

"How To Become A Better Magic Performer In Several Markets..."

(a survival guide!)



By Cris Johnson

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I'd like to dedicate this book to three very important people:

For Eugene Burger, for putting me on a path to being a MAGICIAN...and not a
guy "who does tricks."

For Mick Foley, for giving me one of the greatest lessons when it comes to
creating an on-stage character...and providing it in the unlikeliest of places!

For my wonderful wife Elizabeth, for always telling me I can. Thanks, Libby!

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*David Livingston, Principal
Lewiston-Porter School, Lewiston, NY*

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“Who Is This Guy?”

A lot of people might rightfully ask, “Who is this Cris Johnson guy? “Why should I listen to him?”

Good question!

Here’s the answer as best as I can give it. First off, I’m a full-time professional magician. The comments you probably skimmed over in the beginning of the book are real-life testimonials from the satisfied clients that I’ve been fortunate enough to work with over the years.

In short, to steal a long-abused phrase, ‘They liked me. They really liked me.’ I will never claim to be the next Houdini or the next Lance Burton, or any of the other well-known magicians in the world. I’m just a regular guy earning a damn good living performing magic. I know what my audiences want, and I give it to them. More importantly, I know what pitfalls await a ‘real world’ magician who has no aspirations for a big Vegas show. I know what kind of awkward situations a magician can be thrust into and expected to deal with.

Going further back, I’ve been interested in magic ever since I was a little kid, as I’m sure that’s the case with many other people. I always knew that I wanted to be more than a hobbyist—I wanted to actually go out and DO this stuff!

It wasn’t until many years after I’d ‘gone out into the real world’ that I reflected back on just how tough of a road it had been. I’m not really talking about GETTING the gigs, or marketing, either. To be honest, I’ve always felt GETTING the gigs was just as hard as doing the gigs, at least when I first started out, for reasons I’ll detail later. Once I learned marketing skills, I was able to get a lot more shows and quit the bane of my life, The Day Job.

Even before I learned marketing, I could always count on a few (*very few*) different kinds of shows every month. When I began to desire more of that certain amount, that’s when I learned marketing and fairly quickly was able to up the amount of shows I did very quickly.

Once I did that, however, I learned a rather ugly truth rather quickly: *I wasn’t ready for all the gigs yet!*

This was a bitter pill to swallow! It was a severe blow to my ego. I had never been formally ‘schooled’ on the right way to do a show...as if something ever existed!

Over the years, there’s been a rather sizable ‘explosion’ of material for magicians who want to make more money with their magic. This movement has been spearheaded, in part, by magic marketing guru Dave Dee of Atlanta.

I have to give some thanks to Dave for helping me to live out my dream, but I do have to say that while the amount of general marketing knowledge has certainly increased, the knowledge of exactly HOW to do a show properly has NOT increased.

Yes, yes, I know the purists out there will start screaming that all magicians should be different and unique and with the vast array of different markets, effects available, personalities to mesh with those effects, there certainly isn't any ONE RIGHT way to do a show!

I agree...in theory. The problem I have with that in theory is the fact that there are so many magicians out there pushing themselves with their new-found marketing skills and getting a sizable amount of work LONG before they're ready for it!

I'm talking about the broad, basic things, such as performing an effect before they've really mastered it, stage presence, selecting the correct material for your audience, and other critical issues.

Let me give you a couple of concrete examples of what I've talking about. First, several years ago, when I was scraping out a living in the Pittsburgh area, there was a magician I knew of who could & should have claimed the title of World's Worst Children's Birthday Party Magician.

This 'magician,' and I use that term loosely, used to perform the Razor Blades From Mouth on impressionable five-year-olds, produce a live rat amidst fire (not bad in and of itself, but most adults I've encountered don't like rats—shame, since they're sweet little animals), produced a live python (see comments for the rat!) and generally used a LOT of fire and was a horrible influence on these kids.

I'm sad to say that the magician in question got a LOT of work, and left in his wake, I'm sure, a great deal of children needing a bit of therapy!

I can say this with certainty because this magician was...me.

Yep, I did all those dumb things! I still, however, feel it was a cool show, but not appropriate for the audiences I was offering it to for obvious reasons. I still wonder how many of those kids ran home and put sharp things in their mouth and tried to emulate what I saw? Not a comfortable thought.

Other 'goofballs' I've seen over the years include a clown who performed the bra-and-silks trick...on little children, and another clown who would smash whipped cream pies into the faces of clients...after they vehemently told this person NOT to do such things.

To be sure, I'd like to think that most people out there have better self-control than that, but I wonder. After all, I can remember the magic books I read in my youth telling me to put on magic shows with tricks that I enjoyed performing! Well, is it any stretch to think that a 16-year-old boy is fascinated by fire and razor blade tricks?

I think a lot of the writers of those books had more faith in the magicians of tomorrow than we deserved!

Of course, most of the performers don't have the lack of common sense that I had, although many seem to have no idea of what to perform in public, 'real world' (you'll hear this phrase a lot in this manual) situations.

Let me give you another example from my own past, and lest you think this applies only to me, let me assure you that I've seen this mistake made in countless other magicians' performances in public.

I used to perform a cards and coins routine called the Monster Coin Routine, invented by Paul Harris. It was and is one of my all-time favorite close-up routines. The coins would vanish, appear, and multiply under the cards...even under the spectators' hands! It really is quite lovely.

The problem with this fantastic piece of magic lies in the fact that many close-up performers in the 'real world' (there's that phrase again!) don't have the luxury of the amount of table space needed to perform this masterpiece. (Yes, I know there are exceptions!)

I've been a professional for almost two decades now, and I can count on one hand how many opportunities I've had to use this piece. When I started out in my professional career, most of my close-up engagements consisted of tableside magic, where the magician is hired to entertain guests as they ate. I used to —you'll love this—ask guests to push their plates aside so that I could perform my magic! To be true, the routine usually was very well-received, but I soon realized I'd have to change...and I changed, all right...but carrying my own close-up table on a stand from table to table, spectator to spectator! I was constantly bumping into customers, the wait staff; people couldn't get past me - it was maddening!

I gradually adjusted my material and style to meet the realities of the situations. I'll be covering that in the chapter on Close-Up magic, appropriately enough.

Now, I know how a lot of magicians think—they'll point out how bar magicians have a lot of table space to work on, how magicians in many upscale restaurants are able to dictate their performing conditions, and so forth. (For

example, Eugene Burger from Chicago is, or was, introduced by a member of the wait staff, who then brings a chair for Eugene to sit in as he performs...if we could all be so lucky!)

The majority of us, though, have to deal with the hand we're dealt with. The close-up market is just one example.

What about the birthday show magician? The concerns consist of angle problems, control issues, appropriateness of the material, and the list goes on....

What about the school magician? Does the magic appeal to the age groups in question? Does it have any redeeming educational value? Can it be seen by 450 students clearly?

What about the stage magician who performs company picnics...outdoors? In high winds? With horrible angle problems?

I'll try to offer some guidance on these and other critical issues than many magicians can and do encounter as they venture into the world of professional magic. I'll offer guidelines and suggestions, and even cover many examples from my own working repertoire, why I feel they work and more. I'll also be covering more fundamental issues, such as character development, tips on working with onstage volunteers, working from the stage, and more.

A couple of additional notes: many professional magicians and/or marketers may tell you that it's best to specialize in one market or 'area' of performing. In theory, I agree.

In the real world, I don't. In my own market, I've found it's a rather smallish area as far as major cities are concerned. Therefore, I've found the need to work in different areas in order to make a living without a lot of overnight traveling. I've also only been in my current city for just over a year—in time, I expect this problem to dissipate.

A lot of beginning professionals are often faced with this problem. Specializing is great, and we should all probably do it, but until we're financially able to make that choice, it's my hope that this book will help make the jarring arrival into the Real World a little easier.

On a more personal note, magic as a profession is not 'regulated...' that is, you don't have to undergo any sort of certification process, and therefore, many in the public look down upon our profession simply because there are so many 'professionals' out there mucking it up! Maybe if we all work together...anyway, it's a nice thought.

Another point I want to bring up is that on the surface, the tone of this manual may seem as though I'm LAYING DOWN THE LAW about what you should and shouldn't do as a professional magician. Nothing could be further from the truth!

I only intend on giving the beginning professional some signposts along the way. I believe that any worthy magic effect has its place in the Real World when performed by a competent professional...as long as it's in the right place, for the right audience, in the right conditions. When you get the experience needed, I believe nearly any 'rule' in magic can be broken as long as it's tempered with experience, common sense, and a respect for your audiences.

On a final note, I want to thank Eugene Burger for his influence on me over the years. In a world where most magic books (and now videos and DVDs) seem to merely put forth new moves, Eugene's work made me look at what I was doing in a way that made me grow as a performer and as a person.

“What A Pro Wrestler Taught Me About Character”

Who do you want to be as a magician?

Sounds like a simple question, doesn't it? On one hand, it is, in the fantasy world. I wanted to be “the next David Copperfield.” Not realistic, as I lacked Copperfield's budget, name, experience, etc, etc, etc.

The point I'm going to try to make in this chapter is this: Before you go off into the Real World to perform magic for payment, you should have a good idea of who you want to be...and more importantly, who you're EQUIPPED to be.

Ask yourself these questions: who are your favorite magicians? (You certainly don't have to limit yourself to one answer!) Once you've answered that question, ask yourself what you like about the magician or magicians you selected.

To help you, I'll give you my answers: I admire Lance Burton for his technical ability, David Copperfield for his theatrics and ability to connect with his audiences from the stage, Penn & Teller for their superior meshing of laugh-out-loud humor and mind-blowing magic, and Eugene Burger for his fabulous close-up work, as well as his keen eye to detail.

I'm comfortable with myself enough to know that I don't want to BE any of those people, but it helps me pinpoint what kind of magic I want to do. For instance, in the case of Eugene Burger, his close-up work never looks like it's filled with sleight of hand for the sake of sleight of hand. To look at other close-up workers, their work is, to me, punctuated with marvelous displays of double –lifts, Elmsley Counts, and other sleights.

While I know Burger uses such moves, he's also mastered ALL aspects of magic: pacing, storyline development, misdirection, connecting with his audience, and a slew of other things. Yes, he has the ability to dazzle with sleight of hand skill, but he prefers to let his work look like REAL magic, and that's what I like about him.

What I like best about Copperfield is that when he's speaking, he looks completely at ease being on stage. There's no hesitation in his eyes, no 'thinking' about what his next line is going to be...just him, on stage, connecting. Frankly, I have to say I enjoy his speaking segments a lot more than his illusion segments set to music, with fog and the wind blowing through his hair...ugh.

But that's just me. If you're not sure who you want to be while performing, this can be a useful tool: not just figuring out who you admire, but why. My reasons for admiring Copperfield & Burger are very detailed. I'm sure a lot of

other people admire them for different reasons—good! It's a small step toward figuring out who you're going to be on stage.

Once you figure out who you admire and why, then you can also begin to focus in on what kind of magic you'd like to perform. Maybe you have no interest in cards. Maybe you don't care for most illusions. Maybe you love manipulation.

Myself, I personally have no interest in large illusions when the dancers come out, towing a big box behind them. To me, it just has no interest. I also become incredibly bored watching escapes. That's just me.

I like offbeat magic, interesting stuff that can, at least on some level, be tied into the Real World. For instance, on one of his TV specials, Lance Burton performed a beautiful effect from stage known as "Hospitality," or "Think-A-Drink." In the piece, he poured 6 or 7 different drinks from what appeared to be an ordinary milk carton—afterwards, he handed the milk carton to a young on-stage volunteer. He had his assistant pass the drinks out to the audience to drink—they were all real! Cola, beer, lemonade, orange juice, milk—it was amazing! As a kicker, he took the milk carton that the little boy had been holding and tore it open! It was mind blowing!

I was so enthralled that I ran out and found a version for \$500 and bought it. It's just as much fun to perform as it is to watch! I also created my own original presentation rather than simply stealing Burton's.

The point is, by finding people you admire will help you figure out what kind of magic you will be drawn to...without copying their presentations! (But that's for a later chapter.)

Once you begin to zero in on what kind of magic you enjoy, take stock of who you are. Are you thin, young, and dashing? If so, then perhaps you'll fit the mold of some of the suave onstage illusionists you admire.

Are you slightly heavy, balding, with an amusing sense of humor? Maybe you'd be better focusing on presenting comedic magic.

After you've attempted to figure out who you are, then try getting feedback to those closest to you: friends, family, your spouse, if you have one...ask THEM what kind of a person you are.

Find out if people see you as funny and outgoing, or as serious and unapproachable. Sometimes you'll be surprised by the answers, sometimes not. The key is to listen without the intent to say, "Yes, but..."

Just listen!

This part of the chapter will probably be difficult for some people to grasp—self-reflection is not an easy thing! Let me relate to you a story from early on in my magic career.

The gentleman who was probably most influential in getting me to actually DO this stuff was an amateur magician, a pastor named Lauren Turner. Lauren's style of magic was heavily influenced by the Bizarre Magick movement: wearing black robes, performing magic with Tarot cards, 'rituals' by candlelight, and generally taking the trappings of regular magic and infusing them with storytelling, acting, and atmosphere.

It was tremendous fun! Lauren had created an extremely dramatic character named Geddy Shaw. Shaw had his own origins, history, presentation style...it was so much fun, and Lauren did it very well, with superior acting...I almost believed the stories!

As an impressionable teenager who was already drawn to horror movies and spooky things that went 'bump' in the night, I was immediately drawn to this fabricated 'dark' world.

The trouble was, I didn't have the ability to pull it off. I even had my dad take 'publicity photos' of me in dark robes, staring with, I'd hoped, a menacing scowl...

In truth, I looked like a dork.

In performance, I wasn't having fun. I didn't 'feel' dark or dramatic. I kept slipping in little jokes into my performances, even though they didn't fit. My true 'self' was struggling to break out!

This was a difficult concept to grasp. Over the years, after taking acting lessons and speech lessons, I've come to see myself as someone rather personable, with a goofy sense of humor, a high energy level, and a desire to make people laugh.

This took a LONG time to 'discover!' I tried, for a while, to be the Serious Magician: the kind of guy, who, if I had the budget, would have giant wind machines blowing through my hair.

After what seemed like forever, I finally admitted to myself that I wasn't having much fun playing this character. It wasn't me and I didn't enjoy it.

Now, after much self-reflection, I can probably sum up my stage persona like this: I have the wry wit and observation of detail of Ian Malcolm, the mathematician from Jurassic Park, along with a self-deprecating sense of humor

that allows me to focus the brunt of a joke on myself and not my audience members, like so many magicians seem to do.

I'm very comfortable playing this person, as it's close to the 'real me!'

And so, deep into this chapter on character, let me give all the aspiring magicians out there the best piece of advice I've ever received when it comes to performing in front of people: ***The best personas are a piece of our existing personas, amplified.***

As I mentioned earlier, I have taken acting & speech classes. I've acted in college plays, in front of paying audiences, but I didn't get this lesson from those experiences. Are you ready?

I got this piece of advice from a Pro Wrestler. Yup, 'rasslin'!

Mick Foley, a gifted writer, and performer, wrote his autobiography titled ***Have a Nice Day*** toward the end of his wrestling career. (Yes, of course he acknowledges that wrestling is predetermined!)

In his book, Foley talks about the difficulty many wrestlers have when it comes to creating a character that fans will enjoy seeing perform. He explained that many of these performers will try many things, in essence throwing whatever they can at a wall and seeing what sticks. In most cases, he elaborates, what winds up sticking isn't too far from who the person really is.

In Foley's case, he had the skill and ability to look within himself to eventually carve out three distinct personas, often performing many of them in one show. He then explained how each of the three was a piece of his own psyche.

The first, Dude Love, was the guy he wanted to be: Handsome, dashing, charismatic, loved by all, wanted by women. In reality, Mick was rather heavy, and really didn't see himself as good looking. In time, this character would turn into a parody of the guys Mick wanted to be, and because of his acting ability, wound up being admired and loved.

The second, Cactus Jack, was a wild and crazy kind of character, who would do anything to get a reaction. In his speaking roles, Jack would often embody Mick's darker side, the side that would lash out at the injustices of the world. This character channeled all of Mick's anger.

The third character, Mankind, started out as a truly disturbing individual: dark and demented. Mick described this character as the part of him that never felt loved or accepted. Interestingly enough, the Mankind character eventually evolved into a loveable oaf with a marvelous sense of humor, loved and admired

by all...and this gradual change happened over a few years, as Foley the performer really did become loved and admired by all as he reached the pinnacle of popularity. The evolution in this character really seemed to be the closest to the real Mick Foley.

By the time Mick 'retired' the characters and just became himself, it was no surprise that the real Foley bore a striking resemblance to the evolved Mankind. In fact, Mick had patterned the latter-years Mankind after himself...also interesting was the fact that the 'real' character was the most popular of them all.

Odd, isn't it, the idea of reading about an aspect of magic tied into Pro Wrestling!

The one thing I really want to stress, however, is the fact that this journey into self-discovery does not have to be as dark as it was for Mick Foley. Part of the reason why it was so for Foley is because of the incredibly competitive/cutthroat nature of his profession. On the surface, it seems silly, with wrestling being 'fake' and all, but underneath it, Foley's profession features people who have to scratch and claw their way to the top...with the behind-the-scenes politics being more interesting than the 'fake' sport portrayed in the ring.

In magic, we don't have to worry about such competitive issues, unless we're trying to get into certain markets.

How does all of this relate to magic? Well, for me, I had a heck of a hard time putting aside the idea of being either a dark, sorcerer type of magician or, later, a suave, 007-type of magician. Once I cast those ill-fitting personas aside, I really began to enjoy myself a lot more.

Maybe you ARE the 007-type, maybe you're not. Listen to your close family members, friends...also, just as importantly, try to notice how you speak in real life, your voice inflections, what you're drawn to, your body type, and try to portray that person on stage.

For some people, listening to others may be tough. It may be difficult to accept the fact that they're not the suave 007-type. Others may relish the fact that they don't fit the 'mold' of a stage magician. Still others may be frustrated by the fact that while they DO fit the 007-type, what they really *want* is to be funny on stage (Don't worry, I've got some tips later on for using and harnessing humor)!

Bear in mind, I'm not talking about being completely true to that aspect of your personality—in real life, I like to loaf around the house in my shorts and a tee-shirt, which obviously wouldn't look so great on stage! What I'm trying to convey is the essence of your personality.

Currently I see so many young, teenage magicians trying to emulate the moves and personas of the stage or close-up magicians, but it's a much more rewarding –albeit tougher, at times---path to emulate themselves.

On the flip side of this whole discussion, what if you have a lot of acting experience? What if the person reading this book has been performing for a while and is looking for a new challenge, a new character?

By all means, go for it!

As I said earlier, with experience and skill, any of the “rules” I offer can be broken. The points I bring up in these discussions are intended as aides to ‘new’ aspiring professional (or at least ‘public’) magicians. I wish I had these sorts of guidelines when I was younger.

On a final note before I close this chapter, I've heard from multiple sources that a magician should ideally build a character first and then work on the magic.

In theory, I agree...but, if experience has taught me anything - experience with myself, experience watching/listening to/talking with other aspiring performers - building a character is very difficult.

In my opinion, by at least looking at the type of magic you may want to perform will at least give you a glimmer of who you are as a person and eventually a performer...granted, as you become more attuned to your onstage character, your working repertoire will have to be adjusted...I know mine did!

Later on, we'll be taking a look at some guidelines for beginning magicians to consider when developing their act for different markets, different age groups (both kids AND adults), but at its core, each performance will be greatly enhanced if there's a big chunk of “you” in front of whatever audience you're performing for.

In closing, to the readers who actually took the time to read this chapter and didn't skim over it looking for new tricks, I applaud you for at least giving a chapter with the word “wrestler” in it a chance!

“What In the World Is He Wearing?”

I’ve got another quick story for you: When I started doing magic shows for money (I couldn’t call myself a “professional” yet) I used to show up for shows in the strangest clothes. I used to wear cut-off jeans, tee shirts...whatever I had handy. It just wasn’t something I thought much about. Worse yet, one of my best friends used to come with me. One summer in particular stands out in my mind: She’d wear ratty jean shorts and an air cast on her ankle! (She’d had some kind of accident and had badly injured her ankle.)

That wasn’t the only incident, either. Another close friend, someone with a great deal more experience in front of audiences than I had at the time, was going to perform a 2-person act with me...in – you guessed it – jeans, along with a faded black concert tee shirt.

I also had seen other “professional” clowns in the area. Most wore light-colored outfits as part of their character, and most had multiple stains on the garments. I simply couldn’t believe that people would show up like that for a paying engagement...it was then that I realized that what I wore, while it might have been cleaner, wasn’t any more appropriate. Things had to change.

On the flip side, I’ve seen so many younger performers wearing tuxedos that I’ve literally lost count. There’s something...I don’t know, ill-fitting? about seeing a 14- or 15-year-old dressed up performing...it sort of makes me feel like I’m watching someone play ‘dress up.’ Now, before you start sending the angry letters, let me offer this thought: *A magician’s style of clothing should really reflect his/her character.*

I used to wear black wizard’s robes as a teenager, so I certainly know what it’s like to wear clothing that didn’t suit me.

I certainly admire, greatly, the fact that many of these young people try to dress as a professional in front of their audiences, but it should really fit who they can best portray. The thing that bothers me the most about seeing them wearing the tuxes is the fact that in no way do they look comfortable. They feel self-conscious. For that reason, the classy clothes they wear stands out like a beacon just as much as the person wearing the ratty tee shirt.

I also have a theory that the reason why many of these people feel uncomfortable in their tuxes is the fact that they –on a subconscious level, at least- realize that tuxes are usually meant for very high-class functions, and that little Johnny’s birthday party or the company picnic at the amusement park really doesn’t qualify. It’s as out of place as a snowman on the beach.

I also suspect that many of these people do this because of many of the classically dressed magicians they see on stage. I considered doing the same thing, but finally decided on a compromise between the tuxes that really didn't fit me as a person and the character I wanted to play, and the jeans and tee shirts that I knew were sending the wrong messages.

I decided to start wearing simple black dress slacks, dress shoes (more casual black loafers, I suppose) and the logo of my business above the breast pocket of a simple, one-color polo shirt. Over the years, I gradually changed and started wearing a button up dress shirt with the logo, short sleeved, with a goofy yellow-and-smiley faced tie for young children's shows and a white tie with playing cards all over it for older kids and some family shows.

I felt so much more professional, but I also felt comfortable in my 'skin,' so to speak.

Once I began dressing more professionally, I noticed an undeniable difference in how clients related to me. Clients I had dealt with in the past complimented me on my 'new look.'

Am I saying that if you're wearing a tux to just moth ball it? No, but I am saying that now, right now, take a good look at what you're wearing for shows and take a look at what you're trying to convey as a character and make sure they mesh.

It may be that even if you're a young person, what you're trying to accomplish will fit the tuxedo very well...good! When I first saw Guy Hollingworth on TV, he was in his very early 20's as I recall, and he wore a tux and pulled off the look very well.

It *can* work.

Let me now turn my attention to the other end of the spectrum...

To the person wearing cut off jeans (as I used to), consider this: there's a reason why employers require dress codes: Public perception. They want to be seen as a business, and to do that, one of the quickest ways is to have personnel wear a uniform. It's an easy way to ensure that everyone looks professional.

I do understand the bad 'stigma' of uniforms as it relates to some of the perceived 'lower' jobs.

I myself hated the McDonald's uniform I had to wear and resented it whenever I put it on. I came to realize that I really didn't hate the uniform as much as I simply hated what the uniform represented. I didn't like the meager

wages and the fact that I didn't like the **work**. (DISCLAIMER: In no way do I mean to criticize the McDonald's corporation. It just wasn't a good 'fit' for me as a career choice...*it didn't fit my character.*)

Once I found a profession that I enjoyed – magic – I realized after I had some experience and some knowledge of marketing that clients would perceive me to be a Professional if I *looked* the part!

If you're playing the part of a 'character' maybe dress pants and a tie don't fit you – fair enough. Consider your character's needs.

Maybe your character is going to be a 'mad scientist.' Great! Just make sure your lab coat is stain-free, with no burn holes or anything like that.

Maybe your character is that of a cowboy magician (yeah, I know, just bear with me!) Great...I think. Just make sure your garb is high quality—none of that plastic dollar store stuff. We are dealing primarily with *professional* magicians in this conversation.

The point I'm trying to make with these admittedly weird examples is the fact that you certainly don't have to wear tuxes or even dress shirts and ties if you want to be seen as a professional (although if you don't have a clearly defined character, dress slacks and a nice shirt certainly can't hurt). Just make sure that whatever you choose to wear is of the highest quality you can afford. Some people may not think that's fair, but it is realistic in our present-day society,

Consider this: Even the lowest paid 'professional' magicians usually receive a fee for their 30- or 45-minute show that is a great deal more than the usual hourly rates of lower-income jobs. Therefore, I feel that to dress appropriately or at least NOT shabbily at the very least will show respect to the client hiring you and agreeing to your fee.

Again, I in no way intend to demean or ridicule anyone if they don't have the means to dress professionally. I'm only looking at the bigger picture of how most people in society expect professionals to dress.

My overall goal is to help raise public perception of our craft and as such I wanted to look at the whole picture, not just the tricks.

“Wobbling”

Wobbling?

What an odd name for a chapter!

Not if you’ve ever read Eugene Burger.

Wobbling is the idea that a magician who isn’t really ready for performing in front of audiences ‘wobbles.’ He/she hesitates...has a lost look in his/her eyes, and generally has the look of a deer caught in the headlights.

We’ve all seen other magicians do it, whether it’s the look of panic that a magician gets in front of an audience or what a magician communicates when showing something to an IBM or SAM meeting: “Oh crap, I forgot what comes next.” Nervous smile. “Just give me a second...”

Of course, in theory, goofing up in front of a group of magicians should be “less-bad” than screwing up in front of an actual audience, but as we all probably know by now, amateur magicians can really be less than kind to their brethren.

I want to give a sidebar, too – I’ve heard the theory that “magic meetings” are the ideal place to try out new material and get tips on how to improve it. Well, to that I say the point of trying out new material is to get tips on scripting, angles, and tightening moves. Too many times I’ve seen a magician stumble his way through a new trick, botching up moves left and right, mangle whatever semblance of a script they may have stolen or half-thought out, then ask,

“Any ideas on how to improve it?”

Yeah, try practicing it until you can get through it without messing up. Stop wasting everyone’s time. I can certainly appreciate a need for ideas on scripting, angles, maybe substituting a different move...whatever. But to offer a trick for criticism that you can’t even perform without messing up is rather silly. It’s one of my pet peeves of magic.

This happens in supposedly *professional* shows, too. I could rattle off a bunch of different examples, but the one I’ll settle on really bugs me because of the supposed ‘professionalism’ of the individual involved.

This magician and I were performing together. He had supposedly done many, many shows in front of several hundred – some cases, thousands – of people. In fact, at an IBM meeting he gave an impassioned lecture on how to work from the stage that really helped me.

Anyway, I opened his 45-minute show with a 20-minute show of my own. To put it bluntly, I killed. It was a great show. During the intermission, I met my friend behind stage and lent him my wireless microphone. While there, he showed me an appearing shower of confetti gimmick in a bag or something. He said he'd just got them the previous night and wanted to open his show with the gimmick.

I thought he was nuts. To open the show with something new that could go wrong was unbelievable, in my book...and this *is* my book, after all.

To make matters worse, he tried the gimmick three times behind stage, and it kept goofing up. I finally convinced him to drop it.

When opening your show, you're giving your audience a first impression of you as an entertainer, a person, a magician, and, quite frankly, someone they should pay attention to! Why take a chance with something you're not familiar with? If it messes up, you've blown your first impression and therefore it will be very difficult to 'get them back.'

Of course, there's no place for a trick you haven't perfected the handling of, but the example I just gave was a pretty strong one.

That's also the biggest, most notable example. When I talk about wobbling, I want to focus now on the look of being lost I mentioned earlier. Many times when watching a show, I see a performer duck down behind his table, looking for a prop...and pop up again, spin around backwards, look around again, duck back down, over and over until he finally finds the prop in question.

While the performer who wobbles may not mess up the actual tricks, there's not the sense of a polished performance, of steady, unwavering control...

One thing that we need to do to really improve the perception of our craft in the eyes of our audiences is to look at the show as a whole, not just the parts. Too many magicians out there feel that once they've got the technical parts of the magic down, the rest is easy. They don't consider equally critical aspects of the performance like scripting, pacing, eye contact, blocking, and more.

To have a sense of MAGIC, all of these things and more are critical, not just the props and not just the moves. It's like thinking a piano that's finely tuned is all that's needed to put on a concert! Like I said, Eugene Burger writes about this in every book he's put out. I feel it's an important lesson that bears repeating until the problem goes away...I know it probably won't, but one can hope.

I also wanted to offer a possible solution to the problem, or at least a way to minimize it, for those who truly wish to improve their craft.

I call it... "Consistency of Performance." I think you'll find it intriguing.

“Consistency Of Performance”

Now we come to one of the lessons that helped me a great deal in my own professional work. On the surface, it may seem incredibly obvious, but keep in mind I've seen a lot of struggling magicians break this 'rule' many times.

First, in the last chapter I mentioned the idea of 'wobbling' in regard to magicians looking for props, appearing to be unsure of their next move, etc.

I suffered from these problems myself, so I can certainly sympathize with magicians who go through this.

My first suggestion is to try and do the same tricks in every show in a given category. For instance, in a birthday show for 7-yr olds, I'll do the same routines over and over again. If I'm doing a birthday show for four-year-olds, I'll do *different tricks*, but for the four-year old birthday, I'll try to do the same tricks from party to party, assuming those tricks are well received.

For close-up, I also do the same tricks over and over.

Why do I do the same effects? Well, if I keep doing the same tricks, it's going to build a sense of familiarity with the material, assuming I learn from any mistakes and take the opportunity to further tighten scripting and/or take note of any strong ad-libs that I may be able to incorporate in later shows (more on this later).

I mention this idea at the beginning of the chapter because of the fact that many aspiring magicians become obsessed with what Eugene Burger has dubbed the 'tyranny of the new:' the idea that many magicians constantly want new tricks, new tricks, new tricks, and they keep rotating new material into their act before they've truly mastered the effects they already have.

This is really counter-productive to the effective performance of magic, and I'll explain why. First of all, try an exercise with me. Think about an effect that you worked really hard to master. You've practiced this thing for hours every day for six months, you've scripted it, and you've tried to prepare yourself as much as possible.

Then finally comes the big day: you've decided to add the effect to your show. You get out there, it comes time to do your effect, and then the audience throws you off, whether because of angles, a certain reaction, or simply because you've never done it in front of a group of people.

Of course, we have heard effective techniques to preparing a new trick, such as practicing it in front of a mirror, then in front of a video camera, in front of

friends and family, and constantly evaluating the effect every step of the way, and these are all good critical points, but the fact of the matter is, eventually you're going to be trying it in front of an actual audience for the first time.

That will certainly add a new dimension, whether you're aware of it or not. Maybe it's just an awareness of new material, but I'm always a little concerned when doing new material, regardless of how well I've prepared. Maybe that's a character flaw with me, but I know I'm not alone.

I've seen countless magicians have the same dilemma: new material is something that makes magicians hesitate, a bit. In an ideal world, it certainly shouldn't happen if we've prepared, but nevertheless it does.

For that reason, when adding new material, I feel it's best to only try one new effect in a show at any given time.

Just one.

It certainly minimizes the chance that there will be any kind of an issue, providing the rest of your material is 'up to snuff.'

A lot of professional magicians feel that until you've performed a trick countless times in front of live audiences that you really don't 'know' a trick. I wholeheartedly agree. I feel that until you can do a trick without thinking about it, you still need work to do.

Let me give you an example of why this really matters so much. A few years back, I was performing for a group of about 100 boy scouts. The kids were reacting to everything really well, I was performing effects I was very comfortable with, and we were all having a blast.

Thing something rather unexpected happened. I bent down low to pick up a prop from within my roll-on table and as I stood up, I became very dizzy—maybe I stood up too quick or it was because I hadn't eaten much that day, or whatever, but because I was so dizzy, I was nauseous and 'blind' for the next several seconds. Because I was in the middle of the show, I really didn't want anyone to know what was going on.

The beauty of the situation was the fact that without realizing it, I went on 'automatic pilot' for the first part of the routine I was performing until my head cleared and I became focused again. I dare say I couldn't have done it performing material I was unfamiliar with. In fact, I'd be willing to bet the farm that no one in the audience even knew anything was wrong.

Just recently, I was in Pittsburgh performing an outdoor show. I had been told before the event by the people who hired me that I was going to be on a raised

stage, in shelter. As such, I planned to do some of the effects I would do in a situation like that.

When I arrived, however, I found out that the shelter and the raised stage were both not there, and in fact I'd be performing on the grass, very close to my audience.

Fortunately, I'd packed a few 'emergency' effects just in case. I wound up having to change my entire line up around, on the fly. I was so used to the individual material that I'd chosen, however, that I was able to go on 'auto pilot' once again and plan the show from trick to trick, based on the responses I was getting and the admittedly windy conditions that I hadn't expected.

The result? I came out of the show smelling like roses and the client immediately confirmed the booking for the following year.

That's my take on the whole "consistency of performance" as far as *what* you do. Now I want to shift to *how* you do it.

I never really felt comfortable with my act until I learned that I'd get much better results setting up my show the exact same way for every show-or as close as I could get to the same at every show.

I perform in people's homes in a variety of situations: basements, living rooms, garages, back yards...for schools, I perform in auditoriums, gymnasiums, cafeterias...it can be maddening, trying to figure out what to anticipate.

I used to evaluate the given physical situation for every show and then set up the act accordingly. That means my props would be in different locations, based on trying to hide certain things, angles, etc.

I no longer do that. Now, I set up each trick in the exact same spot for every show. For instance, my Snowstorm fan and load will always be on the second shelf of my roll-on table, against the far-right wall, from my point of view. That way, I don't have to think about where the prop is, because it's in the same spot, from show to show. The repetition has made me very comfortable.

I've taken the guesswork and that panicked 'I forgot where I put this' look out of my eyes.

I just *know*.

Once I made this adjustment, the quality of my show took a major step forward. I still evaluate the situation when I arrive at a show, and make small adjustments as needed, but by and large, there's not much to think about.

I've got a 'system' for everything: my CD player is always on my left, on top of one of my 'side' tables. The "Flying Carpet," if I'm performing it, is always on my right. No more searching for props.

There may be some issues about where to do the show, especially if the client's space isn't big enough, or whatever, but my show has evolved to the point that it usually isn't a concern.

So, my advice to you is this: dig out the effects you perform the most, based on a given show. Line them up and situate them in your roll-on table if you have one. If you use card tables or some other arrangement where your effects are lined up on a table surface where your audience can see them, make sure that they will be in the same spot from show to show.

Don't let your audience see your eyes searching, as though you're looking for the winning number on your Bingo card! It may take a while for you to get a 'system' in place, but I guarantee you that your 'wobbling,' if you do it, will sharply decrease.

Those were my thoughts on stage consistency. Now what about the close-up guys?

First, let me give you my own set-up for the average strolling or walk-around gig that I do. I usually wear black dress slacks, black dress shoes, white dress shirt, and a black suede vest. The vest has three pockets in it, making it very handy for close-up work.

My set-up is as follows: In my right front pants pocket, I have my pocketknives for my color-changing knife routine. I also have a small plastic 'squeaker' for my sponge ball routine. In my left front pants pocket I have 20 one-inch sponge balls. In my right lower vest pocket I have a thumb tip loaded with a 'mismade' dollar bill. If I'm performing for small kids, I'll also have a "hot rod" paddle trick (with the six 'jewels' on each side). In my left lower vest pocket, I'll have a deck of playing cards and a black 'sharpie' marker. In my right rear pants pocket, I'll have two ungimmicked metal forks. In my left rear pants pocket, I'll have a pre-bent metal fork. Around my right wrist I'll have two thin rubber bands. On my left wrist is my watch. (Yes, that matters too – I'll cover my routines in the chapter on close-up!)

Like the stage/stand-up acts I employ, I try to make my working situation as easy on my self as possible. In the 'real world,' magicians often encounter unruly children, adverse weather conditions, unexpected problems, unexpected client demands, and the list goes on and on.

What makes our work so challenging is the fact that we're dealing with 'secrets' and many people are driven to try and figure out those secrets. In the real world, most other performing artists don't have to deal with that sort of

adversarial relationship—no one's going to sneak over to the piano before a concert and start poking around to see how it works!

But people – kids...and adults, too! – very often will start picking at a magician's props before, during, or after a show if they feel they can get away with it and it's easily accessible!

Then we have to engage the audience during the show: hitting all of our marks as far as pacing, the scripting, the actual tricks themselves, and a hundred other details. It's so much to worry about, and by keeping our set-up as close to the same as possible from show to show, that will at least give us one less thing to worry about.

Interestingly enough, once you have the “consistency of performance,” you will become smooth, you'll enjoy yourself a lot more, and your audiences' perception of you as someone worth paying attention to and respecting will shoot up, making a lot of the other problems drastically decrease and/or completely disappear!

“Look At Me!”

This chapter, or ‘rant’ as it may seem, is about one of the most basic fundamentals when it comes to actually performing magic in the Real World – away from your mirror, away from the video, and away from the safety and sanctity of close friends and family.

It’s also an exceedingly *simple* idea: You must maintain eye contact with your audiences!

This applies to all kinds of magic: birthday, school, grand stage illusion, and close-up, all of it.

Let me tell you a quick story. Many years ago, back before I had any idea that I’d actually enjoy being on stage in front of hundreds of people, I went to my high school talent contest, just as a spectator.

They had all kinds of interesting acts – singers, martial arts displays, singers, guitar players, singers, lip-sync ‘artists,’ and oh, I almost forgot – they had singers. All joking aside, they had some really talented kids up on stage. I remember a couple of garage bands in particular really sounded good!

Two acts stand out in particular to me: The first was a lip-sync ‘artist’ – there’s those quotes again! Although I don’t feel that it takes a whole lot of talent to lip sync (it’s just me) this girl really had stage presence, charisma, and most importantly, she involved the audience...she engaged them with liberal amounts of eye contact. Although everyone in the audience knew we were listening to a recording, everyone had a good time with her act.

The second act that really stands out in our minds was a guitarist. He came out, shoulders hunched, and quietly sat down. He plugged in his Fender electric guitar and began to play. Boy could this guy play! It was almost as if Jimmy Hendrix had been reincarnated into this kid, along with several other more contemporary artists.

However, most people were bored a few minutes in because he didn’t engage us! He sat there, staring at his hands, and played.

No eye contact. Nothing. He may as well have been in his bedroom practicing.

When he finished, he stood up, looked blankly at the audience for a moment, and shuffled off the stage. It was a shame, too, because as far as technical musical ability goes, he was probably the most talented person who took the stage that night.

Why? We weren't hooked, roped in!

Without really knowing why, most of us in the audience were able to pinpoint pretty quickly just what was wrong with his performance.

Critics may look at what I just wrote and say, "Come on! The kid had the guts to perform in front of his peers, and high school kids can be rough!"

Believe me, I know. I'm just saying that if we're going to be *professional* magicians, there's an important lesson here. A client who pays money will not listen to a "Yes, but..." excuse when it comes to explaining away bad entertainment.

They have the right to expect a professional act worth whatever they're paying for, and quite frankly, I feel that if we're really going to forward our craft, our profession, in the eyes of the public, we need to *exceed* what they're expecting from us.

I've often said when talking to other magicians that my act, from a technical standpoint, usually will not impress a lot of amateur magicians – the kind who are obsessed with knuckle busting sleight-of-hand.

I maintain, however, that my act blows away my audiences because I've learned how to engage them. Eugene Burger himself has advocated the idea that if he has two choices of sleights to accomplish the same effect on an audience that he'll take the easier route because it will allow him to make those connections with the audiences that much easier.

So, that's my first suggestion to all the amateur magicians reading this book: Look at what you're doing, and if you have the option of changing the sleights **WITHOUT** changing the emotional impact on your audiences, you may want to consider it.

Secondly, I'd like to recap a fabulous lecture I heard years ago on working from the stage. At its simplest level, it consists of this: In your mind, divide your audience into thirds.

Think of the left side of the stage as one section, think of the middle as a section, and the right as a section. Also, if you perform in schools a lot, you may find, as I do, that school auditoriums have created their fixed seating in this fashion, making this exercise really easy in those cases!

Once you get the idea of thirds into your head, try working on speaking to each section as often as you can during your performance. If you're in the middle of a speaking effect, as you begin, start by facing your body and eye line to the left, then working gradually to the middle and right and back again. I'm certainly

not saying you must move back in forth in a systematic, robotic function, but you shouldn't neglect the spectators on your extreme right or left. Many performers do, and unfortunately this makes it easy for a modern audience to "tune you out."

You see, in today's society, fewer people then ever go to any kind of live theater. In fact, as I write this in the summer of 2005, movie ticket sales are slipping drastically when compared with previous years. It seems more and more people are just buying DVDs and staying home. What this means to the modern performer is fewer people know how to 'be' an audience.

Audiences often forget that they must keep their voices low in a theater setting or applaud for something they like or the conclusion of a set or a number. People are used to tuning out a television show or a movie because more people do these activities at home.

By maintaining eye contact with your audience, you're including them. It's one way to make them feel a part of the show. In television terms, it's called breaking the fourth wall – that is, openly acknowledging those watching the performance.

Superb mentalist Bob Cassidy advocates the idea of trying to make eye contact with each and every person in your audience by the end of the show. Obviously, this is impossible if you have a thousand people in your audience, but for most of us, that really isn't an issue. Cassidy's advice is sound.

In the above section, I can't help but noticed something I may have glossed over. Eye contact is critical... but so is your body positioning and body language. When you are speaking to a certain section, try not to merely turn your head and eyes toward the section, but your body, as well.

Open up to your audience! Then, as you begin to shift away to another section, try to keep your body 'open' to the previous section as you subtly shift to your audience to the next section.

Does this make sense? It's a bit difficult to put into print. The essence of the idea is, when you're turning your attention to a new section, you want to keep the previous section engaged. You can turn your head slightly to the new section but keep your body 'open' rather than turning your back completely on the previous section.

It's a simple way to keep the different sections of your audiences engaged as you work the crowd, especially if you have BIG audiences. I can't finish my thoughts on this without mentioning Jeff McBride's fantastic tape, *The Commando Act*, from his *Magic on Stage* series, available from L&L Publishing. He talks about this idea in great depth. Do yourself a favor and buy the whole

three-tape or DVD set. The routines are fantastic, and the information on how to actually WORK as a magician is unbelievable.

Taking the idea of eye contact further, I want to mention that some public speakers, in their quest to assist terrified people who are forced to give a presentation of some sort, talk about focusing your attention to the back of the room. That's fine for a one-time executive just trying to get through the company's financial report at a conference, but bad form for an entertainer.

Why?

Quite simply, because as entertainers we're supposed to crave the spotlight! We're supposed to enjoy engaging the people we work for.

I'm important! Look at me! You can talk about the football game later! If people feel as though the performer is speaking *to them*, they'll be less likely to disrupt the show. People want attention. We're social creatures after all. If we give them the attention, we're giving them what they want, and in the process making our own jobs easier.

By the way, I would be willing to bet that at least some of the amateurs or just-starting-out pros reading this book will think to themselves, "That's fine for kids. They need to be controlled, but I intend to perform for adults, and they're better-mannered."

Really?

What planet do you intend to perform on? Adults need just as much effort from an entertainer/speaker to 'engage' them as kids...more so if alcohol is involved!

From my own experience, I've found adult and kid audiences to be very similar in many ways – some are polite and receptive, and some are not. Some love magic and hang on your every word and others think magic or even mentalism is "just for kids."

What about close-up? With close-up, eye contact and engaging your audience is just as important. After all, is a performer came to my table, announced his intentions to entertain us, and then proceeded to stare at his feet, well...I wouldn't have much interest in watching someone who didn't have interest in looking at me.

One thing to remember is that by and large, people are extremely self-centered, in many different ways. I don't necessarily mean self-centered in how they care – or don't care – for their "fellow man," but more to the idea of, if you're going to talk to me, acknowledge me by looking at me!

With close up, this becomes even more of an issue because while one person speaking out of turn in a crowd of four hundred can easily be lost, one person out of a group of four can easily be meddlesome!

People can and do want to speak up, ask questions, and get involved during a close-up act if they're having fun. Many times in my professional work, someone will ask questions such as "Where did you learn this stuff" or "How old were you when you started?" or even "Where can I learn this?"

These people are not trying to be rude or disruptive – they're curious, as is our nature, and want to be involved. Quite frankly, when I'm working close-up and people begin asking respectful questions like this, I take as a compliment and as a sign that they're engaged.

By paying attention and making eye contact (same rules apply as in my 'rant' about stage, but perhaps not as 'cut & dry' as thirds), your audiences will respect what you do a lot more.

Besides, need I mention the fact that if you're busy making eye contact with spectators in a close-up OR stage setting that you're in a prime position to do the 'dirty work' when you observe their attention is diverted away from the secret work?

Whew! I'm sure some of this chapter may have seen long winded, but I think it's important as professional magicians to understand exactly why we should maintain eye contact with our audiences other than the fact that it "looks good on stage..." although that's certainly true, too!

As a bit of further advice, if you have the opportunity, take a speech class. Read books on public speaking. Go to your community theatre, watch some plays, maybe audition for a part, or volunteer as a stagehand and give yourself the opportunity to view these stage techniques 'in the flesh.'

Also, again, get the McBride tape I mentioned earlier. Watch tapes of your favorite magicians on stage. Work on your blocking and audience interaction as much as you work on your tricks themselves.

By taking the time to work on and incorporate these techniques, we'll be able to earn the respect of our audiences as true Entertainers and not just people with 'silly tricks.'

“Blocking”

Blocking is a theatrical term that refers to, among other things, the placement of actors on stage. Although it also applies to film and TV, I'll be drawing from my own experiences acting on stage for live plays. With film and TV, the director usually has the option of moving a camera around to best suit the context of a scene. Even live TV shows like “Saturday Night Live” have multiple cameras to shift and direct the attention of viewers to where it needs to be.

A magic performer doesn't have those options. He has to direct the attention of the audience through his/her words and actions. I talked earlier about engaging the attention of the audience through eye contact and body positioning – opening yourself to your audience.

To take this matter further, you need to figure out how your audiences will be viewing your magic and place you, your props, volunteers, and any other stage equipment in ways that prove to be the most beneficial to your act. This applies both to ensuring the most visibility for what your audience needs to see...and what you don't want them to see.

First, I'll relate this idea to close-up because in my experience, many aspiring magicians start with close-up because the props in general are a lot cheaper than stage equipment and because many beginners become seduced by the complex knuckle-busting moves that I abandoned years ago.

At its most basic level, amateurs often need to be reminded to make sure their magic is open - even close-up works needs this consideration. Who's going to care about that beautiful Color Change if your hands are obscuring the audience's view of the cards?

Also, and I admit I was guilty of this, what if you're doing a fantastic coins and cards routine on the table surface of some patrons in a restaurant? What if, because of wine glasses, condiment bottles, centerpieces, candles and what not, many patrons can't see the surface of the table to enjoy your magic? They may tune you out. Because they can't see, they're not as engaged! Whenever you're working a close-up situation, consider your audience's lines of sight. We'll be covering close-up in its own section later.

In stage/stand-up work, beginners often need to be reminded not to hide behind their props. When I was just starting out many years ago, I used to hide behind my roll-on table almost exclusively, rarely venturing out. I'm sure to some people, the effect, psychologically, was that of watching a demonstrator behind a counter.

This, too, has a negative effect on making those connections with your audience. If you don't venture out from behind your tables, your audience is going to perceive the object(s) between you as a barrier, and it will impede your audience's emotional involvement. Step out!

Once you learn to step out, that's when you begin making the eye/body movements back and forth across the stage, as I discussed in the previous chapter.

That's the basic level.

What about your props on stage? Let me give you an example from my own work. First of all, most of what I'm going to discuss now can be applied to any "stand up" situation: whether you're working for 5 people or 5000, you'll need to consider blocking in your stage work.

Years ago, I was working on an effect where I would change my birds into a live ferret via a Chalet Birds-To-Rabbit Cage. It remains one of my favorite effects in my entire list of "A" material.

What the audience sees is this: In my case, I've produced many birds in the beginning of the show and placed them one by one into a pet carrier. At the end of the show 45 minutes later, I wheel out my dove-to-rabbit cage, which has a purple/black clothe hanging on the back of the cage. I place the birds inside on the swinging perch, cover the cage, whip off the clothe, and voila – the birds are gone and have apparently changed into my ferret.

The effect is super, and because the cage has an extremely thin base and you can see through the bars of the cage to the back of the stage, the reaction of the audience is amazing...if performed correctly.

In the beginning, I wasn't getting the reaction I wanted. After a long while I finally figured it out – Because the beginning of the effect involved having the clothe hang over the back of the cage, the sides were also partially obscured for audience members on the far right or left of the seats – they couldn't get a clear view of the cage with the birds in it.

Since I performed the effect to music (and thus weren't being told what was going on), and they couldn't see what was happening, at the end of the routine the effect on these audience members was the magician whipping the cover off of a box and showing his pet ferret.

To them, it was a "So what?" moment. Sure, the ferret was cute, but because they hadn't clearly seen the birds going into the cage, they just didn't get it. My big mistake was the fact that I didn't wheel the cage to each side of the

stage and let every section of the audience see my birds sitting in an otherwise-empty birdcage.

The same rule as my body movements applies!

I believe that many beginning magicians make such mistakes because they're so focused on the workings of the effect itself as well as trying to keep the audience from seeing how the thing works.

Part of the solution is becoming absolutely familiar with any sight restrictions on any effects in your act. When you totally understand what your audience can and can't be allowed to see, you'll then be in a better position to show your prop or effect seemingly freely without concern...I say "seemingly" because, of course, many effects have sightlines that audience members can't see without tipping the effect.

I also say "seemingly" because as you show your props or effects, you need to have a natural feeling to your movements. If the audience senses that you're TRYING to hide something, then they'll pick up on the fact that there are things that they're not supposed to see.

This will contribute to destroying the feeling of magic in the minds of your audience: while they may not figure out the secret, your magic will be reduced to either simple "trick box" or fancy finger-flicking, or whatever.

Look at your own act with a critical eye and see if you're making many of these mistakes!

Now, let's take the idea of blocking further...to volunteers.

When you ask volunteers to join you on stage, the issue of blocking becomes even more complicated. Not only must you guide your spectators through the routine in an engaging manner, but you must also make sure that everything is visually pleasing/accessible for both your audience and your volunteer, while taking into consideration the fact that you must keep the workings of whatever you're doing secret. (Of course, I'm not talking about "instant stooge" mental effects or "paper balls over the head" types of effects...this is just generalized ideas for now!)

Blocking one on one – that is, you and your spectator is generally easier than having multiple volunteers on stage. We'll start there.

“Line, Please!”

I owe a huge dept of thanks to Eugene Burger for sending me down this path. In his book, “The Experience of Magic” he explains his idea of framing an effect. For someone new to magic, this basically is the idea that you must have some sort of a ‘plot’ for your magic effect, not only to make it more interesting for your audiences but also to create the idea that you’re a special kind of person if you’re a MAGICIAN.

This may seem like a trivial point, but let’s go back to the beginning of this manual. Think about the magicians who you admire. Think about some of the effects that they’ve done. Why did you like them? Were they funny? Were they dramatic? Did you get a lump in your throat? None of this is possible without framing.

Think about some of the magic presentations you may have used in the past, or you saw a really dreadful magician use: “First I’m going to put my assistant into this box. Then I’ll spin it. Now she’s gone!” Horrible!

No offense, but magicians who use that sort of presentation are really meatheads...really! Pardon my rude language.

Now, before you start sending me Angry Letters, let me state that I have been guilty of using this sort of presentation in the past. It’s sort of like the narration in a book. It’s the kind of presentation that makes me want to scream, “Yes, we KNOW you’re spinning the box!” This is also the kind of presentation TV or movie writers use when they want to use a stereotype, the Bumbling Magician. Let me explain...

I’m a big fan of the now-defunct TV series, “Buffy the Vampire Slayer.” At it’s best, the series would tackle social or psychological issues for teens, make viewers laugh, offer superb character development, create intense drama...all often in the same episode...sometimes in the same scene! It was quite lovely. Unfortunately, in an early episode, the writers presented the viewer with the aforementioned stereotype.

In a nutshell, the plot was this: Buffy and her friends got roped into participating in their high school talent contest. At the school, the backstage area was host to a wide variety of acts, all of which stunk. They had all of the usual suspects: The Off-Key Singer, The Actors Who Can’t Act, The Creepy Puppet Dude, and of course The Bumbling Magician.

This poor magician was the pits. His presentation was exactly what I wrote above, with the girl in the box. The sad thing is this kind of characterization is hardly rare—I see it in TV and film all the time. It bugs me. Want to know why?

Most of the time, they're right. Really.

They're all out there! We see them all the time at our SAM & IBM meetings. (Disclaimer: I have nothing against either group, but that IS where you'll see a lot of Bad Magic.)

What can we do to combat this perception of this art that we love so much? First of all, have scripts and interesting frames in place for our magic.

Where do we get our ideas for framing? Several sources: First, the most difficult yet rewarding way to create frames ourselves. Look at your own life experiences and use a magic trick to illustrate it. Instead of the 'girl in the box,' create a fun plot about a game of hide and seek when you were younger! Think about how strong that is!

"First, I place my assistant in the box..." is replaced by this:

"Magic came in handy when I was younger. When I would play hide and seek, no one could find me..."

See how much better that is? Granted, it's not a work of art—I just came up with it now, at exactly 11:14 pm at night, but can you see the idea?

You can also use your likes and dislikes. For instance, in my own stage work, I often perform the "Zombie." But instead of some boring silver ball, I've been influenced by my childhood love of horror movies to create a whimsical, tongue-in-cheek 'horror' effect about a mysterious creature that floats around...

Neat, isn't it? Those are just a couple of ways you can create your own original material. It's incredibly rewarding, not to mention the fact that no one else will be using it. You'll be able to help shed the public perception of interchangeable magicians and their stupid "magic boxes" that do all the work.

I know what some of you are thinking: Creating my own stuff? That's hard!

Yes it is, which is why I have another suggestion for you:

You can buy material to perform. Bear in mind, I'm not talking about stealing someone's performance, but instead purchasing material from reputable people who put out their material for others to use.

Frankly, I do both. I've created a TON of original material and continue to do so to this day, but because I'm so busy, I often will buy someone else's presentation and pick and choose what I like, adding my own touches, filling it with my own Character, until it fits me and my act.

Many working magicians use this method, and as long as audiences like the material, and it's not that stupid "First I'll do this" stuff, I see nothing wrong with it.

If you do this method, what will happen if you work long and often enough, is you'll eventually begin to write more and more of your own material as you become comfortable with yourself and the kind of stuff you like to perform. Now I'd like to talk about scripting.

Too many amateur magicians wing it.

Dreadful!

By winging it, I mean that they'll buy a prop, fiddle with it a couple of times, and then put it into their show long before the idea for a script has even crossed their minds. It's terrible! Think about some of the great magicians you've been privileged to see work:

Lance Burton: Think he just "wings" it in Vegas when he wants to try a new effect?

Copperfield: Think he just "wings" it when he's shooting a TV special?

Eugene Burger: Think he wings it when he's been engaged to perform at upscale Chicago restaurants for five nights a week?

Okay, I think I've made my point: If they don't wing it, then neither should any of us! It doesn't matter if it's a free show for friends, a \$25 birthday show when you're 14 years old, or a \$2000 corporate show. The art of magic, if it's going to thrive needs and deserves to be treated as an ART, and not some shmo with a "trick box."

If I'm creating original presentations, then here's my basic procedure. It's hardly scientific, but it works for me and thus may help you:

First, I'll jot down my basic idea into a notebook. Eventually, when I have time, I'll start writing—just free-flow, no editing, just writing, as if I'm writing for an audience. Then, I'll go back and see if I can link up any of the physical acts of whatever the magic trick is (like fanning a Snowstorm or dealing cards) with some words from my script—those of you who have my Educational Performance Systems will understand what I mean.

Once that's done, I'll try to edit for clarity, to make jokes stronger (if I'm trying to write something humorous) and try to edit for length. My wife tells me that I can't explain anything in ten sentences or less, and unfortunately, she's right—I tend to be long winded, so I often need to 'chop down' my presentations.

When that's done, I'll print out what I've written, and begin rehearsing my lines while performing the effect. I should point out that I never try to learn a new effect AND learn new lines. I always wait until I've got the trick itself burned into me so much that I'm on "auto pilot."

This really helps, as I find learning lines, pacing, and that sort of thing to be much more difficult than the trick itself. Magic is a PRESENTATIONAL art after all.

Anyway, once I've got a good idea of how I want to words to go together, I'll then condense what I've written into a few main points on a note card, and eventually into a few words.

Why do I do it this way? Well, personally I feel that if you try to have your scripts memorized word for word, you become a little stilted, stiff, not really there, in the moment, for your audiences, and you miss opportunities to really connect with them.

Let me put it to you this way: Stage actors in a play are interacting only with each other, and the audience watches. Magic is different: You're interacting with your audiences, and as a result, unexpected things may and often do happen—after all, many modern audiences don't know "their lines," such as applause cues and things like that. Some one may make a comment that you can use, which I'll cover in a later chapter on ad-libbing.

What I do, since I like to really connect with my audiences and ad-lib where appropriate, is have the basic essence of my script memorized. Let me give you an example from my routine which a parody of late-night infomercials:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to pause for a commercial, from my sponsors, the makers of Wonder Pet!" That's how I sometimes say the opening line.

On some nights I may say this:

"Are you having fun? Good, it's time for a commercial! My show is sponsored by the makers of Wonder Pet!"

See, there isn't a real big difference in either opening line—in each case, the audience is led to believe they're going to see a "commercial." The essence is there, and it's a lot easier then struggling to remember...each...exact...word...

Now, on the flip side, I'll be the first to admit that in certain instances if you've struck gold as far as a certain key phrase getting the perfect response that you should stick with it, but in a lot of cases it may not matter. Different routines will require different handling.

Of course, if you perform often enough, you'll eventually be able to get exact phrasing down for your effects if you wanted to, but again, in my own work it's not always necessary. My persona is that of a relaxed performer, and so I certainly don't want to sound like a "canned" performer—I want the audience to know that I'm making contact—I can see the kid in the first row bouncing up and down, I can see the guy in the back scratching his head, and so on. By CONNECTING with our audiences, we'll seem even more like special people! In a nutshell, that's how I handle memorization. Now, let's take a look at humor in our shows...

“Look, I Made a Funny!”

This chapter is sure to cause a bit of controversy. I feel that if you're a professional magician, your act needs to be squeaky clean. That being said, I'm not a stuffy prude or anything like that. My sense of humor when I'm not working, is quite...shall we say, demented.

I enjoy the comedic works of George Carlin, every raunchy bit! But in my professional work...no way. I advertise myself as ultra, squeaky-clean. I think that in today's age of jumpy client, politically correct behavior and such, a clean act is very important.

Now, I know certain people will probably point out the work of Penn & Teller and The Amazing Jonathon as examples of performers who are gut-busting funny, while being risqué. I couldn't agree more—the works of the artists I just mentioned is absolutely brilliant.

The reason why I don't put that kind of material into my own act is simple and threefold: First of all, the artists I mentioned spent a lot of nights wondering where their next meal was going to come from. While I deeply respect their dedication to their vision, I care too much about making a living. I would LOVE to do that kind of act, but I can't because of point two: I'm primarily a family or kids' magician, and as such can't afford to put any questionable material into my show. The third point is this—while I find that kind of humor absolutely great, it isn't everyone's cup of tea, and I can't risk scaring away potential clients.

Is it a compromise of artistic integrity? Yes. Does it mean that maybe I 'sold out' to the almighty dollar? Maybe. I just want to earn a living. I have no desire to be famous.

I also know some performers who have a “kiddie” show or shows and adult material—personally, I think it's a bit of a risk, because if the wrong person hears/sees something you do for an adult audience, they may assume that you do the same kind of material for kid shows, regardless of any kind of guarantee you may have in place...C'mon, I'm sure most of you have encountered the kind of person I'm talking about.

Let me relate a personal experience with you. A number of years ago, I used to use my pet python in my act. I used to make her appear with a rather large “Square Circle.” Years later, I upgraded and began using a beautiful Birds to Rabbit cage, built by Chalet magic, which cost me several hundred dollars.

While most of my audiences really enjoyed the snake trick and many people booked me just because I had the snake, I later found out that many people wouldn't book me *because* of the snake, regardless of how much I tried to reassure the prospect that the snake was optional, really!

I'm sure many people out there may not see the connection, because we're talking about humor and simple jokes, not some "disgusting slimy snake." Wrong! Think, again, to some of the worst magicians or clowns you may have seen.

I can tell you horror stories about big-time bone-headed magicians who have used the "bra from silks" trick on small children! In my opinion, doing it at a children's party is bad enough, but *doing it on a child*...well, my only guess is that some of these people have a rather poorly developed sense of humor.

I'm also willing to bet that there's plenty of magicians out there reading this thinking to themselves, "Hey, wait a second! I've used that trick for years and no one's ever complained!"

Doesn't matter. Just because people don't complain doesn't necessarily mean that they're satisfied with their service. Case in point: My wife is the kind of person who will go to a restaurant, endure bad service, not speak up, and will still leave a decent tip to the wait staff. She's just nice that way.

But it doesn't mean she was satisfied.

I myself have listened to many clients tell me horror stories about horrible entertainers and the "acts" they've had to endure.

I guess what I'm driving at is this: If you want to do some really original stuff and get a Vegas show, great. If you want to bill yourself as an outrageous entertainer, just do the rest of us who are trying to make a living a favor—be upfront with the client and get approval for anything even the slightest bit risky.

If you want to really jump into magic as a profession, then the safest course, and the best way to be sure you'll get referrals and repeat business is to make sure your shows are clean and safe enough to perform in front of a group of nuns! And no, I'm not kidding—I've done it. I know, some nuns/church groups may think magic is 'evil,' but hey, they called me, and I assured them that my magic was simply sleight of hand, fun, 'light & fluffy' kind of stuff. I did the show, and guess what?

They called me back the next year and hired me again.

“I Came Up with The Funniest Line, But I Forgot It!”

I have to credit this idea to Jeff McBride from his outstanding “Magic on Stage” video series. It also ties in with the previous chapter on humor.

I know I went on a tirade about humor and being careful and everything, but even the cleanest of performers will hit upon something during the show that they feel might add a good laugh to the audience they’re performing in front of.

Experienced performer will especially understand this feeling: You’re ‘in the zone,’ the audience is loving everything you’re doing, and you decide to toss a one liner out there to see what will happen. The best-case scenario happens: They laugh! Everyone loves it!

Very important tip here: *Write it down!* Chances are you’ll forget it if you don’t.

In the last chapter, I mentioned that I’ve got a pretty twisted sense of humor. I’m also regarded as a really funny guy by my family and friends. I’m also regarded as pretty funny by most of my audiences, but because I insist on being squeaky-clean, I’ve found that I often have trouble thinking of something funny to say when I’m scripting my effects, and quite honestly, although I do purchase and use other professional routines, I prefer to use my ‘own’ humor. It’s a quirk—if my audience laughs, I want it to be because of me! Weird, I know.

Because of the fact that this insistence on cleanliness clogs up my ‘writing filter,’ I usually rely on inspiration to create most of my laughter. I’ve tried to create jokes and cute visual bits for my act, but by and large...they bomb. I don’t know why. Even the ones that don’t totally bomb usually need some tweaking and then bam! I’ve got something golden.

Someone once said, and I’m sorry, but I can’t remember who, that when you’re on stage, between the adrenaline rush performers get, they often come up with funny material ‘on the spot.’ Something about chemicals rushing to the brain, and causing the synapses to fire quicker, or some other thing.

It’s a theory that I believe in, to an extent. First of all, I don’t rely on it to get me through a show. I make sure that regardless of the source, the effect is fully scripted and rehearsed before I put it before an audience, even if it isn’t the funniest thing in the world.

Second, I wouldn’t dream of trying an ad-lib out with relatively new material. I really believe better ad-libs come to us with material that we’re already super-familiar with. Oh sure, there’s exceptions, but by and large...

The point to all of this is to write it down if you come up with a good one-liner. I've come up with my best material that way. After you've recorded it, try tweaking it, especially if something about that particular audience is what made the humor work so well. Try to recreate that 'magic moment' with future audiences.

Also, and this is key, try to appear 'spontaneous.' Whit Hayden, a professional magician who's created GREAT routines for the color changing knives and the cut-n-restored rope among others, advocates leading the audience to believe that you're creating many of your 'on the spot' lines right there...even if the reality is that they've long become stale to you over the years. He says it adds to the humor because the audience will appreciate a funny ad-lib more than a smarmy rehearsed comment.

This is a technique I'd more or less developed on a subconscious level years ago and was stupid enough to think I was the only one to stumble upon it. Talk about *illusions!*

Again, the best way to take advantage of this little quirk of the human psyche is to make sure you know your act like the back of your hand. That way, you have the freedom, comfort, and luxury to go in & out of script, knowing that if you strike gold, you still have a solid, reliable script to go back to once the inspiration of the moment leaves you.

“Stop, Thief!”

This will probably be a relatively short chapter. I want to get right to the point: if you're stealing another performer's material...STOP IT!

To steal another performer's material is not only a disservice to the art of magic and the person you're stealing from but also a huge disservice to yourself!

Think about it: most of the people who steal material steal Copperfield's (more about that later) or someone else they've either seen on TV or in a show. A lot of performers try to justify it by that old saying, "Imitation is the best form of flattery."

Well, it's not! It makes people look like a hack. Now granted, I'll be the first to admit that most performers won't get caught, but still, they have to look at themselves in the mirror.

Other counter-points I've heard is the idea of "honoring" past performers much like a concert pianist will honor Beethoven by playing his work. Here's my response: It takes years and years of dedication to properly play Beethoven's work, while it takes NO work at all to rehash someone else's plot lines or patter.

Let me give you a big example of this: I was the opening act for a friend's show a number of years ago. I was to perform 15 minutes and he was going for 45 minutes. Fair enough. He'd explained to me that he routinely performed for two or three thousand people at a time for fees in excess of a few thousand dollars, so I assumed that he was a 'really good' performer.

Well, to make a long story short, we were on stage walking through our blocking and such, when I asked him what he did—I didn't know anything about his act.

He explained that he closed with "Cardiographic," which for those of you who don't know, is a beautiful effect in which the spectator selects a card, and the performer draws his/her card on a large sketchpad...but it's the wrong card. Not to be deterred, the performer adds a few lines to the drawing, declaring it to be a full deck of cards! Obviously, this won't do, so the performer causes a drawing of the spectator's correct card to rise out of the drawing! As an added kicker, the performer tears off the sheet of paper and gives it to the spectator as a souvenir!

Great effect, and I was pleased until my friend explained that he copied David Copperfield's presentation word-for-word, even down to the music! Terrible.

Where's the skill? What has he done to earn the audience's respect/attention? The trick itself (like a LOT of magic) is technically easy to perform...Connecting with the audience is the hard part!

Too many magicians think that once they've got the mechanics of the effect down, that's it! Look at it this way: anybody can bang on a piano and make noise, but it takes talent to make beautiful, moving music.

It's sort of the same idea with magic tricks—it's the performer's tools, nothing more, and the real talent comes from what you do with those tools, which is kind of a big idea for a lot of performers to wrap their ideas around.

Some performers would prefer that every magician create all-new, original scripts for the effects they perform—got a great sponge ball routine? Create your own brand-new patter, or you suck!

Well, in a real world, that's not always possible. I know a great many performers who want to do what they love—perform magic, but they're either not creative enough or they don't have time. My solution is this: BUY material!

I don't feel that there's any shame in purchasing someone's routine who intends for people to purchase it and use it. That's a BIG difference from stealing!

Buying material can really help you, especially if you're just starting out and don't know how to construct a show or even a routine. By buying material, studying it, and using it, you'll eventually begin to understand, at least in part, how to start writing your own material.

Personally, I do both. I create a lot of material and I buy a lot of material. Even if I buy something to use, once I incorporate it into my act, it usually evolves, as I stumble upon my own ad-libs, and line changes based on what I'm comfortable saying for cadence, pacing, etc.

My whole point of any product that I put out for the magic community is to hopefully offer some good advice and in some small way help improve our art. By improving our art, the public's perception of us will improve.

“Safety First!”

Another short chapter—if you’re a professional performer, you really need insurance! Let’s face it: in today’s world, there are too many people out there who are too eager to try and get some money. It’s a sad state to say that, but it’s true.

Also, many clients will not even hire you unless you have insurance! When I moved to Niagara Falls, one of the first things I did to ‘get my name out there’ was to call up several area daycares and offer free shows in exchange for being able to pass out promotional material to all the kids.

A few days after securing these free shows, the day care director of one of the chains I was working for called to tell me that I wouldn’t be allowed to perform for them unless I had insurance...for free shows!

Of course, knowing what I know now about childcare facilities, it really doesn’t surprise me, considering what they have to deal with, but at the time it was a shock. Fortunately, I was able to secure some very inexpensive insurance through the World Clown Association.

I don’t have any kind of a “deal” worked out with them or anything, but I’d like to include their contact information so you can check out what they have to offer on your own. Their phone number, as of this writing, is 1-800-336-7922, and their website is: www.worldclownassociation.com.

On another topic, I want to briefly discuss issues of safety in your shows. I used to do a lot of fire in my act...a lot! I’ve since begun gradually reducing the amount of fire in my show until now it’s almost none. I had candles vanishing, a fickle-fire gimmick, flash pots, flash paper, fire in my dove pans, and on and on...

There are still effects that I use fire for but not many. It just isn’t worth the risk, and insurance doesn’t cover it.

Fire safety doesn’t have to be considered just for stage work, either. One well-known magician’s video covers a terrific effect for kids when table-hopping...well, terrific except for the fact that he instructs you to hand a lit match to a kid! How stupid is this guy?! **(I know purists out there will scream and cry about the fact that you should use common sense, only kids of a certain age, etc. but I disagree! Think about most of the supposedly more responsible 10- or 11-year-old kids you’ve met—a quick flash of an evil grin, and they’re whipping the match at their baby brother “because it’s funny.” Have I made my point!?!)**

Certain magic tricks should be handled cautiously or not at all, too. In my own work, I'll use an arm chopper for smaller shows and a six-foot tall guillotine for other shows. The arm chopper could potentially be dangerous if the operator has a mental lapse, so I'm very cautious and the big guillotine is idiot-proof, which is why I chose it.

On the other hand, a good friend of mine uses a "dissecto" type of chopper, where a switch pulls the blade away from the area that would normally 'chop' something. The problem? The model that my friend uses doesn't slide the blade back all the way...well, during one show, my friend called up a rather thick-wristed woman to assist him...

Can you see where this is going?

Yep, he nicked her wrist as the blade came down, causing her to bleed a little. It was a very minor injury, to be sure, but I don't think ANY discomfort is acceptable for a volunteer!

I guess what I'm getting at is if you're using anything that could potentially cause harm, use some common sense, or drop the thing out of your act all together. And for cryin' out loud, don't use flash paper or fire anywhere near a volunteer!

Okay, thus ends this rant!

“Nobody Will Pay to See Cardboard!”

Let me explain that title with a story. When I first started charging money for my shows (I couldn't justify calling myself a professional yet) I was probably the world's cheapest magician—I didn't want to spend any money on my props. Ten bucks? Too much! Well, to be fair, I also didn't have much money. As a result I used a lot of “Victory Carton-type” effects. Some were things of my own design, and some were straight from the magic booklets I'd pick up used at the magic shop for a buck.

I could produce animals, make things vanish, change, whatever...all with cardboard. I tried everything I could think of to dress up my effects—construction paper, black tape, paint, all of it. The trouble was it still looked like crap.

Then my wonderful friend Scully opened her mouth. Scully (real name Noel) often came with me to shows to assist. She is one of my best friends (I can't wait for her to see the title of this chapter) and has the freedom and tendency to say whatever pops into her devious mind.

Well, after one of my pathetic shows, Scully explained to me that if I was going to continue to charge for my shows and even raise those fees, I really needed to provide a show that people will pay money to see. Finally, to emphasize the point, Scully blurted out, “Cris, people aren't going to pay to see cardboard!”

I laughed my head off and immediately saw the logic in what she was saying. Over the years, I've added a lot of really neat stuff to my act, and while I definitely don't think that expensive props will make your act better, it can certainly help with audience's first impressions of you.

A word of caution, though—don't go to the opposite extreme and try to use nice props to cover for poor skills. I myself learned how to put on a pretty good show long before I paid over \$65 for a prop, and I was doing shows for several hundred people by this time.

Learn how to perform first, and when you go to add a piece to your act, don't get the cheesy version with the Chinese symbols and bad paint job. I'm not saying you have to spend \$500 on a prop if there are other versions, but most of the time the cheapest versions will be the ones that fall apart a lot sooner.

“Huh?”

Learn to speak to your audiences! (See how I just jumped into that subject?) When I was in college, I took acting & theater classes and a speech class, and it really helped me in my performing career.

If you can manage to take such a class in your community, I highly recommend it. When speaking to audiences, you're going to need to have a commanding presence, and unless you use a PA system of some kind, your only tool to get and hold their attention is your voice.

Think about it—you need to be able to cut through conversations, music, wind, cars, pets, the buzzing of insects, and more, depending on when and where you perform.

Learning how to enunciate is key—giving every word inflection so that the last row of people can hear you and understand you. Even more important than that is to use your diaphragm in order to push your voice to that back row without straining your vocal cords.

Protecting your vocal cords in such a way is the most important thing you can learn how to do as a speaking performer. Obviously if you're a silent performer, you can skip over this chapter!

Personally, while I do know how to use my diaphragm, I choose to simply use a PA system whenever I perform for over 50 people or so. Why? Well, in this day and age, many people have never been to live theatre, or anything live other than sporting events, so they don't know about manners or the idea of paying attention or listening.

By the way, if you really doubt what I'm saying, sit in a movie theatre and listen, or better yet, go to another magician's show and pay attention to the audience. You may be surprised by what you see and experience!

Now, a big question that many performers may have is what kind of a PA system should they buy? Well, early in my performing career, with very little knowledge of sound equipment, I basically pieced together a system with Radio Shack's assistance. Over the course of a couple of years, I bought two 10" PA speakers, a wireless microphone, and a 40-watt amp. I also bought a couple of tripods for the speakers.

This is an important point—your speakers must be elevated to be effective. When I first bought my speakers, I thought my sound worries were over until at one show, a guy in the back row complained that he couldn't hear anything I said due to the fact that my speakers were sitting on the floor, and thus didn't travel over the heads of the audience. You'll need to elevate your

speakers...but please don't put them on chairs, stools, or anything like that. Remember the cardboard rule? You'll need some tripods especially built for speakers complete with flanges/speaker mounts. Any reputable music specialty store should be able to help you.

The system I talked about is what I used for many years and easily covered audiences of 700 people. I don't use that system much anymore even though I still have it. Now, I use a much smaller system.

There's a company in Florida called, appropriately enough, Florida Magic Company that sells a tiny little PA system that weighs less than 5 pounds that ROCKS. It costs less than \$400 and will easily cover audiences of 500 people or so. It's got a built-in transmitter enabling you to use one of the two wireless mics that come with it—either the lavalier clip-on type of mike or the headset mike. I prefer the headset, myself. It's comfortable, gives you a professional air about you, and doesn't pick up as much ambient sound. Plus, since the mikes are wireless, you don't have to worry about tripping—minimizing things to keep track of can only help your performances!

For the price, it's a great system. What's more, you can even plug in a CD or tape recorder into it to run music for your act. However, you will need to elevate it just as you would any speaker. I bought a regular microphone stand and flange. I then happened to have one of those little wooden TV dinner tables. I yanked the legs off, painted the flat board, mounted the microphone stand flange, and presto! A professional looking sound system and stand that sets up in less than one minute! It's great.

If you like the two-speaker set-up, many companies now make a really nice system where the speakers and amp/playback unit all connect together for easy transport.

Whatever system you use, make sure it will a) suit your needs and b) look professional, and c) be easy to transport and set up!

The mistake I made with my first system is the fact that it takes about 15 minutes to set up. That's fine for some very large events like fundraisers, but for most school shows, for example, many administrators don't want to be bothered with a performer who takes a long time to set up.

One final note: Do NOT use your home stereo speakers! There's no way possible to make them look professional...yes, I tried!

“Who Would Like to Help Out on Stage?”

You know, a big part of me really wishes I didn't have to write this chapter, but I do. You've all seen it, and many of you have probably experienced it: You ask the question, “Who would like to help me out on stage?” Then it happens.

No one moves. Not a single hand goes up. What do you do?

Where does this fear of helping out the entertainer on stage come from? Well, to be sure, some of it is simply the fact that many people don't like being on stage in front of people. Fair enough.

Most of it, however, I'd be willing to wager on the fact that many people have seen or experienced firsthand an entertainer who really doesn't know how to treat his or her audiences. Think about it...

The squirting flower. The hand buzzer. Disappearing ink. Or the one that I loathe above all the others: The shock chair. (Okay, I may not have the title of the prop right, but who cares? Anyone who would zap his/her audience members in the name of entertainment isn't much of an entertainer in my book.)

And the list goes on and on. I think there is a place for 'sucker' type effects in magic, but they take extraordinary skill, showmanship, and experience to pull off in a way that isn't offensive. Take Penn & Teller, for instance. Their act is laced with sucker tricks (at least on the surface) and all kinds of profanity and questionable material...and I love every bit of it because of their skill as entertainers, their charm, and their character development.

Most of us, however, don't have either the benefit of fame or the skill level that kind of act requires to pull off effectively.

So, to the performers out there in the Real World who take it upon themselves to use effects similar to the ones listed or worse yet to use put-down lines and claim it's comedy, I urge you to take a good long look in the mirror and ask yourself this:

If I was on stage as a volunteer, would I want someone I had just met saying/doing these things to me in front of many people?

People can be very frail creatures. I'm sure most of the performers out there doing these things don't mean for their attempts at humor or entertainment to be taken the wrong way, but the fact of the matter is that people can and do misinterpret things.

“Funny” is defined differently for every person. Just because it’s funny to you does not mean it’s going to be funny to the next person.

These people, these volunteers, who are gracious enough to help us on stage really have no idea what we’re going to do...none! Unless they’ve seen your act, they’re taking a leap of faith by helping you. Maybe they will enjoy being the center of attention. Maybe not.

The point is these people are not simply props to be placed on stage wherever we wish. They have feelings! When someone comes on stage, thank him/her. Ask their name. Treat them as people!

I really feel that common courtesy is becoming a thing of the past. My wife and I talk about this all the time—we’ll go to a store to buy something, and the salespeople are rude, the people at the restaurant are rude, the service sucks, and employees everywhere act as though you’re being a big pain in the butt by being there!

I’ve started boycotting the companies that annoy me the most. And I’ll continue to do so. I work hard for my money—why should I give it to someone who can’t be bothered to be the slightest bit polite?

Transfer this line of thinking to magic. When you get right down to it, can you think of something that is MORE expendable than a magic show? Really—magic doesn’t feed us, doesn’t cloth us, doesn’t shelter us—magic isn’t necessary for our survival...we don’t NEED it.

Now, don’t get me wrong...the world would be a LOT emptier without entertainment, especially the joy that a good bit of magic can provide...but to a bean counter looking at the bottom line, it’s the first thing that can be cut!

Remember that...it might keep some overblown egos in check!

Whenever I bring someone out of the audience to help me, I try to treat it as a mini-job interview. Who else has the power to really evaluate you on a personal basis more than a volunteer? Not only do they get to see whatever effect you’re presenting up close, but they will experience firsthand what kind of a person you are by how you treat that person!

It’s a powerful idea, because people like to do business or at least spend time with people that they like. This idea transcends whatever effect you’re doing—if they like you then you can present anything to them, but if they don’t like you, then it doesn’t matter if you can vanish the Statue of Liberty like Copperfield.

The best way to get someone to like you, it should be needless to say, is to be nice to them! Charm them, treat them with kindness...and make it real kindness, not smarmy game-show kindness, either.

People will be able to smell a fake, so try an acting exercise whenever you've got a volunteer on stage—picture yourself in their shoes: they're not used to being in front of people like you are. They're probably afraid of messing up or looking dumb. If you keep that thought in mind, maybe it will help you as you're dealing with these people.

If they wind up liking you, then I can personally assure you that their performance will be much better as a result. You'll discover that these people can ad-lib and give you great improvised moments to react off of...and the astute performer will take note of these happenings, these unexpected gifts, and try to recreate those conditions in future performances.

That recently happened to me. I perform a "No Bullies Allowed" show for elementary schools, and one of the effects I do involves a teacher reading the mind of a student.

Well, the trick itself is rather ordinary, but by encouraging my teacher volunteer to really ham it up as she's trying to "read the student's mind," I've gotten some wonderful reactions, and as a result of constantly cultivating this, it's now one of the strongest pieces in that particular show. The teachers usually creep menacingly toward the student, bug their eyes out, put their hands on the student's head to 'read the mind,' and so on. I love it, and so does my audiences.

Why?

First, I'm kind and gracious to my volunteers, and second, if they start hamming it up and have a good time, I back off and let them be the star for a few moments. It's a GREAT technique, as first of all it paints me as a gracious host, and it allows somebody to really show off any comedic skills they may have.

The result? A one-man show becomes a multi-person, interactive program that really gets the audience involved in ways many of them didn't expect. As a result, I get a better show, my volunteers come away feeling great that the spotlight was on them, and my audiences come away with a much more enjoyable experience.

Too many performers are afraid to let their volunteers 'get ahead' like that in any way. Too bad, because with some careful thought, they could raise their audience's perceptions of their show to heights they hadn't dreamed of.

“No Skill Required!”

The title of this chapter should really say it all! I believe those three words are the bane of everything that is good in magic.

“No Skill Required.” Think about it.

Really, think about what that implies. It implies, basically, that anyone can do this stuff. How in the world can anyone possibly be expected to take our craft seriously when our tools are sold with crap like that written all over the boxes?

It’s insulting! No skill required, mastered in minutes, fool your friends, yuk! No wonder everyone thinks magic is easy!

Here’s one way of looking at it: They sell magic tricks aimed at kids—fine. They also sell kids’ musical instruments-fine. The music toys don’t have “no skill required” on the packages! They’re sold for what they are...toys.

Not in magic! If you believe the packages, then anyone can pick this stuff up and within 30 seconds of opening the package, apparently people will just drop to their knees in honor of your ‘awesomeness!’

Of course, a great many people evidently believe it, because I’ve lost count of how many people I’ve seen purchase an effect and then put it in a performance...the next day. How reprehensible!

Contrary to the belief of many cheese ball ‘magicians,’ it’s still easy to screw up these No Skill Required props. Even if it’s self-working, any magic prop dictates that you handle/operate it in such a way as to cause an experience of magic in the minds and emotions of your audience. They’re NOT going to get that if the audience attributes the workings of the ‘magic’ to that “trick box” or those “trick cards.”

I’m currently working on the physical handling of a new mind reading card trick by Paul Harris. The handling is technically very easy, but as I’ve discovered, this trick deck of cards needs to be handled in such a careful way to hide the gimmicks...but it must be handled in an apparently casual way to hide the fact that you’re using gimmicked cards...without appearing as though you’re trying to hide anything!

Confused?

The point is, to convince the audience that the magic is you and your props requires acting! It means appearing natural...and that’s where the idea of technically ‘easy’ magic appeals to me. It’s hard enough to make those

connections with your audience, remember your lines, blocking, pacing, and all the technical demands of the effect!

Please understand that I am NOT opposed to technically difficult material. Everyone has to make his/her own choices...I'm just trying to convey to beginners out there that "No Skill Required" does not mean no WORK required!!

"I need something easy to put in my show!"

Okay, here's where I'm going to sound like a hypocrite. I don't think there's anything wrong with the above statement in and of itself, as long as it's with the right attitude. Let me explain.

I've spent most of my life as a magician studying the works of Eugene Burger. He has said in the past (and I don't remember exactly where, I'm afraid) that if he has an effect in mind and two sleights will accomplish the same effect, the same impact, on an audience, that all things created equal he'll usually go for the easier sleight, so he can better concentrate on his presentation.

I used to think I had to put all of the knuckle-busting stuff into my act in order to feel like a "Real Magician." I thought the only requirement was a great degree of difficulty.

That's a common misconception. It's sort like an actor believing that he's not earning his stripes without doing his own stunts or having loads of special effects. *The real art comes from the performance that evokes an emotional response from an audience.*

I think the same thing can apply to magic. Think about it.

What does a truly great filmmaker use to get those emotions? He uses music, pacing, maybe some special effects (depends on the story), great acting, editing, lighting, and the list goes on.

While a case can be made for the importance of everything I said, it can be argued that great performances will elevate the picture above the others.

How true for magic! I'd rather watch Lance Burton perform his ultra-simple "silk to egg" rather than watch some bonehead wheel out a \$3000 prop and slop their way through a 'performance.'

What I'm trying to get at is don't let the props do the work for you! They're only tools—a means to an end. I myself use a lot of really neat stuff in my

act—expensive stuff, that from a technical standpoint is very easy to perform-, no, check that...easy to 'make work.'

In each and every case, a big expensive trick has not gotten much of a reaction until I mesh it with an effective performance...every time!

So, in closing, the next time you see a label that says, "No Skill Required," don't think to yourself, "Oh that's easy! I can add it to my act!" Think instead "Oh, that's doesn't take a lot of technical skill—I'll be able to devote more of my energies to connecting with my audience."

As an offshoot of this whole conversation/rant about No Skill Required, I really want to hit home this idea of practice.

I want to refer you again to Jeff McBride's video series, "Magic on Stage." In the first video, The Commando Act, he offers a practice system of working in front of a mirror, then in front of a video camera, and then in front of friends and family, making adjustments and soliciting feedback along the way before finally putting it in your professional work.

I LOVE his system. Few professionals out there have laid it out as clearly as McBride has. Eugene Burger also details his own multi-step process when working on new material. I'd like to refer you to his video "Gourmet Close-Up Magic" for outstanding tips on working on material.

I'd like to add my own two cents to these two...I feel that you need to work on your lines both with your magic and after, by themselves.

Huh? I'll try to explain.

Usually when I'm working on new material, I start off, like a lot of us do, by concentrating on the physical actions of the effect, learning the moves so well that by the time I move to my script, I don't have to think much about that pinky break or whatever the case may be.

I try practicing my lines out loud, trying to look for ways to edit it, as I want the words to come out of my mouth naturally, without stumbling. I don't try to memorize them word for word in most cases because to concentrate line-by-line really inhibits me as a person.

I then try to find certain rhythms that I'm comfortable with, all the while looking for ways for the lines to match up with the trick's actions, using words, stories, or jokes to hide the 'secret moves' as much as possible in addition to any physical misdirection in the trick itself. This gives me additional layers of deception to rely on.

I then continue in ways much like McBride & Burger, getting feedback as much as I can. After a show, I always check with the clients to make sure everything went well anyway, so I'll take the opportunity to quiz them on any new material I'm still working on.

As far as video, I can honestly say that my school shows improved in huge leaps and bounds once I started taping my shows.

It's amazing how honest the camera is! You can see if the audience becomes restless at certain points, if your body language is working on stage, eye contact...even how your costume/attire looks good on stage.

Video cameras these days are so cheap that you're really doing yourself a disservice if you're not using them to fine-tune your show.

What's nice about video is that you can get honest feedback as opposed to well-meaning family members who only tell you what you want to hear or ill-meaning magicians who only want to tear you down!

Doubt what I'm saying? Try performing in front of a magic club some night! Hmmm, I think I may have hit that point before...

Okay, now I've got one additional topic I want to briefly touch on before I start offering my thoughts on specific markets...

“Is That Bunny Real?”

Live animals! This subject is very near and dear to me. No, I don't think live animals are necessary for a successful act, nor do I think you should even consider adding one to your act unless you LOVE animals.

This is a point I can't stress enough. Just as your volunteers are not props to be placed wherever you wish without regard to their feelings, neither are animals something to be used in a casual manner without regard to their feelings.

With animals, it's even more important that you consider their feelings because they certainly can't tell you with words if they're uncomfortable.

There's been a lot of really crappy books, videos, and other source material that offers ideas to handling animals that's cruel, to say the least.

I'm not going to offer a definitive text as to how to handle animals because quite frankly I don't want to be held liable in the chain of blame, but I do have a few thoughts.

First of all, if you use an animal in your act, realize you're not adding just a prop. You've got to consider every aspect of the animal, including housing, food, medical bills, and a whole slew of other things. Here's a quick story for your consideration.

I use a live ferret in many of my shows. In my act, I change my birds into my ferret with a Doves to Bunnies cage. It's a great prop, very comfortable for the little guys, but that's not the point right now.

A few months ago, my ferrets (I have two) developed some sort of illness that wound up costing me over \$1000 in vet bills over the course of about a month. The financial hit stung to be sure, but I wouldn't have been able to live with myself if I hadn't given the little guys the best possible care!

I'm just trying to get across the point that using live animals in your act is going to take more consideration than just the usual concerns of scripting, technique, etc. You've got to take their comfort into consideration, both to, from, and during the show.

What if you're performing outdoors, during the summer? The heat in many animal travel cages can reach frightening levels in mere minutes, so my own policy is simply no animals, EVER, for outside shows.

What about the prop itself? The noise of the crowd? It's impossible to predict with 100% certainty how an animal will respond to an unexpected event, which brings me to another point.

What about insurance? What if your rabbit bites someone? I used to use a 4-foot python in my act but eventually dropped her out of the act for a number of reasons, the least of which being her safety, because kids always wanted to poke at her. It just got to the point where I didn't want her to undergo the stress.

There are a lot of things to consider when using live animals in an act, but I think I've probably made my point.

What about fake animals? I use a Rocky Raccoon in my act, along with a few other things, and the reactions of the audiences tell me that these fake props are sometimes all I need.

Currently I use doves, a ferret, a fish, and a hamster in my various acts. Maybe someday I'll eventually phase them out of the show, but even if I do, I'm not saying to you not to use animals—just remember that they're living critters.

Now, let's get into the specific markets and some of the problems you can expect.

Close-Up

I want these chapters in the book to be easily accessible, so I've dropped the cutesy titles!

The first market I want to tackle is close-up for a number of reasons. First of all, a lot of magicians (at least in my experience) get into close-up when they're just starting out for, I think, for a very specific reason: Compared to stage, strictly from a monetary point of view, it's cheaper to get props for close-up.

Second of all, a lot of young magicians become obsessed with technically demanding routines and think they're ready for "professional" work long before they really are. I know this applied to me!

Third, I wanted to talk about close-up first because of the intimate surroundings—it's much easier for three or four people sitting around a table to interact as opposed to the stage.

When I first became interested in magic, I pretty much started with close-up, although I didn't wait too long to start working on stage or stand-up tricks, too.

I remember working my butt off on a beautiful coin routine by Paul Harris—as I mentioned earlier, it's a routine that requires a decent amount of table space, rendering it rather useless in my own current work, resulting in my first bit of advice for this market.

I think it's important to realize that unless you're extraordinarily well known or happen to find yourself in a lucky spot, you're not usually going to find a lot of table space to perform on. I usually find myself performing in the following situations when I'm engaged for a close-up gig: cocktail parties, outdoor picnics, after-dinner events, carnivals, holiday parties, and so on.

Think about these social situations—people are engaged in idle chitchat, or having dinner, or enjoying themselves outside, or whatever. In my experience, most of the guests are not even aware that a magician is even present at the event until you make your approach to the table.

In that sort of a setting, your presence is an intrusion on one level, so you really need to 'ease into' your performance, so to speak. Asking people to push their plates aside so you can do your favorite Matrix routine isn't a good idea!

The result? At least when you're beginning, start out with material requiring little or no surface area. (Yes, you'll find occasions for those 'table' routines, especially as you get more experience, but why make it harder on yourself?)

So, here's what I do...

First of all, a lot of thought has been spent on how to approach a table or group of people. Personally, I try to be as polite as possible. I approach a group, wait patiently for an opening as they talk, and introduce myself. I then explain that the host, business, whomever, has brought me in to entertain them with a little magic, and would they care to see a few quick things?

This opening spiel accomplishes a great many things: First, by waiting until I've got an opening rather than interrupting, I show that I'm a considerate individual. Second, I quickly explain that the host has engaged me to entertain and I'm not some nut just running around showing off. Third, I ask them if they'd like to see something as opposed to just starting.

I know this flies in the face of what others may have taught, but really, by offering guests the opportunity to say "no," I'm saving myself grief. Maybe they don't enjoy magic. Maybe they were involved in a personal conversation. Why perform for people who don't want to see you? I've done it and it's agonizing!

Anyhoo, this approach works well for me. Take it and use it as you wish.

How long should I perform? Personally, I usually shoot for two or three effects, sometimes as many as six effects if they're really have a great time...and they'll tell you if they're having fun. Remember, a close-up setting offers more natural opportunities to speak up with the entertainer.

What do I perform? I usually perform the following effects: Psychokinetic Silverware, Psychokinetic Time, Sponge Balls, Money Morph, Color Changing Knives, Rising Card, and occasionally the Balducci Levitation. Now, a few details about each.

If I'm performing for young kids, I usually do Sponge Balls first. If I'm performing for adults or older kids, I usually start with Psychokinetic Silverware or Money Morph. I try to finish with something really strong, but quite frankly, if done properly for the right audience, any of the pieces I just named is a closer, which brings us to an important point.

In close-up work, since most of the time your "show" only lasts from 5-10 minutes, you want to have only extremely strong material, because you just never know when someone will have to leave. End strong, don't try to 'build.'

With my adult material, most everything has a 'psychic' or mentalism feel to it, which works very well, and is still quick, visual, and funny. With the kid stuff, it's still eye-popping, fun magical stuff. I could present just my kid stuff to a group of adults, and they'd love it—in fact, I have.

Now, a few words about each individual effect.

First, Psychokinetic Silverware. This is a video (and now DVD) put out by Banacheck. I purchased my copy from Hocus Pocus (hocus-pocus.com) for a measly \$30!! It's without question the BEST video I've ever bought.

What happens is this: The performer causes ungimmicked forks to bend, apparently by mind control. Some of them bend in his hands, some in the spectator's. It's visual, funny, amazing, and if done properly, able to be done surrounded.

The video also covers two gimmick fork bends, which you can prepare yourself. The best part? Most of the stuff can be done impromptu, with borrowed forks. It's simply outstanding. Psychology, audience control, powers of suggestion, it's all covered. Get the video! I know others have metal bending videos out, such as Guy Bavli, but I feel Banacheck's is the most natural looking and the safest in terms of getting busted.

Psychokinetic Time is a booklet put out by Banacheck and the effect is the spectator names a number as they hold their own watch in their hand. When they open their hand and look at their watch, they see that their watch's hands have moved that many minutes! Mind blowing, impromptu, and cheap: I bought my copy for, I think, around \$12. Get it!

The moves themselves are not hard, but the psychology and audience control methods are what turns this into such a hit.

I got my version of Sponge Balls from a Eugene Burger video called The Real World from his series, "Magical Voyages." Basically, one sponge ball melts into two, and they appear, disappear, and multiply, finishing with three balls turning into 20 in a spectator's hand! I've gotten screams from adults when doing this!

The video's about \$30, and sponge balls are usually \$.50 each! It's great, and it's not the only quality item on the video.

Next, I want to mention Money Morph, which is the title of a video detailing a revolutionary handling of the classic "\$100 bill switch." In this version, a borrowed \$1 bill visibly 'morphs' into an 'inside out bill.' This looks very weird and is always a hit. The video's about \$20 and the gimmicked bill is another

\$10, but you can also change the bill into a \$20 or something like that. I prefer the inside out bill, though, because of the ‘weirdness factor.’ It’s very memorable!

The version of Rising Cards that I use is ultra-cheap—about \$6 for the gimmick, which is basically 3 loops of invisible elastic thread. The handling is simple, and in my version, the audience can examine the cards, the box, take out a card, sign it, etc. Psychology this is very strong! When I use this item, I always close with it because you leave your group with a souvenir!

What I like about this cheap version is the fact that you can do it surrounded, and when your control of the audience is solid (as it always should be) everything can be examined.

I know there are other, more expensive versions of this trick out there, some as high as \$300, but every version I’ve seen either has nasty angle problems or is unreliable mechanical junk. I didn’t choose this version because it’s cheap; I chose it because I feel it’s the best.

The actual name of the trick is “Almost Impromptu Rising Card” and is manufactured by Hampton Ridge Magic. Dig around your local dealers and you should be able to find it. Incidentally, the instructions detail a handling where you start off with the loop around your hand. Personally, I didn’t like that, so I developed a handling where I start with the loop around the deck and I end with the loop around the deck, enabling me to be reset when I’m done!

This is the only trick out of my list that I will not start with, because I feel it takes too long to get to the climax: the card has to be chosen, signed, and returned to the deck. A lot of ‘set up’ has to happen before the magic.

I prefer to close with this because by the time I get to this piece, I’ve already amazed my audience and more importantly hopefully bonded with them a little.

The final item in my no-particular-order list is the Color Changing Knives.

The knives are in many professional workers’ repertoires. The basic effect is simply two different colored knives seem to change places without any apparent effort. It’s a nice trick that can be done surrounded. It can also eat up a lot of time if paced properly—some magicians may be looking to reduce the number of effects they carry, so I figured I’d mention that tidbit!

It’s really the only expensive item in my list. The version I bought is Whit Haydn’s Color Changing Knives, for about \$75. The reason why I like these is because the knives are manufactured with the white side smooth and the

black side textured...this makes the knives and the proper sides very easy to find in your pocket without looking at them! This makes for a much smoother performance.

Whit also has a video called "The Intricate Web of Distraction" that routines the effect very nicely in such a way as to guide the spectators away from the idea that you're using trick knives.

As with everything I've mentioned, it's available from Hocus Pocus or your favorite dealers.

None of these effects are really hard from a technical standpoint, although each, especially the watch trick, requires you to keep a close eye on your audiences' attention and divert their attention to where you need it to be.

Still, while I don't consider my stuff 'easy,' as in no second deals, double lifts, or pinky counts, you do need to practice, as you should any effect, regardless of the market, degree of difficulty, or whatever.

While I do have other material I can use, this is my core set of effects for most close-up engagements. The effects are fun, amazing, have no major angle problems, and can all be done with no table surfaces. Remember those criteria! They're critical, as is one more I forgot to mention earlier: Close-up magic that can be done either in the spectator's hands or with a borrowed object naturally gets a bigger reaction because lines of reasoning seem to break down.

Look at the bending forks effect: it can be done with borrowed forks and much of the routine can be done in the spectator's hands or at least with him touching the forks.

The dollar bill trick? Borrowed. The sponge balls? Much of it happens in borrowed hands! The watch trick? Borrowed watch, trick seems to happen in their hands. The Rising Card? They sign a card and can examine everything. The only item on my list that doesn't adhere to this rule is the color changing knife routine, and while I love the effect and it does get great response, it's my least favorite.... but it does serve a very important purpose.

Often when I approach a table, people are apprehensive when they find out I'm a magician. My theory (and it doesn't take Einstein to figure this out) is that maybe they're afraid of being made fun of by those stupid magicians' put down lines that so many seem to use.

By opening with the color changing knives, I'm giving the audience a chance to get to know me as a person and to realize I'm not going to treat them badly or "steal their watch."

I don't always open with the knives, but if people are nervous, it's a great way to ease them into my act.

There are a great many other effects you can add to your act, but remember, each "show" is very short, so you don't need to lug around a close-up case from group to group. It's unprofessional and clumsy looking. I'd also like to refer you to Kirk Charles' wonderful book, "The Complete Guide to Restaurant and Close-up Magic." It's a great book, and at \$30 it's a steal.

Each effect also stands on its own and can be a great 'closer.'

Please consider each effect in terms of what I've outlined above. Don't make the mistakes of amateur magicians!

Another point to keep in mind is what happens if the group you're performing for doesn't seem to be enjoying themselves. Personally, I just cut the act short and graciously bow out. I've been doing this for so long that I've learned to read people to know who will get a kick out of this and who won't.

One thing to keep in mind when a client books you to try and adjust the time so you're not standing around after you've hit all the tables/groups. I like to have the option of skipping a group or cutting them short if they're not having fun. Why torture yourself and the group? There will be plenty of others who will enjoy my work.

Occasionally, however, I'll be performing for a smallish group—anything less than a hundred people—and the hostess specifically requests that I make a visit with every group/table. In that situation, if I encounter a group that doesn't really enjoy my work, I employ the "abridged visit" I mentioned earlier.

In his book, Kirk Charles recommends roughly one hour of close-up magic to roughly 100 people, and I've found that to be pretty true.

Some groups may try to engage me for 90 minutes for 60 people or something like that—rather than let my greed glands swell up, I prefer to take less time (and thus less money) and protect my reputation. Clients will also appreciate the fact that you had their best interest at heart, too.

What if you're performing for rude or drunk guests? Same thing—bail out early but graciously. It benefits no one to get into a war of words or putdowns with such guests. In the case of unruly children, having objects that can be examined can be a life-saver if one of the little beasts grabs your props. In the case of the Whit Hayden knives, for instance, you're provided with two un gimmicked knives to throw off the know-it-alls.

Personally, I rarely have this problem. Establishing control in the beginning is key, and by using material that doesn't have angle problems will often eliminate the cocky spectator's ideas of how your effects work. My rule is simple: If I don't enjoy the group I'm performing for, I finish whatever effect I'm doing and bow out.

Other problems you may encounter may be loud music or wind. When you book the show, get all the information you can from the client and plan accordingly. In the case of the loud music, explain to the client that guests need to be able to hear you, and as a result you'll need to concentrate your work away from the music. Most guests understand and are grateful, again, for your consideration for their investment in your program.

In the case of wind, make sure you use props that will remain firmly in hands—yours or theirs—and eliminate effects in which props are too light, such as sponge balls.

If you use a little common sense and look at the demands of the situations you'll be in, you should be able to avoid a great many of the problems amateurs encounter. This is an important lesson not just for close-up but ANY market:

Who will you be performing for?

What kind of physical situation will you find yourself in?

What age groups and economic backgrounds will you be performing for?

What are they expecting from you?

What material should you use that will satisfy the demands of the items on this list?

If you're a beginner, you may want to refer back to this list for any market.

Now, let's move on to one of the easiest markets to break into...but one that is very demanding!

Children's Birthdays

Here we come to one of the easiest markets to book, but don't let that fool you into thinking that it's easy. Working for children is always demanding in my book...and well, this IS my book!

Anyway, what I'm going to do is give my thoughts on birthdays overall and some of the problems you can expect to encounter, then I'll cover some finer points of the different age groups, and finally I'll offer some of the routines that I do.

First of all, with birthdays, one of the major issues is control. The kids should be allowed to have a good time, but you must absolutely keep their attention riveted otherwise they'll lose interest and/or run over you. I cover specific control issues in my School Course and my Quitting Your Day Job Course. Contact me for further details.

Secondly, kids want to laugh. More than anything else, they want to laugh and have a good time. Too many magicians have made the mistake of going in and just trying to amaze the kids. Most kids will try to catch you if your only goal is to amaze them!

However if you keep them busy laughing at the same time as you work to amaze them, then your task becomes a lot easier! It's a lesson I had to learn the hard way.

In his outstanding series of audiotapes, Dave Risley outlines three different approaches to being a children's entertainer character. I highly recommend that you run over to Riz's website at daverisley.com and just order everything he's got if you're going to be a children's entertainer. His stuff rocks!

In short, Risley's theory is to allow the kids to do the magic—empower them with magic words, gestures, etc. The kids, he feels, are always struggling for acceptance in their adult-dominated world. By empowering the kids, you don't come off as a know-it-all, powerful magician that the kids are trying to "bust." It's a different mindset and one that works perfectly.

Although that paragraph really doesn't do Riz justice, it's a starting point for you to consider when framing your act.

Other problems include being asked to include one and two-year old kids in your act..." But they're really smart for their age!" Right. I simply refuse to perform exclusively for that age group. My thought is this: I know I won't be able to hold the attention of a one-year-old, and trying to do so will only prove to be futile, so why try? I would only damage my reputation. Why?

Simple. Suppose you try to perform for kids that are too young—you'll fail, and the birthday mom won't see it as the kids being too young to watch your show, she'll see you as an incompetent performer! That may sound unfair, but it's true. Perception is reality—always remember that.

It's a different situation if the birthday child is turning one but all of the other kids are older – for that situation, I explain to the client that their child won't get anything out of the show, but the other kids will. Why lie and make yourself look bad? By the way, if you're thinking to yourself that you can do a magic show of any kind for a one-year-old...well, have at it!!!

What do you do when you get to the party, and you've been engaged to perform for five-year-olds, and the birthday mom still insists on plopping the toddler siblings right smack in front you? I personally explain in a very polite but firm voice that the toddlers always wander off and for safety reasons we must keep them firmly in control of an adult. Tact is vital here, as you don't want to offend the host, but you still want to put on your best show.

Other problems you can expect to encounter include a too-small-to-perform area. I always try to clearly outline my needs when speaking to the client on the phone. Even so, I occasionally have to use a little creative thought when I get to the party. Experience will tell most performers to downsize their show—almost everyone starts out too big. Try not to let this be you!

I personally try to fit everything into a roll-on table, with the exception of my animals and my "Floating Carpet." Most houses can fit a roll-on table comfortably.

What if you've been hired for a five-year old party and you find that the age ranges are really 5-13? I encounter that a lot. Like I mentioned earlier, most birthdays fall into two categories: Either the birthday mom invites the child's class from daycare or school (which includes same-aged children) or the "relatives" party, with cousins, friends, aunts & uncles, and so forth.

Finding out which kind of party is key! If you find out it's a "relatives" party, bring extra material appropriate for the other (suspected) age groups. It's simple!

Other problems you can expect: Not having a parking space within sight of the house! My solution to this twofold: ask the client to save a spot for you and to lessen the amount of stuff I have to carry in. That's a tip I picked up from a Docc Hilford booklet. He advocates mailing a "Reserved for Magician" sign along with the contract!

Another problem is the idea that for some reason it's okay in the birthday mom's mind for the kids to be running around in the same room while you're setting up. I put right in my agreement "contract" that the kids have to be in

another room. I've also structured my show in such a way that it only takes me about 20 minutes to set up my biggest birthday show. I also bring a backdrop frame and backdrop with me for my bigger shows so that I have a place to hide certain props as well as my animals if kids go running by.

The last problem I want to touch on in the bane of most kids' performers, the Outside Show. Ugh.

I do a number of these every year and usually hate them all. I've tried building shows with only outside-friendly material and have had some success with them: stuff like rope tricks, multiplying bottles, and so forth, and while it does help, be aware that the attention of the kids may be harder to control based on several factors: wind, heat, outside noises, insects and last but certainly not least, the fact that your voice loses volume outside.

There are ways of handling this: You can bring a small PA system, but what I usually do is try to get the birthday mom to have the show in the garage. It's a lot easier, and it makes the show a lot more fun—on the grass, your tables and props may not rest properly after all!

I've also got a built-in advantage when it comes to outside shows: My animals. I refuse to use them outside for reasons I mentioned elsewhere. I then explain that I can do the show, but it will have to be without the animals if we're doing it outside. The client, after I explain these concerns for the animals' safety, usually agrees to have the show in doors.

Regardless of how your show is structured, be prepared for some of the pitfalls if you agree to perform outside. Of course, you can refuse to do outside shows, but that may severely cut into your income.

As far as guidelines for tricks, I would consider material that sets up quickly and doesn't have a lot of angle problems as being key. Every party is different. Every house has a different layout. Sometimes you may be hired to perform the show at a church or a community center, or a restaurant. Can the trick be done with the audience sitting practically on your toes since space is so tight?

Remember that kids are curious, and they may be very determined when trying to see how something works! Consider angles!!

Does your trick involve confetti, like "snowstorm" tricks? You may want to reconsider, since the poor birthday mom is going to be cleaning anyway. Obviously, this is a trick that is best suited for outside shows, in the yard, although I'd still ask permission.

Is the trick potentially messy, like “Silk to Egg?” If that’s an expensive white carpet beneath your feet, you’d better be darn sure the egg only spills on YOUR table!

I mentioned set up earlier, but I feel it’s important to stress how frazzled many birthday moms are—they’re trying to get this party going while balancing childcare, a job very often, and any other responsibilities they have as a mom and wife and lord knows what else. For that reason, the quicker you can set up, the better. If your show can be done virtually in any setting, that’s better, too—it’s one less thing to stress out the mom.

Finally, a note on effects: I feel it’s best to never do “sucker” effects (i.e. silk to egg) as intended for children. The kids will feel frustrated because most sucker effects are structured to rub the audience’s face in the fact that you fooled them! That should NEVER be the goal of magic. “Sucker” effects can turn an audience against you.

Now that we’ve tackled some of the problems in the general birthday market, I want to touch on some specifics for different age groups. First, 3- & 4-year-olds.

I will never do a show longer than 30-35 minutes for this age group. I just feel that it’s too much to ask them to sit still longer than that, regardless of how much fun they’re having. Second of all, I never do anything too complex for this age group. These kids couldn’t care less for the magic! That was a tough lesson to learn, but a valuable one.

Keep their shows silly, with lots of color and laughing. Some of the tricks I use for this group include: A Rabbit in The Hat glove puppet. It’s soft, appealing, and with the right routine, it can be funnier and more enjoyable for them than anything else. Remember their interest/comprehension level. I’ll also use the good ol’ Coloring Book. For those of you who don’t know, the coloring book is a cheap \$4-\$10 prop that causes blank coloring pages to become filled with drawings and finally color. It packs flat and plays huge and it easy to find in any magic shop. If you’ve established a good rapport with the little ones, you can also use Rocky Raccoon. I think you really have to “make friends” with this age group before you bring out Rocky because it can be scary to little ones. Finally, the good ol’ blooming bouquet, the flower that only blossoms when you’re not looking, is a big hit for this age group.

For this age group, I recommend keeping the children ahead of you—that is, they see things you don’t, they get questions right that you don’t know the answers to, and so forth. They like seeing adult figures off balance! Again, refer to Dave Risley’s material for more information. Just buy everything he offers, trust me!

The second age group I perform birthdays for is 5–7-year-olds. If it's a group of five-year-olds, I'll generally offer the same sort of material with maybe some more 'advanced' things to boot. For six- and seven-year-olds, I'll start bringing more 'amazing' stuff into the show, always with more of an emphasis on making kids laugh. I'll use stuff like a mini-chick pan to make a live hamster appear after a series of gags with trick magic wands. I love the Multiplying wands and the Appearing 8' wand. They're great!

For the seven-year-olds I may also work in the sponge ball routine I mentioned earlier...they're old enough that they can appreciate what's going on...plus I've got a cute storyline to go along with it. I tend to personify a lot of my props as 'animals' or 'pet substitutes' because I wasn't allowed to have animals as a kid...or so the patter goes!

I offer my clients my animal effects too (at a higher price) but these days I really don't bother doing this for three- and four-year-olds—generally they don't understand the magic part of the trick and the introduction of live animals can serve as too great of a distraction for the rest of the show.

For the 6- and 7-year-olds, I also will often perform my version of the Zombie, in which I again personify it as an animal, even going so far as to create a fur covered 'critter' out of a zombie gimmick. I've found this to be much more effective for this age group as opposed to a silver ball.

One point I want to bring up here for all birthdays is the handling of volunteers. I firmly believe in the idea that you should alternate tricks with volunteers with tricks without volunteers, to break up the show, otherwise kids could get really restless as they try to anticipate getting up on stage, so to speak. "Silly Billy," AKA Danny Kaye, writes about this. I stumbled upon his column in MAGIC magazine years after I was 'silly' enough to think I was the first one to come up with the concept.

I would also prefer not to end my show with a volunteer trick so that the kids don't feel left out because they couldn't help—not a good note to end on. The only exception to this idea is when I'll make the birthday child float in the air on a "Magic Flying Carpet."

I've found this to be a valuable addition to my show, although kids older than 8 will often become obsessed with catching how this is done, so be forewarned! The "Carpet," available from most dealers for around \$330, is a bit 'angly,' so if you get one, call me and I'll give you some thoughts on how I handle it. I've considered the Chair Suspension, but quite frankly I've heard too many horror stories about safety, so I've decided not to buy one.

Other tricks I use for this age group include PB&J, the old trick where the Peanut Butter and Jelly change places under cover. It can done surrounded,

outside, and if you spice it up with wand gags and volunteers, you can have a rather lengthy piece. I also use the doves in my act, as kids at this age love live animals and this is one instance where they're so captivated by what's happened that they don't mind being 'fooled' as much.

For children's parties ages 8 and up, I'll do a lot of 'advanced' material as far as comprehension goes. This group can really be difficult to perform for, especially boys. I've tried different control techniques, but certain audiences of all-boy groups are just too excited. I have a theory about economics, parenting, and politeness, but since it's just a theory...

This group includes the ages where they really try hard to bust you, unless you present your magic in such a way as to keep them laughing and engaged, as with other groups...this age group is just a little more persistent!

This is the age group where it's risky to bring out the cut and restored rope, thumb tip tricks, and other such classics, because a lot of kids spend a lot of time on the web and at magic shops! For an idea of camouflaging a classic effect, consider my Zombie idea. Or, for the cut and restored ropes, I'll set up the effect so a volunteer is responsible for the magic happening and I'm the idiot who keeps messing up the trick by cutting the rope. It keeps the kids laughing, and as a result they're not in such a hurry to 'catch' me.

Certain card tricks can work in this group, as long as it's stuff they didn't see on TV being explained by Mac King! I like using the 3-1/2 of Clubs trick. For those of you who don't know, in this trick, you force the 7 of clubs on a volunteer. After explaining that the big jumbo card you've had in view for the whole show will change to 'exactly half' of your helper's card, you ask them what the card is. After acting horrified that you can't have a half of a card that's odd—like the 7—you turn the jumbo card around, showing the 3-1/2 of clubs. It's very cute, and you can usually find them for about \$2 in a magic shop.

This age group is also where I'll bring out the old Arm Chopper. Tongue in cheek danger like this will often keep the kids' attention as opposed to yelling out how it's done. In fact, with the chopper, I TELL the kids it's fake, and it can't hurt you! It completely takes away their thunder of busting the effect's workings, and then I pull a reversal on them. Let me explain.

After telling them that it's a "trick blade," I then proceed to demonstrate how safe it is by putting a carrot in it...which is "accidentally" cut in half! Yikes! Do you see the psychology here? And for the rest of the trick, the kids are giggling in the make-believe hope that I'll screw up on a volunteer's arm! I took away their thunder.

Recently, I've been offering Magic Classes to ages 8 and above, and this works GREAT as the whole issue of "I know how you did that" is COMPLETELY

erased! Once again, Dave Risley teaches how to do a magic class on one of his tape packages. I do it almost verbatim, so I can assure you that it rocks! In the future, I may ONLY offer Magic Classes for kids above the age of eight.

While the ideas, effects, and routines I've offered in this chapter are by no means all-inclusive, it should get you started if you're a beginner. As in most markets, it's not necessarily what you do, but how you do it. Keep that in mind!

By putting the power of the magic seemingly in the hands of the kids, by using a lot of humor, and by structuring the show so you guide most age groups of kids to look at you as amusingly incompetent, you're creating scenarios that are much more fun for the kids as opposed to the guy who gets up in front of the group and shows off how "great" he is.

It's a different mindset, but it can really work wonders!

Daycares

I really enjoy this market, and again, if you're going to get into this market, I highly recommend that you get Dave Risley's materials!

A great deal of what I said in the birthdays 3–4-year-old section of the last chapter can definitely apply here. First of all, you're going to be dealing with very young children who very often may not comprehend what magic is all about.

Eddy Wade, a terrific guy in his own right, once described his 3–4-year-old birthday show as “the clown with no make-up.” Silly, gags, no magic. I think that's a great way to look at it. I'm not going to spend a lot of time rehashing what I said about 3-4 birthdays, but I do want to cover some problems or situations in the daycare market that you may encounter.

First off, let me just state that I feel it's one of the easiest markets to work in, so the potential problems are very minor, at least to me.

One area of contention is the lock-down security systems that many of them have. Basically, for security and safety's sake, you'll have to press a buzzer to gain access to the building...many times, which means you'll be hitting the buzzer 3 or 4 times, depending on how much stuff you carry in from the car.

This was a big wake up call to me! Now, I have a rule: no more than one trip, max. For one reason, it's easier on me, especially on days when I'm doing three or four shows. The other thing you need to consider is making it easier on your clients. Day care directors are incredibly busy, stressed-out people. Taking care of children is tough. Taking care of a business is tough. Putting the two together probably generates a high amount of ulcers.

So, make it easy on people you're working for: reduce the number of trips to the car. Also reduce the time you need for set-up—it's a pain, for them, if you say they need to herd the kids into another room for a half an hour of set up!

I've really worked hard to make my shows daycare-friendly. My typical summer daycare program sets up in just four minutes, only one trip from the car and the kids can be in the room with me, as long as they're supervised. My winter programs set up even quicker.

The only time you'll want to consider older material for your daycare audiences is usually in the summer—that's when daycares run their summer programs for school-age children.

Many times, you'll be expected to entertain groups of kids from 2-1/2 to 13 years old. This can be tough if you're not prepared. Other experts have

recommended that you play toward the 5-year-olds in that case, and I've found that to be very effective. I call it doing a balancing act!

Other times, if enrollment is very high, some centers will want you to do two shows: one for the preschoolers and one for the school-age kids. In that case, you can really make life easier on yourself by presenting two differing programs.

Most of the time my approach is to treat daycares as big birthday parties in terms of trick selection: the kids are close enough to you, and the crowds usually aren't as big as school shows.

One other aspect of daycare shows is worth mentioning: Very often daycare directors will want you to have themed or educational shows, even for preschoolers. Summer shows very often can be just entertaining, but most places will be more prone to hire you if you have theme shows.

Last year, for instance, one chain of daycares who had hired me for 8 summer programs called to hire me the following year for summer again, but this time they wanted a theme show. Fortunately, since the summer programs were loaded with school age kids, I was ready and able to pitch them on my self-esteem show, "Yes We Can!" (There's a not-so-subtle plug!)

The only other "pitfall" in daycares is the fact that many of them will require you to have insurance. Like I said earlier, I feel insurance is a must if you're a full-time performer anyway. Plus it's a selling point to many clients!

As far as tricks, again consult my ideas in the 3-4 birthday section for preschoolers and the other sections for older kids—like I said, I often treat daycare shows as big birthday parties.

For preschoolers, please take my advice and get a rabbit in the hat puppet from Dave Risley and get yourself a Rocky Raccoon spring animal, too. While I'm not in favor of everyone doing all the same material, I do feel that those who are just starting out should guide themselves with the classics and what other top pros are doing—then those who are just starting out will learn what works and be able to eventually judge new material for themselves with an experienced eye.

Daycares can be a wonderful place to work. Just use a little common sense: don't use any fire or questionable material and get Dave Risley's materials if you want to do a lot of these shows!

Schools

This is probably my favorite market to work. There are a lot of things to consider when working in this market. For one thing, you'll need themed educational programs in most cases, if you want to do a lot of shows. Oh sure, some schools will call you for an "end of the year" thing, and I even get the occasional Halloween show, but theme shows are THE key to working in this market.

Ideas for possible theme shows are: Anti-Drug, Bullying, Self-Esteem, and Reading. While by no means complete, that list can get you started (Cheap plug: contact me about my detailed Complete School Performing/Booking Course!).

Here's a few quick tips on themed assembly shows...

When putting together theme shows, don't try to put too much info into a program. Most schools expect a 40–45-minute program—anything shorter and they really don't feel it's worth bringing in. Anything longer, well, they really don't have time. You need to focus in on that 45-minute mark.

Strolling isn't as popular in this market except for the occasional outdoor spring carnival and things like that. I don't devote a lot of time to thinking about strolling or close-up magic for schools for that reason.

There are several possible pitfalls for this market if you're not prepared for it. First and foremost is audience control. I routinely work with anywhere from 250-450 kids per assembly, with some of them being as large as 600 kids. You HAVE to be a strong enough performer to hold their attention!

This requires a strong character, no wobbling, and an ability to "work the stage." This is a market where the points I made earlier in the book really come into play. Re-read my thoughts on working the stage, keeping everyone engaged, the theory of thirds, eye contact, and important concepts like that.

I also feel that you should really own your own PA system. Granted, 9 times out of ten, the school will usually offer you use of theirs, but for me, this just isn't viable. First of all, it's usually going to be a handheld mike—wireless if you're lucky, but very often with a nice thick cable to drag around and trip over.

Do yourself a favor—get your own and become familiar and comfortable with it long before you try big audiences like this! I know the first time I used a mic, I was horrified by the sound of my own amplified voice. It just felt uncomfortable, as I wasn't used to it.

I also feel that you'll often need larger props for school shows—not big illusions, but some effects that are visible from 37 rows back is needed! Some

effects, however, like the “Blooming Bouquet” and the “Coloring Book” are really small props and play well to big crowds!

Another problem you may encounter is when you are brought in for a show, they may stick you on stage in the auditorium...which is fine, but what if there’s band practice or some other group expecting to use the stage while you’re setting up? Different people in the school often forget to inform all departments about incoming programs. It can test your diplomatic skills!

I have a couple of ways to try and reduce these occurrences. First, I make sure to send my clients a performance agreement (contract) with the dates and times in question. I request that they send a copy signed back to me. This will—hopefully—reinforce the idea that they must plan for this program!

Second, I will very often send along a customized full-color flier with the dates, times, and nature of their programs so they can duplicate it and hang around the school. This is detailed in my extensive School Course.

Third, I’ve developed two versions of each show: “Fast Set-Up” and “Big Show.” The “Fast Set-Up,” as the name implies, sets up in about 10-15 minutes, which means minimal disruption for the school...especially if I’m doing the show in a gym or cafeteria! This happens quite often!

If the school feels the set up time of the “Big Show,” which includes live animals and bigger effects (which contributes to the “WOW” factor and really impresses kids and staff and makes me more money) and sets up in 30-35 minutes, is just too much, I’ll try to guide them toward the “Fast Set Up,” even though I get less money. I’d rather be known as someone easy to work with and protect my reputation, and thus future bookings. Giving clients a choice allows me to be seen as flexible and accommodating – critical in the school market.

I also feel you should look professional when dealing with the school administrators---not stuffy, just professional: no ripped jeans, for instance. Consider a clean-cut appearance, business or business casual dress, short hair, etc.

I also feel that your requests to the school should be minimal, such as no help carrying anything in, bringing your own PA, etc.

Also, just as in the daycares, very often you’ll have to “buzz in” every time you re-enter the school. Some administrators/PTA members will offer to prop open the door to the performing area, which is nice.

A “control” open at the beginning of the show and a control close to settle the kids down before you turn things over to the teachers at the end of your program is key! Too often an entertainer will come in and get the kids all charged up, but

when they leave, the school officials are on their own! Not a good impression. I will often get great feedback pertaining to this very point.

My control close, by the way, is detailed in the afore-mentioned school course.

Many times school officials will split younger kids, often grades K-3, into one assembly and the older kids, often grades 4-6, into another assembly. On one level, this is great for a number of reasons: First, by doing two shows you can get more money! Second, by having grades split up, you can really tailor each show for the grades—you don't have to worry about making sure you don't bore the older kids as you present material for the younger kids, and vice-versa.

Doing two assemblies has downsides, however. Most schools will expect to start the second show no more than 10-15 minutes after the first show...meaning your set-up and reset time has to be fast! I love doing two shows, but the short reset time is something you need to be aware of.

Of course, some schools will want only one assembly due to budget and time constraints. How do you cater to an audience of 400, grades K-6? I usually tailor the show right down the middle, to second grade, with a few silly things for the younger kids. It works pretty well, but it can still be tough if you don't know what to expect.

Often, schools will want assemblies for 7th and 8th graders. These shows are often very tough! I personally try to avoid this age group. Very often, these kids/young adults go out of their way to look/act "too cool" for what you have to offer.

In recent school seasons, I've had more luck offering more adult-themed material, in terms of mental magic and even some kinds of mentalism. It doesn't appear as 'childish' to that mind set. While it's too early to see if these experiments will hold up, my initial results are very encouraging.

Other problems can include having to carry your props w-a-y far away into the school, because the auditorium is located in the exact center of the school, with the shortest distance being a mile!!

For this reason, unless I'm doing an elaborate fundraiser program, I will try to limit myself to no more than 3 trips from the car as far as equipment goes, for my "Big Show." For my "Fast Set-Up," a streamlined version of each program, I only need one trip to the car. I've also recently purchased a small dolly/hand truck to make the trips a lot easier. Most hardware stores carry a small model for \$20. I can tell you that my school shows are a lot easier this year!

What about tricks, you ask? Again, watch your angles because in schools you'll be thrust into some difficult situations. Don't do any questionable material, such as fire. Clear any debatable material such as arm choppers or bottles with school officials.

Bottles?

I love doing the "Multiplying Bottles," which is an angle-proof effect that plays big to any audience and with the exception of the 7th & 8th graders, pretty much any age group. This effect is sort of like the classic "Passé Passé Bottles" gone horribly wrong.

Because the effect uses what looks like alcohol bottles, some school officials might get a little uncomfortable. I usually restrict my use of this effect in schools to my "anti drug" programs, and for that, it works great.

Schools are VERY sensitive to certain subject matter, such as guns. Don't even use the word! It's a BIG taboo.

Scissors? As in "Cut-N-Restored Rope?" I've never had a complaint, although I always throw in a suggestion of safety when doing it for younger kids.

Animals MUST be cleared with school officials because of possible allergies.

"Snowstorm" effects that use confetti? I try to limit my use of such effects because some schools don't want the added clean up, although I've considered carrying a broom!

Some professionals have warned me about never using a girl volunteer for any kind of a levitation, like the "Flying Carpet," because of the fact that you'd have to lift the child onto the device...and in these days of jittery lawsuits, people may assume that you've done something inappropriate while lifting the child. Horrible to think about, but true.

I've even been advised never to use a restroom that students have access to for the same reasons I've mentioned earlier. Just more things to consider...

More trick ideas? I love good old Rocky Raccoon. Certain card tricks, like "Cardiographic," which I talked about elsewhere, are good visible choices for the older grades.

If the audience conditions warrant it, I'll occasionally even use my version of the "Dancing Handkerchief," which is just awesome, but you do have to be careful of your lighting and sightlines when using any thread effects.

“Zombie,” regardless of the version that you use, is a great way to get a ‘floating’ effect into a school show without having to worry about threads. It’s not as angle-ridden if you use some common sense and looks great for big crowds.

Finally, last-but-not-least, is the “Mouth Coil!” This is one of my most popular effects. It packs small, can be done surrounded, and really helps fill a stage. Don’t overlook this useful, colorful prop.

Consider using a backdrop—it can really increase the PERCEIVED size of your show. The kids “ooh” and “ahh” at the display, especially if you use a colorful or shiny backdrop fabric. It also serves as a place to ‘hide’ larger props until you’re ready for them, giving the stage a ‘tidy’ appearance, and you the look of a professional who’s worth the higher fees!

As far as humor, it must be squeaky-clean. Some assembly performers will try to sneak in double entendres or slightly off-color jokes to try to appeal to adults. Don’t! As I mentioned before, because of litigation, schools are extremely jittery and will take any flaw to justify giving you lousy feedback.

Considering humor further, I feel it’s a valuable component in schools, just as any other market where you’re working with children. Remember—if you try to only amaze kids, basic Kid Psychology 101 will dictate that they try to bust you on your effects. Kids are already struggling, in their minds, to be heard over the din of what many kids perceive as the oppressive adult authorities. By trying to amaze them, in their minds, they see it as “Look what I can do, and you can’t!” They will try to nail you.

With humor, however, you’ve changed the game. By making kids laugh, they won’t be as focused on burning your every move. Humor can be the most effective misdirection!

Consider, too, the usefulness of humor on the rest of your audience: PTA and school officials. By getting them to laugh and have a good time, you’re giving them a partial break from the stress of their day, whether it’s minor or major, real or imagined. Think about how rough your life is...then think about how good it feels to laugh unexpectedly during the day! Laughter can be wonderful medicine.

Just keep it clean!

Just as important is audience involvement. Without “join in fun,” there’s no real advantage over a film, which is a whole lot cheaper! Get the teachers involved, too. While your focus should always be on the kids, getting a teacher onstage for an amusing segment (WITHOUT making them look stupid!) can be extremely entertaining and fun because the kids are seeing an authority figure in a brand-new setting. Don’t overlook this powerful idea!

Your onstage performance, your movements on stage, how you dress, how you walk, all of these things and more will be scrutinized not just because of the large audiences but because the school systems are very often taking a chance on you and allowing to use valuable school time during the day. The school's officials are taking time away from educating our future to allow them to attend your program!

Keep that in mind—in schools, when you're presenting a themed educational show, your motivation can NOT be to just do magic so people will admire you. You have to think about the perceptions of your clients, their busy schedules, their needs, and the needs of your audiences.

Schools can be a GREAT market to work if you prepare for the possible problems, make it easy for schools to work with you, and you're experienced enough to handle BIG crowds. In fact, it can be a rush!

Family, Company, & Church Events

Now, we come to more than one market, but I really wanted to lump all of these different kinds of programs into one section. In my mind, any show where I'm performing for adults and kids qualifies for this category. Obviously, each situation is different, but I will cover some of the differences.

The first thing I want to cover is the summer event. This could be a family reunion, a graduation, a company picnic, anything. In most cases, I'm brought in to entertain the whole group and not just the kids...but more on that later.

You'll find yourself in all kinds of situations—fire halls, garages, back yards, pavilions in parks, and the list goes on and on. Make sure you're prepared by asking a lot of questions pertaining to the area you'll be performing in. Most of the time, the person planning the event will have no idea as to your needs as a performer.

If it's an outside show, keep in mind the thoughts I'd offered earlier pertaining to outside shows: use tricks that will either be in your hands the whole routine like rope, or use effects that the wind can't blow over.

Outside shows = PA system. Trust me! While you're at it, bring a LONG extension cord. Usually the area where you wind up performing will be at least 200 yards away from the one lonely outlet at the pavilion that is currently sweating out four or five too many connections for the DJ, various crock pots, and all sorts of mayhem.

Let's look at some of the individual kinds of outdoor situations. While by no means all-inclusive, it will start you thinking about what you can expect in the 'real world.'

First off is the situation I hate the MOST as a performer: It's the state park pavilion...you know, the ones with the 800 lb. Picnic tables that have been bolted into the cement somewhere during the Jurassic era...not good.

You see, this kind of situation gives you NO ability to move tables to give you any kind of a performance area. The tables are usually about two feet apart from one another in rows...hardly enough space to set your table or most props for a stand-up show. In this situation, the tables also cover the entire area under cover, so if you don't want to do the show sitting on your audience's lap, you'll have to do the show on the fringes of the pavilion while everyone else sits at the tables to watch your show.

This is why for this kind of event, I personally use props where all or most will fit comfortably in my roll-on table: since I'm out in the open, I want to minimize the chance of anyone messing with my stuff. I usually have to stand

guard, too, because kids of all ages are usually running around like crazy, enjoying the sunlight.

When it's show time, don't expect much help...many times these events are not 'structured' at all. Usually the person who hired me will say, "Well, I guess you can start," even though half of the audience is either still playing, eating, or yelling and having a good time. I usually try to head this off when I'm initially hired by telling the person who hires me that when it's show time, it will not be my responsibility to gather the audience to the tables (or wherever). I feel that by having the entertainment do that chore, it really demeans the whole thing. I don't do it. Like in a lot of situations, diplomacy is the key here.

So, you've got your audience gathered, or at least a chunk, consisting usually of 4-5 yr olds, a lot of 8-11 yr olds (ugh) and a few surly looking teens, along with adults who may not even know who you are or why you're there...you're just annoying filler until they announce the winner of the raffle! (Getting the idea I don't enjoy these yet?)

So, you're facing your audience...and you notice it's mostly kids! You've been hired to do a show that appeals to all ages! What to do?

Well, if you're like me, over the years you've learned it's wise to come prepared to do both kinds of shows. I've also found that very often, the first part of the show will be barely attended, or at least barely paid attention-to by adults. After a few routines, if you're doing a good job, that's usually when more and more adults start coming over to see what the laughter is all about...which brings me to a good point—if you've got a small, easy-to-set-up PA system, almost ANY outdoor show is a good time to bring it out!

Anyway, once you've built a crowd of adults, that's a good time to begin working in some of your adult material, meaning more "sophisticated" effects. This is when I may branch off from my usual kiddie fare of "Zombie" and "Mouth Coil" and do my version of "Bill in Lemon" because it appeals to most ages since I'm burning money! Just be careful—on a windy day, try another routine!

Once you've got your adults' attention, you can alternate between kids' stuff and adult – type material...at least that's what I like to do. It depends on what the client tells me she wants...if she says you're there primarily for the kids but "some of the adults may be watching, too," then I usually just focus in on my kids' shows with a couple of things for the adults. Believe me, usually the adults are having a blast watching their kids interact and have fun.

For that reason, effects like "Arm Chopper," in which an older (for me, 9 and above) kid is in mock-peril works very well here. While the adults may enjoy your show, I've found it's like pulling teeth to get them to assist you during a

routine. If you're gracious and just ask someone politely, they will usually grudgingly come up...especially if their peers begin coaxing them!

In my experience, at these outdoor picnics where alcohol is served, I'm normally very leery of any adult who jumps up and is eager to help... often they've overindulged and want to 'show up' the magician! Tough, very tough.

For outdoor shows such as this, I like to end with "Snowstorm." Again, it's a fun effect, perfect for outdoors and at least with my version (McBride's handling: See his "Magic on Stage" video series), I can do it virtually surrounded.

The worst situation is when, over the phone, the client specifies that she wants all the adults engaged, but when you get to the event, the adults are very callous toward you, because the last magician was really childish, or really bad, or because the picnic's their one day off and all they want to do is drink beer, or for a number of other reasons.

I hope I'm not coming off as too negative, but these situations can be very tough if you're not prepared. I'm just trying to give you the psychology of what many of these people are thinking...once you understand the situation, you can then begin to adapt to your surroundings much easier.

Now, I talked about these outdoor summer company picnics, but these situations can easily transfer to a family reunion, a church event, whatever. There seems to be a prevailing opinion that this type of entertainment is just for kids.

Let me summarize the mixed age outside group: Bring a PA, bring both kinds of material (kids' & adult), be prepared to improvise your show's running order on the fly, watch out for drunks, pack a VERY simple show that doesn't take much to set-up or break down (no privacy!), and be prepared to work in the sun. Oh, don't forget the bumpy terrain!

Now, I know that they're not ALL like that, but by preparing for a worst - case scenario, you'll be ready.

Now, I know purists out there may scream, "Wait! Why don't you just explain very clearly to the client when you book the show what you need?"

Trust me, I do. I usually tell the client that I need 20-40 minutes set-up time (depends on which show they buy), I need the kids away from me while I set-up, I need easy access to a power outlet, and I need an adequate level space in shade (especially if they want animals...though I don't offer them for outside shows anymore) and so on.

I provide it in writing, in clear simple, short words and I explain it on the phone. Then when I get there, I'm usually shown to a shady spot under a tree,

three feet from where all the drunks and/or kids are playing volleyball (lots of commotion, chasing, and feet hitting props). Also, the tree's roots make it impossible for anyone other than an experienced gymnast to maintain an upright position...oh, and I forgot to mention it, but the nearest outlet is at least ½ mile away. Fun.

Some clients just don't get it. Here's the reality of the situation: In most cases, the person planning this thing is usually an overworked human resources person, patriarch of the family, church official, or whomever who just wants to be able to say, "Yes I got the damn entertainment, so leave me alone!"

Of course, some times those horrible things don't happen and when you arrive, not only is the outdoor facility perfect for your act, but the adults line up their chairs in neat rows right next to the children's and everyone waits patiently for you to start your act (*That's great when it happens, but most parks have the tables bolted into the earth's core—if you can move things around, you're in luck!*).

Those are the shows that I love! Yes, outside shows still suck, but having a great audience can help. That's when I'll start alternating effects: one for kids, one for adults, or roughly so. Still, for these shows, I try to blend the ages and find a happy medium: I don't do things that are too childish, and I don't do what I call hard core mentalism, either—stuff like Q & A is definitely out!

The aforementioned "Bill in Lemon" is good here, as is easy-to-understand adult routines, like "Cardiographic," or, believe it or not, "Rocky Raccoon."

Adults love Rocky! He makes them laugh, which is, I'm convinced, the single most important thing you can do at ANY show, regardless of the audience. Make them laugh and it will help you to win them over.

Anyway, with Rocky, I've figured out a way to use Rocky first to get the kids to laugh (by making him jump on the kids is a good start!). Then I've figured out a clever routine to make Rocky read the minds of the adults! I first heard of this great idea from Dave Dee from Atlanta. Dave has a "Mind Reading Raccoon" segment of his adult shows that I've heard is very funny.

Unfortunately, I've never been able to get my hands on it, so I created my own! Here's what I do, bare-bones description: First, I bring Rocky out and my usual gags with the kids. I fight with Rocky a lot—kids like that. Then, I'll perform the "tossed out deck."

The "tossed out deck" is a classic in mentalism. Basically, the performer puts rubber bands around a deck of cards and tosses them into the audience. He instructs one person to lift up and peek at one card and then pass the deck to another person who does the same. He then reads their minds and reveals their

cards, having never touched the cards after the spectators have handled it. Pretty neat trick.

Well, what I do is I have Rocky read their minds! It's a perfect way to link up an adult routine with a kids' routine. I haven't worked all the kinks out of the presentation yet...that is, filled it with enough jokes, but it's well on its way to becoming one of my 'go to' routines in these cases.

For a SUPERB handling of the "tossed out deck," check out Max Maven's "Video Mind" video series, the Stage Mentalism tape. His psychology is brilliant.

Now, what if it's a company party, family reunion, or whatever...that's inside?

Well, there's a lot less to worry about. Maybe it's just my experience, but outdoor shows just seem to bring out the worst in people. Moving indoors, in fire halls, banquet halls in hotels and other venues, you've got more options for your show. That's when you may want to consider stuff you couldn't do outside, like that killer silk routine, or maybe you convince the client to pay extra for the live animals...I never include animals on my 'entry level' stand up/stage shows.

What I've encountered most often is this: tables at one end of the facility and the buffet tables lining the only wall where the kids aren't playing...oh, of course, the DJ has the raised platform (the one that they promised to let you) use all for himself, of course!

In these situations, I either treat the show as an 'outside show' in terms of a fast set up, or if I have some angle-sensitive material, I select as my performing space a corner, so it's not as easy for people to come up behind me during the show.

Oh, never set up anywhere near the bathroom!

This is also an important point: What if it's a holiday show and they are having a Santa? My advice is this: INSIST on setting up as far away from where Santa will be as humanly possible. Don't take no for an answer! Why?

No magician on the planet can possibly compete with Santa because every kid knows that Santa brings... (drum roll please) ...

FREE STUFF!

You can't compete with that! Even the pimply-13 yr-old who doesn't believe in Santa knows that if he just keeps his mouth shut, he's going to get Free Stuff! Don't set up near Santa.

Second thing, and this is just as important as the first: Do NOT EVER let them bring out Santa with the idea that you can do your show...after Santa. It just won't work. If you find yourself in this situation, most of you may find yourself wondering why you became a magician!

I consider myself to be a superb performer, and I've got the testimonial letters and comments to back it up. I've been booked 5 or 6 years in a row by the same companies, but I don't want to compete with Santa!

Oh, for those Christmas or non-denominational holiday parties, this is probably a good time to pull out "Snowstorm" even if it's indoors. It ends the show with one of those 'feel good' moments that people love.

One tip about Snowstorm, though...the kids WILL jump up and try to catch the confetti, no matter how much you warn them to stay seated. It just happens. What I've been doing is to walk AWAY from my performing area, do the Snowstorm in the audience, let the kids jump around, and head back to the relative safety of my performing area...away from the Snowstorm!

Now, I've given you my thoughts on how to handle these "mixed ages" stage/stand up shows, and although I certainly didn't cover all of the pitfalls, I do want to reveal one thing you can do to eliminate most if not all of these problems:

Do strolling or close up magic!

All problems...gone!

Think about it: There no set up if you do strolling in the easiest way, which is to operate out of your pockets, there's no gathering of your audience, no worrying about drunken volleyball players running over your props, no PA system to worry about, no trying to balance your effects for a crowd situation you weren't ready for, no competing with Santa, no competing with a DJ, no hassles!

I've got a friend in Texas who refuses to do stand-up or stage magic for ANY event that has a DJ because they always get there way ahead of you and monopolize the best space to set up. With strolling magic, you don't have to concern yourself with the DJ!

With strolling, like I outlined earlier, if there's a group at a table that is abusive or uninterested in your magic, simply approach a different group. It's great! With a stand-up show, you have got to fill your 30-40-minute slot or the client will not want to pay.

With strolling, you'll find the time will fly by, and the feedback is usually stronger. I love stage shows more than anything, but these goofy company

parties, family reunions, and church events make it really hard, sometimes, to present a good show.

I've performed for over 650 people before, but in a lot of these company/family events, I find it difficult to keep the attention of a 100 people! My theory is that many people don't get to 'catch up' often and so they'd rather socialize instead of watch a show...which makes strolling magic even more of a good idea in my book!

Well, I hope after reading this section, you've got a decent idea of what to expect in these situations. Like any performing situation, if you've got the right mindset and you're prepared, you'll be able to handle the situation.

I don't mean to sound so negative—I can think of many, many different 'mixed ages' events over the years that I've deeply loved. Most of the horrific situations I talked about here were maybe 6-10 events over the course of about 7 years...definitely not many. I just like to be ready for anything!

Now, let's take a look at the final category that I perform in...

Adult Events

For this discussion of adult events, I'm going to limit myself to holiday or summer parties where there are no children under the age of, say, 15 and you're hired for entertainment. I'm not going to cover motivational speaking, trade shows, product introductions, or anything like that because I have very little experience in those areas at this time (early 2008).

First off, I have found that the entertainment that most of these functions enjoy the most is straight mentalism with a little magic thrown in. I think that adults usually enjoy this more because when mind reading effects are presented properly (and as Eugene Burger puts it, "How else would you want to present it?"), it can be more mind blowing than magic because it leaves no room for figuring things out.

You see, in magic, people have some knowledge of sleight-of-hand, or maybe they saw those stupid Fox shows, or maybe they bought tricks as a kid, or...

Do you get the point? Now, consider how many people still visit fortune tellers...or read the horoscopes in the newspaper...I don't think I'm letting the cat out of the bag when I say it's little more than 'cold reading'...which, for those of you not in the loop, is basically a way of getting a REAL GOOD first impression of someone and revealing what you 'see' with your 'third eye' or whatever. Of course, it's more complex and skillful than that, but if you really break it down to its core, that's what it is.

Now, some audiences DO enjoy magic, too. Remember, I'm talking strictly adult audiences, here. Keep in mind that in my book (and this is my book), the guidelines I laid out earlier still apply: ultra, squeaky-clean...can't risk offending anyone; people LOVE to laugh regardless of their age (if you can fly across the room, then you can get away with ONLY amazing your audiences, but in most cases, if you make them laugh AT THE SAME TIME as amazing them, well, you'll get greater results in most cases!); carry a PA system for larger crowds, and so on.

One nice thing about working for adults is the fact that they don't try to 'peek' at things quite as much while you're setting up, which is really nice!

Back to my thoughts on stage/standup material. In my own experiences, (and it may be different for all of you) I've found that if I offer the client a choice between an all-magic show, an all-mind-reading show, or a little of both, they'll usually take the mix. Maybe I'm not presenting it properly on the phone, I don't know.

What I do in those cases is to offer my “Snowstorm” for holiday parties, maybe the “Bill in Lemon” routine, and then the rest mind reading effects...that’s just my preference.

I’ve also found that an older crowd of mostly seniors will very often prefer all magic. That’s just my experience.

Anyway, in all non-alcohol induced adult audiences (that phrase should tell you something!), I have found the audiences to be respectful, for the most part, and eager to listen to me.

Now for the bad news: I’ve found it REALLY hard to get adults on stage! Maybe the fear ridicule, whatever, but I’ve found it tough. Now here’s a tip from Brad Henderson, who wrote probably the funniest book test in mentalism, The Satanic Book Test.

Brad’s tip is this: To get an adult on stage, find someone who looks like they’d be a good helper, look at them and ask their name. Then, you turn away from them as you say, “Let’s give Betty a round of applause as she joins me on stage!”

Once you get Betty on stage, do NOT ridicule her. Adults can be even more sensitive to teasing, even if done in jest. I once went to a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Pittsburgh to see a supposedly well-regarded motivational speaker/magician give his presentation to about 200 people during the Chamber’s monthly luncheon.

The first effect the presenter did was the hundred-dollar bill switch (see “money morph” in the close-up section). Fair enough, good effect. From there, things went down hill as he asked a spectator, “Would you like this new \$100 bill?”

Duh! Of course the guy says yes.

Here’s the beef I had with this bonehead’s presentation: He eventually convinces the poor volunteer to run around the banquet hall making choo-choo noises! And after that, nobody would volunteer to help with anything!

By a show of hands, can anyone out there figure out what he did wrong?

Back to the technique to get people on stage...

This is very powerful because, since you’re not looking at Betty, she almost HAS to come up. I won’t go into all of the psychology, but it does work. By the way, buy Brad’s “The Satanic Book Test” if you want to do mentalism—it’s fantastic and not the least bit ‘evil’ despite the title!

I want to give you a few thoughts on mentalism: first of all, I recommend staying away from any effect that requires any kind of ‘calculation’ method...like having someone select a number, add four, multiply by 2...and so on. That stuff may work for those “magic right in your own living room” TV segments, but I don’t think they’re as popular as some of the mind reading effects I’m going to refer you to.

First off, go out and buy “Mental Miracles” by Bob Cassidy. It is the BEST tape of its kind I’ve ever seen. For about \$35, you get a 25-year veteran professional mind reading on stage performing his entire 30-minute or so act. After the show, he explains his act in over an hour of very precise instruction, in terms of psychology, pacing, props, the actual methods, etc. It will give you a “crash course” in mentalism!

My favorite effect off the tape: at the conclusion of a particular routine, a volunteer and the performer stand back-to-back, each holding a sketch pad. Both begin drawing—with no pre-show work, both drawings match! It’s an absolute showstopper.

I also want to refer you to Lee Earle’s work. Earle is a very well-regarded mentalist who has come up with some absolutely GREAT material. Get his books and videos—his stuff is great, too.

What if the client wants more magic? Here’s a great opportunity for me to present my dove act. Adults enjoy the magical appearance of live animals as much as kids! Check your favorite dealers on books with “dove stealing.” Greg Frewin from Canada has recently released a whole video series on dove work. Tony Clark’s videos are good too.

I also often use Martin Lewis’ “Technicolor Prediction.” It’s funny, easy, lends itself to a variety of different presentations, and packs flat!

One more thought on mentalism: while I feel it’s okay to do some mind reading of your selected card or whatever, I feel mentalism is much stronger for adults when you reveal ‘personal’ information, such as the name of a childhood friend or a pet, like in the Cassidy video I mentioned earlier. Why?

Well, in my opinion, revealing the 3 of clubs isn’t nearly as impressive as somehow looking into someone’s mind and plucking personal info out. It’s personal, it’s relevant, and it’s for them! The 3 of clubs will always be the 3 of clubs...not to say it’s not entertaining, but I’ve gotten better results with personal stuff.

To close my adult shows, I almost always use a modified version of an effect by Mark Strivings on the Desert Brainstorm Series, I think tape 3, called

“Confabulous Vacation.” Basically, in a nutshell, you have someone in the audience selected as a winner of a ‘dream vacation.’ This works well for an “Employee of The Month” or for the boss at the Christmas party.

Anyway, the people in the audience begin coming up with suggestions for the person’s dream vacation: a destination of New Orleans, a departure date of January 4th, whatever. You solicit these suggestions of food, guests, etc.—maybe 8 items—and finally reveal that you predicted all of the choices on a postcard addressed to the person in question!

I can’t tell you how powerful this is—because it’s so open ended, you get some really goofy and funny answers from the audience, making it funny, interactive, and that much more amazing at the end! People LOVE this!

If you know the method to a good newspaper headline prediction, then that’s a good place to end, too.

Of course, a great deal of my adult shows also involve strolling magic, which I’ve covered elsewhere. Adults really like strolling magic because they can continue their conversations immediately after...and because strolling magic is so close, it’s more baffling when done well, and a great way to stimulate conversation!

For adult shows, I usually like to dress up, sometimes with a sport jacket. I feel that to be taken seriously by adults in this sort of entertainment situation, it’s good to appear very professional and businesslike, even if once your entertainment starts, your goal is to have everyone in stitches.

I have found adult events to be much easier in terms of setting up, getting people to quiet down, and so forth. If your act is strong enough to get past the negative stigma of magic being “for kids,” you may find adult parties very appealing.

Final Words

Well, I hope this book has helped you. You'll notice that unlike my other materials, I really didn't have much to say as far as marketing advice. That's simply because, as I said earlier, I really feel that magicians and entertainers out there should really pay more attention to how they're presenting something and just what they're presenting.

Performers should also polish their act and people skills long before they begin offering their services to the public, regardless of whether or not it's for payment.

Finally, I really want to stress again that the routines, effects, and ideas that I mentioned are by no means the only ones you should perform. I simply wanted to offer examples from my own work to give you an example of what I do in certain situations in order to eliminate or minimize problems.

Nearly every rule I talked about can either be broken or at least bent if the situation calls for it, but only with the right level of experience. Experience will really enable you to recognize certain situations for the problems that they may turn into and allow you to 'head them off at the pass.'

A lot of magicians put out material to make a quick buck, but the real reason why I wrote this book is because I really believe a lot of magicians out there need a helping hand or at least a gentle nudge in the right direction. The reasons should be obvious...

Clients will often not tell an entertainer of possible mishaps. This is due to both parties not understanding the needs and realities of the others' situations. Communication is the key! Ask lots of questions.

Secondly, I believe a lot of magic products out there really leave a lot to be desired as far as durability, angles, set up time, and so on. They may be fine for hobbyists, but not for the guy doing 30 shows a week...and yes, they're out there!

I really didn't expect to sell a ton of these books, but I really did want to add my own two cents' worth to try and help performers realize what they can expect in an actual performing situation.

Like a lot of people, I became hooked on magic after watching Copperfield on stage. It looked so easy! Years later I found out just how much thought and preparation goes into those TV specials. Copperfield leaves NOTHING to chance, and neither should any other performer.

By becoming better-informed magicians, we'll all have an easier time.

I want to wish you all the luck in the world. I also welcome your feedback on this and other works that I've offered the magic community. My email address is: phantasmsmagick@hotmail.com. Let me know of your success!