc. that detail different handlings for the effect. I’ve been using Jeff McBride’s simple handling highlighted on his wonderful “Magic on Stage” DVDs. If you’re looking for a good physical handling for Snowstorm, the price of the DVD is worth it just for this one effect. (*AUTHOR’S NOTE: While I am not going to reveal McBride’s handling, I will say that he presents it as a two-person effect, but once you understand his handling, it should take you about ten seconds to realize how easy it is to ‘convert’ his handling for a solo performance.*)

However, this book is mostly about presentations. In my case, I verbally set up the effect first, then I play some music as I perform the physical effect. The music I use is some dramatic instrumental music off of the first X-Files Movie soundtrack. Verbally, what I came up with makes sense, ties into superheroes (which engages the kids) and even offers a little nugget of a self-esteem message. Here’s what I say to set the effect up...

**Routine Script:** “When I was a young boy, I was picked on a lot because I was different. I always imagined how cool would it be to have superpowers to deal with those problems.

“I thought, ‘if I were Spiderman, I could just swing away anytime anyone picked on me.’ Then I realized that wouldn’t work because spiders scared me.

“Then I thought, ‘If I could fly like Superman, I could fly away anytime anyone picked on me.’ Then I realized, ‘that’s silly, people can’t really fly.’

“Then I thought, ‘What if I could control the weather? I could make it snow every day so school would always be canceled!’

“Then I realized something important: it doesn’t matter what anyone says about me. It’s not good to run from your problems. All that matters is how you feel about yourself...still, I thought it would be cool to control the weather...”

**End Notes:** After this simple script, the music starts and then I perform Snowstorm. This script may be short, but please don’t dismiss it because it’s so short. Verbally setting up an effect doesn’t have to take a lot of words. In my work, unless the entire effect will be a

talking routine, like my Arm Chopper routine (*AUTHOR'S NOTE: From Volume 2*), then I don't want a lot of script to set up a magic-set-to-music routine.

It literally took me years to come up with an original routine and for years I refused to use the tired old "I never saw snow as a kid" routine that many magicians use, so for the longest time I just started music and went right into the routine...but that was so unsatisfying to me. I felt like a generic magician doing a generic trick. This simple script gives the effect meaning, reveals several things about me personally, and infuses the routine with a hint of a message. Have fun with it.

## Sword Thru Neck

**Effect:** A set of neck ‘shackles’ is placed around a volunteer’s neck for ‘protection.’ A sword is then pushed through the volunteer’s neck, miraculously leaving him unharmed.

**My Thoughts:** Although I still prefer my Arm Chopper routine, the Sword Thru Neck is great for audiences who have already seen my Arm Chopper. The Sword Thru Neck that I use ran me about \$200 from Hocus Pocus.

When I was working on my routine, the one “issue” I had was trying to remember was where to place the sword. You see, there are two ‘slots’ in which you can place the sword...one slot where the sword’s tip will go straight through and allow you to pop a balloon beforehand, ‘proving’ the sword is sharp. The other slot allows the gimmicked sword to slide into the neck shackles, around, and through the other side, showing the sword going through the volunteer’s neck.

To eliminate the fumbling, what I wound up doing was taking a sharpie and next to the slot where the sword will go straight through, wrote a tiny “Y” for “Yes,” for “Yes, the sword will go straight through.” Next to the slot where the sword will go ‘around and through’ the volunteer’s neck I wrote an “N” for “NO,” as in “No, the sword won’t go straight through.”

The point is, having these little, teeny marks makes it a lot easier to push the sword in the right slot during a show, allowing me to focus on the presentation and my audience.

Now, as an unadvertised bonus, I am now going to include my personal presentation for Sword Thru Neck. As you’ll see, it’s funny, commercial and plays very strong.

Admittedly, there’s some similarities to my Arm Chopper routine (which is why it’s an unadvertised bonus. Using this for repeat audiences means having a new effect ‘echo’ the previous show is, for me, a lot of fun.

**Routine:** I announce to the audience that we are going to do something filled with...danger. Of course the kids cheer! I ask for a volunteer, always a boy of at least 10 years old. Once I have him up on stage, I introduce myself to him and learn his name. Then it’s time for the routine.

“John,” I say, “you’re not a little kid anymore. You are an adolescent, BLOSSOMING into adulthood!”

As I deliver that last line, I am raising my right hand in the air in a very Shakespearian gesture, really hamming it up.

“And therefore,” I continue, “I’ve found that people your age tend to be a little frightened over what I’m about to show you...be brave...wait for it...”

As I'm delivering this line, I have cued up the classic theme from the movie "2001," and as the music reaches its climax, I bring out a 12" round yellow balloon. John is confused while everyone else laughs at the absurd idea that anyone would be frightened of a balloon.

"I know, John, it's just a balloon, but I'm using the balloon to show you that you really don't have to be afraid of...THIS!"

At this point I bring out the sword for the effect.

"That's right, it's a great big sword! However," I continue, "would you all like to learn a secret of magic?" Of course most of the kids all shout YES.

"Okay," I say, "everyone raise your hand in the air and make a promise." The kids all raise their right hands, mimicking me. "Repeat after me. I.."

The kids all say "I."

I say, "state your name..."

Of course the kids all say "State your name" which never fails to get a huge laugh, especially from the adults! This admittedly old bit gets a huge reaction AND more importantly is a great way to get parents laughing with humor more on their level without trying to use 'blue' or off-color humor. (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: Here's an important tip that I've noticed with that old bit. When the kids say, "State your name," smile, shake your head and in a general sense, non-verbally communicate the fact that THIS is the first time this little business has ever happened to you. Comedy is, so often, about reactions and by YOU reacting that you can't believe the kids repeated the phrase "State your name," you'll get a much bigger laugh than if you play it with a wink and act like you planned it all. You'll see I use this same gag when doing the 'Sketchy Drawing' routine later in this book. Obviously when doing both effects in a show, I only use this bit one time!***)

I shake my head in mock frustration and say, "Just don't tell anyone! Put your hands down! The secret is this: This is a FAKE sword. It can't hurt a fly. I'm going to first push the sword right through the balloon WITHOUT popping it. Then you'll see how safe the sword is, then we can push it right through JOHN!"

Of course, everyone starts cheering at this!

"But," I begin, "I want the balloon to look like John, so hold still..." Here I take the balloon and with a large Sharpie I've had in my pocket, I draw a rudimentary 'face' on the balloon. Really, I just draw a pair of eyes and a mouth. I purposely do NOT try to make it look like John in the slightest because I don't want to give the kids in the audience any 'ammo' to continue teasing John after the show's over.

“There we are!” I announce triumphantly. “Okay, so it doesn’t look like John at all, but it IS pretty lifelike.” This absurd line sets up a key joke in a moment. “Here, John, hold onto the balloon while I get something...” At this point, I take out from my table the neck stocks that will go around John’s neck in a moment.

“Okay, John, here’s what’s going to happen. First, I’m going to shove this sword into the balloon and it won’t pop. Then, you’ll know that the sword really is fake like I said, then we can put the stocks around your neck and push the sword right through your neck without anything going wrong!”

The entire time I’m delivering these lines, from the moment I give John the balloon to hold, I’m actually looking at the balloon’s “face” as I’m speaking. When I finish, I act frustrated that John has not responded. I start snapping my fingers, saying “hello?” and so on until I ‘realize’ I’ve been talking to the wrong John.

“Oh, sorry John, I got the two of you confused. You both look so much alike.”

Admittedly, this gag sometimes flies over the kids’ heads and sometimes they get it and laugh, but adults always get a kick out of it. It’s an example of humor for adults that is not inappropriate for kids. The key to this gag is acting...really acting as though you’re frustrated ‘John’ is not responding. Do not OVER act. Try to act naturally. Mugging can kill a gag like this.

I then take the balloon and put it in the neck stocks. I ask the audience, “Ready? On the count of three, I’ll push the sword right through the balloon and you’ll see nothing bad will happen, showing the sword is fake.” I push the sword part way into the stocks and as the audience counts to three, I push the sword completely through the stocks, popping the balloon. Startled, I yank the sword out and look chagrined.

“John don’t worry...I’m SURE I won’t mess up with your head! Hold still...” At this point, I put the stocks around his neck, having him hold the handles to make this easier. To cover this ‘dead time,’ as I’m locking the stocks, I ask John, “Do you know what an attorney is?”

If John says “No,” I respond with, “Good!” which gets a nice laugh.

If John says “Yes,” I respond with, “Darn!” which also gets a nice laugh!

Once John is locked in, I say to the audience, “In a moment, I’m going to shove this sword right through John’s neck...and if anything goes wrong, there’s only one thing to do: go through John’s pockets for loose change!” Another good laugh.

“Okay, everyone, on three! One...two...are you ready John? One...two...audience, are YOU ready? One...two...am I ready? Okay, One...two...three!” On three, I shove the

sword into the proper slot in the neck stocks and the other end comes out the front, completing the illusion that the sword is coming out of John's neck.

A quick note on the whole “one...two...false start” I just wrote. I covered this more in depth with my Arm Chopper routine in Volume Two, but essentially, I like the idea of building up the suspense by starting to count but cutting myself off, but I always disliked other presentations where the performer would say something like, “On three! One...two...three weeks ago I tried this...” I dislike that approach because it comes off that you're intentionally messing with the kids, but with my approach, and specifically my acting during this part of the routine, I'm trying to communicate the idea that I really am counting but I interrupt myself because I want to double check that everyone is ready.

Yes, I'm STILL messing with the audience, but I think my way is a bit more motivated from a character standpoint because I rarely if ever ‘wink’ at the audience. With my comedy, I play it straight, if that makes sense.

### ***Back to the routine...***

When last we left John, the sword is sticking out of his neck. I make sure to get him to turn in all directions so from a blocking standpoint everyone can see what's going on. I then go to remove the sword, but it's ‘stuck.’ I try pulling several times with no luck.

Finally, I get the bright idea to ask John, “I've got it! Open your mouth...” As John does so, I easily pull the sword out...sometimes finishing with either an exclamation of “Excalibur!” or, if I'm feeling like a true nerd, “By the power of Grayskull!”

I then lead the audience in applauding John which takes up a few seconds of ‘dead time’ that it takes me to ‘unshackle’ the neck stocks. I escort John back to his seat, ending the routine.

**End Notes:** I only perform this effect for older grades in school, for grades 3 and up. I feel anything younger than that runs the risk of scaring small children.

The main idea I like with this routine, similar to my Arm Chopper routine, is the fact that I take away the possibility of older kids yelling, “It's fake!” because before we do anything, I dismissively tell the audience that the sword is in fact fake...with the idea that I'm going to prove it by causing the sword to go through the balloon without harming it.

Then, the surprise of actually popping the balloon causes the audience to do a 180 degree turn in terms of expectations.

Try it, you'll like it!

## Floating a Kid Trick

**Effect:** The magician floats a kid from the audience!

**My Thoughts:** Okay, so I COULD have put just a little more effort into describing the effect, but I really didn't want to describe the Flying Carpet AND the Chair Suspension AND...

Just too many ways to float an audience member! So, consider the script I'm giving you to be applicable to "Your Favorite Method!"

As the ad copy for this book suggests, this is my solution to giving the effect a presentational frame – admittedly an obsession of mine – without relying on the tired old "When I was a kid, I dreamed of flying" stuff that many others use.

I wanted my presentation to be different. I wanted it to have meaning and if possible, I wanted it to be funny. Here's what I came up with. Feel free to alter it to suit your needs. I'll include a few additional notes afterwards.

**Routine:** "People ask me all the time how I learned magic. They ask if there's a school for it if I took classes or just how I learned. The truth is, I first learned magic by reading books in my school's library. Then I found even more books on magic in my public library so I could keep reading during the summer.

Another way I learn magic is by a monthly magic trick club! Each month, the company emails me a link to a brand new mp3 file. I just received the latest one earlier today, so let's listen together..."

At this point, over the sound system, a cheesy music track is heard. It plays for a few seconds and then a female voice is heard.

VOICE: "Hello, welcome to Acme magic. Today's lesson is Floating a Child in The Air. To do this effect, you'll need a board supported by two upward supports. You will also need a volunteer. The volunteer must sign the waiver. This is important, ever since...the incident. Pause the audio and get your volunteer now."

At this point, the performer selects a volunteer from the audience. He also has his "Two supports and a board" ready. He resumes the audio file.

VOICE: "Now that you have your two supports, board and volunteer, you are READY to float a child in the air!" (*pause*) "Tune in again next month to learn how to perform this amazing effect!"

At this point some more cheesy music plays, but this time it's more like the kind of music that plays during a game show when a contestant doesn't win...sort of a disappointment track.

The performer stuffs his hands in his pocket, looks around uncomfortably and finally says to his volunteer, "Wanna see a card trick?"

After the resounding "NO!" that roars from the audience as a whole, the performer says that he will attempt to 'figure it out anyway' and then goes on to perform the effect nonverbally, set to music.

**END NOTES:** Again, what we're talking about here is a lead-in for the effect. The overall concept is, of course, inspired by the Vanishing Bandanna routine. The whole routine is based on the concept of an audio program teaching the magic a trick.

The whole "tune in again next month" bit plays REALLY well, especially to the adults in the audience. Also, the whole "wanna see a card trick?" gets a great laugh. The part in the audio regarding the waiver form and reference to a past (vague) incident gets a good chuckle out of adults, too.

After I reveal that we're going to do the trick anyway, I play some fun upbeat music and pretty much don't speak for the rest of the routine.

Obviously, this lends itself to many more comedic possibilities than I use, but in my work, when I perform the Float A Kid trick – these days using a Chair Suspension – it's near the end of my 75-minute family night show and the kids are getting restless. It doesn't matter how good the show, movie or TV show is, kids get restless if they sit too long.

My routine plays about 5-6 minutes, with the audio track stuff, the process of selecting a volunteer and getting him/her onstage, the performance of the effect itself and so on. For me, that 5-6 minutes is just perfect. Any longer than that, and it feels too long and anything shorter than that and I feel like I'm burning through the trick too quickly.

However, if you're the type of performer who feels more comfortable with a longer routine, there are a lot of things you can do to get more time and laughs out of the routine. You could have the audio track apparently ask you questions and answer...and then the audio track responds to what you said.

In my opinion, the BEST "teach a trick with an audio track" routines out there are "Shoe Business" put out by Scott Alexander & Puck and Paul Romhany's "Multiplying Bottles" routine. There are a few others, but those are my favorites.

I originally planned on including the audio files with this book as I use them, but realized I'd have to include multiple methods for the different 'floating' effects out there. As I said, I currently use the Chair Suspension so the whole "Get two supports and a board

across the top” script works for me, but it would not work so well with a Flying Carpet. Therefore, you’ll have to make whatever adjustments in the script for your ‘floating effect.’

As far as the audio files themselves, there is a great free audio program out there called Audacity. Just Google Audacity Audio Program and it should come right up on a web search. It’s 100% free and enables you to create audio programs quite easily. You can add music, sound effects, fade-in/fade-out effects and more. I had my wife record the script in about 5 minutes.

I control my music throughout my show with Jim Kleefeld’s Sound controller, which is no longer available but there is a website I found with ipod remote controls available. Check it out: <http://www.buyijet.com/remotes.html>

If you’re a non-techie kinda person, another option is to have an off-stage assistance simply say the audio recording stuff off stage. This has the potential to be really funny because the two of you could find a lot of fun ad libs!

A third option is to have the script in book form and read the instructions yourself, and at the end realize that there are no more pages, just a ‘push’ for next month’s ‘lesson.’ I used this approach with an old rope routine I used to do.

Frankly, I feel the audio file method is the best because it adds texture, in the form of another voice, to the show.

The cheesy music is some copyright free stuff that I found online. Super simple to add that in using Audacity.

I will confess that in my actual show I still talk about getting an audio CD mailed to me each month. I know that may ‘date’ me which is why I use the term mp3 file in the show script. Use whatever you wish. :)

## “Sketchy” The Talking Sketchpad

**Effect:** The magician introduces a sketchpad and draws a face on it – eyes, nose, mouth. Incredibly, the eyes start moving, the mouth moves and as a finale, the magician tears the paper off of the pad and hands it out proving there is nothing “fishy” about the drawing!

**My Thoughts:** Sean Bogunia is a freakin’ genius. His take on the animated drawing is incredibly inspired because you get to hand the drawing out at the end! I know many performers prefer the Axtel talking board and in all honesty, I will probably be picking up one soon for repeat audiences. Either way, my routine will work for you.

When I started putting together a routine for this prop, I realized pretty early on that I didn’t want to do vent. I have nothing against vent, I was just too lazy to write an effective back & forth ‘dialog’ between myself and the other character.

After experimenting with the prop, I also realized that many performers fail to let the audience appreciate the miracle of what’s happening: you’re causing a drawing to come to life! This is amazing! Because this is so miraculous, why not allow the simplest of movements to begin the routine and let it build from there?

I first came along this line of thinking not from magic but rather from my work as a stage hypnotist. During my stage hypnosis show, my skits build from simple skits until the end of the show where the volunteers are dancing and doing a lot of really crazy things.

However, I’ve noticed that one of the biggest reactions from the audience in my hypnosis show is during the very first skit where I am telling the now-hypnotized volunteers that they are relaxing on a beach. I encourage them to stretch out their legs and get comfortable. Sure enough, the volunteers stretch out their legs and the audience goes absolutely crazy because they are seeing the real evidence of hypnosis for the first time.

Contrast this with performers using the Axtel board (oddly, I’ve never seen or heard of another performer using Sean’s prop.) Most I’ve seen jump right in with the board going crazy. It’s effective, sure, but since you’ve given the audience the ‘full monty’ of motion, the rest of your routine really needs to be funny and engaging otherwise the routine will get old real fast.

With my routine, there is a slow build and a wonderful use of the “magician doesn’t see it” principle. Of course I’m not taking credit for this principle nor am I taking credit for using it with an animated board...only that I extended it, added some great laugh lines, and polished a rock-solid 5-minute routine...with no vent. (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: If you use vent, you can easily extend this routine and get more mileage!**)

One final note: I will explain this routine in the context of a birthday party, but this routine was truthfully something I developed for my school shows. I’ll comment more on

that in the ‘end notes’ section. The key point is I’ve found the best way for me to begin the routine is to act like you’re going to draw a picture of an adult. The kids LOVE this, and you’ve got them hooked immediately.

**Routine:**

I take out a sketch pad.

“Because Mrs. Jones here was nice enough to have me come here for Lucy’s party, I’m going to do something nice for her...I’m going to draw your portrait!”

The kids all giggle. I take a marker and flip open the sketchpad to a blank page.

“Okay, Mrs. Jones, hold still...smile! Good, your eyes...the rest of your eyes...pupil...iris...it’s a science show, too...and your mouth.... whoops, mine’s a little crooked...”

*(AUTHOR’S NOTE: I’ll break in here to mention that as I’m doing this drawing business, the pad is facing away from the kids, a necessity with Sean’s prop at least until you have the eyes and mouth drawn. So the little comments above as I’m drawing are what I’m saying so there’s not just ‘dead air.’ I specifically mention drawing the pupils AND iris because I feel some audiences can “pencil read” me drawing as I draw big googly Simpsons-style eyes and I worry they could be mistaken as drawing glasses...and I certainly do not want anyone thinking I’m drawing anything to make fun of a person wearing glasses. Additionally, if you have Sean’s prop, his simple drawing is the one I use. Simple and easily visible for huge audiences.)*

Once the drawing is finished, I remark, “Well, it’s not going to look exactly like Mrs. Jones...but it does look like her...in her ameba stage!” *(AUTHOR’S NOTE: Full credit to Sean for that terrific line!)*

“Okay, it’s not REALLY Mrs. Jones at all...it’s actually my friend Sketchy. And I always like to bring Sketchy with me to a show, but for some reason, whenever I bring Sketchy out, people say the weirdest things to me, like Sketchy’s eyes are moving or something crazy like that...”

As I say that line, the drawing’s pupils slowly move to my right, sliding over to ‘look’ at me. The kids start freaking out and REALLY reacting over this small movement!

I look at the drawing and as I turn my head, the eyes slide back to the center.

“What are you guys talking about?”

The kids start screaming that the eyes have moved. As soon as I turn away, the eyes start moving back to me again. Once again, the kids start freaking out! I look at the page but as

I do, once again the eyes slide back to the middle position, as though they are staring straight ahead!

I scream – more of a yelp – and the kids laugh, too.

“Okay,” I say, “That’s pretty crazy, but do you guys want to see something GROSS?” Of course the kids all say yes!

“He’s gonna make his eyes go outside of his eyeballs! Ewwwwww!”

As I say this, the dark pupils of the drawing’s eyes slide slightly outside of the eye ‘circles’ I’ve drawn. The kids react, too.

“Oh no! He’s going to do it again!”

The kids squeal with delight as the pupils slide outside of the eye ‘circles.’

“All right...that was pretty crazy...It would be REALLY cool if Sketchy could smile, but that’s impossible...”

As I say the word “impossible,” sure enough, Sketchy ‘smiles!’ The kids go absolutely crazy! I look at the drawing, but the smile has already gone away. I look at the audience in confusion. The kids are of course screaming that the drawing ‘smiled.’ Confused, I look back at the drawing just in time to see it smile again. Just like before, I yelp and scream and the kids react accordingly.

I catch myself, calm down and continue:

“Okay, that was really amazing...but now do you want to hear Sketchy TALK?” Of course the kids do, so I motion for them to quiet down. The drawing’s mouth starts animating again as I badly try to do vent in a high-pitched voice saying:

“Hi kids! My name is Sketchy!”

Some younger kids really lose their mind while older kids groan and point out that it was just ME talking. I smile and explain:

“Okay, okay, that was just me...I know, that was pretty weak...Sketchy can’t talk. He doesn’t have any vocal cords – he’s just a piece of paper! But you know what? I can READ LIPS and Sketchy’s got something to say...”

At this point, the drawing’s mouth starts animating again. I “translate” for Sketchy: “Oh, this is cool! Sketchy says he’s got a special BIRTHDAY PROMISE he wants you all to say, so raise your hand like this...” here I raise my hand in the air like I’m going to promise to tell the whole truth in court. “...and repeat after me: I...”

The kids all say “I.”

I say, “state your name...”

Of course the kids all say “State your name” which never fails to get a huge laugh, especially from the adults! This admittedly old bit gets a huge reaction AND more importantly is a great way to get parents laughing with humor more on their level without trying to use ‘blue’ or off-color humor. (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: Here’s an important tip that I’ve noticed with that old bit. When the kids say, “State your name,” smile, shake your head and in a general sense, non-verbally communicate the fact that THIS is the first time this little business has ever happened to you. Comedy is, so often, about reactions and by YOU reacting that you can’t believe the kids repeated the phrase “State your name,” you’ll get a much bigger laugh than if you play it with a wink and act like you planned it all.***)

After the laughter subsides, get the kids to repeat the following...I’ll leave spaces, so you’ll know where to pause...

“...do swear to do my best...”

“...to make this birthday party...”

“...the best ever for Johnny...” (or whatever the birthday child’s name is!)

“...or I agree...”

“...to be hung upside...”

“...by my toenails...”

“...in my underwear.”

Huge laugh with that line. I’m not completely sure where I heard that last line, but I think it may have been the great Dave “Riz” Risley.

After the laughter dies down, then I say, “Oh! Kids! This is great! Sketchy’s gonna stay HERE! I just have to add some details to the drawing...”

Here is where I turn the drawing back to myself to fill in the eyes, as per Sean’s instructions in preparation for the tearing off of the drawing. To cover and get a free laugh I say, as I’m doing this, “I just have to make Sketchy’s eyes a little bigger...and his eyebrows bushier so he looks like my Aunt Ethel...” Again, BIG laugh.

I then turn the drawing back to the audience, showing off the slightly larger pupils and the ‘bushy’ eyebrows. I then add, opening, as the kids watch, something across the top of the drawing like “Happy Birthday Johnny” or something along those lines.

I then animate the mouth again as I say, “You know, people always think there’s something WEIRD about this drawing...people think there’s something strange about it because the mouth and eyes move, so watch...”

Here I SLOWLY and openly lift the paper up and tear it off...and hand the same paper to the birthday mom, or birthday child if I sense he’s not going to go crazy and tear it up. ***(AUTHOR’S NOTE: If you’ve been doing birthday parties as long as I have, you know that occasionally you meet a birthday child who is otherwise ‘normal,’ not special needs or anything, but they are so excited and fired up that they crush everything they touch! I had a birthday kid, one time, get so frazzled and fired up that he’d grab every other balloon animal for the other guests as I made them and crush them til they popped. The kid was possessed, I’m sure of it!)***

I then ask the person I hand the drawing to (usually the adult!) if there are any moving parts or anything attached to the drawing. Of course they say ‘no,’ and usually at this point, everyone (kids AND adults) is so amazed you could hear a pin drop in the room!

**End Notes:** Most of this routine would play great for the Axtel Board and admittedly, the actual animation of the Axtel board looks better than the Manual Sketch Pad, but in my experience, the ‘money moment’ is when I hand the same drawing out to someone in the audience. It’s such a powerful moment – it could be a closer and while I usually do not close with it, it’s always near the end of my show and is one of the things I’m most asked about.

Here’s a few tips to keep in mind:

- I really feel that scrawling a message across the top of the page is a nice touch. The handwriting looks so casual, I think subconsciously people in the audience think it MUST be the same drawing because they’d notice the change in the handwriting. I don’t point this out, but I think it “sinks in” below conscious awareness.
- If you are using this in school assembly shows (as I most often do), you can have the drawing ‘ask’ you questions about the show, allowing this routine to become a recapping point in the show...in fact, when I’m talking to a school prospect on the phone, this is one routine I always mention.
- If you are doing this in schools, daycares, summer camps, corporate family picnic, whatever, then here is a GREAT pro marketing tip I can share with you ***(AUTHOR’S NOTE: and this is the incredibly cool tip I mentioned in the ad copy for this book!)*** Print your website on a small address label and place it at the bottom of the page. I make mine very small, just 14pt or so in size so it’s not going to stand out like a beacon, but if someone is looking at the paper up close

after the show, they'll see the website. Additionally, during the show, as I hand the paper to an adult, I ALWAYS instruct them to hand the drawing up where everyone can see it after the show. I ALWAYS see the drawing hanging up in schools, either in the main office or on the PTA/PTO bulletin board, usually located near the main entrance.

This is like having a huge business card hanging up for all to see – parents will ask their kids what the drawing is all about and BAM! The kids excitedly describe what happened. Don't overlook this!

# ConFab Headline Prediction

## The Basic Effect

A sealed FedEx envelope is handed out to someone at the beginning of the program. At the end of the program, several local newspapers are handed out to audience members. (In a corporate setting, there are usually round tables that seat 8. I will usually give one or two to each table.)

At the appropriate part of the show, the performer encourages the audience to select their own headlines, phrases, or even individual lines of an article out. The performer writes these down on a notepad, cautioning the audience that for entertainments' sake, to please stick with 'pleasant' headlines and articles. The person holding the FedEx envelope opens the sealed envelope. Inside is a smaller 6"X9" envelope, which is also sealed.

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 has all of the audience-selected material on it in as much detail as the performer cares to have.

## 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 usually 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.

Even though with the above handling one must double-write the material the audience selects, I think it adds an additional layer of deception in that not only do I predict the day's headlines but ALSO specific headlines and lines of articles, so it becomes a double mystery: "How did he predict WHICH things from the newspaper would be chosen?"

With all of that being said, you can also dispense with this extra step and simply have your prediction written in advance, which makes double writing unnecessary and keeps the pace quick.

But I prefer the added level of deception. :)

One additional note: many mentalists purposely make the actual wording of their predictions somewhat vague, so the wording does not actually match the headlines, adding a supposed layer of believability. I personally do not do that as I've found it plays better as an exact match...but then again, I am more of a John Archer style of performer in that I do not mind mixing magic and mentalism.

Ultimately, the choice is yours.

### **My History of The Effect**

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: With the company's recent 'difficulty,' insert your own joke here.*)

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've used this method for a lot of different presentations, such as a dream vacation type of routine and much more. In this book, I'll be concentrating on my approach to the headline prediction.

Since most of my mentalism-based work is for corporate holiday parties, 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](http://www.hocus-pocus.com)) but first-time clients get what you are about to read. It's been my closer for at least twelve 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 corporate people at a holiday party.

At this point of my show, near the end, I will pass out copies of local newspapers to the tables as mentioned previously. The FedEx (or US Priority Mail Envelope) is in the hands of my client, having been mailed to her previously. ***(IMPORTANT NOTE: It's a necessity to call your client before the show and remind her to bring the envelope SEALED to the event. I will often place a sticker with my signature across where the rip cord tears open the envelope, so if the sticker is torn or damaged, I know the person has snooped...and I will then skip this effect and go right into my dream vacation handling with another envelope I've brought with me as a backup!)***

I approach my client and say, "Sheila, please verify everything I'm going to say is true. Two weeks ago you received the sealed FedEx envelope you are currently holding. The postdate verifies how long you've had it and I have not had the opportunity to come anywhere near it. I also asked you to keep it sealed until now, isn't that true?"

"Yes."

“Great, Sheila!” 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, “Folks, there are several copies of your local newspaper on the tables in front of you. Please go through the paper and find an interesting article or phrase. I’ll just grab a few...by the way, only pick POSITIVE article headlines or phrases since this is supposed to be fun. You can certainly use headlines, or you can even use a phrase in the article itself.”

I then go to a few tables and get headline or article phrases. Only 3 or 4 is really necessary. 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 choose that?” Of course, if the person gives a funny answer, 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.)***

After I’ve obtained a few headline or article suggestions I will continue:

“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 once

again reinforce all the suggestions 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 selections of several spectators from a future issue of a newspaper 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***

*the word 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:

**“The Buffalo Sabres drop their third straight...”**

**“Senator Johnson to address graduating class...”**

**“Gas prices drop 10 cents in the last week...”**

Or whatever was selected from the newspaper by the audience.

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 mailing the prediction 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. Depending on what the audience selects, 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.

While the card must be folded in this manner to be palmed and dropped into the sealed package, you can have it unfolded as the routine begins to maximize your writing surface area. As you ask for the information from each table, you'll have a few moments to fold or unfold the card as needed to maximize your writing area.

### **Notebook Preparation**

Have a blank page opened and ready for the double writing. Use the bulldog clip to hold the folded prediction card to keep everything in its place until it's time to perform the routine.

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 with my client. Again, remind your client **A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE SHOW TO MAKE SURE SHE BRINGS IT!!!** I've had a few clients forget it, meaning I've had to alter the ending of my show.

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

When it comes time to perform, I hand the copies of the local newspaper out and then 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 in living rooms. 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 it to reinforce it in the audience’s mind.

As an example, after someone suggests “The Sabres travel back to Buffalo, NY,” I might say, “So what made you choose the phrase ‘The Sabres travel back to Buffalo, NY?’”

Later, when Sheila is onstage with me, she can see and verify that I’ve written that exact phrase 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 passing out the sheet of notebook paper, I’m negating the idea of writing the stuff down on something else in their mind.

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 scissor 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 cannot 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 also use a "Dream Vacation" presentation quite a bit. Check out my book, "Cause & Effects – Volume 2" available from Hocus Pocus for details on my other approaches to this method.

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.

## Spelling Bee Presentation

**Effect:** A board is shown with seven letter cards horizontally arranged in a jumbled order. The cards are held inside the board by way of slots. Turning the board around reveals numbers on the back of the board. The performer assures the audience that the letters actually do spell something. The board is flipped around, and the letter cards are removed. Without looking at the mixed cards, audience members tell the performer where each card goes, naming off numbers to make the selection process easier, trying in essence to spell a word simply by guessing where each letter goes because the magician only shows the back of the cards. Incredibly, when all the letters are arranged according to the audience’s decisions, the board is turned around, revealing that the audience selected EVERY letter correctly!

**My Thoughts:** The only downside to the routine is the fact this selection process by the audience can really drag. Really, “Okay, where do you want to put this letter? “Good, where do you want to put this letter? What about this one?” is NOT the most compelling presentation! Most performers I’ve seen using this prop try to rush through that selection process to ‘get to the good stuff.’ I decided to follow the sage advice of Eugene Burger and others who write about the necessity of making the journey interesting – it’s not the ‘ah-ha’ moment of revelation that makes the effect worth it but rather the entire journey from beginning to end. With that in mind, I’ve changed the entire structure of the routine by just using one volunteer onstage with me (*others present the event by calling random people in the audience and ask those people to call out numbers*) and added some very funny lines during the selection process. The lines are “kid friendly” and completely age-appropriate.

In my opinion, having the one single volunteer onstage adds focus to the routine, whereas by calling on various people in the audience, kids are so excited to help at all during the show that the routine becomes a muddled mess as kids try to get the performer’s attention. Additionally, using one volunteer, for me, really opened up the comedic possibilities.

Finally, in most presentations where audience members call out numbers from their seats, the performer holds up a card, shows it blank side to the audience and solicits a number.

This means that the PERFORMER decides which card will be selected next. True, the audience must decide where each card goes, but in my single volunteer presentation, she gets to mix up the cards AND select WHICH card will be selected each time AND she gets to decide the position of each card. In essence, this way of presenting the effect adds an additional layer of impossibility to the routine.

Like most of the stuff I create in these books, the presentation isn’t the ‘stuff that dreams are made of’ but are in fact suitable for the real world. I’ve been presenting Spelling Bee in this fashion for years now and I can assure you that my ‘selection process’ is the highlight of the routine.

Also, check out the “End Notes” after the routine, as I’ve included a nice little unadvertised bonus...

**Routine:** I mention needing a volunteer and this is enough to generate interest. I call one volunteer up on stage and introduce the prop.

“Hi Julie! Thanks for helping me!” (*AUTHOR’S NOTE: Manners first...*)

“I’ve got this board with seven letters all jumbled up. They spell something, but rather than just tell you, which would be kinda boring, we’re going to have you guess and try to spell the word.”

At this point, I turn the board so the audience (and Julie) can no longer see the letters.

Once the board’s “back” is facing the audience, I point out the numbers.

“Look, the board has seven different numbers on it. You’ll tell me where to put each card by number. I’m going to take the cards out...”

The nature of the Spelling Bee prop is such that when the board is turned numbers side to the audience, everyone can still see the back of the letter cards sticking above the board. I pull out all the letters and put them in a haphazard pile, face down, on my performing table, which is roughly waist high for me.

“Julie, I’d like you to swirl the cards around, mix them up, like you’re playing that old game ‘go fish.’”

Julie mixes the cards.

“Great! Now, put your finger on top of ANY of the cards and just slide one over to me...”

When Julie does this, I pick up the card, being careful not to let the audience or Julie see the identity of the card.

“Okay, Julie, can you see through this card?”

Julie says “No.”

I respond with, “So you don’t have X-Ray Vision?”

Usually, Julie giggles and says “No.” Other times she looks at me like I’m a moron.

“So if I ask you to guess where this card should go, you really have no idea where to put it, right?”

“Right,” she says.

“I’m going to try to help you a little bit. Inside my brain, I know exactly where this card is supposed to go...so I want you to look DEEP in my eyes and try to read my brain and say out loud which number I should put this card.” (*AUTHOR’S NOTE: Sometimes I do say ‘read my mind’ but more often than not, I say the phrase ‘read my brain.’ It’s kind of whimsical sounding and sometimes makes kids giggle.*)

I hold the card, back to Julie, and open up my eyes as wide as I can make them, big-eyed, and stare at Julie, moving in to about a foot away from her face as I say, “Okay Julie, READ MY BRAIN and tell me what number you want me to put this card!”

For some reason, this whole ‘bug-eyed’ thing really gets the kids laughing! Julie makes her selection and I put the card on the number she indicated. I ask her to slide another card toward me of her choosing. (*AUTHOR’S NOTE: I don’t make a big deal of the fact that she gets to choose each card as I try to keep the exposition down, but for those adults and astute kids who notice, this is a solid point.*)

I hold up this card as before and as I do I say, “Once again, Julie, look DEEP into my eyes, read my brain...right about here, Julie’s thinking, ‘why is this creepy dude staring at me?’”

That’s a laugh-getter and eventually Julie names her selection and I place it where she indicates. She slides a third card toward me...I pick it up as before and say, “Look DEEP into my brain! Am I creeping you out yet?”

Another laugh line. The key to making this work is the fact that when I started performing this effect, I too really wanted to make the selection process faster, yet I noticed kids ALWAYS hesitate as they debate with themselves over which number they select. Their hesitation gives me the opportunity to use these lines.

Julie selects the fourth card and as I get the card into the air, I once again make my eyes “bug eyed” as I say to Julie, “Look deep into my eyes and choose a number...quickly, please, my eyeballs are drying out!”

Julie chooses her number and I put the card where she indicates. She slides the fifth card over to me, I get it into position and, with eyes bulging, say one of the funniest lines of the whole routine: “Look deep into my eyes...or up my nose!” As I say this line, I angle my nose upward toward her, flaring my nostrils.

Julie names her number and she slides card number six, one of the two remaining cards, over to me. My line this time is, “As you look deep into eyes, can you smell the onions I had for breakfast?” As I do so, I get closer to her, mouth hanging open. Lots of “Ewww’s” and calls of “Gross!” from the audience here!

For the final, seventh card, I pick it up myself and say, “Well, Julie, there’s only card left, so we obviously don’t have to do the silly eye thing....” As I say this line, I am looking at the audience. After the line is said, I wait for a count of two and then suddenly lunge toward Julie again, eyes bulging. The audience laughs as Julie names the final, only remaining number.

I put the final card in the final slot. “Julie, you didn’t have X-Ray Vision, so really, you were guessing where each card should go, right?”

Julie says “Yes.”

I finish the routine by saying to the audience, “Even though Julie didn’t know which card was which and even though I didn’t even tell her what word we were spelling, somehow, Julie guessed right for EVERY card...spelling the word RESPECT (or whatever word we’re spelling).”

At the same moment I utter the word, I slowly, dramatically turn the board around to reveal the word to the audience. I thank Julie and walk her back to her seat or at least the stairs back to the seating area.

**End Notes:** As you can see, the routine selection process of the letters plays very well, the lines are funny and there is more focus than the old scatter shot approach I’ve seen others use.

Here is some seven letter words you can use the spelling bee concept for if you are using this prop in an educational show for schools or libraries. I’ll also include a few notes about the message that could go along with each word and even the show that each word fits in with my own school programs.

**RESPECT** – This one fits into my bullying show and/or my self-esteem show. Respect is a powerful word – one that cannot be bought or taken.

**READING** – Library or school reading shows. However, although I used to spell **READING** for my reading and library shows, I no longer do this as I think it’s too redundant: the kids **KNOW** already that the show is about reading as they’ve been told by their teachers. Therefore, if I use Spelling Bee in a reading themed show, I now spell...

**WEALTHY** – I use this word to talk about the fact that without good reading skills, a person is not going to have as many opportunities to get a really high paying job. The only quibble some people may have is that it seems to promote a materialistic message. Personally, I feel with any themed program, it’s a good idea to include benefits or motivating factors for the audience and money is/can be a motivating factor for some people. Just look at how our society idolizes celebrities!

ANIMALS – Good for a ‘go green’ show in that the benefits of going green not only benefit us but also benefit the other living things on our planet. Appeal to the compassionate side of the audience.

SPYWARE – I use this word in my Internet Safety show to talk about Spyware and some of the dangers of the Internet. It’s a cautionary message to stay away from any sites and/or downloads that your parents have not thoroughly checked out.

ALCOHOL – I use this in my anti-drug shows for older grades. I talk about how just because you can see something for sale in a store (as opposed to “on the street”) does NOT mean that it’s safe.

CHOICES – Another good one for a self-esteem show. The power and importance of this word should be fairly obvious to anyone doing educationally themed shows. Of course, there are plenty of other seven letter words one can use in a theme show.

***(AUTHOR’S NOTE: In case I have not done so already, I should stress that if you have not purchased Spelling Bee yet, the board comes with slots and numbers for seven letters. You can also use six letters as the card deck that comes with the prop does include blank cards.)***

I think Spelling Bee is one of the most versatile kids show props in the world and because it is a ‘classic,’ I think many magicians overlook it.

Before I close out this routine’s section in my book, I also want to share a story. If you are familiar with the prop then you understand that the selection process really is completely fair – that is, your volunteer(s) actually pick where each card is placed in the board, but due to a simple and clever concept, no matter where the cards are selected to go, you still show your ‘force’ word in the end.

As I’m going through the selection process, I often keep track of how many letters’ positions the volunteer actually gets correct. Most of the time, the kids don’t get a single letter correct. Occasionally, they’ll get one or two. On very special occasions, they’ll get four...but recently, at a school show, the girl helping me with the effect got every letter correct!

This excited me to no end...and even caused a brief short circuit in my brain because, and I’m not making this up, after the 6<sup>th</sup> letter was correct, I thought, “Wow! I hope she gets the LAST letter right!”

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Okay, now that you’ve stopped laughing at me (yes, I deserved it!) I will also add that while this delighted me, it also frustrated the hell out of me because I couldn’t tell them!

There was a teeny part of me that wanted to simply explain the whole trick and then add,  
“But she really DID do it!”

Obviously, I didn’t do it.

## Silk To Egg

I love the classic Silk to Egg effect. As far as sucker effects go, I don't think there's a better one out there. The ending is just so impossible seeming, due to the delicate nature of eggs and just the unexpected nature of the big moment. It's quite dramatic.

I perform the effect quite often, both for gigs I drive to as well as gigs I have to fly to.

When I drive, I transport the egg(s) in a simple egg carton, one of the sturdy heavy cardboard ones right from the grocery store. I simply cut one of the regular dozen egg cartons in half, meaning I can tuck the carton easily into my case, which keeps the egg safe.

When I fly, it's not going to surprise any of you to hear that I do not even entertain the idea of taking eggs with me. When I land, I simply drive to a local grocery store and pick up some eggs.

Here's where the story kicks in...

On one particular fateful gig, in Arizona, if memory serves, I stopped by a local 7-11 Store to pick up some eggs. I should break in at this point to explain that I never liked buying a carton of eggs just to do the trick once or twice and then letting the rest go to waste.

So, I walk into the 7-11 Store and eureka! I spot single eggs on sale! Relishing the opportunity to just buy one egg and still do the effect, I quickly paid for the single egg and wander merrily off, quite pleased with myself...never bothering to question why the single eggs were NOT in a fridge with the other dairy products, but rather resting in the same place as the already-prepared foods.

Later that night, I'm doing my show and I'm at the point of the show where I'm getting ready to reveal the supposed 'plastic' egg that a moment ago housed a bright red silk is now a real un gimmicked egg.

I crack the egg on my glass and instead of the expected running, sticky yolk coming out, I noticed that the egg was still curiously...solid feeling.

I squeezed the egg, bits of the eggshell flaking away...finally realizing that the egg was in fact hard-boiled. I continued on as best as I could, explaining that the red 'hanky' (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: Never refer to it as a silk!***) was gone and that the egg was now completely SOLID!

You could hear a pin drop.

Moral of the story? Know that any egg NOT in a fridge is probably a hard-boiled egg and NOT right for Silk to Egg!

Honestly, I can look back on it now and laugh!

### **Unadvertised Bonus: My script for Silk to Egg!**

**My Thoughts:** As I said earlier, I do love the Silk to Egg effect. My routine’s physical handling is pretty simple, though a little hard to put into print. Follow along, and most importantly, my script is included because what I wanted to do is add some bits of business to the routine – most scripts are simply based on exposition... “now I’m going to do this, now I’m going to do that.” Boring!

Some of the bits I’m using were inspired by a festival balance/high-wire act/juggler performer I saw about a decade ago.

**Routine:** “I know many people want to know how to do magic, so I’m going to teach you all a really neat effect you can do for your family and friends. First, take out a colored hanky. If you don’t have a colored hanky, you can borrow one of your mom or dad’s dress socks...just don’t tell them I told you to do that!”

At this point, I take out from my table a red 12” silk.

“Then, you walk up to a friend of yours and say, ‘hey! I’m gonna show you a magic trick!’ Usually they’ll run away. So then you throw them to the ground and say, ‘hold still. I’m going to show you a magic trick!’

“Then, you wave the hanky around like this...”

I started waving the hanky back and forth, in a kind of figure eight pattern.

“People will think you’re crazy...then you keep on waving til it’s not funny anymore...then you keep on waving til there’s a long uncomfortable silence...”  
*(AUTHOR’S NOTE: This little exchange involves long pauses between each line and the last line about the long uncomfortable pause WILL get you a laugh, but you have to wait a few seconds. Honestly, the first few times I tried it out I was afraid the ‘bit’ was dying, but there comes a point where the laughter starts. It’s really cool!)*

At this point I stop waving the silk around and start stuffing it into my fist.

“Then you stuff it in your hand, making sure your sleeves are up so no one thinks it’s going up your sleeve and when it’s all tucked away, you blow on it and show it’s changed into an egg!”

I then reveal the egg to gasps from the audience.

“I’ll teach it to you...the secret is this: it’s a plastic egg with a HOLE in it and the hanky goes right inside!”

I then slowly pull the hanky out so everyone can see the hanky does in fact go INSIDE the egg. I leave enough of the silk, so the egg is hanging from the end of the silk.

“Oh, I forgot! Anytime I teach magic, I need to get my sign out...”

Here I reach into my table and pull out a laminated sign that reads “Class in Session.” I stick it to the front of my table via Velcro on both the table and the sign.

“There! Now we’re ready! Here’s what you do. You need a red hanky...” I take the hanky in my other hand and display the plastic egg in my firsthand, by putting my thumb inside the egg. “Have your parents cut a hole in the egg, big for your thumb to go into very easily AND big enough for your thumb to come back out easily...” I demonstrate by pulling the egg off of my thumb.

“Then, you put the hanky in your pocket, in your table, behind something, whatever.” I demonstrate by putting the silk into my table and casually yet openly showing the right palm empty. “Then you hold the egg in your hand in a secret way called palming. Palming means you hold your hand very naturally.”

Here, I am holding the egg in a loose palm.

“Now, I see you’re looking at my hand, but that’s because you know that it’s there, but if you didn’t know that it was there, you wouldn’t know, you know?” (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I got part of this line from the movie Sneakers starring Robert Redford. It’s a caper film, one of the best!**)

“Anyway, now you get the hanky out and wave it around...” I remove the hanky again from inside the table, “...and people will think you’re crazy...”

At this point I’m waving the hanky again.

“But the REAL reason you’re waving the hanky is so peoples’ eyes are drawn to the hanky, and they don’t watch your hand...then you tuck the hanky all the way into your hand, making sure your sleeves are up so no one thinks you’re pushing the hanky up your sleeve...”

“Oh, and this is important: as you tuck the hanky into the egg, don’t say ‘I’m tucking the hanky into my egg.’ It ruins the surprise.” (**AUTHOR’S NOTE: I actually did do that once during one of my first performances. Talk about brainfarts!**)

This is where I once again tuck the hanky into the egg again. I then reach into my table, pulling out a drinking glass.

“Now, this is important...keep the hole facing YOU. If anyone SEES the hole, they’re going to figure out pretty quick that there’s something weird about the egg.”

Here I hold the egg in one hand, between my thumb and first finger. I use my other hand to slowly ‘spin’ the egg, showing the ‘hole’ with the red hanky visible.

“If you accidentally show the audience the hole, then you gotta start over, so you peel the hole off.,.”

I peel the hole off and stick the little red egg-shaped ‘hole’ onto my “Class in Session” sign which is primarily white in color for the contrast. I then crack the egg into the glass, allowing the yolk and egg white to fall from a few inches above the glass so the egg visual is easily seen.

Of course, applause follows!

**Handling:** Now, I just covered the basic script so you could get a sense of the flow of the script. There’s still a great deal of exposition – necessary for the effect – but in my routine I inject a lot of humor and ‘asides’ to keep the entertainment flow up.

I also did not differentiate in my description too much between right and left hands, because I did not want to discriminate against lefties, but in this section, I will give a bare-bones description of the physical actions, using the point of view of a ‘rightie.’ The handling is pretty easy and allows for a fair display of the silk hanging out of the egg, rather than some handlings I’ve seen in which you are using a real egg the entire time.

Additionally, you end up clean at the end and the use of the sign allows you to eliminate any pocket use, which I really try to avoid in any stand-up routine.

Also, I learned the routine using a black ‘hole’ and a black silk, but I quickly changed it to red, as the red really ‘pops’ from the stage. (*AUTHOR’S NOTE: The genesis of this routine comes from Dave Dee’s library reading show. The show itself was truly dreadful, but the one ‘gem’ was his silk to egg handling.*)

**Equipment:** The sign I use is laminated 8” x 11” white card stock with the words “Class in Session” in big letters. On the back of the sign I stuck a bit of Velcro at the top in the middle.

On the table, I stuck a bit of Velcro on the upper left corner front.

The ‘hole’ is electrical tape that I’ve cut up into a small one-inch egg shape. Before the show, I stick the ‘hole’ onto the egg, leaving one corner sticking up slightly, making it easier to peel it off in the routine.

My fake egg is a simple plastic egg with the hole already installed. It was cheap, just a couple of bucks, purchased at a brick-n-mortar magic shop (remember those?) years ago.

I keep intending to upgrade and get a great looking wooden egg, but just haven't gotten around to it.

Although the risk of breakage is there, I do indeed use a real glass, a short, squatty tumbler. I use a real glass because I find it easier to break the glass, but obviously if you're worried about it breaking, by all means use a plastic one.

I also use one 12" red silk, though there are times when I'm packing for a show that I accidentally grab an 18" silk. (*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Taking a tip from Jeff McBride, I hang all of my silks, large and small, from a clothesline in my office.*)

All of these props are side by side, easily accessible in my case or table.

**Routine Actions:** For the description of the routine actions, I will differentiate between righties and lefties. Hopefully reversing these actions will be easy enough for lefties. To start the routine, I reach into my case and in my left hand, I palm the plastic egg, the hole away from my palm. In my right hand I pick up the silk by one corner. I then drop my left hand to the side as my right hand starts waving the silk about. I then bring my hands together and tuck the silk into the plastic egg. A moment later I slowly, carefully turn the egg revealing the hole. I then carefully pull the silk slowly out of the egg, leaving half the silk in the egg, which allows me to let the egg hang from the silk in my left hand.

After a moment of displaying the silk and egg in this fashion, I then use my right hand to put the egg into my left hand and allow the silk to dangle, elbow bent upwards, displaying this arrangement for the audience.

I reach into my case with my right hand. I palm the 'real' egg, making sure the 'hole' is AWAY from my palm. I also pick up the sign. I take the hidden egg and sign out and hang the sign from the table.

I then immediately use my right fingertips to pull the silk all the way from the plastic egg, with my right elbow bent. As the silk comes away from the plastic egg it falls over the back of my right hand (which is towards the audience) and naturally helps hide any tell-tale 'bulge' of my right hand as my fingers maintain their grip on the corner of the silk.

Using my left hand to manipulate the egg so I can put my left thumb inside allows me to display the egg on the end of my thumb, once again showing that this is undeniably a fake hollow egg, I then curl my fingers around the egg as my right hand moves in and under cover of the silk (still draped over the back of my right hand), I do two things at once: using my right fingers, I pluck the plastic egg off of my left thumb and palm the plastic egg in my right hand as the left fingers take the real egg into the left.

I then display the real egg in my left hand, again taking care not to flash the 'hole' because this would not make sense to see a red hole while the right hand holds the red

silk. I display it for a moment and then palm it, carefully, talking about palming it as I do so.

I then reach into the case and remove the silk, without the plastic egg, obviously. As I continue to speak, I tuck the red silk into my left hand, behind the real egg. Once the silk is carefully tucked into my hand behind the egg, I take the egg into my right hand – still taking care to keep the ‘hole’ facing ME – while at the same time I use my left hand (holding the silk) to reach into my case and ditching the silk while picking up the glass, which I set on the table.

The ‘work’ is done.

From here, it’s simply a matter of openly and slowly showing the ‘hole’ on the egg and ever so slowly, peeling the ‘hole’ off, sticking it to the sign (which everyone can see clearly) and cracking the egg open in the glass.

**End Notes:** I realize you may already have your own handling of silk to egg so feel free to adapt my script for your routine...I simply wanted to be complete.

Again, what I really like about my routine is the fact that there is no pocket work, I’m clean at the end, and the bits of business in the script as well as the amusing sign reveal, which, in addition to being a cute ‘bit,’ also provides a great place to stick the ‘hole’ at the end of the routine, allowing for great contrast.

I suppose you could also use a black sign with white letters and use a yellow silk and ‘hole,’ giving even more color contrast for larger audiences.

Finally, I keep spare ‘holes’ stuck to the inside lid of my little plastic ‘tackle box’ emergency kit in my case at all times.

Have fun!

## **Some Thoughts on Money Magic...**

I love money tricks and thus have come up with a few bits of business, comedy lines, thoughts on the logic or illogic of certain performances and more on a few of my favorite performance pieces with money.

### **An Amusing Line to Use With “Hundy 500” (Or ANY Five \$1 Bills to Five \$100 Bills Routine)**

Honestly, in many ways, Hundy 500 (or any number of ‘many one-dollar bills turn to many hundred-dollar bills’ routines) is the perfect opener for a strolling/close-up set. The idea of using money immediately captivates an audience and if the version of the trick is a strong one, it’s a great opener.

As the title for this little “interlude” suggests, my favorite version of the trick is Gregory Wilson’s “Hundy 500.” It’s easy to construct, easy to perform and other than rubber cement and bills, you don’t need anything else, so this is one of those great solutions if you fly to a gig and you lose your stuff and need to come up with material.

Wilson included several great lines to include in your presentation when spectators make their little ‘jabbing’ lines, none of which I’ll repeat here because that’s Greg’s material, but in my very first performance, I came up with a great line to use when a spectator says, “Hey, can you change those back?”

Let’s analyze this for a second...you’ve changed \$1 bills in to \$100 bills...and a spectator asks if you can change them back.

Realistically, I could, but why would I? Why would I want LESS money?

So that was my response. The exchange went like this:

“Can you change them back into ones?”

“Why?”

Big laugh. And whenever someone has asked me that same question ever since that first performance, that’s been my standard response and it always gets a huge response.

Now truthfully, the handling of Hundy 500 allows me to change the bills back in the same manner, but rather than perform a less desirable trick, I throw that line out and it works. Obviously, the key to it is not to be “snarky” but simply ask the question.

## **A Short Essay on The Hundred Dollar Bill Switch**

The classic Hundred Dollar Bill Switch, most often performed with a thumb tip, is my favorite close-up trick of all time. There's just something mind-blowing about borrowing a spectator's bill and, with your sleeves rolled up, folding it, and unfolding it very openly to show it's changed into another denomination or, as I do when performing close-up, into a 'mismade' bill. It's amazing and in many ways the perfect effect because a) it's using a borrowed object, b) can be done without a tabletop and c) the spectators can still hold their drinks in a corporate setting while you do it! (Add to the fact that the angles, with a little care, are really good and it's easy to understand why I like it so much.)

The handling I use is Kevin King's "Money Morph," one of the 'one trick' DVDs that many people like to gripe about, and I like his take on the classic handling because the way Kevin does the effect, the bill never leaves the spectator's sight during the folding/unfolding process.

While doing the mismade bill version for walk-around or strolling, it's obvious the spectators really like the oddball bill and although many over the years have stated they would like the bill to stay in its odd state, the transformation back to the original bill isn't met with any tremendous amount of resistance.

And then one day (I promise we're getting to the point of this essay), I had the occasion to see a friend of mine perform a motivational program and during it, he included a message about how money was not the most important thing in the world, and so on.

To illustrate the message, he borrowed someone's dollar and performed the Hundred Dollar Bill Switch, changing the lady's bill into a hundred-dollar bill...and then changed it back again. When he said he was going to change it back, a wave of knowing disappointment washed over the room. I say 'knowing' because no one in the room doubted for a minute that he was changing it back.

And I thought, "That's a terrible note to end a routine on."

I tucked that little thought in the back of my mind for several years until I was crafting a message for one of my school assembly shows where the hundred-dollar bill switch would fit. I had always just done the effect for strolling/close-up, but I was sure I could make it work for stage. I immediately realized I would NOT change the bill back.

I also utilized this same thinking with a different message (but the same trick) for my presentation on motivating salespeople.

In short, I borrow someone's bill and change it into a bill of a larger denomination...and then I give it to the person to keep.

Now, although I came up with the idea independently, Peter Loughran told me about a guy big in the corporate world who does this with much higher bills than I can afford to...but right at this moment I can't for the life of me remember who the guy was.

The point is the goodwill this generates is unreal.

When I do this in a school assembly, I ask a student for a dollar and change it to a five and he keeps it. I can afford to blow four bucks to really make an impression on the students.

When I do this for a corporate group, I ask for a one-, five- or ten-dollar bill and then change it to a twenty, letting the adult spectator keep it. I ask for a one, five or ten because, quite frankly, I'm trying to minimize my investment! (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: As luck would have it, to date, I've only been given one-dollar bills!***)

I can afford to give a twenty-dollar bill at corporate events because I charge a higher fee than a school assembly show and besides, my thinking is this: it's going to take a higher denomination of bill to create the same 'wow' effect for the corporate groups.

The entire point of this is to really look at the effects you perform and determine if there's anything in your set list that ends on a note of disappointment like the standard way of performing a hundred-dollar bill switch.

Just something to ponder!

And because this entire section is about money effects...

## **An (Untested) Idea for Bank Night or Just Chance**

Bank Night or Just Chance is the classic mentalism effect in which a set of envelopes, usually 4 or 5 "pay envelopes," are mixed and four people each choose an envelope and the mentalist keeps the last envelope for himself. The four people usually get pieces of paper or worthless items where the mentalist gets something of a higher value, like a large denomination of bill.

Max Maven has several nice routines – one of which, on his "VideoMind" series of DVDs. Eliminates the whole idea of money and just uses pieces of paper for the routine.

Another Maven creation, "Just Chintz," appears on his "Nothing" DVDs and it involves an amusing plot of the mentalist giving what he believes to be valuable prizes and the reality is the 'prizes' are awful.

In terms of physical handling, John Archer has created an incredible version in which the remaining envelope contains several bills, and the bills are not folded, adding to the

visual display (and thus climax) while also increasing the “how in the hell--?” factor. It’s a great version.

The version I currently use involves a handling and presentation by Lee Earle that uses no gimmicks (everything is completely ungimmicked) and to remove the ‘sting’ of the typical “ha ha, I get to keep my money while you dumb spectators get nothing” presentation, the four spectators each have a lottery ticket in their envelopes while the mentalist does keep his money.

Richard Osterlind also uses lottery tickets (and a gimmick) in his version of the plot but I personally his presentation to be a bit on the unclear side as far as the spectators understanding it all, so I’ve stuck with Lee’s.

Now, while the lottery tickets do take some of the ‘sting’ away, there is still a sense of disappointment. I recently had one of those “Eureka!” moments that was so profound and so compelling...that I immediately wondered if someone else has hit the same idea that I did. I haven’t found any performer using the same approach that I’m about to suggest but that doesn’t mean the person isn’t out there.

In short, the idea is simply to make every envelope a winner – put a twenty-dollar bill in every envelope except yours...the climax the effect, your envelope will have a hundred-dollar bill...or whatever denominations you want to use.

I’ll confess I have not used this idea yet, though if the right corporate gig came along (***AUTHOR’S NOTE: the right high-paying gig, that is!***) I will consider using it. It’s one of those ideas that I believe could make a performer stand out.

And obviously, if you’re doing any kind of corporate work and/or sales trainings, the obvious money tie-in from a presentation standpoint is potentially very strong!

## A Kids' Zombie Routine

Zombie is one of those classic effects which is so perfect and so open to interpretation that I believe new versions and variants on the basic concept will continue to be generated for the next hundred years.

What follows is my presentation, basically unchanged, for the last 16 years. I first tipped this routine a few years ago with a modestly produced DVD titled “The Funniest Zombie Routine in The World.” The DVD’s been out for a few years and while it continues to sell, I know a lot of performers like to read books for effects rather than use DVDs, so I’m including it in this collection. The routine is pretty simple in terms of handling, but if you are completely new to performing Zombie, I recommend Jeff McBride’s “Magic on Stage” DVDs.

After the basic routine, in which I’ll detail it as if I were doing the routine at a birthday show, I’ll cover some details, a few suggestions for altering the script for Bill Abbott’s Thing and more.

**Routine:** A large, 12” square wooden box with a pad lock keeping the lid locked is introduced and set on the table.

I begin, “Inside this box...is a tribble! They are amazing little critters and the best thing about the is that they can FLOAT in the air! Who wants to see it?” Everyone’s hands shoot up!

“All right...but there’s a catch: sometimes when the box is opened, and the tribble floats out, he can be a little...cranky. Don’t worry, I’ve got a med kid back here so if anything happens... I’ll be fine.

“Now, we need to do a special test to see if he’s feeling happy today...or if he’s feeling cranky. I brought along this key. If he causes the key to MOVE BY ITSELF, that means he’s going to come out to see everyone!”

The key I’ve introduced is a skeleton key. I ask for a volunteer (the birthday child if it’s at a birthday show) to come up and examine the key for any “strings. Mice, rope, or hidden reptiles.” Not finding anything, the child pronounces the key ready to go.

I place the key on my outstretched hand and ask everyone to stare at the key.

After several seconds, the key slowly and eerily turns over in my hand! I encourage a child to pick it up and check it out – no strings or anything attached!

Excitedly, I announce, “Do you know what that means? He’s going to come out and SEE everyone!”

Of course the kids all squeal with excitement. I send the child back to sit with the others. I then stand behind the box.

“I am now going to UNLOCK the box!” At this point, I hesitantly and oh-so-carefully unlock the box. Just as my body language starts to relax a bit, the padlock slips out of my hand and smacks the top of the box, making quite a loud noise. Horrified, I grab at the lock, quieting the sound. The kids giggle at my misfortune.

“Okay...do you want me to open it?” Usually the kids just nod. “All right...don’t make a sound!” I then slowly lift the lid off and then dramatically slam it back down, asking the kids, “Are you SURE you want me to open it?”

This combined action of slamming the lid loudly down and asking the kids if they really want me to open it really gets a big reaction!

I then cover the box’s opening with a foulard. I then try coaxing the creature out, expressing frustration.

“I don’t think he’s going to come out,” I explain, but just as I look away from the box, a shape is seen rising underneath the cloth. The kids squeal and point, but as I turn back to look, it drops back down. The kids giggle some more as this is repeated.

Finally, I STARE at the box: “I’m going to watch it closely!” I proclaim...and nothing happens, causing the kids to laugh again. I stoop to get down VERY close to the box...and suddenly, the creature rises out of the box, its round form pushing up the cloth, and it freezes near my eyes, which are locked on the form. It’s sort of like a standoff, and I hold this worried, frozen look on my face for several seconds as the kids laugh and react.

Eventually, the shape drops back down, and I stand up, relaxed. “I don’t think he’s---“and before I can finish that question, the form rises again...higher and higher...til it’s completely out of the box, the round shape floating in the air, my hands just delicately holding two corners of the cloth. The creature floats back and forth, finally darting toward members of the audience. I apologize profusely, yet the creature keeps “yanking” me along.

Finally, I proclaim, “Oh no! He’s coming out! You’re going to be able to see this hideous beast!” As I say this, I’m holding the ends of the cloth, so the entire foulard is hanging vertically like a curtain and the shape slowly reveals itself to be...a cute fuzzy guy with ‘wiggly’ eyes. The audience goes “Awww!” until suddenly the creature darts behind my backdrop or back to the box, depending on my performing conditions to end the routine.

**End Notes:** This routine plays STRONG! It may not read as much, but there isn’t too much I can do to successfully follow this routine for a kids’ group.

The workings should be obvious as far as making the creature float. I'm using a standard Zombie, but I've purchased "faux fur" from a craft store and completely covered the silver ball, only leaving the hole for the gimmick open. I then glued two big 'wiggly' eyes to the proper place on the ball where the front of the ball will be visible when you do the reveal.

If you're unfamiliar with the zombie routine in its classic form, there are YouTube videos of it you can watch. Melina in particular, has a beautiful routine with great technique – even though I really don't like her script setting up the effect. Again, Jeff McBride also teaches fantastic zombie techniques on his "Magic on Stage" DVD series. (The volume you want for Zombie is Volume 3.)

What I did with this routine was customize it for kids. You'll notice that my routine is 2/3rds build up and a lot less about technique. The "creature" rises part way out of the box a few times, eventually it rises out of the box completely and eventually, only at the very end of the routine does the audience get to see what's actually under the cloth.

Psychologically, when working with kids, this is very strong because the routine becomes less of 'let go of the cloth' (a common request with kids watching such effects!) and more of 'what's he look like?' In other words, with the routine structured this way, I can actually satisfy the prime desire of the audience.

I also don't do a lot of fancy zombie moves, like behind the back or anything like that – it's not necessary and besides, the majority of the time, I do not have the angles working in my favor.

Another key psychological component is the fact that I'm building up the fact that this mysterious terrible little beast is ultimately very cute and cuddly-looking. It's sort of like the punchline of a great joke. It releases all the tension that's been built up and the audience collectively sighs in relief when they see the critter is cute.

Also, when I work for small groups (less than 30 people) I can add more build up and stretch the routine by first performing the classic Haunted Key, which if you don't know is a specially balanced key that will turn in your hand automatically. It's a classic effect and is available from nearly all magic stores for less than five bucks.

The box itself is, as I indicated earlier, about 12" square and painted black. The padlock is on the front side of the lid, so the audience can see the lock when I set the box down. Immediately, the question becomes, "What's the box locked up for?"

The lid is not hinged but rather completely removable so as to make the workings of the effect much easier. If you have any wood working skills, you'll know that the box is really easy to make.

Another note on the lid: I only have one padlock on the front side of the lid. Having one on the back, opposite side would just slow the routine down. I've never had anyone address this, but if you want to be completely logical, install TWO hasps on your box and two padlocks.

The zombie gimmick (the one your finger goes into) is accessible outside the box even while the ball itself is inside the box because I've cut a simple ½" 'slit' all the way up the back wall of the box so I can easily make the rise up and down in the box. I just slip my thumb in and I'm ready to go.

Obviously, the box is brought out with the zombie already in the box. I have the cloth covering the box, so the gimmick is not in danger of flashing. Once I pull the cover off to remove the padlock and lid, I keep my body close to the box to protect the angles. I've done the routine almost surrounded and never been busted.

In a pinch, you can also cut a slit in a bag and make the ball rise, or even a cardboard box – which is what I started with when I was just a kid! The advantage with using a container of some type is first for the buildup and secondly for the ease of getting in and out of the routine.

There are times when, to finish the routine, I just have the creature 'pull' me behind my backdrop and I just leave it there. Other times, as needed, I slowly and drastically make the critter re-enter the box. I pull my thumb out of the gimmick, put the lid back in place, cover the box with the cloth and I'm done.

**Using Bill Abbott's Thing with This Routine:** I eventually adapted Bill's Thing to this routine because the tiny box travels much better than my big Zombie box. Also, Bill's Thing gimmick has certain advantages over a Zombie that I cannot reveal in print. Let's just say it's REALLY cool!

In terms of scripting, about the only changes I had to make was stressing that the critter was invisible. Also, instead of the big 'reveal' at the end, obviously the invisible critter just re-enters the box after a few escape attempts as per Bill's handling.

My routine gets a lot of laughs and a lot of performing time out of a great prop – whichever you decide to go with!

# Survival Tips for Magicians

After performing 200 or so school shows a year and 50 or so corporate shows a year, I've come up with a few things that could help aspiring magicians in this wild, wacky world of performing. My information will come from the perspective of a traveling magician who bounces from hotel to hotel, as that's my current reality. First, I'll share a few horror stories and what I did and then I'll share a few general tips readers may benefit from...

## ----- **Show Horror Stories...and How to Survive!** -----

A couple of quick stories...

### **Story #1**

I was at an assembly at a school recently and had just performed my first show, which ROCKED. 10 minutes before the second show, power goes out in half the school due to a lightning strike down the road.

Teachers were concerned for me, and I just shrugged and said, "I'll shout. If the kids get a little loud, just help me." I wasn't thrilled about it, but it was no one's fault.

Then I noticed that in the cafeteria I was performing in, the other half of the cafeteria had power! I told the teachers I was going to haul my props to the other side of the cafeteria and do the show from there. (Turns out that the cafeteria's power was on from a different power supply, and it was a weird building. I don't get it.)

Anyway, teachers were frazzled at my impromptu rearranging of the assembly.

"But the kids are facing the wrong way!"

Nonplussed, I calmly said, "We'll have to turn them around." Easy, right?

It was bizarre, to say the least, but I quickly rearranged my tables, PA system, props and within 5 minutes, I was ready to rock, and the show went great.

### **Story #2**

I was in Arizona getting ready to perform for three hours for Verizon (the telephone folks). I had done my homework – because I flew to that gig, I arrived the night before and checked out the sound system at the facility.

(Note: Whenever I drive, I insist on using my own PA system, but since I flew, I was at the mercy of the show facility).

In this case, the facility, a Dave & Buster's, had an adequate (but not very good) system. Still, everything checked out the night before. I arrived an hour before my presentation was to begin and re-checked the system. It worked perfectly. I set up my show (which in this case took 5 minutes) so I spent the rest of my time BSing with my client (maintaining rapport!)

The CEO did his speech (the sound system worked great for him, too) and then I was introduced.

The lav mic I had tested died.

The facility coordinator frantically handed me a new mic.

It died too.

I couldn't believe it. I was 60 seconds into a three-hour event and the only mic left was a handheld, with NO stand. (NOTE: I always use a headset mic to allow hands-free movement.)

What did I do? The only thing I could do – I used the handheld when I was just speaking and then did my best to project, using my voice and diaphragm, when I needed my hands free for magic or mentalism.

After the event was over, the facility coordinator apologized up and down. My client was standing right there, befuddled. I smiled and said, "That's OK, I got through it. No big deal."

She then went on to explain that she had already ordered two mics.

My client understood that it wasn't my fault and I received praise overall for the program. There's no big secret to handling a show disaster other than this: Don't lose your cool. Why?

First, losing your cool clouds your thinking. You get what I call "brain lock" and pretty soon you can't function. You get frazzled and next thing you know, you're making other mistakes.

Secondly, if you lose your cool, rapport with your client vanishes and soon she/he looks at you like you're an unprofessional putz at best and a snotty jerk at worst, especially if you start snapping harshly at facility personnel, custodians, etc.

I know it's hard. Trust me, when I'm not given enough time to set up or something out of my control happens, I get irritated fast. But you can NOT communicate your frustration to your client or anyone, quite frankly.

People operate on their perception or reality, NOT reality itself. It's a hard concept for many people to grasp, but it simply means that people do not look at situations for the reality, but how it affects them.

In shorter terms, even if you are 100% in the right to be pissed, showing how pissed you are will kill your relationship with your client. The client does not care about your hardship – they simply want you to do your job.

So, do what you can to prevent disaster. Double-check your stuff. Triple check it. Use checklists, whatever.

The second thing you can do is decide what you will do if something goes wrong. We discuss 'outs' in magic all the time, so what not develop 'outs' when things go wrong other than tricks?

I can't give you a blueprint because the shows you do are different than mine, but just let your imagination run wild and figure out all the horrible things that can go wrong and develop a plan on how to handle them if something does go "kaflooeey."

Third, and most importantly, realize that no matter what happens, you won't die! I've been in some rough shows (loud kids, disrespectful adults, tough performing conditions, you name it) but at the end of the day, I still get to leave.

Don't underestimate this! Before I went full-time in magic, I used to work for the biggest ass on the planet. Honestly, this boss was abusive, and I took it, day after day. At the end of the day, I'd escape and go home, but as I went to sleep at night, my last waking thought was "What will tomorrow bring?"

With a bad show, you can choose never to work with a bad client again! Despite what some judgmental people will say, there ARE bad shows and bad clients. Heck, I had one this past week. Here's a quick story, just ONE aspect about this client.

I arrive, do my first show (which ROCKED) and before the second show, I ask the client, "So who do I see afterwards for my check?"

She gets annoyed and says, "I don't know anything about that." Bear in mind, SHE was the one I sent the invoice to. SHE was the one who hired me, so it was logical to assume she could at least point me in the right direction.

That was just the tip of the iceberg with this client, and I will make sure I don't go back. It's liberating – firing a client!

So, in conclusion, always remember that no matter how bad things get, you'll get to leave! This is great for your mindset – when something goes wrong at your show, the first thing you must fix is your MIND.

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**TIP 1: Carry an Emergency Kit!**  
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**A Few Show Disaster Survival Strategies...**

The other day I got to my show and disaster struck...twice.

I was unloading my props and one of my effects broke – it was a heavy-duty thread that broke after 200 or so performances. On top of that, I mis-counted the number of mouthcoils I would need for the week and came up one short for the show I was currently preparing for.

Fortunately, I had my ‘Ace’ packed under the seat of my car – an emergency toolkit! I immediately dug the sucker out, found some heavy-duty thread and repaired the prop. On top of that, I had stuck an extra mouthcoil in the toolkit months ago, so I was covered.

I forget who it was I first heard the idea of packing an emergency toolkit from, but man, it’s one of those things where if you’re a working pro and you’re on the road, it’s critical!

I’ve been a professional magician for 15 years and have been a full time pro (no ‘day job’) for over 8 years. In that time, I’ve used the emergency toolkit exactly 4 times.

One of the times was the story I just told you, from a show that was last week. The other three times were for shows where I was performing the Silk to Egg and needed new egg ‘stickers.’

Let me explain first of all what my toolkit is packed in and what’s in it. The kit itself is my idea of an emergency kit for magicians. It’s a simple plastic container with a snapping lid and little dividers inside sort of like a tackle box for fisherman. (Actually I think it’s one of those arts and crafts kinda things.)

In it, I have an emergency mouthcoil, rubber bands, several different kinds of thread, a needle, a box of matches, some cotton balls and several ‘silk to egg’ stickers stuck to the inside lid.

Is my box loaded with the best stuff? No. For the life of me I can’t remember what my reasoning was for the cotton swab!

The rubber bands, however, are great not only for fastening things together but also for an emergency – let’s say I get to a gig and for a closeup gig, one of my other effects breaks. Well, I can grab those rubber bands and perform Crazy Man’s Handcuffs. The threads I carry serve a ton of uses. The mouthcoil? Anybody can get 5 minutes out of a mouthcoil. I do mouthcoil routines a LOT so having spares makes sense.

I may expand the kit to a larger box. In it, I'd include batteries of all kinds, with the understanding that every few months I'd have to replace these emergency batteries with fresh ones. Maybe I'd stick a thumbtip and a \$5 in there, so I could do an emergency Hundred Dollar Bill Switch. Maybe some superglue for more prop repair.

Or how about a length of rope and a pair of scissors?

The point is not that I have this awesome toolkit (because mine kinda sucks). But the point is that I do have one for those rare times I need it.

As pros know, emergencies pop up when you least expect them. That's why they're emergencies!

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**TIP 2: What Can You Create Immediately?**  
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My buddy Paul Romhany talks a lot in his writings about having an entire emergency show packed and with you when you fly. Rather than rehash his great information here, I have another somewhat unusual emergency plan...the tricks I can create completely from scratch on the road!

I'll admit I'm an extremist – life on the road can be stressful so I always imagine what the worst possible thing could be? Well, what if something horrible happened and you lost your carry-on, too!

It COULD happen: I was leaving a plane and I saw someone take my bag and walk off! I had to push past several people and stop the guy. Turns out he was just mistaken as to which bag he thought was his, but if it happened once...

Additionally, other professionals talk about designing an act that could be carried in one airplane carry-on. When I fly, I do try to get as much stuff as possible into that bag, but even then, I've found a risk. Let me explain...

There are times when I fly on a large jet to my connecting airport (Chicago, for instance) and then, if I'm flying to someplace a bit more remote, like Des Moines, Iowa for example, the plane I board is quite small. On these planes, passengers must turn their carry-on luggage to the airplane personnel who then store the bags in the vast underbelly of the plane. When the plane lands, their carry-on bags are returned to them WITHOUT having to go to Baggage Claim.

Sounds pretty safe, right? Wrong – once my carry-on bag was returned to me with the outer pocket torn from the bag and a hole punched in the bag!

My point is simple – even having your props all stuffed into a carry-on bag is not assurance your gear will make it unscathed to your show! The only true answer, then, is to design a show that will fit completely into a briefcase, as that qualifies as a “personal item” that the airlines will not take from you on even the smallest planes that I’ve been on thus far.

Designing a mentalism show that fits into a briefcase is a snap – I sat down and figured out I could do something like a 90-minute show of great stage mentalism out of a briefcase...and that’s just the material I feel comfortable presenting.

For me, magic is a little tougher. For this book, I then decided to design a show for an audience of at least 200 people of all ages – kids, adults, and everyone in between! (Does that even make sense??)

The show would have to roughly 60 minutes in length, as most family shows I do must be at least 45 minutes and many clients want an hour, so the show I designed would have effects that would play to a larger audience (again, at least 200 people), would require no assistants, appeal to the largest age range possible and could be put together in one evening in a hotel room after searching local craft stores and Wal-Marts.

The material I selected is obviously not the **ONLY** stuff one could use, but merely stuff that I myself feel very comfortable performing and that’s the idea I’m trying to give you...if you design a show you can put together anywhere with tricks you’ve never performed, you’re asking for trouble!

The point is, rehearse this ‘emergency show’ like you would **ANY** show. Before I get into my lineups (mentalism **AND** family outlines) a few other tidbits:

- I always carry this list on my laptop, so in the case of an emergency, I can pull up the file and go shopping.
- I always carry my sound equipment with me – wireless mic and all connections allowing me to plug into virtually any sound system and my iPod and remote controller, allowing me to control my music professionally without a sound technician. (I use Jim Kleefeld’s awesome Sound Control, which is cheap, fits in your pocket, and very reliable).
- I do try to stuff as much as possible into a briefcase-sized ‘personal item’ so I have at least **SOME** material that I wouldn’t have to build from scratch.
- I’m not going to explain the workings of the tricks, but I will include a few notes on some as to why they made the cut.

Again, the list of tricks is stuff I can put together by running into an Office Depot or OfficeMax (office supply store chains abundant in the U.S.) and our friendly neighborhood Wal-Mart.

Here's just a few of the effects I came up with for mentalism and magic along with the approximate running time as I perform each routine. Obviously, your running times will differ from mine. I'm also not listing the materials needed as in some cases this would tip the method.

#### MENTALISM:

1. 4<sup>th</sup> Dimensional Telepathy by Bob Cassidy – 12 minutes
2. Chronolouge by Bob Cassidy – 5 minutes
3. PK Touches by Banachek– PROPLESS – 4 minutes
4. Psychokinetic Silverware – 4 minutes
5. Magic Square (pick your method!) – 5 minutes
6. Dream Vacation (my spin on the Confabulation plot) – 10 minutes
7. Blindfold Routine by John Archer – 12 minutes
8. PK Time by Banachek – 3 minutes
9. Book Test (There's a ton of impromptu book tests out there!) – 5 minutes

That, for me, is a killer stage mentalism show 60 minutes in length. Again, with mentalism, the possibilities are nearly endless.

#### MAGIC:

1. **Freefall** – Andrew Mayne's method for magically causing a large heavy object to appear is a GREAT opener and can be prepared in a few seconds! – 1 minute
2. **5 – Card Opener** – I do this right after the bowling ball appears! Once you understand Bill Abbott's great routine, you'll be able to build your own props very quickly. Try scouring Dollar Stores to find Jumbo cards as I feel it plays better plus no one can accuse you of palming all those extra cards! – 5 minutes
3. **Cut & Restored Rope** – Sure, you're not likely to find soft, plush rope, but you can get through a routine! I'm partial to Jeff McBride's 3-phase routine taught on his Magic on Stage DVDs – 5 minutes
4. **Linking Coathangers** – Mike Caveney's routine is very funny and his coathangers are great props, but once you know the routine, you can buy a hacksaw and plastic hangers at the store and put together a temporary set. (You'll need the hacksaw for the routine as well as making 'gimmicks' too.) – 5 min
5. **Bill in Lemon/Orange** – In both the Mark Wilson Course in Magic as well as Penn & Teller's How to Play in Traffic, there's a terrific method for this classic that is incredibly easy and mystifying to audiences. 5 minutes

6. **Blindfold Routine** – I use the John Archer method, as it only requires 2 coins, duct tape and a cheap little sleep mask. It’s one of only two mentalism effects I included in this emergency show because for family audiences, I wanted to challenge myself by including visual magic and the sight of the performer with duct tape wrapped around his head is very funny even to young children.
7. **Zombie** – You can find good Styrofoam balls at craft stores along with cloth for your “foulard.” Any department store will be able to provide you with the material for your gimmick. No, you won’t have a stand, but you could make the ball float up out of a nice gift bag or cardboard box decorated nicely with colored paper. 5 minutes
8. **PK Touches** – propless! It would have been easy to load up the family show with mentalism, but I wanted to challenge myself by including more actual magic. Still, for even the most diverse family audience, PK Touches kills! (See my “Cause & Effects – Volume 2” book for a great family – friendly presentation!) – 4 minutes
9. **Chico The Mindreader** – This routine is a master class in kids’ entertaining, but the routine kills too! No, you’re NOT likely to find a puppet anywhere CLOSE to the fantastic Chico puppet Bill Abbott provides, but if you visit your local Dollar Store, you should be able to get a hand puppet, props and even cards to give you the material you need to get through a show – 10 minutes
10. **Incredible Suit Jacket Escape** – This plays huge! Buy ‘panels’ of cloth from a craft store and a ton of safety pins and make your ‘curtain of death’ by pinning the cloth together from the inside. Audiences won’t see the pins that way and you can get through the show without having to spend countless hours sewing the curtain together. Use some of that cut and restored rope for your handles and you’re all set with the curtain. Instead of shackles, learn a good thumb tie with a quick release and you’ve got a great stage ‘illusion’ that plays for any audience! – 5 minutes
11. **Gypsy Balloon** – This would be my “emergency show closer!” Tony Clark’s AWESOME take on a stage version of the old Gypsy Thread plot is the perfect closer! I found workable yarn at my local craft store and balloons and helium are available at party stores everywhere – 2 minutes

So that list is enough to get you started. Once you put your mind to it, you’d be amazed at what you can come up with. The point is, PLAN for it and have your list in your wallet ready to go!

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**TIP 3: Plan for Road Emergencies**  
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Remember this is show BUSINESS. With that in mind, I always plan carefully for trips. I always have the following with me at all times:

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- Cell Phone and CHARGER
- Garmin GPS and CHARGER
- Emergency roadside kit (jumper cables, flares, etc.)
- Several credit cards
- In the winter, warm boots, and blankets
- Ice scraper
- Hotel Discount Provider member cards – If the weather's bad, you can call your provider and find a local hotel quickly!
- Change of clothing
- First Aid kit
- Bottled water

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**In Conclusion**  
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If you think about the magic business as a BUSINESS (there's the unnecessary capitalization again!) you'll see that it's quite easy to plan for many emergencies. Obviously, there will be things that surprise you, but you can continually learn and adapt.

## Mouthcoil

I remember the first time I ever saw a magician perform a mouthcoil routine. It was Jeff McBride, off of his amazing “Magic on Stage” DVD...well, back then it was on VHS tape, so it’s been a while.

I was transfixed, having never seen anything like it before. I went to my local brick and mortar magic shop and excitedly asked if they carried these wonderous little miracles. “Oh sure,” came the off-hand answer. Clearly mouthcoils were ‘old hat’ to everyone but me! Nonetheless, I never forgot my sense of wonder with my first experience with them. Whenever I perform a mouthcoil routine, I know that something very special is about to take place.

**Effect:** During a simple game of “do as I do,” the performer and a young volunteer from the audience are each waving pieces of toilet paper back and forth as music plays. Eventually, the performer ‘eats’ some of the paper and takes some of the volunteer’s paper and stuffs that in his mouth too!

Finally, the performer takes a bit of the paper out of his mouth and hands it to the volunteer...who pulls on it, eventually pulling a fifty-foot-long colorful streamer out of the performer’s mouth!

Thoughts: Honestly, there’s a couple of good lines I use in my routine along with a good song, but the BIGGEST reason why my whole routine is so funny is because of one thing: I hand the end of the mouthcoil to the volunteer and convince him/her to pull it out. The resulting look of amazement on the child’s face helps elevate the routine even higher in the audience’s minds.

That may not sound like much, but I’ve lost count of how many magicians I’ve had come up to me after seeing my routine and saying, “I’ve never thought of letting the kid pull out the mouthcoil! That’s brilliant!”

Personally, when I first saw it, that’s the first thought that popped in my mind. What better way to show just how long the thing is than to have the volunteer pull it out as I back up? When I finish, the volunteer and I are about 30 feet apart.

Again, this may not sound like much – which is why I didn’t make a huge deal of this routine in the ad copy – but if I was told I could only do ONE trick with a kid onstage, this would probably be my choice. I only included it in this book because so many magicians have told me how funny it is. Am I the first magician to have the volunteer pull the streamer out as we back up from each other? Probably not, but I have yet to see anyone else do it, so maybe I am.:)

**Routine:** You can get mouth coils at any dealer for about \$15 for a dozen. Don't cheap out and buy 17- or 25-foot ones, either—what makes the routine so funny and powerful is the fact that the stuff just keeps coming and coming! Buy 50-footers. You'll be glad you did, especially for bigger stage shows.

My handling is very simple – I have the coil with the 'tail' pulled out and a double-layer of tissue paper folded over it in my table. When I pick it up, the 'tail' is inside the fold, so I can immediately pop it in my mouth. Another two-layer length of toilet paper, maybe a foot long, is in the table, too. I pick up the volunteer's in my right, my gimmicked one in my left. I hand the volunteer the normal folded over length of two layers of tissue paper. Mine is kept in my left hand until it goes in my mouth.

***(AUTHOR'S NOTE: One more thing, and I just want to stress this again—don't use tissue paper like everybody else—use toilet paper. It gets a great laugh!)***

Ask for a volunteer. Hundreds of hands will shoot up! I add this line: "I only call on people sitting quietly. With one hand in the air."

I don't state this as an admonishment, but simply matter-of-factly. I then wait patiently for the kids to settle for a couple of seconds. It's a simple control technique that accomplishes a goal without lecturing or sounding harsh.

To your volunteer, say: "What's your name? Thank you for helping me. (***Show your volunteers respect. Most magicians don't do this well!!***) "I'm going to give you something very special. You get your very own...genuine...state-of-the-art...toilet paper!"

Hand the volunteer their piece of toilet paper as I mentioned above. The whole 'genuine...state of the art' business is something I use to cover the few seconds it takes me to pick up the toilet paper so there's not just 'dead air.' Usually the volunteer and the audience acts grossed out and says "Ewww!" I respond with, "Well, it's not USED!" (***If the volunteer is a girl, say, "Well, I know, I've got cooties!"***)

"Here's what we're going to do. I'm going to turn on my music. Then my volunteer will do as I do, meaning if I lift my arms, you lift your arms. We're going to start off slow, and then go a little faster. It'll be LOTS of fun! OK?"

Turn on music, hold your own toilet paper, and wave your arms slowly, then faster. If you have music playing that starts off slow then picks up, all the better. If I'm using a girl volunteer, I usually say something like, "That's right, find the beat, go girlfriend!" HUGE laugh—don't overlook this, trust me! Develop your own routine—it's a fun way to really let your personality shine through. Finally, 'eat' the toilet paper...then act chagrined, take the volunteer's toilet paper, and eat it, too! I then pull out a foot or so, wait for the audience reaction, and finally encourage the child to pull the rest of it out. It's hysterical, and amazing! (***AUTHOR'S NOTE: Since my mouth is 'full,' to get the volunteer to pull the streamer out, I just make pulling motions with my hands. They always get it. Always.***)

"Give her a big round of applause! She did a GREAT job!"

**End Notes:** Again, this is very simple but effective. For the music, I use something really upbeat and 'peppy' as this is a high energy routine. For the record, the song I've been using is an old Ace of Base song, but I should be a responsible author and encourage readers to use some copyright free music.

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**About Cris Johnson**  
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Cris has been delivering motivational and fun-filled programs to clients all across North America for 15 years. By offering messages of realizing one's own potential and taking action, Cris has made it his life's mission to help people of all ages to fulfill their potential and achieve their goals. Cris also offers products designed to help magic performers take their performing to the next level. Find out more about his products and sign up for early release product specials by sending an email to [crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net](mailto:crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net).