



How to Make a Ton of Money Performing in Schools

Main Manual

by Cris Johnson, BCH, CI, CT.NLP

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How To Make a Ton of Money Performing Magic in Schools

Introduction & Why I Love School Performing

I want to thank you for purchasing this course. I can assure you that everything you're going to encounter in this System has been developed and proven again and again over the last 15 years of my professional career. I only wish something like this had been available to me when I was just starting out—it would have made the journey much easier!

In this course, I've tried to include everything from the shows themselves, to the marketing of those shows, to effective performing & stage techniques. Too many so-called courses gloss over the important issues of performing, and as a result, many people are out charging money for gigs long before they're ready for them. This really bugs me, so as a result, I've tried to make this as complete as I possibly can, so you'll learn what to do and more importantly what not to do and why.

First, a little background. I started getting involved in magic, as did many of you, when I was eight years old. I'll never forget my first magic set—it was a big plastic top hat with all kinds of hidden trap doors and panel to hide the tricks. It was marvelous!

Fast forward several years, and I'd done several birthday shows, cub scout shows, and different events for pay...I wouldn't dream of calling myself a professional at that point! Then came a day that would forever change my life...the day that I was asked by a friend of mine if I would do a school show with him. As it turned out, there were three shows that day, with about 10 minutes between to allow for the students at the show to leave and the next group to come in.

With about 100 students per show, it was an exciting yet terrifying experience! The funny thing was, despite the fact that back in those days I had a truly awful show, the kids seemed to really have a good time. I would have chalked it up to selective memory, but a video actually still existed of the shows for about 10 years after the event, and the gasps of amazement were very loud and very real.

I couldn't figure it out, because even back then I had a self-awareness of whether what I was doing was in fact good...and I knew what I was doing was just terrible...so why did the kids have a good time?

I have a few different theories...first of all, in that small town, I doubt if the kids had ever seen a live magician before. This was before the big magic 'explosion' of the 1990's...before the onslaught of the Web, before the rash of magic TV specials. I myself had only the annual (at the time) David Copperfield specials to look forward to.

Secondly, and this relates to why I love schools so much: for kids, a magic show in school represented a break from the norm, something different! Anything was better than sitting in class. As further proof, I can remember, very vividly, being ecstatic about pep rallies in school, despite the fact that I hated any and all school sporting events because the boys on the teams were the same boys who tormented me in class.

I have a feeling that the kids watching the magic show that day were just happy to be out of class.

As the years went by, I eventually did become a full-time professional magician, offering my clients birthday parties, daycare programs, school programs, and shows for many other events.

I know a great many professionals out there will think to themselves that it's better to specialize and just do one type of show. I agree wholeheartedly, but I live in a smallish area, near the city of Buffalo, and to specialize in just one area would mean either a lot of traveling to neighboring cities (which I'm not thrilled about) or not working as much.

So I continue to offer different services.

Schools, however, remain my favorite venue.

First of all, the money is a lot better than anything else I'm currently involved in on a regular basis (I get the occasional high-paying corporate gig, but it's not something I enjoy as much so I don't push it very hard). Were it not for the summer months when there's no school, I probably could subsist on doing school shows, but like a lot of people, I want more money opportunities.

Money, however, is not nearly the most important thing. I feel that for a person to be truly happy professionally, he or she should do what they enjoy as much as possible. I personally enjoy performing for kids, but more so in certain situations. Let's look at some of the situations...

The Ugly Truth About Certain Markets

First, there's the obvious birthday parties. Though they're probably the easiest gigs to book (notice I didn't say *easy*, just *easiest*...important difference), I enjoy them the least. As Dave Risley says, "You're on their turf." I personally feel it's easier, for me, to perform for 400 students in a school than it is to perform for 20 kids on a Saturday at a birthday show. Why? The kids are in home on familiar ground...and I feel that many parents need to do a better job teaching their kids about respect and manners.

Next, I also perform in daycares. Daycares are a LOT of fun and are very close to the top of my favorite performing markets. A lot of performers shy away from the ages 2-5 group because they don't understand how to perform for these kids. Personally, I find daycares to be a blast. The only drawback? The pay isn't nearly as good as other markets. Still, the shows are easy to do and a lot of fun, so I do as many of these shows as I can book, often 25-30 a month.

There are other markets, of course, but schools are the most enjoyable to me. First, the control factor is easier—the kids are in school, and the teachers are right there. Plus, as I said, they're thankful to be out of class. Second, the shows are during the regular workweek, which is becoming more important to me as I get older. Third, most importantly, I really enjoy doing theme shows.

As you'll find out in this course, theme shows are imperative if you expect to do school programs on a regular basis. While it gives you that 'edge' to get into schools, I also enjoy theme shows because it immediately gives your show a certain relevance. As I continue in my professional career, I also continue to try and learn. Unfortunately, most material in magic focuses on new tricks, new tricks, new tricks. I prefer to learn new techniques for giving the most enjoyment to my audiences.

Delving deeper into this idea, maybe I'm getting philosophical as I get older, but one of the fundamental problems I see with a lot of contemporary magic as it's most often performed is the fact that it comes across as good ol' showing off. See what I can do! Isn't this fun? While I still do enjoy just for fun performances, I crave more for my own satisfaction.

Helping To Fight a Social Problem

Structuring your show around an important social issue such as bullying immediately gives everything you do importance, as long as your effects tie-in to your messages.

I don't claim to be changing the world with the programs I offer, but my thinking is this: As assembly presenters, if we can make a difference in one person's life while also entertaining the whole group, well, in this day and age, that has to count for something.

A quick note on how this manual is structured. I'm going to relate a great deal of my experiences during the creation of this material so that not only will you understand how I do something but why, as well as what led me to that. I feel that by relating how I got to this point, more of what I say with my opinions will make a lot more sense, and you'll come away realizing that everything I'm giving you is based on a specific reason.

In this manual, I'm not going to jump right into marketing for school shows. If you've never done a school show before, or you have very limited experience, I think it's

important to understand some ideas of how to perform for large groups of people and specifically children first. Too often, other material on booking school shows has saved this stuff (if at all) for a couple of tips at the end, in just one or two pages.

As a result, I think a lot of people rush out to sell their shows before they're ready. So, with that being said, I'm going to turn now to the next section, which is **Working from The Stage**. Don't worry, we'll get to booking shows soon enough...I just want you to be prepared.

Working From the Stage

Imagine this: You've done all kinds of work to book school shows. You've got all of your props. You've meticulously researched the topic you'll be talking about. You've carefully tied-in your effects with your messages. You've prepared and rehearsed your act. You walk out on stage and wait for your audience. You were told the number: 430 students, for example. No big deal, you think to yourself, it's just a number.

As you wait, standing there on stage, you see the students piling into the gym. They keep coming and coming...wave after wave, class after class! There's so many! Finally, after it seems as though half of a medium-sized city has poured into the gym, the principal quiets everyone down and introduces you. All eyes are on you. You freeze! Now what?

Congratulations, welcome to my first school themed assembly show! It was terrifying!

While it was true that I had done some school shows before this one, I'd often had a partner. I had also done a few school shows on my own, but those were the kind of set up I'm sure many of you reading this are familiar with: You're set up in a classroom or corner of the gym and two or three classes are brought in to see a show as part of the day's spring carnival, end of the school year celebration, or whatever.

This was much different...and scary!

If you've never done anything like this before, it can be unnerving for the first few times, especially if you're stumbling along with no real help as I was. If you've done some school shows before, I hope to give you pros out there a few tips you haven't thought of or maybe just a refresher course in stage work.

Many years ago, twelve, I think, I was at an IBM lecture (no, not the computer company, but the magic group...oh, you figured that out? Sorry!) and heard a wonderful lecture from a part-timer named Jeff. Unfortunately, I don't remember his last name, so Jeff, if you're reading this...sorry!

Jeff's lecture was about working from the stage. When he made his announcement, you could practically feel the energy level drop in the room. Most of the guys (and girls) in the room were addicted to close-up and all the latest card tricks.

I, however, was in the beginning stages of establishing myself as a working professional in the Pittsburgh area and already knew I wanted to concentrate on stage and parlor work, so I perked up and began taking notes.

Jeff's theory, which I'm sure was not original with him, was based on what he called the 'Theory of Thirds.'

The Theory of Thirds

Basically, this is a simple technique that allows the performer to mentally divide the audience into three sections. Why is this important? Too many performers concentrate solely on what's directly in front of them, ignoring the audience sections on their far right and far left. This has the unwanted result of subliminally alienating those sections of the audience. Even if the rumblings in the aisles don't start, as someone in tune with the 'heartbeat' of an audience, I've felt it happen.

A Flawed Tip from Public Speakers

The other thing that amateurs do is take the public speaking tip of "looking to the back of the room" to avoid eye contact with anyone. Well, then you're cutting off, in a subconscious way, the people right in front of you as well!

When entertainers follow that tip from public speakers, I think they're forgetting the fact that the said tip was probably designed as an aide for people to just get through a public speaking engagement that they're terrified of and just want to finish it without looking like an ass.

I don't think the tip was designed for entertainers. Why? As entertainers, we're supposed to crave the limelight and engage the audience...if we're terrified of the stage and more importantly, we *continue* to be, why are we there? Don't get me wrong, I still get butterflies before a big show, but I prefer to think of it as the Edge, something that keeps me sharp.

So, before I get into the theory of thirds further, my advice to you is to put the public speaking tip I mentioned out of your mind if you plan on being a stage performer with any degree of regularity.

Eye Contact

When you're on stage, you'll want to make eye contact and turn your body toward each "third" of the stage, the left, center, and right. I don't mean you should do this in a robotic, systematic fashion, either. It should look effortless, as though you're not thinking about it.

Also, when you're giving your attention to a section, it's important to keep in mind that your eyes should be moving—make eye contact with people in the front row, then the next few rows and then yes, send some 'energy,' some attention to the back. There's no particular sequence, just do it.

I do confess that I have a tendency to concentrate slightly more often to the center section, but I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing, because if you turn your body to the far left or far right, it's going to throw off your audience too.

After a while, you won't have to concentrate on "thirds" as much and many of these things will become second nature and you'll just be making those connections.

Including Your Audience

On Jeff McBride's *Commando Act* Tape from his **Magic on Stage** series, he takes this idea of working from the stage further. He talks about keeping your body open to the other sections as you turn your head and 'energy' to one of the side sections. He also talks about keeping your arms and shoulders and especially gestures open and broad, not tight to the body, as you work back and forth so that even when you turn your head away from a section, your body language, the 'openness' of your posture, still keeps the audience 'with' you.

In particular, what he talked about at one point was this: let's say you turn to the audience section on your right. You interact with them for a moment in the middle of your speaking, and then you want to move in the other direction. Instead of turning your back on them, you hold your right hand out to them and then, as you begin moving away toward your left, keep your torso "open," without completely turning your back on either section. This type of upper-body positioning coupled with the fact that you're holding your hand out to that section of the audience subliminally keeps them "included" even as you move away. Basically, you're trying not to turn too far to one side as you move back and forth across the stage.

Obviously with certain routines where you're interacting with an onstage volunteer and your profile to them to facilitate the workings of an effect, this wouldn't necessarily hold true, but when addressing the audience as a whole and you're onstage alone, this is extremely effective. Like I said, on his video it makes a lot of sense. Try it yourself in front of a mirror. It works.

"How Do I Do This?"

I admit a lot of this is difficult to envision in print. I recommend first you get the tape I just mentioned. While the magic techniques on it are outstanding, I feel the working-from-stage techniques are more valuable. You'll actually be able to see what I'm talking about.

Secondly, videotape yourself working on these techniques. Stuff like this, I feel, is more important in many ways than the actual magic presented, because as we all know, a lousy presentation can kill a great effect. You'll also see with the programs I present, I tend to shy away from overly complicated material from a sleight of hand perspective because I want to be able to concentrate on connecting with my audience...so, if you

bought this course with the hopes of learning cool knuckle-busting techniques, sorry, it ain't gonna happen.

Personally, I've never been a particularly graceful person, so these techniques are something I struggle with to this very day. I've drastically improved, though as a perfectionist, I still feel I have a long way to go.

Movements

Making those adjustments to your body language and posture is important when working from stage, but so is actual movement. I talked about eye contact and movement as it pertained to 'including' all sections of your audience a while ago, but now I want to talk about movements in general.

When you're on stage, remember that you're one person. Consider how tiny you'll look from the back of an auditorium or gym for audience members. It's difficult to see you! Now think about how short adult's attention spans are...now think about the fact that children's attention spans are even less!

Commanding Attention

One way to combat boredom and wandering attention is through movement. Oh sure, you've got your shiny props and if you're like me, your doves, backdrop, etc., but I know a lot of good performers like to "pack flat, play big," and they seem to get by just fine. In fact, I know of several magicians with big props who really don't capture anyone's attention at all. Why? Presentation, for one thing, but here we're not talking about that.

By moving. By exaggerating gestures. If you're opening your hand to show it empty after a vanish, sweep your hand and arm out in a graceful, or at least broad, gesture. Walk back and forth across the stage as you make contact with the different sections of the stage. I don't want you to get the idea that you need to be manic—too much movement can be distracting. It's just that I've seen a lot of struggling magicians plant their feet center stage and deviate from that spot very very rarely. Study Jeff McBride's tapes. He took a lot of mime, and it shows. Although his emphasis on grace is not everyone's cup of tea, at least a basic understanding and appreciation will help your stage performances.

Use Props to Fill the Stage

I personally love having big props. For me, the tricks are fun, they capture the eye, school officials are very often impressed with the "production value" of my show (which is one more thing on a big list that helps justify my fees—not necessary, but it helps, especially in my area), and it's the closest I ever want to be to becoming an illusionist...I don't want to haul around *that* much stuff. Besides, in schools, it's not always desirable—we'll be covering specifics about what to offer schools in depth later.

I know many performers don't like hauling around a lot of stuff, but if you do have a few big items, and if some of your larger props are on wheels, roll them from one side of the stage to the other as you "show that ordinary box empty (wink, wink)."

If you're producing long streamers or silks or mouth coils, take the opportunity to let the effect fill the stage through the use of displaying the full length of the item. I first learned about this idea through Jeff McBride's use of 50-foot mouth coils to help fill stages. This idea heavily influenced my own work with mouth coils.

I can't resist adding this: One fairly well-know magician/marketing guy put out a school video years ago and one of his routines used a mouth coil, but instead of allowing it to fill the stage, he merely pulled it out and allowed it to collect on the floor. No, take advantage of the space and use something small to really "project" your act to the back row!

Conveying Emotion Non-Verbally Onstage

If you use funny faces or body language to show that you're "upset" at the magic "not going right"—an effective and often-used technique in children's magic—try broadening your gestures. Scrunch up your face more than you normally would, but to really convey the idea of annoyance, your body language is really going to need to be exaggerated to get your emotions out to the last row. Hunch your shoulders. Cross your arms in a huff. Stomp your foot. Crane your neck forward. Stick out your jaw. These things work wonders at non-verbally conveying an emotion. It brings up the quality of your performance tremendously!

Of course, the same would hold true for showing surprise or happiness or nearly any other emotion, too. Widening your eyes is great but consider throwing your arms out in shock if your goal is to show surprise at something.

Conversely, using a lot of movement on stage gives you the added benefit of NOT moving as a control device. If some of the audience is having trouble settling down, you can freeze your movements, which will get attention. At the very least, this can serve as a subtle message to some of the teachers to move in. Although we'll be going over control issues later, I wanted to make that point now.

Working With Onstage Volunteers

In the overall subject of working from the stage, working with volunteers has to be one of the most neglected aspects in all of magic! Oh, let me count the ways...

First of all, most magicians have no idea how to treat someone on stage. They're herded on stage like cattle, prodded (figuratively in some cases, literally in others) into place and generally treated as flesh-n-blood props. This really bugs me. They're people, after all.

Name & Age

A great deal of merriment can be generated simply by interacting with our volunteers. First off, ask for their names! Let me give you a few minor things I've come up with over the years.

Often when I get a child on stage, when I ask for her name, very often she'll rattle off her entire full name, middle name, and last name. For instance, instead of saying "Becky," as she's usually called, she may say, "Rebecca Bethany Anderson," or whatever. For some reason, adults find this amusing. My guess is that the child sounds so business-like, that it creates a humorous contrast.

I picked up on this over time and now when this situation presents itself, I'll often stare at the child in disbelief and hesitantly say, "That...that whole thing, huh?" Very often I'll then say, with a rather dejected look on my face, "Well, my name's just Cris." More chuckles from the adults. Nothing earth shattering, but definitely an amusing exchange, one that tends to humanize me as a magician. By the way, the inspiration for that line came from a Bruce Willis movie. Inspiration comes from the weirdest places!

Other times, and this is a delicate subject, a child from a different ethnic background than my own will be the volunteer and after several attempts to get the child to say his/her name clearly (they often mumble—stage fright), I finally give up and say, "Can I just call you 'Little Girl' instead?" More chuckles. Please understand that I'm not making fun of anyone's name, and if I try to pronounce the name and get it wrong, well, children are very quick—they may think the mispronunciation is funny and begin to call the child by that (wrong) name. Rather, I'm gently poking fun at *myself* for my inability to understand their name!

Again, it's nothing earth-shattering, but it helps skirt a potentially embarrassing situation by poking fun at myself and it does amuse the adults in the audience. They seem to enjoy self-depreciating humor in modest quantities.

After the name business, I'll then ask the age of the helper. I'll then go into one of the many age gags you may have heard, where the entertainer hears the age of "six" as "sick" and so forth. A lot of work has been put out by Dave Risley and many others, so I won't go into it. (Go to www.daverisley.com if you're new to working with children. Riz's stuff is gold!) The point is, by interacting with your onstage helpers by using these two simple questions—age & name—you're showing yourself as a gracious entertainer without slowing down the show.

Blocking

Blocking with your volunteers is also very important. Blocking is a stage term that refers to the placement of actors and props onstage. I've seen a lot of bad blocking by magicians, so I'll throw in my two cents (or should that be "sense?").

First of all, try not to have your back to the audience. Visually and psychologically, you're excluding the audience, so try to minimize it. I do have a few routines, such as my Gloves routine—when I'm handing pairs of gloves to ten onstage volunteers—when this is unavoidable, but otherwise, try to avoid it.

Try to have your volunteer face the audience directly if you're in a one-on-one situation most of the time. This allows you to BOTH show off your facial expressions. Yes, I say BOTH because many kids are hams and want to show off on stage. With proper control, this can be very funny and again allows you to "play off" of these helpers in fun, unexpected ways. Obviously, there are certain effects where it's going to benefit you to have your volunteer and yourself profile to the audience, facing each other to allow for everyone to see what's going on. One example of this is when I use Barry Mitchell's delightful Bulls Eye Book, which uses a card fountain built into a book. In the routine, the child faces me and activates the book, shooting cards at me. By standing profile, this allows much of the audience to appreciate what's going on.

Many of my routines use two onstage helpers. For these situations, I'll have one person on each side of me. This keeps me "center stage" and allows me to play off of either volunteer in a back-and-forth motion, as the situation warrants, which can be very amusing or even very dramatic.

For other effects, I'll have two volunteers face each other, profile to the audience, as in my "Split Deck" routine when an adult reads the mind of an older child. This sort of "dueling" blocking with the two helpers is very effective, and often as the two are engaging in the effect, I'll step back from the action for a moment and turn the spotlight over, so to speak, to my two helpers. Not surprisingly, this has developed into one of the most popular routines from my theme show line-ups.

As I look back over what I've written, I forgot to add one more fairly obvious bit of advice but considering anyone reading this can probably rattle off the names of several part-time magicians who botch their blocking to the point of looking like a keystone cops routine, I wanted to be thorough.

Here it is: If you're going to have volunteers on either side of you or both sides or whatever, and the nature of your routine is such that you'll be turning to face them, make sure the helpers are either even with you or further upstage than you, that is, when you turn to look at them, you're not turning away from the audience so much that you're practically turning your back to them. I hope that makes sense.

A final note—although this shouldn't have to be added, I will anyway: rehearse your blocking as much as you would your sleight of hand moves. Having all of your

staging, blocking, and audience management concerns out of the way before you begin doing school shows will give your programs more of a polished look, which is obviously what you want.

Going Into the Audience

I want to touch briefly upon the idea of going into the audience. What I mean by this is the idea of going into the audience to make a connection. You can do this in different ways, such as going into the audience to select volunteers or interact with them during a routine.

In an ideal world, I'd prefer to select all of my volunteers by going into the audience, but it eats up a lot of time, so realistically, now the only time I do it is when I'm selecting volunteers for either my "Hospitality" Think-A-Drink routine when I need six volunteers at once or my "Gloves" routine when I need ten. Since I need so many volunteers, things can get rather confusing during those two routines so going into the audience makes things run smoother for those segments.

I also like to go into the audience for a couple of routines, such as Rocky Raccoon, which as I'm sure many of you are aware, often features the prop being tossed into the audience as though the critter "leaped." I also let my Zombie "pull" me into the audience sometimes and let it dart at certain kids. This gets a great response!

I like doing things like this because it helps break down the invisible wall between the audience and me and helps create the feeling that "anything can happen," and really connects with the audience.

I can't help offering these tidbits of going into the audience without also offering a few words of warning: First, when considering the idea of going into the audience, be aware of the limitations of your sound system and any distortion that may result from walking too close to a speaker or anything like that. Of course, this will apply only to people who choose to use a wireless microphone—someone with a wired microphone would not be able to use these techniques.

Another warning: in magic, children may become so wrapped up in what you're doing that they may look at an obviously fake stuffed animal or puppet and be frightened.

I can relate a story of this happening. I was performing a Reading show at one of the local schools a couple of years ago. At one point in the show, I took out my Rocky Raccoon (For those of you who don't know, Rocky is a "Spring Animal" that can be manipulated to 'scoot' up your body, appear to eat goodies, jump out of your arms and so forth). Anyway, some of the kids in the very back of the gym were in wheelchairs and were special education kids. As it turned out, when I got my evaluation forms back (I always pass out forms to teachers to get feedback and testimonials), a few of the teachers gave me low marks for scaring the children with Rocky.

Please understand that while I suggest you try to offer programs with no offensive material, despite your best efforts you may eventually run into someone who takes offense at the most innocent of things. Rocky was probably at least 40 or 50 feet away from the nearest special education child. I certainly didn't mean to frighten anyone, but I also personally don't want to sanitize my show to the point of it being dull.

Keep that story in mind when putting your programs together. In this day and age, there's a person to get offended at everything. It's unfortunate but true. Of course, I should also point out that that was the only such incident of a teacher complaining about Rocky.

Going into the audience can be a lot of fun, just watch the faces of your audience and avoid anyone who looks uncomfortable as you near them. I feel that a presenter's goal in school, beyond the messages of course, is to amaze and amuse, never frighten.

Consistency Of Performance

Consistency of performance is a term I coined years ago simply because I didn't want to "wobble" in my performances anymore. Magic guru and all-around terrific magician Eugene Burger talks at length about wobbling in most of his works.

Try this: think back to the last time you saw a magician perform something that he/she hadn't mastered yet—maybe someone at a SAM meeting, maybe a show in your town. I'll bet you could tell instantly that he hadn't mastered the effect. On his face you saw the blank look as he tried to remember what came next. Then he ducked down behind his table and stood up again, thinking. You could see it on his face: "*Where did I put that thing?*"

At one point we've all probably done it. I know I did...a lot.

Although I know the idea is decades old, I wanted this course to be complete, so to touch upon this idea, I'm going to reprint a section from my book, "***How to Become a Better Performer (a survival guide!)***" in which I talk about this. Here it goes:

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 time 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.

Another story: Just recently, I was in Pittsburgh performing an outdoor show. I had been told before 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 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 to 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...

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 people 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!

Well, there you have it...my ideas on how to eliminate the hesitancy in your work. I took out some rather lengthy thoughts on close-up from the book, but I feel that the whole idea of consistency is an important idea that isn't brought up enough, especially in courses like this. I didn't want to just offer marketing knowledge, but instead I wanted people who buy this course to have a complete package. This idea of consistency, while it's certainly not an overnight fix, with time, can be one of your best weapons to presenting a great show, no matter where or for whom.

Sound Systems

OK, now we're going to get into an area that causes a lot of disagreement. I'm going to tell you what I used to use, what I currently use, and why, and then it's up to you.

First off, many performers, in their desire to cut down on how much equipment they have to haul into the schools, have elected to not use a sound system unless absolutely necessary. One full time pro even told me he doesn't use a sound system unless he knows his assemblies are going to be attended by at least 150 kids. Other professionals advocate using the schools' sound system.

When Do I Use a Microphone & Sound System?

Personally, and I've taken public speaking & acting classes and have plenty of stage experience not related to magic, is this: I will bring a sound system if I even suspect that a group will number over 50 people.

I perform several hundred shows a year and I want and need to protect my voice—it's as simple as that. I feel that using a sound system also makes matters of control much easier as well. The kids won't be nearly as inclined to talk over you because you'll be able to be loud enough to gain and keep their attention.

I also feel that bringing a sound system puts the person or persons who hired you at ease—it's one less thing to go wrong.

A Matter of Control

After doing school shows as long as I have and videotaping myself as long as I have, I've noticed that in between routines or jokes or whatever, there's often a little bit of excited chatter, I don't think it's an issue of control or anything like that. Kids get very excited by what we magicians do. If there's a few seconds of excited chatter and then the kids shut right up as they do with me, I consider it a compliment on two levels: first, the kids clearly enjoy my show and two, they quiet right down.

I personally think too much of an issue has been made out of the idea of control. Too many performers that I've seen tend to clamp down too hard on the kids, whereas I want the kids to enjoy themselves and have fun without getting out of hand. I've seen supposedly enjoyable performers do their act in a school and then the kids don't react and only clap because they're told to...but they're clearly not having fun. What's more, the teachers don't look happy after the program, either. The performer scolds the children for reacting, threatening to stop the show or whatever, and comes across as unpleasant and commanding.

With my programs, not only do the students chatter excitedly after something they've enjoyed for just a second or two, but also so do the teachers. Everyone briefly comments on what has just transpired (human nature!) and then they immediately settle down. I've earned their respect, and everyone has fun and shows the proper respect by settling down. I hope all of this makes sense, because I do think controlling an audience of several hundred kids is important, it's just that in my own work, other than settling the kids down at the end and establishing the ground rules in the beginning, the rest of my control is non-verbal, and I don't have any problems using this system.

Now, and we're finally getting to the point, I feel that by bringing a sound system for all but the smallest of assemblies (less than 50 kids), I'm able to go right into my next routine/message without yelling at the kids or threatening to take away a trick or any of

that garbage that other “experts” advocate. Again, we’ll get to issues of control in great detail later. The kids settle down immediately and I don’t have to deviate from my script. Consider that.

Using The School’s System...Yikes!!

I also don’t like using the school’s system because it’s something I’m not familiar with and 99.99% of the time it will utilize a handheld microphone, which I don’t like. By bringing my own, I’m in complete control of my performance, using equipment that I’m comfortable with, making my job easier and more relaxed.

My First System

With that being said, I have to admit that the first sound system I bought and used for the first several years of my professional career was a monster—I had to carry in two big speaker stands, the speakers themselves, and a case of equipment that included my amplifier, speaker wire, wireless microphone receiver, etc. It took me 15 minutes to set the whole system up, which isn’t a lot of time, but considering everything else, it added up. It was and is (I still have it as a back-up) a great system with great sound, but it just wasn’t practical because of the extra time bringing it in and setting it up.

A Teeny Solution

A few years back, I bought a tiny little sound system from Florida Magic Company. I can say with experience that their little system rocks! It’s roughly 8” square, which means it’s easy to carry. The microphone’s wireless receiver is built into the unit, which means all you have to do when you get to a show is plug it into a wall socket and run a cable to your tape or CD player if you use music as I do. Set-up time: less than one minute. It’s awesome and runs for less than \$400, making it very economical. To someone just starting out in a small market, it may sound like a lot, but one school show should pay for the whole system.

The Florida Magic Company’s website is: www.floridamagiccompany.com and they have ads all the time in MAGIC Magazine and Genii Magazine.

The only drawback to the system, in my opinion, is the fact that if you have a two-speaker system that plays your music (practically everything you’d buy) and you run a cord to the Florida Magic PA system (which is a one-speaker system), you need a special adapter so that the two-speaker system doesn’t fry the one-speaker adapter plug of the unit. Having the adapter is MANDATORY to protect the input of the PA. The good news? The adapter in question is available at Radio Shack for less than \$5.00.

I bought a little tiny “boom box” from Wal-Mart for less than \$30 and I was all set. I’m able to perform for several hundred people and in most cases my set-up time is

only a few minutes more than my birthday show despite having optional larger effects and small illusions available to my clients.

In the end, the choice is yours. If you do decide to invest in a sound system, regardless of where you get it, be sure to check out the pros and cons. Here's a few questions you may want to consider when deciding on a system:

- Does the system set up quickly?
- Is it going to be powerful enough for the audiences you decide to perform for?
- Will the unit hold up to being used several hundred times per year?
- Is there minimal distortion as you walk around the stage?

Anyway, that's my take on sound systems. In a nutshell, I believe that by bringing in your own system, you're positioning yourself as a true pro in the eyes of your clients. You're also giving the client one less thing to worry about by providing your own system. It's also going to benefit you by giving you more control without actually having to verbally settle the kids down. By not using the school's system, it's also going to give you a consistent performing experience. All of these things will go a long way to presenting yourself as a true assembly presenter and not just some guy/girl doing tricks.

Microphones

Although I touched briefly on microphones earlier, I wanted to touch upon them here in their own section for completeness' sake, especially for any readers not familiar with some of the options available.

Traditional Handheld

The microphone most people are familiar with is the traditional hand-held wired microphone. Traditionally, a performer either holds it in the hand or has it set in a stand adjusted to his/her height, right at mouth level.

I've tried these and I have to say that I hate them. From a magician's standpoint, it isn't that hard to see why: It's very difficult to perform much magic when holding a microphone. I've seen some do it well, but it was just something I didn't want to bother with.

I've also seen some magicians have the hand-held microphones held in place around their neck with a little add-on thingie. Again, for me I decided it wasn't my thing, but for those of you with music equipment, this might be an option if you already had some stuff and didn't necessarily want to run out and invest a lot of money.

Although it's hands-free, it looks a bit unwieldy and there's still the matter of the cord to contend with.

Wireless Handheld

This is what a lot of DJ's and karaoke people are using these days. With a wireless microphone, performers are able to move freely with few restrictions on stage as most decent wireless mikes of any kind give you more than enough of a range to maneuver.

I still don't like them because of the handheld factor, although with the 'neck loop' thingies (sorry, I don't know the term), I considered one of these until...

Lavaliere Microphone

This was the first wireless microphone that I tried, and I soon found out that there was a great deal about it that I liked. It was hands free and didn't have the unwieldy look that I didn't care for. Plus, the prices came down in recent years making these little jobs more affordable.

Basically, a lavaliere microphone is a tiny mike that clips on or about your lapel area on your shirt. Then, the wire to the unit either runs down your body and across stage to your amp or, as I did it, simply ran to a belt pack, which then sent the signal to the wireless receiver, which was hooked up to my amp & speakers. This was a very nice arrangement once I bought the wireless unit.

The only thing I didn't like (and still don't) about these "lapel" mikes is the fact that if you turn your head far to one side, the mike doesn't pick up your voice as well as when you face forward. By its very design, the mike requires the user to keep his/her head at a consistent distance from the mike for peak performance. For me, I want to concentrate on my performance, not the positioning of my head!

As I'm a very fussy performer, I continued searching...

Headset/Gooseneck Microphone

Ah, perfection, at least for me! This little unit has it all: Hands-free operation, no clunky appearance like the handhelds, wireless operation, and best of all, it didn't matter where I moved my head.

The head set mikes are similar to what you see rock stars on TV using nowadays. After looking at pictures of Lance Burton's shows in Vegas, I notice he uses one when he's not on TV.

The head set mike, as its name implies, fits around your head, and includes a mike attached to a bendable "gooseneck," allowing you to position it from your mouth and keep it there. You can choose to use it as a wired mike (why would you want to?) or

obviously the wireless method. Most wireless modes have a cord that runs from the head set down to a belt pack which then sends the signal back to your system.

You can get adequate units for less than \$100 by themselves or pay a fortune, depending on how much you want to spend and how much quality you want.

For me, this bugger works the best. I should also mention to you that if you go with Florida Magic's PA system, it includes both a lavalier microphone and a head set mike, allowing you to choose the one that's best for you. However, different performers prefer different things. By listing some of the features of the different mikes available to you, hopefully you'll now be able to choose your own path and fully research what's best for you.

Control Techniques

Now we come to an area that's either been ignored or abused by a lot of professionals. Like everyone else, I'm going to throw in my two cents and let you decide for yourself.

As I mentioned earlier, I really feel that it's necessary to open your school assemblies with some kind of control opening speech. Likewise, I think it's a good idea to use a similar technique right before turning things over to teachers at the of your program.

These control techniques are important because it sets up boundaries for the kids watching your show. It also establishes you as a professional that understands the plight of the school administrators and how valuable control is, regardless of if it's ten kids or 700.

Opening Control Technique

What I like to do, right after I'm introduced (in my experience, it's usually by the principal) is to get right into my control opening before I do any magic. The key to this is to get through it fairly quickly before you bore the audience.

My technique has been influenced by Dave Risley, Dave Dee, Brian Flora, and many others. I've also added my own bits over the years. It goes something like this:

“Good morning (Afternoon) Everyone! My name is Cris The Magic Man. Will you all say ‘Hi, Cris?’” **(Kids respond)** “Thanks! Now, we're going to have a lot of fun today, but before we get to the show, I just need to tell you about a couple of quick rules. First: This is a LIVE show, so you can see and hear me...” **(At this point if I'm dealing with younger grades such as K-2, I'll often open my eyes real wide and stare with a silly expression on my face at the first couple of rows, allowing my eyes to pass over several kids as I just stare silently. This very often causes many people to giggle.)** “...and I can see & hear you...” **(I repeat the bug-eyed staring thing again, getting**

more giggles) "...So there can't be any talking while I'm talking so we can hear what's going on, okay?" **(The whole bug-eyed thing breaks up the boredom of the 'rules' a bit, helps establish my character, and makes a point about listening without being too harsh. Obviously, I don't do the bug-eyed thing for older grades.)** "I know I won't have any problems, though, because I can tell you guys are going to be a GREAT audience!" **(I use positive reinforcement instead of that 'if you talk, I'll have to cut out tricks and fun' crap that I've heard over the years from other...professionals. I'm sorry, but I want this to be a fun experience. Since dropping the cutting out tricks stuff, I've actually had an easier time controlling my audiences. I think that by dropping that line, I was eliminating a subtle 'challenge,' so to speak, to some of the kids.)**

"Great! Rule number two: if you see something you like a lot or think was funny, you can clap. Let's practice this on three...one...two...three!" **(This was not my idea; I learned of it from Dave Risley, but it's incredibly important as you're teaching the kids how to be an audience. Most people don't know that you're "supposed" to clap if you enjoy something in a live show. Kids are told to be quiet so much, well, they have to be encouraged to respond. Also take note of the fact that I didn't say to clap say 'yeah' real loud as some do. A small point: you don't usually have to encourage kids to make noise! Don't overdo it and open Pandora's Box.)**

"Rule number three: If you see something you didn't like, I still want you to laugh and clap." **(Again, not my own, but very funny to the adults!)** "Rule number four: if you want to help out with the show, sit still and raise your hand QUIETLY like this." **(I demonstrate by raising my hand. This is important because you obviously don't want the kids to stampede the stage and scream to help you! At this point, hands usually shoot up.)** "But now right now, so put your hands down." **(A chuckle from adults)** "Now, are you ready for the show?" **(At this point, the kids will respond. I then turn on my music and start the show.)**

I feel this opening sets the rules of the show very nicely without coming down harshly on the kids. I also want to point out that very often, most of the time, this is the ONLY thing that I need to do to maintain order through the show.

Nevertheless, there are a few little things I do on occasion that I want to offer you for consideration if you're just getting started.

A Few Other Ideas

As I talked about earlier, by moving across the stage to hold the attention of the kids (the eye is drawn to motion), you're set up to catch the attention of your audience by not moving. If you find the audience is a little unruly, freeze. You'll very often catch the attention of the kids.

An extremely valuable technique that I stumbled on (another that I'm sure is not original with me) is the idea of alternating volunteer tricks with effects that require no volunteer. The idea is that by alternating, you're breaking up the show to prevent kids from practically leaping on stage in anticipation of the performer's request for assistance. Break it up, and the kids won't be able to be sure when you're going to need someone.

Another technique I use quite often –just because it's part of the patter of one of my signature effects- is whispering. I first heard about this technique many years ago, after I was silly enough to think that I'd "thought it up." Anyway, Danny Kaye (AKA Silly Billy) talked about lowering your volume of your voice to create peaks and valleys in your show. Too many people continually ask the kids to 'yell real loud' in response to something.

Silly Billy's idea (and mine) is to introduce a quiet segment or segments in your act to break up the energy level. For me, I use this most often with my Zombie routine. In my routine, my Zombie is a mysterious creature living in a black box with a padlock on it. When I bring the prop out, I walk very gingerly, carrying the box as though I'm trying to be very cautious about what's inside. I also say, "Shhhhh!" as I carry the box. I feel this comes across as more of a transition into this routine than a control technique because of the idea that I'm 'scared of what's in the box.' That way, it doesn't look like I'm begging for the kids to cooperate.

Since I'm a high-energy, fast-talking person, I also can change the tempo of the show by slowing down my speaking (For me this is tough!). I usually do this for my reading show for older kids as I'm telling them a story about an illiterate co-worker from my past. It works great for me because it marks a character change and tells the kids that something important is going on. When I tell that story, you can hear a pin drop in the performing area.

I've also adapted this idea of lowering my volume and slowing down my speech for the last sentence or two of my closing technique, which I'll get to in a moment.

Closing Technique

I have to credit Dave Dee from Atlanta with most of this technique, which is used here with his permission, although the last little bit is mine. Some performers like to end their show on a big high with the kids amazed and excited by your show-stopping effect, because they feel it creates a lasting impression on the adults...well, it does create a lasting impression, just not the one you want!

You have to look at it from the school's point of view: Once the program is over, the teachers are now responsible for getting 400-600 kids back safely to their rooms. It can be pandemonium! They're going to have the bad taste of that chaos in their minds a lot longer than the good feelings that you managed to cultivate during the other 44:30 minutes of your assembly program.

Add to it the fact that most of the time, they will have no access to a microphone to aid them as you did.

Simply put, if you're working from stage, you need to show some consideration to the school officials that were nice enough to invite you and do your best to settle the kids down before you turn it over to the administrators.

Here's what I like to do. Right after my finishing effect, regardless of what it is, I say something to the effect of:

“Did everyone have fun today?” *(I know a lot of experts say not to ask an open-ended question like this...that is, don't give the opening for a NO answer. Personally, I'm confident enough in my programs that this isn't a problem. The choice is yours.)*
 “Great! Now this is the most important part of the show. Your teachers are watching you.” *(Pause. Remember what I said about slowing down.)* “Your principal is watching you.” *(Pause.)* “It was up to them to bring in this program. They could have kept everyone in the classrooms, but they thought that it would be a lot of fun to have this special program. Now it's up to you to show them respect. The best way you can show them respect is to make it easy for them to get you back to class. The easiest way to get everyone back to class is by not talking. No talking to your friends...no whispering to your neighbors...keep your mouths closed...Now, you'll have plenty of time to talk about the show after school— *(I added that last bit to soften this up a bit.)* “—But for right now, show your teachers respect and do them a favor and make it easy for them to get you back to class by being really quiet.” *(By this point, my speech is quite slow and very quiet.)* “Before I go, let's all whisper ‘NO BULLIES ALLOWED’” *(or whatever the name is of whatever program I'm doing that day. This allows me to remind the kids one last time what the program was supposed to be about and by having them whisper it very slowly, I bring the energy level way, way down before I turn things over to the principal.)* “...Very slowly on the count of three...one...two...three: ‘No bullies allowed...thanks, everyone...Goodbye!’” *(As I say the last line or two, I'm whispering into the microphone, my body language says ‘quiet,’ the kids say the name of the program quietly, and I walk quietly behind my curtain. At this point, the principal takes over a group of quiet, calm, kids. I first came up with this idea on the spot at a school show I did a year ago and it's worked tremendously well since then.)*

I should point out that sometimes what happens at this point is the principal will step before the group and say, “Let's show Cris Johnson how much we enjoyed his show! Yeah!” or something like that. Of course, the kids go nuts, completely undoing my quieting work, but my opinion is that at that point, it's their fault.

Now that we've covered some of the ins and outs of stage performing, let's turn now to developing your show.

Developing Your Show

I know this next section is going to fall under the “Oh, I knew that” category for some of the old pros out there, but it never hurts to brush up on old skills. For people new to performing in schools, this section will serve as an important building block in being able to offer your clients a product that will leave them satisfied.

I’m including this section because too often, many new stage magicians will pick out a bunch of tricks and just do them from start to finish with no reasoning behind the line-up. You want your show to flow smoothly with different elements to break up the monotony and keep the audience’s attention.

There’s also a very big marketing reason why you want many different elements in your program, but I’ll cover that later. Consider this more “laying the foundation” stuff, especially if you’re new to the game.

First of all, let’s take a look at the different elements you can incorporate into your shows and then I’ll explain why it’s important to use as many of these as you can in each show.

Laughter/Humor

When working for kids, many magicians make the mistake of placing too much emphasis on how amazing their magic is and not enough on actually entertaining the kids. Laughter is critically important when working for kids, especially young kids.

Kids may like the idea of magic, but when presented with a straight magic show with little laughter, younger kids become restless and tune out. They just don’t have the attention span for something that doesn’t actively engage them. Add to that the fact that a lot of magic is difficult for younger children to understand, and you have a recipe for disaster.

By making the kids laugh, you’re engaging the audience with a stronger connection than just the ‘wow’ factor many magicians desperately crave. Make your younger audiences laugh and you’ll hold their attention and experience much better results.

Younger Grades

When looking material for younger kids—say pre-K to 3rd grade or so—look for material that is surprising, easy to understand, highly visual, silly, and if possible, makes the performer look silly. Kids absolutely love to see adults (especially authority figures) look silly. Silliness in itself is something that younger kids enjoy. In fact, certain words, or phrases just sound silly to kids.

This past winter, I found myself performing a for a daycare-age group of kids. One of my routine's scripts that I'd written involved a reference to that old show "Gilligan's Island." The reference wasn't amusing the kids as well as I'd hoped in performance, so this time I mentioned the word "coconut" when talking about the Professor. For some reason, the kids really got a kick out of that. I'm not sure if coconut is a funny-sounding word to a young child or if it was the silly expression I plastered on my face—one of exaggerated exasperation. Either way, the bit worked, and I've kept it in ever since, to great response.

Another tip is something I touched on earlier—the idea of silly expressions, wide hand/body motions, and more. Study classic cartoons and watch many of the exaggerated gestures of the characters. Study physical comedy performed by master children's entertainers like Dave Risley. Too many performers use comedy based on adult responses and they don't understand that what makes children laugh is very different. Simply put, it often helps to become childlike and let yourself look like an ass. As Riz puts it, "You have to leave your ego at home."

In my shows, you'll see how I tried to incorporate silly material into my younger programs as well as simply adding silly elements or scripting to standard effects. See, the problem with a lot of store-bought magic is that the manufacturers very often don't supply a very good script with the piece. Many fledgling magicians don't understand the value of a good script and therefore merely use what came in the box or resort to descriptive patter: "First I'll do this, then I'll do that." Boring!!

When working with younger audiences, remember that they like several standard "plots" in magic. They are:

- Magician in trouble – anything that happens to the magician to make him/her look silly.
- Conflict – Look at Tom & Jerry and other cartoons. Conflict can be between the magician and the audience, the magician, and a volunteer, or even the magician and a puppet. Conflict can be very, very funny!
- Magician is scared/surprised – anything that startles the performer. Look at the standard "Blooming Bouquet" for an example. When the kids finally get the performer to see the flowers when they're blooming, he's startled.
- Look, not see – anything that the kids see that the performer doesn't. Again, most of the standard "Blooming Bouquet" performance falls under this.
- The audience is empowered – One thing kids don't want is for a show-off type to walk out on stage and display his wonderful powers. Adults already have all the power, and now we have a super-powered one? Oh, fun. Many

tricks that you already do may be changed to simply allow a child or the whole audience to “make the magic happen.”

Of course, there are other plots and situations you can use, but these can get you started. All have been proven highly effective over many years by a plethora of different performers. In many ways, they’re ‘classic’ plots, but I look at classics like this: They’re regarded as such for a reason! Too many young performers set out to reinvent the wheel. While it’s admirable, I believe it’s best to learn what works first and then if you’re intent on exploring/inventing new territory, you will have an understanding of what works and more importantly *why* it works.

Older Grades

Not surprisingly, many older kids will look down upon many of these techniques if they’re presented in the exact same manner. When routining shows, I often use many of the same plots, but I do it in a subtle manner. My body movements and gestures aren’t as extreme.

I think that laughter for this age group is just as important for the success of a show but maybe for slightly different reasons. Here, laughter can help engage the kids and occupy their minds, which can help prevent them from being focused solely on the workings of the trick.

You see, when kids get older, they tend to be very curious about how things work and why. They want to see what makes things tick. When they’re shown magic, most older kids know that it’s just illusion and so they want to show their intellectual superiority...by screaming “I know how you did that!”

Laughter can keep them busy. It’s tough to heckle if you’re laughing! Besides, kids will respect you and enjoy your show a lot more if you make them laugh. It’s similar to what little kids think about the authority figures...but at this age level, kids tend to assert themselves more. It’s part of growth and the rebellion of youth. As entertainers, the more we’re aware of these tendencies, the more we can embrace it and work our act around this. There are a lot of dynamite things we can do in our shows if we plan for this!

The magic itself can be more sophisticated, but laughter is still critically important. With this age group (Let’s say grades 4-6), they begin to think of themselves as too grown up for a lot of magic. Ultra-silly stuff like the Blooming Bouquet is probably out.

I tend to weave the plots I mentioned earlier into my show in ways that paint me as more of someone who simply didn’t “catch” something that happened (Magician Didn’t See It) and less of a complete goof or imbecile.

I'll often use this technique in such a way that I become agitated when the older kids see something that I didn't and accuse them of trying to trick me. Not only is this different than what I do for younger kids (portray myself as completely unaware of some things), but it helps take the 'heat' off of the working of the effect. The kids are so busy trying to get me to believe them when they say that something has happened that they lose focus on trying to figure out how the thing works.

I feel there's a fine line between getting the older kids to laugh and crossing that line and having them lose respect for you because you're too silly. Of course, with this being magic, the rules are made to be broken. I'm sure there are plenty of gifted performers out there who can be just as silly for the older kids as for the younger kids.

Adults In the Audience

Many performers are worried about "losing" the adults (school administrators, PTA, etc.) watching the program by focusing in on the kids. They then make the mistake of working in magic or mind reading that is far too sophisticated for the age level they're performing for.

Don't fall into this trap!

The adults in the audience will be sufficiently entertained if you present a good show that engages your audience. If anything, you'll earn high reviews for yourself by presenting what they consider to be an "age-appropriate" show.

Dave Risley offers a fun solution for appealing to adults in an audience made up of primarily kids: Puns! Use plenty of puns! Stuff like the old bit: "It was raining cats and dogs. In fact, I stepped in a poodle!!"

It's what I call "groaners." Adults will appreciate this kind of humor because they'll instantly understand that those kinds of jokes are aimed right at them. It's fun acknowledgement of them as audience members without doing anything harmful for the kids, which I'll talk about in a few moments.

100% Non-Offensive Content

One of the keys to getting a lot of work in any market these days is by emphasizing the fact that you will not do anything offensive or dangerous during your act. There are different elements to touch on and why each is not desirable in schools.

Off-Color Humor

This is one of the biggest and conversely, it should be the easiest to avoid. Too many performers want to appeal to the adults in their audience, as I mentioned before, but instead of sophisticated magic that kids can't understand, these boneheads work in adult

humor into their act. Nothing turns off adults faster than an idiot who uses adult humor during a show with kids in the room!

Play it safe: Stick to humor that is safe. Even if you don't care for the use of innocent puns like I mentioned before, you can still be "safe" with your humor and make adults laugh. I'll give you a quick example: Often I'll perform a version of the Bill in Lemon, which in my case involves the tearing up of the borrowed currency. If I'm doing this and there are older kids present (I usually wouldn't do it for younger kids—it sets a bad example and more importantly, they'd get bored fast.), I'll remark directly to the kids, as I tear the paper, "Trust me, you DON'T want to try this at home. You'd be in some SERIOUS time out!"

That line gets a nice laugh, is safe, and really appeals to adults, especially in the context of what I'm doing.

Especially in this day and age of being politically correct, you can't afford to take any chances with kids in the audience. Personally, I happen to feel that to offer off-color humor to an all-adult audience is still taking a chance because you may offend somebody!

Nothing Dangerous

Another big no-no is doing material that looks dangerous or sets a bad example. I learned this the hard way growing up as a teenager because I was really drawn to some truly demented effects, like Razor Blades from the Mouth and Harry Anderson's wonderfully macabre Needle Thru Arm.

Over the years, I also used a snake, a rat, and lots of fire in my act. The snake was cut out because too many people found it squeamish...plus, using my ferret (or even a rabbit) in the exact same prop was much more visible. The rat being cut out of the act was something I truly regret. Go to any knowledgeable pet store owner or veterinarian and they'll be the first to tell you that rats make the best pets, with mild tempers much better than hamsters, gerbils, etc. The thing is, I just didn't want to fight the negative stigma anymore.

Fire & Guns

The fire was an easy thing to cut when I started doing school shows because it's obvious with Fire Prevention programs and such that schools would find the whole idea of fire use in a school assembly program horrific at best!

Although I never had any kind of desire to use anything pertaining to guns in my shows (such as a gun safety message or anything like that), I've nevertheless decided to pass on a tip to you:

Don't even mention the word gun in your programs!

I've heard a lot of horror stories about children being expelled from school just for drawing a gun. Other school performers have also shared similar stories about school officials admonishing them for even saying the word "gun" during a program. With the zero-tolerance policy schools have (and can you blame them?), it's best not to even try to work in a helpful message on that topic.

Arm Chopper

These days, the most "dangerous" thing I do in some of my school shows is a funny rendition of the Arm Chopper. Now, I know a LOT of professionals out there would tell me I'm an idiot for still putting it in my school shows, but I'm extremely careful when and for whom I use it.

First of all, I never use it for ANY shows where anyone from the lower grades would be present. Secondly, I always clear it with the school before I do it. Thirdly, I keep my presentation "light and fluffy," not choosing to try and scare people like some dunderheads do. Fourthly, I actually stress in my presentation over and over that it's a "fake blade." This gives me some great comedic moments in my show and also takes some of the 'heat' off of using a questionable prop.

I will admit that part of me is tempted to drop it completely from my school acts...but I really enjoy presenting the messages that I've been able to associate with the prop during my assembly programs. I should point out that I've never, in 15 years, had any kind of a complaint from schools, and I pass out evaluation forms to several teachers at every school I've ever performed for (As I mentioned earlier, the only complaint I'd ever received was about Rocky Raccoon!).

Mouth Coils

Other professionals will warn you about putting anything in your mouth that doesn't belong there. For me, this would mean cutting my mouth coil routine, which, especially in the case of my anti-drug shows, includes some of the best tie-ins to messages. I don't mean to toot my own horn, but my mouth coil tie-ins have some very powerful and effective messages attached and I really didn't want to give them up.

Again, it's a judgment call for you. I've never received a complaint about it because my tie-ins are so strong. I certainly couldn't blame someone for taking the safe road. It's sort of a question, to me, of picking your battles carefully.

The mouth coil and even the lesser-used arm chopper are the only two things in any of my school shows that I use that could even be mildly considered dangerous. I think that by making sure that the rest of my act is ultra-tame and safe, schools simply don't see those two potential hot buttons as anything worth considering. Again, with

both, they each have powerful tie-ins to my messages, so it's easy for school officials to see I'm doing them for a reason.

The choice, of course, is yours.

Nothing Controversial

This would fall under the broad heading of 'don't do anything that might offend anyone.' Topics to avoid would include political statements, religion, abortion, etc.

Like I mentioned earlier, in this day and age, play it safe and don't give yourself any headaches.

At this point, I can't resist the urge to go on a bit of a rant about controversial effects. I've already talked about the perceived dangers of effects like fire, the mouth coil, arm chopper and so on, but what about BONE-HEADED "effects" (and I use that term real loosely) such as the "Bra from Silks?"

I've seen brain-dead performers use this with children in the room or even on children! I don't know what these "performers" are thinking, but I hope those of you reading this understand why using something like that might be considered offensive.

While I understand that it's supposed to be just a silly sight gag, I think it's important to consider ideas of decency when performing. I personally think that *that* stupid prop is inappropriate for strictly adult audiences let alone kids!

While I'm at it, let's consider other props that put the fear of volunteering into audiences such as Shock Chairs...maybe I've got the name wrong, so here's a brief description: A volunteer comes on stage and is invited to sit in a chair, which then "shocks" the volunteer, causing the volunteer to jump up in surprise. Oh, that's SO funny! (Can you sense my sarcasm?)

Is it any wonder that we magicians as a whole generally find it difficult to get adults (and even some kids in certain situations) to come up on stage? Who in their right mind wants to stand in front of a group of people and be made to look like an ass? Sure, some people and/or performers do and it's fun sometimes, but I'm talking about the cases where the volunteer is clearly uncomfortable.

Treat your volunteers with respect!

I placed these comments under the heading of controversial material because rants like this can be controversial in the world of magic. Too many performers don't "get it." Hopefully, dear reader, with a little common sense and a lot of work, we can reduce the number of bonehead performers in the world!

Before closing on this sub-heading, I should point out that some clients may be iffy about what seems to be the most innocent of effects. Let me explain.

In addition to schools, I often will perform for church groups—covered dish dinners, holiday events for kids, etc.—and one thing that some of them tend to be squeamish about is the idea of floating someone in the air. Of course, for most working professionals, this usually involves a Floating Carpet or a Chair Suspension or some other prop. Accusing someone of being in league with the devil for using one of these props would be like accusing the maker of the Stratosphere of having supernatural powers!

Nevertheless, in my experience, it's been a matter of concern for many churches. There is always a possibility that a catholic school that hires you could have similar concerns. Just keep that in the back of your mind and be prepared to substitute a different effect if this comes up.

Audience Participation

Now we'll get back into the things you can and should be adding to your school shows. School administrators especially feel that audience participation is very important.

A live assembly is a unique experience for a school. It gives the kids an opportunity to interact with a live presenter. Participating is one of a live assembly presenter's strongest selling point. Without audience participation, the students could simply listen to a film on the special topic in class. It would certainly be easier on teachers as well as the scheduling and budget of the school.

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of audience participation. Magic has a large advantage over other kinds of presentations because a good magical presentation can use both of these effectively.

Onstage Volunteers

By using onstage volunteers, a good magical performer can really drive his/her messages home. It's also one of the easiest ways to maintain control of your audience, because the kids in the audience are eager to see what will happen to one of their friends.

Some different ways of using onstage volunteers include role-playing, empowering them to do the magic, some comic interludes, and so forth.

I really enjoy using onstage volunteers because it really helps break up the pacing of the show and prevents the audience from getting bored.

The important points to remember, of course, is to always treat your volunteers with respect. This includes not only the time volunteers spend onstage with you but also

the manner in which you invite them onstage and dismiss them. Don't forget to say "please" and it's important to ask rather than demand.

Obviously, when inviting audience members onstage it's also important to keep in mind any obvious physical disabilities. While I don't feel it's acceptable to discriminate, at the same time it may be best to pass over a potential volunteer if it's apparent that he/she would have difficulty getting onstage.

Participation For the Whole Audience

While onstage volunteers can add a lot of fun and excitement to a show, don't neglect the idea of utilizing the entire audience. For those of you new to stage magic, this is actually easier than it sounds. I actually use several different techniques to get everyone involved.

The first way is also the most easiest: asking the audience to say a certain phrase or magic word. This is for effects where "the whole audience needs to help with the magic," although I also use the name of the show as the magic words often to drive home the point of the assembly. For younger kids, this can really be a magical moment for them if you present this properly.

Consider the good ol' Coloring Book trick. It's old as dirt, but still a great effect for children's workers. The standard way to do this is to ask the kids to either say the magic word or throw imaginary colors at the pictures in the book, thereby having an active role in "coloring" the pictures.

Another little thing that I do is point to one of the pictures and ask of the audience, "Who picked red?" and acknowledge those hands that go up. I'll do the same thing for a few other colors, directly acknowledging those who helped. It's a nice personal touch that I feel makes a difference.

Other ways to get the entire audience involved would include clapping at the end of a routine. My Control Opening in another section details how to "train" the audience to be an audience, so to speak.

At the end of my programs, I also get the whole audience involved as I recap what we've learned during the assembly. One of my animals or a puppet or whatever "asks the audience questions." I tend to keep these extremely simple, just yes or no answers, so it's easy for the whole audience to chime in with the same answer, rather than a muddling of sound as 400 kids try to answer in a different way.

Amazing Magic

You'll notice, of course, that this one came down the list a little bit. There's a reason—without proper use of volunteers, clean program content, laughter and such, your show will not be nearly as successful, regardless of what kind of cool magic you present.

That being said, it is of course very important that you present good magic that is highly visible, easy to understand, and very mysterious. First, when you're dealing with several hundred people in an audience, I don't care if your effects are the "pack flat, play big" variety or big props on wheels that you roll out—your stuff needs to be clearly seen from the back row.

For that reason, I do few traditional card tricks from the stage. If I'm going to use cards, I try to use jumbo cards as much as possible. Granted, there's a couple I do with a regular deck such as "Cardiographic," or The Sketch Pad Card Rise, but even with that, eventually it's an effect with a huge drawing.

Secondly, keep your effects easy to understand. Even 8- or 10-year-olds may lose the thread of a 12-part Ambitious Card routine. Also, now is not the time to try out your Q & A routine on the first graders if you have a background in mentalism.

Finally, anything you perform should obviously fool people. After all, magic is supposed to be mysterious. Your effects should be the enhancement to your message and if they're not properly mastered and rehearsed before you step before your audience, it's going to show and it's going to reflect badly on you, regardless of your wonderful messages.

The cold truth is this: school officials will be judging you on the merits of your messages *and* on your magic. Both must be professional. I'm not saying you have to have the manipulation/technical abilities of a Lance Burton or a Teller, but you do need to be smooth and confident when presenting your material. Even if your character is supposed to "mess up," your audience will have a sixth sense for intentional goofs or unplanned mistakes.

Don't make the mistake of placing too much emphasis on your amazing magic, but it does need to be thought out and entertaining.

Storytelling

This is an underused category by many stage magicians trying to get into schools. As I said in the beginning of this section on developing your act, there are some very good reasons why it's important to have different elements in your act and one of them is storytelling.

From a technical standpoint, it's an easy thing to add—no moves to worry about if you're just telling a story. Of course, you can also use a story to illustrate an effect.

Dave Risley does this with a neat storytelling presentation for his take on the 20th Century Silks which he uses in a couple of his theme shows.

I'll often use a quick story from my past to illustrate a concept or effect that has a tie-in with one of the messages I'm trying to get across in my assembly programs. Other times I'll use the story by itself, as a stand-alone part of the show, such as the story that I use when I'm talking about illiteracy during my reading show.

Although I said from a technical, sleight of hand standpoint storytelling was easy, it doesn't mean that telling a story onstage is easy—you still have to keep your audience engaged. I keep my audience engaged during the story with several techniques that I discussed earlier, such as movement, altering my speaking style and/or volume, eye contact, and others.

It can be a longer story that goes on for a couple of minutes or it can be a short paragraph. It can even be the narration of a play—for one of my routines, I'll ask for three volunteers to be “actors.” Each will play a part in a little ‘play’ involving some simple costumes, magic and of course storytelling.

My whole point here is to give you a feel for the different ways you can incorporate storytelling into your show. Contrary to popular belief by many amateurs, storytelling is not boring.

Puppetry

I was technically using a puppet in my act for years before I realized it. Some of you may recognize the “puppet” under it's more traditional name: The Zombie!

I know, I know, many people don't consider the Zombie to be a puppet, but the way I perform it, it qualifies in the minds of my prospects. First, I characterize my Zombie as a living creature. My Zombie ball has fur and eyes, so instead of manipulating a silver ball, I'm trying to keep a mysterious and strange creature under control! This also has the advantage of utilizing conflict as a basis for what's happening. It's certainly more interesting to the audience than merely showing off my floating silver ball (I don't mean to sound harsh toward the classic Zombie, but after using both for many years, for my own work there really is no comparison when I work for kids. I implore you to try this version!).

What about Rocky Raccoon? It would be very easy to make a case for considering Rocky a puppet. Your clients will certainly accept him as such. Once again, you're using an “animal” onstage to create interest and if scripted as such, conflict. Conflict will hold the audience's attention so effectively when used properly.

Of course, a section on puppets wouldn't be complete without mentioning traditional ventriloquist puppets. Many performers use ventriloquism and puppets to

create a unique onstage rivalry between the performer and his prop. While it's not my cup of tea, after seeing other gifted performers use these kinds of techniques and puppets in their own work, I can honestly say that it's one of the most effective things a performer can use on stage, especially for a themed assembly presentation.

Regardless of what kind of puppet you may choose to use, one of the biggest assets is the fact that you can use them at the end of the presentation for recapping what you've covered with your messages. In its simplest form, the puppet seems to "whisper" in your ear, apparently asking the audience questions. It allows you to show the school officials that the audience of children has understood and retained your concepts.

Another advantage to using puppets is the idea of using the puppet as the "dumb one," the one who doesn't get what the theme show is all about. Using a puppet in this manner will allow a clever performer to get the audience to set the puppet's ideas straight, in effect turning the kids into the smart ones as they tell the "dumb" puppet just how wrong he is. This can be an extremely powerful technique since you're empowering the kids in a way that allows them to show how smart they are... and in the process demonstrating to the school administrators that the messages you're teaching are again being retained and understood by the audience.

Production Value

Production value is a term used in theater and other industries that relates to how something looks. In other words, by making your stage set-up look big and impressive, you'll often command respect from some clients before you've even spoken a word. For example, a couple of years ago, I found myself in the middle of getting ready for a school show in December, one of my self-esteem shows.

I should mention that I bring a large backdrop and very often some big expensive-looking props. As I was finishing my preparations, the head of the PTA came into the auditorium to check on me. As she walked over to me, she noticed my stuff, which was doing a good job of filling the auditorium stage, and said, "Oh, wow! You can use us for a reference anytime!"

I hadn't done anything yet! I wound up having a great time and everyone was very pleased with what I did, but the point is that I won over the client before I did a single thing.

I know a lot of magicians prefer the "pack flat, play big" type of show and that's fine, you can just skip the next page or two. For the other magicians reading this, those like me who enjoy using some of the bigger tricks, in just a little while I'll give you a great system for getting more money out of schools that want a bigger show.

In the meantime, there are a few ideas I can give you to increase the “production value” of your show without drastically increasing your set-up time, something you have to be careful of when working for schools.

Big Tricks

No big secrets here; one way to increase the perception of your show is to use larger props. When I offer my daytime assembly shows larger props, I tend to offer them one big prop, such as Floating a Student in The Air or Changing the Birds into A Ferret. Both are VERY big and really end the show on a high note. Neither increases my set-up time by more than a couple of minutes, and by only offering one, I’m minimizing the trips to the car that I must take.

The key to this is picking effects that look great but don’t involve a lot of set-up time. For instance, I used to use “Hospitality” (Think-A-Drink) for my anti-drug shows, but because of the seven different drinks involved, I was taking between 5-10 minutes to set up that one effect! I’ll get into more detail when I get to the “Big Show” vs. “Fast Set-Up” section very soon.

Backdrop

One of the easiest ways to increase the perception that your show is a big deal is through the use of a backdrop. Backdrops are compact and most of the backdrop support frames set up in under a minute. You can also use a backdrop to hide any larger props you may have. I prefer to have a very “clean” looking stage without a lot of clutter. I feel this helps focus the audience’s attention on me rather than the kids trying to figure out what that big prop is going to be used for.

I bought my backdrop support frame from a photographer. It has two telescoping tripods that can each extend to almost 12 feet tall. It also came with four cross bars so that the frame’s width can be six, nine, or twelve feet across. This looks really nice on stage, and the whole system packs down quickly into a small 36” bag.

The fabric itself is a silver sequined fabric, which reflects light and shimmers nicely on stage. It also doesn’t wrinkle, which is a plus—if you consider using a backdrop, make sure the fabric you pick doesn’t wrinkle, as it would look terrible on stage.

Different fabrics are more expensive than others. Personally, other than the silver stuff that I currently use, I’ve found crushed velvet to be very economical and it looks fantastic on stage. Regular velvet is the best, but it’s also very expensive.

You’ll need to figure on a lot of extra velvet vs. the planned width of your frame. For instance, if you’re planning on using a 12-foot-wide frame, you’ll need a curtain of

fabric 16-20 feet wide, so that the curtain will ‘billow’ like a shower curtain on the frame, which looks very nice on stage.

I had my wife sew the top of the curtain so that the frame poles could just slip through the fabric like a sock. This allows you to have an extremely fast set up.

My frame cost me about \$200, but if you’re just starting out, I highly recommend you take a look at my “Backdrop Report.” Contact me for further info. I built my first frame for less than \$10 and I used it almost daily for nearly two years.

100% Control of The Audience

Although I covered control of your audience earlier, I feel that when you’re developing your show, it’s good to rehearse every aspect of your script, including the control methods you use so that your entire presentation is extremely smooth.

This is also something that when we get to actually marketing the shows and putting together our offers to school clients, you’ll want to stress that you have 100% control of the audience. You’ll see why that’s so important later.

What To Wear?

Developing your show also includes consideration of your attire. To give you a reference point, when I first started performing shows for payment (I wouldn’t want to qualify myself as a professional at that time), I wore ripped-up jeans and a tee shirt. To say that I really didn’t look professional was a huge understatement.

For school assembly programs, I now prefer to wear a sports jacket, dress slacks, tie, and dress shoes. I feel this really presents me as a dignified person who takes his job/business very seriously. Also, when I’m on stage, my character is basically an extension of my real-life personality. For those of you who create a different character, you may elect to have a certain costume for your character. Whatever you decide to go with, the main consideration is that the attire is not faded, wrinkled, or ill fitting. Your clothes are a reflection of your business, and regardless of how you feel about it, many people will judge you by the quality of your clothes.

I also recommend that whatever you choose to wear, make sure you’re comfortable in it. Too often, I’ve seen many magicians wearing tuxedos just because it’s what they seem to think all magicians should wear. The problem is that on a subconscious level, you can tell that many aren’t comfortable in their tuxes. They feel awkward and ill at ease. Why bother? You want to project confidence on stage, not hesitancy.

My personal opinion is that tuxes aren't really appropriate for school assemblies—they're actually too formal. Nevertheless, the choice is yours.

Although I see nothing wrong with costumes, I feel that to earn the maximum amount of respect (and thus dollars) from the school administrators, it's best to present yourself first and foremost as a businessperson and a speaker who uses magic to enhance what he's talking about. From their point of view, the purpose of your visit is to communicate important messages to the students, regardless of how you elect to accomplish this.

On stage, I can do and act in a manner appropriate to the age group and the messages I'm trying to get across, but the manner in which I dress commands more respect from the adults. No matter how silly I become for the kids, my clothing still commands respect from the adults.

One thing I've been told from other professionals is that it's better to position yourself as a speaker instead of a magician because professional speakers command fees that are much higher than magicians. I can see the logic in this, although I'm still referred to as a magician whenever someone introduces me on stage. I think the schools insist on doing this because of the perception that the kids will enjoy a magician.

Now that I've made a case for dressing professionally, let me expand upon that—I don't think you necessarily need to wear a sports jacket if you're male. Other options include a simple polo shirt, a dress shirt and tie without the jacket, a dress shirt and vest, and so on.

I have seen other assembly presenters in my area—extremely well-regarded ones—that wear jeans. I personally don't think it's appropriate, but if it's something you decide to do, I advise making sure the jeans are wrinkle-free and clean.

For women, a smart pantsuit or similar attire is fine. I'm not going to offer a lot of opinions on what female magicians should wear because, well, I'm not one. The best advice I can offer is “business casual.”

Finally, a quick note on hygiene: with as hectic as life can get, it's important to make sure you're clean shaven and I'd recommend carrying breath mints with you. Two simple points, but I wanted to include them for completeness' sake.

At Least Three Versions of Each Show

Here's a huge, gigantic tip that will make you a ton of money and make your school performing career a lot easier, too.

Simply put, whenever you're putting a show together, put together three different versions of it: one for younger grades (K-3), older grades (4-6) and a "combo" show for grades K-6.

When we get into the actual marketing of your services, I'm going to get into this in great detail, but the short version is this: If you offer two different shows to schools based on the different grades, many clients will elect to hire you for two programs instead of just one. Obviously, this means more profits for you!

This idea also makes your life easier, because to offer the exact same show for all age groups is a bad idea. You'll either "lose" the attention of the younger kids, or you'll bore the older kids. With my own theme assembly presentations, I provide you with a "menu" of effects plus my actual line-ups to use for all three categories plus my thoughts on performing for junior high kids, which is another topic.

You see, schools have different grades and so may break down each age group for each show differently. An elementary school may only have grades K-5, so if they book you for two shows, they may have grades K-2 at the first show and grades 3-5 at the second, or they may elect to just have one show for the whole school, hence the "combo" show. Earlier I alluded to the idea of boring one half of the kids or the other by concentrating too much on one age group. By balancing out your material carefully, you can learn to do these "combo" shows quite easily. Again, I cover what I do in great depth in my individual program books, elsewhere with your course.

Other schools may go from grades K-8, and you may wind up doing one show for K-4 and the second show for grades 5-8. In my opinion, performing for grades 7 & 8 is rather tough, so I often have specific effects in reserve for these groups.

Most difficult of all are the occasions where the school has insisted on one show for the entire school, grades K-8. Talk about tough! I've done a number of them, and for obvious reasons, I focus more of my material, slightly more than half, on the younger kids. My thinking is this: the little kids will get far too wiggly if their bored whereas the older kids will still enjoy most of the show simply because it's funny, regardless of the sophistication of the magic.

The point of all this is to be prepared for the different situations you'll be called about. Flexibility is one of the main selling points of a good assembly presenter.

Big Show vs. Fast Set-Up

Now we're getting into one of the most effective things that I've ever done when developing my shows to maximize profits. I'll fully explain the concept here in this section and then I'll explain exactly how to use it in great detail in the marketing sections of this course.

A Brief History

I developed the idea of the “Fast Set-Up” and “Big Show” several years ago. I had been told recently (at the time) that schools preferred it if incoming assembly presentations had short set-up times, preferably less than half an hour.

At the time, my assembly shows featured a bloated hour set-up time and an equally staggering hour break down. Although it took me far too long to realize this was a no-no, it turned into a good thing for me.

You see, in the two major markets I have performed in (Pittsburgh and Buffalo, both big cities), the schools have loved the big “production value” of my shows. Obviously, most were less than thrilled with my long set-up times.

After receiving the afore-mentioned advice, I decided to scale back my shows. I toyed with the idea of scaling back my programs all the way to simply using a roll-on or suitcase table onstage—plus whatever I could fit into the case, of course.

In developing this new line of shows, I suddenly became worried that any repeat schools would miss the larger props, so the idea of offering both shows quickly developed.

How I Offer Choices of a Client’s Show...

When offering my services to schools, regardless of the age group or number of assemblies, I now offer them their choice of either a scaled-back performance that takes 15 minutes or less to set-up or they can choose a larger show with larger props plus live animals. The bigger show still only takes a half hour or so to set up and only 15-20 minutes to break down. By doing this, I’m allowing the schools to make the choice. Many schools have me set up on a stage in the auditorium or their “cafetorium” (cafeteria/auditorium combo), and don’t mind a slightly longer set up time. Many other clients have me set up in the gym on the floor, and since that area is used quite often, a shorter set-up time is a huge relief to them.

This type of choice has huge psychological and financial advantages that I’ll cover later. For now, let me detail to you the differences in both of my set-ups and why they work so much better than my old method.

How I Structure My Fast Set-Up...

For the fast set-up situations, I will bring in the following equipment: my roll-on table, my side table that contains my CD player and backdrop curtain, my PA system (carried in a 14” square carrying case), the backdrop frame unit in its own carrying case, and maybe one medium-sized trick that doesn’t fit into my roll-on table/case (a trick such as Multiplying Bottles or Dancing Hanky...not too big).

My roll-on or suitcase table is the Joe Lofler model, which sets up in two seconds, is covered with that speaker carpet material and has plenty of space inside. It also takes a beating—always a plus. It looks great on stage, too—something that I insist on when selecting equipment.

The side table I mentioned is available from David Charvet. It's essentially a cube-shaped road case like musicians might use. The table legs pack inside and there's plenty of storage space inside. It's called the "10 Second Table," because it sets up so fast. It looks great on stage and takes a beating, too. I use it to carry additional equipment and as a "catch-all" during my show to prevent dumping most props on the floor.

I should also mention here that those "slightly bigger" tricks are usually packed into their own individual silver cases, briefcase style, that I buy from Lowe's or the Home-Depot. It protects these bigger and more expensive tricks because of the customizable foam inserts inside and it makes traveling a lot easier since the cases stack on my tables and other things.

The way I maximize time and effort is by stacking the side table on top of the roll-on table (which has the majority of my props inside). On top of the side table, I'll also stack the extra trick, if I'm using one (usually packed in its own silver carrying case, described earlier). I'll wheel all of this in using a portable hand truck or dolly. Mine breaks down to half its regular size for compact travel. For \$20, it was one of my best investments because it makes hauling all of this heavy stuff into schools very easy.

As I'm hauling this stuff in, I'll usually have the PA carrying case over my shoulder with its shoulder strap. I should mention the fact that Florida Magic Company, the manufacturers of my PA system, don't provide a case. However, I found a "cooler" type of case (complete with zippered compartments for all of my cables, batteries, and mikes) at Wal-Mart for less than \$20. The unit would also fit comfortably in my roll-on table, too, if I didn't have so much stuff already in it.

Also over my shoulder is the backdrop frame, also in its own case with carrying strap. Tucked with the frame is a silver mike stand I use to elevate the PA system so the sound travels over the whole audience.

This arrangement allows me to bring everything for the show into the school in one trip, which can come in handy on busy days, especially since I work solo.

Once set-up, I have a 12-foot wide by 8-foot-tall silver backdrop curtain, the roll-on table center stage, and my side table off to my left side. My PA system is further off to the left and a few feet in front of me to minimize any chance of feedback.

This arrangement looks very impressive on stage and also helps keep a very tidy and professional appearance. I never liked the way some performers set up: they'll use a

series of card tables, and all of their props are on display for all to see from the beginning of the show to the end. I never cared for that look.

I wanted to explain all of this in great detail so you would understand the concept of what I've coined the "Fast Set-Up." By using this, I still had the impressive look of my old set-up without all of the work. Obviously, for me, one of the keys is the backdrop.

How I Structure a Big Show...

For what I've coined the "Big Show" set-up, I add my dove act in which I produce two or three doves in the beginning of the show. Sometimes I'll add another medium-sized prop—which for me means carrying in another one of those silver cases from Lowe's that I talked about. I'll also add one very large prop, usually the X-Walkaway Suspension so I can float someone in the air or my Doves to Rabbit Cage, which I use to change my birds into my ferret. When schools choose the "Big Show" (which is at least 95% of the time), I've recently started giving schools the option of choosing which of those two very large effects they'd like.

For my set-up time, this usually means one or two extra trips to the car, which usually amounts to another 5 minutes of carrying stuff into the school. It also amounts to another 5-10 minutes of actual set-up time. The "Fast Set-Up" takes me 15-20 minutes, so the "Big Show" boosts that up to 30-35, which most schools still find very acceptable.

Both of these arrangements are vastly superior to what I was doing—first, my old PA system was too big. It involved three trips to the car, so that burned up a lot of time. Then, instead of limiting the show to one or the other of the two big tricks, I'd often bring both, resulting in yet another trip to the car, at least. Add to that the fact that I hadn't come up with the idea of getting the hand dolly for my school shows and I was averaging seven trips to the car. My actual set-up time, once I dragged everything in, was still about an hour. Needless to say, I was physically exhausted after a school assembly.

Ugh.

With my new system, I've eliminated more than half the trips to the car, and I've cut the set-up time in half.

So, if you're considering adding some big stuff to your school show, consider the idea of a "Fast Set-Up" and "Big Show" as two offers to schools. By doing this, you'll allow the schools that can and do want a bigger program to have that and you're giving schools that need to use the performance space immediately after your program the consideration they deserve. Like I said, I haven't even touched upon the financial merits of this system yet.

A Few Tips on Making This Work...

First of all, when planning your “Fast Set-Up,” it’s important that all or most of your props can be packed comfortably in your roll-on table if you use one or at least one travel case of some kind. If I find I want to use what I consider a “medium-sized trick” that has its own case, I try to limit it to one or possibly two depending on what show I’m doing.

The props in the roll-on table should all set up very quickly, less than ten minutes for everything. That may affect your prop selection a bit.

Secondly, if you’re using a PA system of your own, the main thing that will make this work is a PA that sets up extremely fast, preferably in under a minute. It’s no secret that I love the Florida Magic Company, but if you get one elsewhere, try to get one that has the wireless mike receiver and the amplifier built into the unit. There are plenty of good ones out there. Trying to route and plug in a bunch of cords will kill your set-up time. If you use music, make sure that you can patch your music source into your PA with just one cord.

If you elect to use a backdrop, make sure your frame sets up fast. My photographer’s frame sets up in under a minute. I get the curtain itself ‘threaded’ onto the cross bars in about a minute, which isn’t bad considering my curtain is way over 12 feet wide, to accommodate the ‘billow effect’ I like.

Even if you try my inexpensive backdrop in my “How to Build a Backdrop Frame for Less Than \$10,” you’ll find that with a little practice, it too will set up in under a minute.

For the “Big Show,” I think it’s a good idea to add something impressive in the beginning of the show that clearly sets the bigger show apart from the smaller one. It doesn’t have to be live animals, of course. It could be another medium-sized trick or perhaps something that has a lot of apparent skill involved, like the Linking Rings or juggling. At the end of the bigger show, it’s important to end the performance with a bang, hence the big trick at the end. Again, set-up time for the big trick should be minimal. Both of my levitations set up in about a minute. The doves to rabbit cage sets up in under two minutes.

Since this is usually going to be something pretty big, it’s another reason why I like using a backdrop—it allows you to hide the big trick at the end, making the introduction of the prop a mini-event in the course of your show.

So there you have it—an outline for developing either a “Fast Set-Up” or a “Big Show.” We’ll be revisiting this topic later.

Why Is All of This Important?

Some of you may be wondering why I took so much time describing the different elements that you can and should add to your school assembly shows. A lot of people have the mistaken impression that all you really need are your messages that you're conveying and your tricks.

Not so. By adding all of these elements, you're making the list of what you bring to the table much longer. People very often equate bulk with quality—that is, “Well, if I get all of this stuff, it must be worth the money.” Advertisers do this all of the time with TV ads. “If you act now, you'll get the steak knives PLUS the oven mitt PLUS the diapers, and if you call within the next 10 minutes, you'll ALSO get the suntan lotion, and that's NOT ALL...” Get the point?

By stating all of these different elements, you're helping to increase the perceived value of your offer, which obviously means that you can justify higher fees. It's a valuable marketing concept that few people take advantage of.

From a performing standpoint, all of these different elements really can enhance your show and give it variety, vitality, and a sense of fun. It will increase your audience's enjoyment of your program, which will have a domino effect, as that client will tell someone how good you are and they'll tell someone, and they'll tell someone...

Now that you've got a decent idea of some of the options available to you when developing your programs, I'm going to give you some ideas of what themes schools might be looking for and some simple ways to incorporate these ideas and concepts into your show.

Themed Shows

Hot Topics

There are plenty of topics that schools are interested in bringing in for assembly programs. I'm going to give you the four that I've found to be the most popular from year to year. Although this list is by no means complete, it will get you started.

Non-themed events that schools might want a magician include:

- Family Night Events (I offer a great fundraiser to schools)
- End-Of-The-Year celebrations for the students
- Ice Cream Socials
- A "reward" for the school reaching a certain goal, such as a recycling drive
- Holiday events

While my main focus is my assembly theme programs, when these other events come up, it's nice too.

The four educational assembly programs that I offer are:

- Reading shows
- Anti-Bullying shows
- Self-Esteem shows
- Anti-Drug shows

Of the four, in the past, the anti-drug shows were my biggest sellers. For the past couple of years, however, my bullying and self-esteem shows have been my biggest sellers. My theory is that this has come about because schools are starting to realize that the basis for many decisions in life is our self-esteem and our relationship with other people.

The thinking is that if a person has a healthy self-esteem and a healthy respect for the rights of others, they'll probably be less inclined to try drugs and they'll be more inclined to be good readers and thus strive for a better life.

As a result of this thinking, all of my shows now have elements of positive self-esteem embedded in them. If you received my complete show or shows with this course, you'll be able to see this for yourself.

Regardless of which show is currently the strongest seller, I enjoy offering a variety of programs to schools simply because it gives you more of an opportunity to get in the door, so to speak. We'll be covering differing opinions on marketing approaches later.

I've also been told by other professionals that test preparation programs would be a good seller in certain parts of the country. My friend Todd from Texas constantly gets requests from schools to put together such a program. I feel that a slight adjusting of the self-esteem programs would probably suffice, but I don't have any experience doing anything like this.

Other topics worth looking into include Anti-Violence, Science, Good Character, and Teamwork. Personally, my self-esteem program has elements of good character and teamwork in it, but it may be worth exploring the idea of doing a program just on one of those ideas.

When looking for other ideas, it's good to keep your eyes open and try to keep yourself on the "pulse" of what the school systems in your area are thinking. Topics you never considered before may present themselves as opportunities.

Research

As much as possible, it's a good idea to research your topic before you put your show together. For the three shows that I offer to you, I've done most of the work for you, although it never hurts to be more informed. The easiest way to do that is to talk to schools.

For instance, I got most of my anti-drug information from I what I learned in schools growing up, but as I did more and more of these shows, I'd see more posters and such hanging up in schools encouraging kids to feel good about themselves and encouraging others to believe in their own abilities. Getting kids to just 'say no' wasn't and isn't enough.

I was lucky enough to get most of my research for what schools wanted in a self-esteem show simply because I was already in schools enough doing the anti-drug shows.

The bullying show was a different matter. To be quite honest, when I was growing up, we had very little emphasis on self-esteem and bullying was an idea that was never talked about. I actually developed my bullying show by accident.

I had just moved to Niagara Falls and was filling my weekends with birthday shows. One of my birthday clients called me up and asked me if I'd be interested in presenting a bullying show to her children's school. I was elated for the opportunity but felt the need to admit that I didn't have a bullying show.

This client and the school wound up sending me some information that the school was sending home with the kids, their objectives, their policies, etc. From that information as well as conversations with school administrators, I was able to construct my earliest version of bullying show, which evolved over time.

My reading show was originally based on another marketing magician's reading show, although I added in my own stuff as time went on. Since I still use some of that gentleman's ideas, I didn't feel it was appropriate to publish my reading show for others to buy.

As I mentioned before, keep your eyes open to new ideas that schools may want for assemblies. With the emphasis that I see in elementary schools on recycling, I've considered adding an environmental show to my menu. Other opportunities may reveal themselves to you.

Three Messages

Whether you decide to use my shows as they are (which is fine, that's what you paid for), or if you pick and choose things, or if you create your own program from scratch, one important thing to remember is to keep it simple.

Most professional speakers advocate covering no more than three to five main points in a 45-minute speech. Anymore than that and you risk confusing the audience with too much information...and that's for adults.

I try to stick to this "three points" rule as much as possible. For instance, in my anti-drug shows, my message are: Drugs really hurt you, why school is so important, and how you can have a great life by staying away from drugs.

I didn't want my entire show to just be about drugs and their effects. Not only would it be a downer of a show, but as schools have realized, kids need and want a more effective message than that. For that reason, I wanted to stress in my drug shows that schools will teach kids the real truth about drugs. Let's face it, 45 minutes is not a long time. I wanted to take some of the little time that I had and try to hammer home the fact that schools are there to help you and they can do a better job than a short presentation.

My third message came about because I really wanted to use the final third of my show to build the kids up, to show them how great life can be by staying clean.

I really feel that my three messages build upon each other—the first message warns kids of the problem. The second message talks about a long-term way to combat the problem and find out the truth, and the third message talks about the benefits of heeding the warnings of the first and using the second.

When constructing your shows, try to use three messages that the kids can understand.

Easy To Understand

When I was initially putting together my drug show, I started looking at what other magicians had put out and unfortunately, most of it was crap. There was too much of a reliance on statistics.

I feel that statistics are just numbers to many people, especially kids. You're taking away a lot of emotional involvement. By not focusing on any statistics in my messages, I eliminate that number factor.

When I'm giving my messages, I'm trying to reach the kids, on some level, on an individual basis. "How will this affect ME?" is what I want them to think...and what I want to provide is an answer.

Forget the big picture. Try to reach one child. Answer these questions:

"How does this affect me?" Or "Will this even affect me?"

"If it does, what can I do about it?"

In my opinion, when you start talking about the big picture to a child, it's sort of like reading the headlines in the newspaper— "100,000 layoffs expected." Yes, it's terrible and my heart goes out to those families, but I get my heartstrings pulled a lot more when the 6:00 news focuses on the plight of just one of those families. There's a human connection, a feeling of, "What if this was me?"

Bring your messages down to a simple level for the kids to understand.

Another way that it's important to keep the message simple to be careful of your vocabulary for the younger grades. I'll give you an example.

When I was performing my first run of bullying shows, I received almost universal praise for it. I say "almost" because one of my ideas in the show was to give the kids three simple techniques for dealing with bullying. One of my techniques, from following the example of the school that helped me write the program, was to encourage kids to avoid the bullies.

It sounds so simple on paper. For the different age groups I had tied in some effects to visually demonstrate this idea and the routines went over very well. After I received my first batch of evaluations from several school clients, the only negative comment was my use of the word "avoid."

The teachers were concerned that the younger kids, say grades k-2, weren't familiar enough with that word. After dwelling on the matter for a while, I realized that when I did my recapping of the messages at the end of the show, the younger kids' response wasn't as strong when I asked them, "Is it a good idea to avoid bullies?" The teachers were right!

I made a few minor changes in the show based on concerns of vocabulary and since then the show has received universal praise.

Just watch some of your vocabulary, both for the younger kids and the older ones—don't be too juvenile with the upper grades.

Brief Overview

Another technique that professional speakers use is to give a brief overview at the beginning of the program. In speaker's terms, "You're going to tell them what you're going to tell them...then you tell them."

Reading that quote here, it may seem a bit redundant, but it's not. It's like reading the opening paragraph in a newspaper article. If it's written correctly, it should answer the basic questions of "who, where, what, how, why." Giving people an overview at the beginning of the presentation lets everyone know what to expect and what points to look out for. It's sort of like a road map.

Some magic professionals advocate the idea of using a specific effect or routine that introduces, visually, all of the main points in the presentation. Very often I'll do this with my Blendo routines.

For those of you who don't know, Blendo is a routine where the magician takes several silks of different solid colors and through the use of some degree of magic (a mirror tube, change bag, whatever) causes the smaller silks to 'blend' together into one big silk that's noticeably comprised of each of the individual colors.

What I do is individually produce each silk one at a time with a Snap Silk arrangement (check out Jeff McBride's **Magic on Stage Series**, *Volume 2*), mentioning each message or point as each silk appears, on each verbal 'beat' so to speak, so the silks are visual representations of what I'm saying. I then mention some of what the audience is going to see/experience during my program (music, animals, volunteers, etc.) as I stuff the silks into the changing device (in my case, a mirror tube). As I cause the change to happen, I then stress that we'll be learning about these important messages with...magic, trying to time the word "magic" just as the new "blended" silk is fully revealed.

If you can find an effect that you can use in your overview, it can make quite an impression on the entire audience. First and foremost, if it's good magic and if it's your first effect, it creates a feeling in everyone's minds of, "This guy's for real," and most importantly, by tying everything into that one trick, it instantly communicates to the school administrators that you're not going to be one of those terrible "Don't do drugs! Now let's see a trick" type of amateurish assembly "presenters" (and I use that term real loosely for those people).

Recap

Conversely, it's also considered by most presenters to be just as important to include a summary of what you covered in your presentation. People these days have very short memories. By recapping what you've covered, it serves as an effective way to remind people of all of your main points even if they forget the details.

For kids, I either like to use a puppet of some sort for younger grades or even one of my live animals to "ask the audience questions," which effectively gets the recapping down in a fun way.

Now that we've covered some of the essentials of theme shows and some of the elements that you can use as spice for your school presentations, let's turn now to some broad suggestions on structuring your show from top to bottom.

Structuring Your Show

What I'm about to suggest as a structure for your school assemblies is certainly not the only option available to you, but it's served me quite well over the years. I'll explain what I do as well as why, along with my feelings on breaking these guidelines, as very often my own choice of material has necessitated breaking my own preferences.

This structure is intended on covering everything that you do from the moment you're introduced by the school official to the kids to the moment you turn things back over to the school administrators. Here we go...

Control Opening

Right after I'm introduced, I'll go right into my control opening. I've covered it thoroughly earlier in this manual plus in the show scripts themselves, which are bound separately from this main manual. As I said earlier, the whole point here is to establish the ground rules of the show. Although directly verbally to the kids, it's important that the school officials understand what you expect to so that they can step in and stop any interruptions by unruly kids.

Opening Routine

After the control opening, I like to go right into a routine that establishes my abilities as a magician. I feel that the kids have to take you seriously as a fun entertainer before they're going to pay full attention to your messages. They may be quiet, but if they're bored by your magic, they'll tune you out mentally.

If it's a "Big Show" program, I usually open with my doves, which just knocks everyone's socks off—not because I'm 'so amazing,' but because people love live animals. If it's a "Fast Set-Up" program, I'll do something quick and colorful, such as Jeff McBride's handling of the Vanishing Cane to Silk Streamers on his **Magic on Stage** series, volume one (Just buy the whole set. You can thank me later!!).

I try to keep this segment short, no longer than two minutes, because I really do want most of the show to relate to what I'm presenting in my messages.

Introduction To the Concept of The Show

After the opening magic routine, I'll then do my overview of the show— "Tell them what you're going to tell them." Some professionals advocate the idea of doing the control opening at the same time as the introduction to what your show is actually about. They feel that you want to get your messages verbalized as soon as possible so that the school is reassured that most of your program is going to deal with matters of substance.

Personally, I feel this is a mistake. I can certainly understand their reasoning, but I really think that to do all of that talking at the top of the show before you get to any magic is going to suck the positive energy out of the audience. Yes, you can (and should) use an effect to tie in your introductory remarks but remember these are kids. I feel that if I break up the talking with a bit of killer magic in between the necessary talking, the kids will be more receptive to what I say because I haven't bored them with a lot of talk.

Main Body of Your Presentation

From here, once you've done your introduction, you can move right into your presentation. A lot of entertainers use only one effect to illustrate their point, whatever it may be, and then they spend a LOT of time talking about that point either before, during, or after the actual effect.

I'm certainly not going to dispute what's worked well for other long-time professionals. I try to use one effect per point, but during the scripting process, if I feel that there's too much talking going on without enough action, I'll sometimes use two effects to illustrate a point.

That's just my opinion, but several school officials have commented that they enjoy my presentations more than certain other magicians' presentations because the other presenter didn't do enough magic.

The first time I heard something like that, I was very surprised because I thought the messages were the most important things for an assembly. After hearing comments like this quite often, I have a couple of theories about this.

First, school officials have reluctantly come to the realization that because of the media, video games, our faster-than-light lifestyle, and a whole slew of other factors, to keep a present-day child's attention, you really have to work hard.

My second theory is that despite all of the school's blustering about needing educational content in their assemblies; they also want the kids to have fun. Although not verbalized as overtly as the concern for quality messages, the adults definitely want the kids to have fun during an assembly.

I don't know if those theories hold water across the country, but in the Pittsburgh and Buffalo markets (again, major U.S. cites), I've definitely received enough feedback to support both of my ideas.

As a result, I put a lot of magic into my programs. I average 9 or 10 routines in my shows. Of those 10, one is usually used for my introductory remarks, and one is used either for recapping or some effect intended to encourage everyone in the audience to spread the word about the messages.

Of the remaining 8, one of the routines will sometimes be a story without any magic but an important part of the show, nevertheless.

That leaves 6-7 magic routines to flesh out the body of the program. For a 45-minute program, this works great for me, but I also speak somewhat quickly, and I pace my show differently. You may need to adjust that number.

Anyway, of those 6-7 routines, I try to use half of the routines with onstage volunteers and half without. Certain children's professionals (much wiser than I) have claimed that it's a good idea to structure your show so that you alternate your onstage volunteer effects with non-volunteer effects, with the thinking being that the kids will begin to anticipate you calling for volunteers for every routine, thus distracting you.

I wholeheartedly agree. The only problem?

In structuring my programs, for certain shows, I've found that the best routines for a certain spot for the program often must be volunteer tricks that follow other volunteer tricks. Let me elaborate.

In my bullying show, the final half of the show, roughly speaking, involves three simple techniques for kids to use when dealing with bullies. Unfortunately, when doing this show for the older grades, each of the effects I use to illustrate these three ideas utilize onstage volunteers, so I'm contradicting the respected advice of other experts.

99% of the time, my control of the audience is such that this really isn't a big deal, at least for the older grades. The obvious solution, if it were a problem, would be to simply substitute other material that alleviates this problem. I have thought about it, and like most magicians, I always keep on the lookout for new material (it's an addiction most magicians fight) even though I'm happy with the effects I use.

Regardless, as much as possible it's definitely a good idea to alternate volunteer/no volunteer tricks.

Recap

In the overall structure of the show, there's no surprise here as I strongly advise the use of some kind of effect to recap the show. The instance I may not do this is if the school has seen me before and instead of repeating the same recapping effects that they've seen before, I'll work in what I call my "generic ending."

In my case, I have three different routines I can use to recap a show—all involve the use of a puppet or animal. If I've been to a school numerous times, in order to not use a trick or routine the kids have seen before, I'll sometimes use "Snowstorm."

For those of you who don't know, the classic "Snowstorm" effect involves the magician showing a piece of tissue paper and soaking it in some manner with water. After squeezing most of the water out, he takes the still-quite-wet tissue and fans it with a folding fan. Suddenly, the wet paper erupts into a shower of "snowflakes" (actually confetti) that fill the stage.

It's a beautiful effect. My handling is based on –you guessed it, Jeff McBride's handling—and I've already got a terrific tie-in with the effect for my drug show. As an offshoot of that, I eventually developed a presentation that I can use to close virtually any themed assembly presentation.

My scripting is presented in full in my script books that came with this course, but the essence is the idea that important ideas like what we talked about in the presentation aren't any good if we keep them to ourselves (show wet paper). It's important that if we want everyone to be happy, that we spread the idea to everyone we meet (fan out the confetti snowstorm) to our friends, family and beyond.

It ends the show on a high note and can be used for virtually any show. Try it—you'll love the response you get!

Control Closing

Of course, after your final effect, you don't want to leave the kids whipped up into a frenzy, so you'll then want to use some variation of a control closing, as I discussed in detail earlier.

After The Show

After the kids leave, collect your evaluation forms if you've passed them out, collect your check, and try to maintain a rapport with your client. Too many performers are happy just to grab their check and leave. Granted, some clients are going to be terribly busy, but some will have a few moments to chat. By being friendly, you may be able to get an impression of whether or not there are other opportunities for work, either with the same client or other schools in the area.

Most schools have an informal network and whether they admit it or not, they love to talk and you can be sure that if you've done a bad job or a good job, your show will be talked about. Obviously, if you've done a good job, it would benefit you to leave promo material with your client.

I like to leave one of my bound full-information packets. I bind it myself and due to the vast number of testimonials that I fill it with, it creates quite an impression. Plus it's colorful, too. That helps.

I'm not going to claim mine is a work of art or anything—I have zero graphic artist experience—but it works well enough. Try modeling mine for some ideas for yours. I leave one of these at every school I perform for. It's also what I send out (with a cover letter) when a school calls me and asks for more information to be mailed out.

Of course, we'll cover the information pack in greater detail in the marketing section that we're going to begin very shortly.

Customizing Your Props

When trying to decide what routines to use in a theme show, I always try to find some way to customize the props for whatever theme I'm working on. For instance, I've seen a few different theme silks for drug shows. I picked up a really nice "Just Say No" silk that's red and yellow that I use in a Blendo routine in the beginning of a drug show.

If you're going to do a card effect, consider buying a blank deck and writing (in large letters with a Sharpie) words that pertain to your theme. For instance, in my bullying show, a card trick that I use is customized with all kinds of names kids might call each other to illustrate name-calling. It certainly packs more punch with the school officials than just the "4 of Hearts."

For me, adding the classic Multiplying Bottles to my drug show was a no-brainer because the effect uses bottles of alcohol.

Consider the effect Spelling Bee. It's basically a mental magic trick for kids that allows you to customize it for nearly any word up to and including seven letters. For reading shows, you can use READING. For bully or self-esteem shows you can use RESPECT and so on. It's only \$40-45 from your favorite dealer.

After you've selected your material, put your thinking cap on and try to come up with different ways you can customize your props. It makes a big difference in the perception of your show—it sets you apart as a real professional, a specialist. Specialist = Higher fees!

Now that I've laid the groundwork as far as how to work from stage, how to develop your shows and how to properly present the shows, let's finally get into the meat of how we *get* the shows...

Booking The Show

Before we get too far into booking the show, we need to take a look at exactly who's going to book our assembly programs. I'll tell you what the case for me has been most of the time throughout the years and I'll tell you what has been recommended to me. I'll also list the drawbacks of each person you can target.

Know Your Decision Maker

In my experience, I've found that the two people who book me the most often are the heads of the PTA/PTO and the principal of the school. The PTA/PTO president, in case you're not familiar, is a parent volunteer who heads up the Parent-Teacher group for that school.

After doing this for several years, I've realized that more than 60% of the time, a member of the PTA/PTO, if not the president herself, is the one who calls to book my programs, regardless of how they heard of me, and I'll be covering that in a little bit.

Of the other 40%, I've found that 35% of the time or more, it's the principal of the school who calls me to book. I've found that a lot of the time, if the principal is the one to call, it's usually a small school, but not all the time. Some principals are more active with special events than others.

Of the remaining 5%, for me, I've found that I do get a few guidance counselors who call me—not many, but a few. I also will occasionally get a call from a teacher at the school who was asked by a busy principal.

One thing I do want to stress at this point is that in your market, it may be different. I've talked to other school presenters who insist that the guidance counselor is one person not to ignore when planning your campaign. Other presenters advocate the idea of contacting each of these people. Again, in your market, you'll have to test things.

I'd recommend contacting the principal first for a couple of reasons. In most cases, this is going to be the easiest person to get an actual name. The PTA/PTO president changes every year and unless you develop a good rapport with the present year's PTO president, it's going to be difficult to keep up if you're mailing to several hundred names like I do.

The second reason why I recommend going to the principal first is that studies by marketers have shown that contact when used with a person's name is a LOT more effective than just mailing to a title. While you can also get the actual names of the guidance counselors at the schools you're trying to reach, in most cases you'll have to

pay for them. There are resources where you can get the principals' names free, along with the schools' addresses.

Now let's take a look at some of the things that schools want from an assembly program.

What School Officials Want from An Assembly Program

Before we can construct an offer to our prospects to hopefully sell our product, it's important to understand what they want from a program. In selling, it doesn't matter what you want—it's all about filling the needs and wants of the prospect. *That's* how you make the sale.

I'm taking some of this list indirectly from the section earlier in this course where I talked about things you can and should add to your school show. Back in that section, I did it to make your life easier as a performer. Now that we're in the marketing section, I'm listing a few of those things again, in a different context, because it's what school officials look for in a quality assembly program, in addition to *some other things they look for in an assembly presenter of any kind*, not just magicians, which is an important point. My main competitor in my school market is a singer!

1. **Flexibility** – This is a biggie. The school needs to know that you can be flexible in where you perform. Some schools have assemblies in an auditorium. Some have them in a cafeteria. Some have assemblies in the gym. Some have a “cafetorium,” which is a multi-purpose area. Sometimes you'll be elevated, other times you'll be on the same level as your audience. Being adaptable will earn brownie points and make the school officials' jobs easier.

Flexibility is also important as to what grades you'll be performing for. This will vary from school to school, so making sure your choice of material covers different age ranges is critical, as a school official will flat out ask you if your program is appropriate for certain age groups.

Also, flexibility with time is important. I've occasionally had the school ask me to trim five or ten minutes off the program because they were late getting everyone into the performing area and the show had to end at a specific time because it was close to the end of the day and kids had to get on buses.

Other times, a prospect may ask you if you can do a small 20-minute presentation for every classroom. It means smaller props and a shorter show, but it may also mean less reset time and a tighter schedule. It's a lot of fun and a nice change of pace if you're ready for it.

Be prepared for anything.

2. **Audience Involvement** – In the previous section, I covered this pretty thoroughly, but I wanted to stress again that schools really want the kids to be involved, otherwise they could just pop in a video in the classroom.
3. **Professional** – This covers a lot of area. They want a presenter who’s professional in how they conduct themselves both on stage and off. They want a presenter who knows his/her subject. They want a presenter who is well groomed. Props should be in good shape and hopefully not look like a child’s cheap plaything like so much magic.

Professional should also mean that you’re good at magic—the school demands that the show you put on is full of good fun magic. If not, word will spread.

4. **100% Control of The Audience** – Obviously, this is the biggie. I think I’ve whipped this dead horse enough. The school officials are often very cautious about bringing in a magician, even for non-themed events. Many schools have been burned by a lot of bad magicians that started doing school shows long before they were ready. Make sure you have a good understanding of the control techniques I discussed earlier. Get Riz’s tapes, as he covers a lot of terrific child psychology. Do your homework and you’ll be fine.
5. **Easy To Work With** – Like the “professional” heading, this covers a lot of ground. It covers flexibility, which we covered earlier, but it also covers set-up time. Schools do not like to hear that a presenter needs an hour or more to set up. Your program is an inconvenience to the school, even if it’s welcome.

Although I offer both a “Fast Set-Up” and a “Big Show,” neither takes more than 30-35 minutes. In fact, two days before I wrote this paragraph, I did a “Big Show” for my self-esteem show and it only took me about 20 minutes to set it up. That also included setting up a video camera to tape the program for the deluxe version of this course!

This also covers what you need from the school. Some performers need tables, special lighting, etc. Not me—I tell the school I only need access to one electrical outlet, enough space to perform, and that’s it! Having your own sound system is a big relief to the school, too.

6. **Clean Content** – You HAVE to be squeaky clean! Schools cannot and will not tolerate anything less! No subtle “adult” humor or anything like that. Period.

7. **Testimonials/Referrals** – Many schools will feel a lot better about hiring you if you can provide them with feedback from past clients, especially clients in their area. They want to know they're getting someone with experience. I'll be covering this topic more later.
8. **Guarantee** – If you're so good, a guarantee shouldn't be a problem, right? Many schools have asked me about a guarantee until I built up a sizable number of testimonials and a good reputation.
9. **Expert On the Subject** – The last thing you want is to present something that can be disputed. Like I said earlier, Schools have been burned before. Expect a few cautious questions when they call you. It does happen.
10. **Variety** – This is where all the discussion earlier in the course will benefit you when I discussed the idea of adding a lot of different elements to the show. Schools REALLY like variety because they know it'll be easier to keep the crowd under control.
11. **Support Material** – This is something that helps extend the life of an assembly, thereby increasing your perceived value. It also helps set you apart from the other part-timers in your area trying to take school work from the professionals. Basically, support material can include objectives for the assembly, post-assembly discussion and classroom ideas, and more. Ideally, the material should be short, not more than a couple of pages. This makes it easy for the school to make copies for everyone and it's easier for the busy teachers to read and digest.

I'll be covering the support materials that I use (and have included in this course) later.
12. **Insurance** – I'm fully insured and yes, I actually have had a few schools ask me if I would provide proof of insurance. It's not something I dwell on when I talk to schools, but it's a good thing to have regardless, simply because this is a business and as a business, it's good to protect yourself. Besides, you never know when a school might ask about it.

Different Ways of Reaching Schools

There are quite a few ways of getting schools to know that you exist. Obviously, without "visibility," there's no way anyone is going to hire you, regardless of how good you are.

Yellow Pages

This was the first method of advertising that I ever tried. I had great success with this in Pittsburgh and now I'm having decent success with it in the Buffalo area. In most cases, what a yellow page ad produces the most of is birthday parties and summer picnic/family reunion kind of events. It also produces some holiday parties and that's where schools enter the picture.

Most schools are not going to look through the yellow pages looking for an assembly presenter, at least not for educational assemblies. Nevertheless, I do get the occasional call from a school that found me in the phone book. This is usually for a holiday event for the kids.

Although I've booked a few assemblies shows this way, I can't highly recommend it for the person looking to specialize in schools. If you're looking for advertising vehicles that get you results, regardless of what kind of show, then I can recommend yellow pages...cautiously. Many big city yellow page rates are astronomically high. Crunch the numbers and make sure that the ad will profit you. A good rule of thumb is this: ***One show booking should pay for an entire month of the ad.*** While this is overly cautious, by following this rule, you won't lose your shirt.

Parenting Magazines

This is where I get the majority of new children's birthdays (I say "new" because 50% of my birthday clients are referred to me). If you've never heard of them, parenting magazines are obviously, as the name suggests, a publication devoted to parenting skills and tips for a happy, healthy, socialized child. Most of the time, these mags have a back page section devoted entirely to entertainers. By advertising here, you're really narrowing your focus.

If you want to be a children's entertainer, this is the place to advertise. I cover how to construct a dynamite ad and other important details in full in my course, "How I Quit My Day Job in Less Than Six Months—And How You Can, Too!"

While I do book some school shows this way, it's usually a PTA parent who's calling when the school is looking for entertainment for an "end of the year" spring event or possibly a family fun night kind of event. I get a few of these per year from the parenting magazine that I advertise in, so it's worth mentioning here.

Referrals

Any good business should have a referral method in place. I use what I call a "bounce-back coupon," which is essentially a letter I mail to a school after I've worked with them. The coupon offers a discount to the school for a future program if they refer me to another school. The second school, I should add, also receives a discount.

I'll cover this in depth later in the course.

Direct Mail

This is where I get the lion's share of my school assembly work. Direct mail allows you to target whatever market you're interested in working very efficiently. When used properly, it can be one of the most effective ways imaginable to booking shows quickly, as most of the time, the calls will start coming in a few days after your mailing has hit their desks.

Quite obviously, this is where we'll be spending the majority of the time on the booking of assembly programs.

I should point out that there are other ways of getting your information into the school official's hands, but these are the ways that I've found the most effective.

Where To Get the Names

Whenever you use direct mail, it's always better to mail to an actual name as opposed to just a title. It seems more personal to the person reading the outside of the envelope. I cover this later in **A-Pile vs. B-Pile**.

I've got some bad news for you—the only sure-fire way that I've ever heard of to get the names of the PTO/PTA presidents is by calling each school individually. Since the names change so frequently and since the organizations are more informal and volunteer-based, there's no way to buy the lists.

With that being said, I've found that mailing to the title ATTN: Assembly Coordinator usually works well.

What I sometimes do, however, is mail to the Principal for my first mailing. I'm able to send the letter directly to an actual name at the school, and the principal will very often see that the letter gets to the right person if she/he is not the one who handles the assemblies.

I get my mailing lists from InfoUSA; they're on the web. Just type in <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> and you'll be all set. It's a government sponsored site and FREE!

Secondly, if you're looking to start off with a small list (my first list was only 268 names), you can use your address as a "hub" and instruct the site to give you the lists of schools in a radius around you. I currently do 100 miles around my house, which allows me to keep the list under 1000 names.

Thirdly, that site allows you to elect certain criteria, such as charter, private, etc. schools.

Another source for your names is your home state's web site. If you dig a little, you can get the school names broken down by counties. Many of these sites include the principal's names, meaning you can get the lists free!

You can also build your list by going through the phone book as I mentioned earlier. Although time-consuming, you'd have information that not everyone else would have instant access to on the net.

Best Time to Mail

Before we get into the "meat" of direct mail, one thing that needs to be discussed is the best times to mail. Quite obviously, that's going to be slightly different for everyone reading this based on where you are.

Nevertheless, a few guidelines: The absolute best time to mail is at the beginning of the school year. Let's say the school year starts on September 5th. I would get my letters in the mail so that they hit maybe a week or two after the school year starts.

Some professionals claim that the best thing to do is to get the letters into people's hands before the kids go back to school, but personally, I've experimented with it and found that no one responds to letters until the school year begins. I have a few thoughts on why.

First of all, anyone who's been doing school shows will start getting their material into people's hands during the summer. As a result, when the principal or the PTA president starts going through their pile of mail, they're going to have a big fat pile of it to go through, so they're going to be a little less picky when deciding what to keep.

I know this is true at least in the two markets that I've worked because many school clients have told me how loaded up their mailbox at the school gets toward the end of the summer.

I feel that by waiting for school to start—and waiting maybe a week into the school year—you're giving the school PTA or principal or whoever a chance to get settled, collect their breath...and throw out everyone else's mail.

I've tried mailing right before school starts, but I've found that the majority of the time, my phone calls or emails don't start coming in until after the school year starts anyway. Of course, you can try it for yourself in your market. I'm just telling you what's worked for me over the years.

Second Best Time to Mail

I've found that the second-best time to mail is right after the winter holiday break, right when the kids come back after the first of the new year, however it's scheduled in your market.

Often, the school officials have had a break and are looking for special programs to break up the monotony of winter, or something special for spring, or the end of the year...or some officials use this time frame to begin planning what to do for the following school year. I've had schools book assemblies as much as 8 months in advance, and from what I've been told, it isn't that uncommon.

Regardless, it's a good idea to plan on a second campaign during this time of the year if you want to do a lot of school shows.

I've had a great deal of success when mailing in this time frame. It's not quite as profitable as the first time, but it's definitely worth doing.

The Third Best Time to Mail

Some presenters also start a third mailing campaign in the spring, right around the time the snow breaks or Easter, depending on your market. I have to admit that I've never personally done a big mailing during this time frame. Most presenters tell me that it's not anywhere near as profitable as the other two, but you still net some shows, especially if you hit the schools that like to book in advance for next year.

What I usually do is mail to all of my past clients or leads and pick up some spring shows or programs for the following year that way. Although I feel that I should do a mass mailing at this time, I usually don't have the time because I'm so busy during the spring...not to mention the fact that very often I'm "burnt out" on preparing all of those mailings by this time. I know, excuses, excuses!

We'll be covering the exact sequence as well as the break down of the letters themselves very soon, but I want to give you the broad strokes first so that you'd have a good idea of when to start getting everything ready.

What You Can Expect from Direct Mail

I will tell you that most marketing experts are tickled pink by direct mail results of 1%-1.5%. What that means is that for every 100 letters you send out, the average is that you'll receive one to one and a half responses from the names you've mailed to.

That may not sound like a lot but look at it this way: If you're getting \$250 for one school assembly (prices vary, this is just an example) and it costs, as of the time of this writing, \$37 for 100 stamps, that ain't too shabby. Of course, I left out the cost of paper, ink, and envelopes, but there are ways to save money on those expenses.

I can honestly say that ever since I started mailing to schools, my response rate average has been between 2.5% and 4.0%. Also, I'm talking about actual bookings, here, not just responses. That means that on the average, for every \$37 that I've spent on postage, I book (assuming \$250 per show—it's usually higher than that because most schools book two shows) \$625 worth of shows. Plus, many schools either refer me to other schools or book me for multiple programs.

With those numbers, it's easy to see why I love performing in schools!

Now, I've talked about the cost of envelopes, paper, and so forth. I want to talk briefly about a few things you can do to make this easier on you or more profitable and the pros and cons of each.

Money Saving vs. Work Saving

I'm cheap in a lot of ways. I'd rather put as much money into my pocket as I possibly can as opposed to paying someone to do the "grunt" work for me. Let me explain...

When I was first starting out as a professional, many experts would tell me about the virtues of hiring office personnel to do all of the mailings for me. While I love the idea of just being able to focus more of my energy on performing, I didn't want to cut into my profits all that much.

A lot of this thinking comes from the fact that as I write this, my wife and I are in the middle of buying our first home together. I'd rather have more money in my pocket to do things to our new house than pay someone else to do work that doesn't take a great deal of thought.

The flip side of this idea is the fact that if you're looking to travel a great deal and you're not going to be home all that much, it's going to be difficult for you to stay on top of your mailings. Personally, I try my best to not travel more than 100 miles away from my house for a show. While it's fun to travel for a show once in a while, I'd rather not live out of a suitcase.

Ultimately, it's a decision you'll have to make for yourself, based on several factors: First, what size of a mailing are you undertaking? I rarely do more than 600 or so pieces at a time, so I've found it easy to do most of the work myself. If you're going to be tackling a few thousand names, realize that it's a LOT more work and you may have to have help if you want to stay on schedule.

Secondly, if you're the type of person who doesn't like doing the sort of tedious work like stuffing envelopes then it may be worth it to you to hire someone to do it for you. A stay-home neighborhood mom may enjoy a little extra spending money.

Other Cost-Cutting Tips

Since I can't do anything to cut down on the cost of postage, I try to save money on my mailings whenever I can. Paper for the mailing is one area where you can be a little cheap and it won't hurt you.

At many of the office supply stores you can buy a big box of 10 reams of paper for a lot less per ream than if you were to buy each one individually. I've actually sat down with a calculator and done the math.

I've also done the same thing with envelopes. By buying a big box of 500 envelopes, you save a lot of money when compared to the little boxes of 40 or 50. It's taking a little bit of discipline, because when you're just starting out with direct mail, it can be a bit of a stunner when you go out to buy all of your paper products. Most people don't buy paper in mass quantities for direct mail, so these things don't seem as expensive until you talk about higher numbers.

Finally, I do all of my printing from home. I also refill my black ink cartridge myself, meaning I save massive amounts of money on printing. I should point out that refilling your computer's ink cartridge is easiest if it's an HP printer. The color cartridges are tough, but the black ones are extremely easy—providing your computer has separate black & color cartridges.

I buy my black ink from a company online called Ink Tech. (www.inkkitsales.com) From them, I'm able to buy a big bottle of black ink (They're different sizes—the ones I get are \$12.95 each). Out of each bottle, I'm able to get 20 or so refills for my ink cartridge, which works out to be roughly \$.60 per refill. When you consider that a new ink cartridge is anywhere from \$20 to \$50 or more, you can see how it's easy to really save big by doing it yourself.

After crunching the numbers, I've discovered that each printed page done at home costs me less than one penny per page. This is a GREAT deal when you figure that most copy places charge you eight cents a page.

While I've been able to get the total ink/paper costs of copies at an Office Depot down to as little as two cents a page by printing in mass quantities, I've found that the copies produced at the office stores don't look nearly as nice as pages I print at home on my printer. Appearance does count to a degree, so it makes my decision easier.

A Way to Increase Responses...

When you're just starting out, getting a solid 1% response is very encouraging. Different factors such as what schools in your area expect to pay and what the schools in your market tend to focus their special programs on will factor into your results.

It's not precision rocket science, but I've figured out a few things to increase response from what other presenters have taught.

Again, we're going to be getting in the nitty-gritty of writing your letters very soon, but I wanted to give you some more groundwork so that a lot of the details that I cover later will make more sense.

...Is By Offering More Than One Program in Your Letter

This idea goes against what many marketers recommend when using direct mail, but I've got some thoughts and experiences to back it up.

When I first started using direct mail to book school shows in Pittsburgh, I always used the letters to push my anti-drug show. I did quite a few of these shows and life was good. After moving to the Niagara Falls/Buffalo area years later, I had developed a Reading show with the assistance of another magician's materials.

As I was preparing my first mailing in my new market, I decided to just add a quick "p.s." to my anti-drug letter. The "p.s." simply mentioned the name of my reading show without any other details.

Surprisingly enough, the first few responses to my mailing were from people interested in my reading show. Realizing I was on to something, I then made my second letter focus on all four of my programs. Since it was just a one-page letter for the second mailing, the letter was really just a "handshake," a way of introducing myself to the schools, with just a couple of sentences about each topic.

My second letter actually outperformed my first letter, generating a whopping 4.5% response. What's more, each show on my "menu" of shows each was responsible for an equal share of the bookings.

I've continued to modify and tweak this concept until I reached the letters you have in your possession. They work wonders for me, and I think it's because I'm offering schools a choice.

When creating your offer, most marketers will tell you that you'll get a far better response if you offer choices—a choice between something and something is psychologically more effective than offering one choice...in other words, to buy or not to buy. It's basic human psychology.

Nevertheless, some fairly well-known magic marketing experts have insisted that when mailing to schools, it's better to only offer one program. While I respect, greatly, their contributions to the field, I can't help but think that it violates a basic marketing idea, that of choice.

I also feel that to offer schools a choice of a menu like this isn't too much of a stretch because we're still restricting our offer to assembly programs, not a choice between trade shows, birthdays, assemblies, and so forth as when many magicians send out their "Magic for All Occasions" brochure.

The other reason I like this approach is because it negates the necessity of having to find out what each individual school in your area is going to prefer. By offering a menu, you're allowing the school to choose, and the four main choices -- an anti-drug show, self-esteem show, anti-bullying show and a reading show -- are, as of this writing, the most popular anyway.

Although I don't offer a reading show for purchase (because the show I use is based too much on other people's materials), I can give you a few good tips and point you in the right direction, so call me if you're stuck on a reading show. I may develop my own and put it out, but in the meantime, I've created some solid individual routines and messages.

Now that you understand some of what you can expect from direct mail as well as my tips for keeping the cost down and increasing responses, let's take a detailed look at what a lot of beginning magic marketers often ignore.

The Envelope

I want to take some time now and go over some critical concepts when using your envelopes for mailing. While I know that a lot of work has been done on constructing the proper letter, I feel that a lot of care and thought needs to go into the envelope because an envelope still needs to "convince" the recipient to open it.

A-Pile vs. B-Pile Mail

The main concept of a good envelope is that it convinces the prospect to open it. Different techniques have been tried by individual marketers up to large companies over the years. Personally, I always laugh when I get a credit card offer from a big company and printed on the front of the envelope is the line, "Please do not discard." I'm sure that it's been tested by that company's research department (at least I hope it has for their sake), but I find it to be unintentionally funny.

For individual marketers such as magicians looking to get a person who has never heard of the magician before, the absolute best way to get them to open the envelope is to make it look like personal mail, or what has become known in the world of marketing as "A" pile mail.

The theory of mail sorting, in a nutshell, is this: Many people, when they take their mail out of their mailbox, sort it over the wastepaper basket very quickly, tossing the stuff they don't want into the garbage and making a quick stack of the

stuff that they intend to keep and/or look over. Obviously, the “B” pile stuff is the material that gets quickly tossed while the “A” stuff is kept.

Why does so much mail get tossed? People are busy, and they get bombarded by several hundred messages a day, whether it’s print, radio, TV or whatever. So much crap gets tossed their way that people have no choice but to filter through stuff very quickly.

What kind of stuff gets kept? Well, bills that the person wishes they could ignore must unfortunately be kept, material from individuals or companies that might interest them (more on that in a minute) and ...personal mail.

Personal mail is or used to be easily identified by the name and address being handwritten on the envelope. It’s personal and handwritten—I’d better open this to see what it is! By and large, people don’t dare throw away material that’s handwritten because it may be important.

Whenever I do a mailing to several hundred schools, I always hand address every envelope. I also, if I’m mailing to a specific name and not just a title (for instance, ATTN: John Smith as opposed to ATTN: Principal), will include the person’s name as that increases the likelihood of the envelope getting opened even more.

I will also hand-address the return address in the upper left corner of the envelope as well. Although some people like to use address labels, I think to hand address the whole envelope sends the unmistakable message that this envelope needs to be opened. I also recommend using either your last name above the return address or no name at all. Having any company name or magic-sounding name is only going to help negate the good psychology of everything else about the envelope.

Quite obviously, neatness counts, so if your handwriting is truly awful, you’ll either need to improve it or get someone else to do it for you. Some marketers also claim that addressing your envelopes with a Courier-type font is acceptable because more and more people are typing personal letters.

My personal rule is this: If my mailing is less than 1000 pieces, I’ll hand address it, because I can do it myself in a week or two just doing 50 or so a day. If it’s over 1000, then I’ll do a mail merge and print everything, because then things are too time-consuming, especially considering that in most cases, you’ll be doing more than one mailing.

Different Sizes?

Other marketers like to use different sizes of envelopes for each mailing because it breaks up the look of each mailing, so that two weeks after you mail your first piece, your second mailing doesn’t look like a carbon copy of your first mailing.

Personally, I can understand the thinking behind the idea. In practice, I've had mixed results using such an approach. To me, it makes me wonder if such a practice helps negate the idea that the piece is personal mail, since few individuals send personal mail in anything *larger* than a number 10 business envelope.

I've tried sending my first piece in a 6 x 9 envelope (which is the largest size you can use before you get hit with a higher postage rate...keep that in mind), and then I've sent my other pieces in a regular business #10 envelope. Other years I've just sent everything in number 10 envelopes. I haven't noticed much difference either way, but it may be something you may want to experiment with in your market.

The Testimonial Approach

Another approach to envelopes advocated by many marketers is the idea of an "endorsed mailing." Endorsed mailing is a technique where the marketer will use a satisfied client's name to write a "first person perspective" letter from that satisfied customer. In the letter, written on the satisfied customer's letterhead, the customer talks about how wonderful the product or service being offered is and why prospects should jump at the offer.

The technique has the advantage of apparently having someone else sing your praises to future prospects. It also helps quite a bit if the satisfied "letter writer" is someone the prospect would know or trust, such as the superintendent of a particular school system in the case of assembly programs.

In reality, what's going on is the marketer writes the letter and asks for the satisfied customer to give his/her permission to use the letter with his/her name, and simply copies the letter onto the customer's own letterhead. The customer does practically nothing.

For envelopes, a similar though simpler technique can be used. You can have a few short testimonials on the outside of the envelope touting the virtues of your services.

If you're looking for something new if you've already mailed to your list several times, this is a great technique to try.

Mailing Sequences

In just a few moments, we're going to be examining the components of a good direct mail letter, but first I wanted to give you an overall picture of how to use direct mail and some of the different options open to you.

First of all, direct mail usually works best when you send out a sequence of letters as opposed to just one. The reasoning is that people are so busy that sometimes they need to have the offer presented to them multiple times before they act. Other people will respond right away. By sending more than one piece, you're hitting both kinds of people.

When mailing to schools, I've found it most effective to start off a mailing sequence with a long, detailed sales letter, and then for the follow-up mailings, send a one- or two-page letter or perhaps a post card. Again, some people will want very detailed information before they make a decision, while other people will respond better to a shorter piece—not everyone will want to read a multi-page (My long letters are usually six pages) letter, but most will read a short letter.

For the actual sequence itself, I usually like to mail the first letter (see the ideal mailing times listed earlier) and follow the longer letter with one of the shorter pieces 10-14 days after that to anyone who hasn't responded to the first mailing. Then, 10-14 days later, you'd mail the third piece to anyone on your list that hasn't responded to either of your first two mailings.

I should point out that you don't even have to stop with three mailings. If you monitor your results carefully and you're still getting a great response with your third mailing, you can keep going as long as it's profitable to do so. Master marketer Dan Kennedy talks about how some of his members have 10-17 steps in their mailing campaign!

Following up 10-14 days between steps is ideal because it allows enough time to go by so that it doesn't seem as though you're pushing too much and nagging prospects, but at the same time, it's not letting too much time go by so they hopefully will remember your name and feel somewhat familiar with you, at least on a subconscious level.

Different Pieces

As I mentioned briefly earlier, when mailing to schools, you have different options. I prefer to send out a long, detailed letter of about six pages (three pieces of 8" x 11" paper, printing on both sides) as my first piece.

I should point out that most of the time, the most 8" x 11" pages you can send in one envelope before you cross the "one ounce" barrier, and thus have to pay additional postage, is four pages. When mailing to several hundred schools, this becomes an issue!

You can also send out, for later mailings, a short letter. This would be a sort of "handshake" letter, basically just an introduction to who you are and an invitation to respond for more information.

Another thing you can do when mailing letters is to put a grabber at the top. A “grabber” is something that creates interest in the letter. A lot of grabbers add a bit of ‘bulk’ or a ‘lump’ to the letter, which is easily felt on the outside, thus raising the curiosity factor, encouraging people to open the letter.

Some good grabbers include customized pens, pennies taped to the top of your letter (Dan Kennedy uses this brilliantly. He’ll send such a letter with a penny at the top along with the headline, “A Penny for Your Thoughts...” and the letter goes on to ask why the prospect hasn’t responded to other offers), ‘million dollar’ bills, and so on.

I have very limited experience with grabbers, but I’ve done enough research to know that when used properly, they can really boost response. The idea with a grabber is to create additional interest in a sequence, to make each piece stand out and be different from one another

Some marketers also really like mailing postcards. They have some advantages over regular letters, but some disadvantages as well.

Advantages: There’s no need to worry about envelopes. It’s even quicker for the recipient to look over what you’re offering because there’s no envelope to deal with. Furthermore, if you send the standard little postcards, you’ll save postage expenses.

Disadvantages: Using the regular size postcards really restricts what you say in your copy, so careful consideration must be given to every word. Also, by using an envelope, you’re hiding your mail as apparently being “A” pile. Postcards don’t have this advantage, although by the time most people use them, their name has crossed the prospects’ desk, so to speak, multiple times before anyway.

You can also use oversized postcards, such as an 8” x 11” size, which allows you to have more copy, but also raises your postage rates.

Now that you have an idea of how sequencing works and some of your options, let’s dive right in and examine the long sales letter. I’d also suggest removing the copy of my long sales letter from the sales materials section of this binder so that you can follow along with the points that I’m making.

The Sales Letter

Before I begin, I want to state that my sales letters have been influenced by Dave Dee of Atlanta, although they differ greatly, especially when the offer is stated—I firmly believe in letting the schools know up front all of the different educational assembly programs that you offer. Over the past few years, this has worked wonders for me!

Let's start with the very top of the sales letter. At the top, the first thing you see is my letterhead. To me, this gives you credibility as a legitimate business, although I personally don't want to focus too much attention on it. The first thing I want the prospect to see is the...

Headline

Any competent direct marketer will tell you that the headline of any sales piece is of the utmost importance. It's the first thing that a prospect should notice. It should also appeal to that particular prospects' needs and wants.

Too many magicians try to talk about how wonderful their magic is when trying to sell their services. No one cares about how great that split fan production is! When trying to appeal to your prospects, you have to structure your offer in such a way that you present yourself as a solution to a problem or need that they have.

To put it another way, your magic and all of the descriptions are features. I cause live birds to appear. That's a feature of my act. What I want to do is find the *benefit* of that feature, how my act will help the prospect solve their problem.

How does this line of thinking apply to schools? Well, educators are trying to find new and entertaining ways to get kids interested in special topics and by structuring your offer to solve that problem, you're offering your prospects something that is very real and valuable to make their jobs easier.

So, for the example above, my birds are a feature of my act. The benefit of my birds is that the kids will become very excited and will be more attentive to what I'm talking about as far as the messages go.

I hope you can grasp this concept, because it is the cornerstone of every offer in every market. Every market has its own needs and desires. For schools, we're focusing on primarily the idea of communicating messages effectively to the kids. (For a more in depth look at the features and benefits as well as desires of different markets, check out my Phone Script course, titled "*The No BS, Sure-Fire Way to Getting Prospects to Book You Over the Phone.*")

Anyway, the headline for this letter communicates to the prospect the idea that I have something that will benefit them. This will hopefully get them to read further.

Positioning Title

After the headline, which is the "To" section of the page, I've named myself the "Area's #1 Assembly Program Presenter." This positions me as an assembly presenter and not just a magician. To be viewed as a specialist in school assembly presentations

will put you at a level higher than the other entertainers in your area that use the “Magic for All Occasions” tagline. Don’t use “all occasions”—it reeks of amateurism.

Greeting

From here, we move into the greeting. Again, if you’ve got the names of the actual people you’re mailing to, it’s far better to personalize each letter with a mail merge. Yes, it’s more of a pain, but you’ll get far better results. Mine doubled!

If you don’t have the luxury of using names, studies have proven that “Dear Friend” is the next best thing.

State The Problem

After the greeting, in this letter I use a classic direct marketing technique, which is to state the nature of the prospect’s problem. This is necessary both to prove that I understand the dilemma of the prospect as well as building my credibility that I can actually solve their problem later.

After reading that opening paragraph, it’s difficult to disagree with what I wrote—anyone who knows anything about the plight of schools would have to agree, so the prospect will have to think ‘yes.’ Building ‘yes momentum’ is necessary in any sales process.

From here, I continue to dig in the knife, making the problem seem even worse by pointing out the expense of most professional assembly presenters.

Creating A Double Readership Path

I’m going to take a brief break in my analysis of my letter to give you a few important broad strokes to keep in mind when writing sales letters. After the opening few paragraphs, you’ll see that I added a subheading. This helps break up the letter, making it easier on the eyes. This is called a “double readership path.”

You see, some people will examine every letter and syllable very carefully as they read, while others only skim the letter to see if it’s something that interests them. By adding in bold headlines, sub heads, underlining key phrases and using italics, you’re appealing to both kinds of people, because while the information is rather lengthy, it’s easy to breeze right over this letter because of how things are broken up.

The underlined, bold, or larger font portions of the letter allow readers to get a good idea of what you’re writing about without having to digest every word, which will hopefully hook them in to more thoroughly read your offer and thus move them closer to action, that of contacting you!

My sub-heads are also in an Arial font, which is easier on the eyes for headings. Arial is a 'block' text without the little hooks and thingies on the end, unlike the font that I'm using now, which is Times New Roman. This font is good for body text, in other words, where the "meat" of your writing is. The theory is that fonts like this help the eye "flow" over the text easier.

I generally try to keep the paragraphs themselves very short, too, because long blocks of text can also intimidate some readers, especially in an instance like this where you're trying to sell something.

The short paragraphs, combined with the fact that it's considered best to write on an eighth-grade reading level will help even the longest letters become an easy read.

Another thing to do with your letters is to keep the tone, the overall feel, of your letter casual, conversational, as though you're just talking to the prospect. Remember, your primary job is to appeal to the one person reading your letter. Don't think about appealing to the entire school in your letter...just the one person who's reading it. Writing from the standpoint of one-on-one will also help hook the reader in, making it more personal.

You want to take away any barriers that might keep the person from finishing your letter.

OK, now that we've taken care of that stuff, let's get back to the actual contents of the letter. As you examine it, just keep in mind some of those techniques. The visual appeal of your letter is just as important as the actual content. Both must compliment each other to create an effective sales tool.

A Solution!

After stating the problem and grinding it in during the opening paragraphs, I paint myself as the answer to their problems. I then name-drop, listing all kinds of schools that I've worked for in the past, which gives me a great deal of credibility.

From there, through use of another sub-head, I proceed to list three reasons why they should pay attention to what I'm saying, because after all, who am I? Most people haven't heard of me before, so I've got to give the skeptical people reading this letter some compelling reasons why they should pay attention to me.

Notice that the three reasons that I give relate to my level of experience and expertise. Important note: If you think you have a different compelling reason to use that will state your case more strongly, use it! For instance, what if you were a teacher at a school for many years? That INSTANTLY gives you credibility in the eyes of

school prospects because you are/were one of them. Don't be afraid to use something like that if it applies to you.

My Programs

After I list my three reasons, I jump right into descriptions of my programs. I also back up each program with some killer testimonials from past school clients. It's important to note that I use only SCHOOL testimonials here.

Very often, some magicians will use birthday testimonials, which is really inappropriate. It unfortunately paints you as an "All Occasions" magician, not an assembly presenter.

The use of testimonials can NOT be overstated. You see, in this day and age, people are skeptical and don't believe a thing that most people say. By using testimonials from school clients, *especially school clients in their area*, prospects will tend to be more open to the idea of accepting what you have to say.

I've met a lot of school clients who have told me how they've been "burned" by school performances by so-called assembly professionals, and thus will not hire anyone without a boatload of testimonials.

Some of the beginners out there may be thinking, 'What if I don't have any school testimonials?' For instances such as that, I feel it's acceptable to use company testimonials, such as if you've done company picnics or something to that effect. Nothing beats school testimonials when marketing to schools, however, so if you're just starting out, you may need to do a few freebies to establish yourself. I'll cover a few other ideas later on, too.

"Is He Lying?"

This next headline and paragraph deals head-on with the idea that people may be skeptical of what you claim. By acknowledging this and answering it, you're keeping ahead of the prospects' doubts, and maintaining the friendly rapport established early on.

Benefits

From here, I list what the benefits are of each program. This directly comes from the section earlier, when I discussed what schools are looking for in an assembly program. This is important because in any sales process, you want to find out what the prospect wants and structure your offer accordingly.

Over the years, I've discovered through trial and error what school officials want and I've managed to condense most of it into that list in this section. If you haven't

already, be sure to go over the section where I cover school officials' concerns in detail. It will help you to "get into the mind" of your prospect, because if you're going to sell to the school officials, it doesn't matter what you want—it just matters what they want.

Also, as per my desire to create a double readership path, I've used different techniques—such as bold face type - to break up this list so it doesn't appear too boring.

Magic!

Finally we get to the section that's of most interest to any magicians reading the letter! Although it's not wise to focus your efforts entirely on your magic, it is a good idea to let clients' what kinds of things you'll be doing. After all, the kids need to like the magic if they're going to enjoy the show.

Again, when describing your effects, keep the descriptions REALLY short, just one line. Focus on benefits—what kind of enjoyment do the kids get out of it?

And this is really important—no magic terminology! Don't say "produce," say "magically appear," and so forth. Describe your effects in fun ways that sound exciting. Talk about color, audience participation, visibility, surprise, and most importantly humor and laughter. Don't talk about skill. Who cares? The kids just want to have fun—they don't care how hard or easy an effect is to do...they just want to know that it's fun for them.

Qualifications

This section I learned from Dave Dee, and I use it here as an effective way to apparently instruct schools on how to judge a good assembly presenter. The key when doing it is to only list three things that YOU meet. For that reason, when using this type of format, you may need to alter it to fit you.

Obviously, by advocating the necessity of testimonials and experience, you really are helping schools, and that is important. The key to making this section work is by not making it sound too self-serving. It's a fine line to walk, but an effective one.

The advantage in this section is that it effectively helps push the other "pretenders" in your market area out and positions you as both a specialist and as an advocate of schools—a 'nice guy' looking out for their best interests.

Remember what I said before—anything that you can do to position yourself in the minds of your prospects as an expert and a specialist will put you miles ahead of the "all occasions" guys.

I feel that my three “qualifications” work pretty well for me. First, I’m advising schools to only consider full-time professionals, with the idea that part-timers don’t have the experience, expertise, or skill that the school deserves. Right here, this weeds out a lot of your competition, since we all know that in most markets there’s more part-timers than you can shake a stick at.

Second, by advising that schools put a lot of value into testimonials, you’re again effectively weeding out a lot of the competition in your area because most magicians either don’t collect testimonials or provide the wrong kind to a client, such as giving out birthday testimonials to a corporate client or something like that.

Guarantee

Third, we come to the guarantee, and this is straight from Dave Dee. Most magicians don’t offer guarantees at all, so right there you’re separating yourself from the competition, but one thing Dave Dee did that was smart was to really make the guarantee strong – by offering to donate \$100 to the PTA if the client isn’t satisfied with your program, you’re boldly stating that your show is **THAT** good. By the way, if you’re going to offer such a guarantee, it’s important that your show is rock-solid. Later in this course I’ll give you a few tips for getting school work (and thus experience and testimonials) before you begin offering educational assemblies, especially if you’ve never done any assemblies before.

In this day and age, guarantees are very important because people basically expect to get screwed, so they don’t believe anything most salespeople tell them without proof.

Details

From here in the letter, it’s time to give some critical details that the school will want to know about, such as the cost of your program, the length, and so forth. Some marketers prefer not to list prices in the letter for fear that some prospects may back off.

I feel it’s a personal preference. Dave Risley feels that if you don’t list your fees, then on a subconscious level, it may communicate to some people that your fees are too high. I can understand this—when I go to a nice restaurant, if I see “market price” listed for a particular dish, I don’t bother to inquire about it.

On the other hand, some professionals prefer not to list their fees because their territory is so large, it doesn’t make sense to charge the same fees if your show is 10 miles away or 200 miles away.

Personally, I always list my fees. One, I do it because my own territory is small enough that I don’t worry about different fees for different cities. Two, I want my

clients to have all of the information that they'll need to make an informed decision, which means that most of my school clients don't have to be 'sold' when they call me. I just find it to be easier for me.

In this "details" paragraph, I mention that the program is most effective when each group of students is less than 400 and that I offer a significant discount for a second show on the same day. I also mention that I've created two versions of each program for different age groups, as a further reason why the school may want to consider two programs.

All of these things will help convince prospects to book two shows, which of course maximizes your profit at each school. After all, why not offer a discount for a second show? You're already at the building and you're already set up.

Big Show

From there, I also touch briefly on the "Big Show" options that most schools decide to go with. I like separating the Big Show details from the other details in order to give the reader a chance to digest one set of details and fees before I muddle the issue with the extra details.

Again, I feel this Big Show/Fast Set-Up options offer schools more choices when booking because some schools have larger budgets, which in turn allows you to maximize profits, because some schools are willing and able to pay more for an incoming program while other schools with a more modest budget will still have the option of booking a less expensive program, which may result in bookings where there may not have been bookings with only one choice.

Of course, the key to making the "Big Show" appealing is plenty of extra benefits. With me, I focus more on the live animals and larger effects, such as Floating a Child in the Air. If you've never worked in schools before, I can't stress to you how much value floating a student causes, even among the staff and other adults. Live animals are also very strong.

After the benefits, I then state that any assembly can be upgraded to a "Big Show" for just a few dollars more. This idea and technique is sort of based on Dave Risley's "Good, Better, Best" selling technique, where he advocates starting off with the lower-priced packages before working your way up to your most expensive packages.

Deadlines

From here, we're reaching the finish line for this letter. We've already made our case, based on experience, expertise, and other factors. Now, it's time to urge the prospect to respond NOW, before they do anything else.

The reason why you want to push your prospects to respond as soon as possible is because if they put your material down, they may forget about it or put it off. Remember what I said about people being extremely busy. People forget things and get distracted.

Case in point: I was asked by my wife this morning to take some meat out of the freezer to thaw for dinner this evening. I should have done it right then and there, but I didn't and then I was sidetracked by booking shows for this summer (It's spring as I write this, and I tend to book a LOT of summer shows this time of year). Oops.

The best way to do this is by giving your prospects a deadline that they must respond by in order to qualify for discount on the fee of the show or shows. People love a sale! Most people, if they're going to respond to an offer, will respond a lot faster when motivated by the idea of saving money.

Using a specific date is also a lot more concrete and "fixed" than simply saying to book soon because dates are going fast. Everybody says that, and unfortunately, people are less inclined to believe you. A firm date works a lot better.

Call To Action

Okay, we've given our prospects a specific cut-off date to respond by...now what do they do? What comes next is a specific "call to action," that is, you tell them specifically what you want them to do. Laying it out for them in black and whites ensures that there will be no confusion as to what to do. Like I said, by making everything simple to understand, you will minimize confusion. If people are confused, the likelihood is greater that they'll decide it's too much of a bother to respond and they'll put your offer away.

For magicians, consider how many times you may have purchased a magic trick that looked and sounded really cool, but unfortunately the directions were poorly written and confusing...so you gave up and the prop went to that "Unused Magic" section of your house.

Signing Off & PS

Most marketers will tell you that a friendly, effective way to close your letter is to simply use "Sincerely" followed by your name. I agree, and I think this method of closing a letter is more businesslike and desirable than "Magically Yours" or any number of other ways I've seen magicians close their letters. Remember that first and foremost that when trying to get work from schools, it's important to present yourself as a responsible business owner.

After my name, I've found it effective to use a couple of PSs. The first PS restates the need to respond by a certain date to qualify for the savings. This is simply a

reminder and another urge to respond now rather than wait, because of what I said earlier about people forgetting things.

The second PS is often a quick plug for a different program, in this case, my Family Fundraiser. Like I wrote earlier, I originally used this second PS to briefly mention my Reading Show back when I was focusing the body of the letter solely on my Anti-Drug program, so I know that this second PS works. If you're in the middle of developing a new educational assembly program for your market, such as an environmental magic show, using this PS can be an easy way to test whether your prospects will have an interest in your new show.

And that's a breakdown of the letter, why it's written the way that it is, and so on. Now I'm going to turn to actually putting the letters into the envelopes.

Folding

When you're loading your letters, it's important to fold them in such a way that when your prospect opens the flap, the first thing that they see as they pull the letter out is your headline.

What this means is if you're tri-folding the letters to fit into a business-size #10 envelope, you'll want to use a "z" fold so that the headline of the first page faces out. If you're putting the letters into a 6 X 9 envelope, fold the pages in half, with the headline facing out, and load the letter into the envelope so that the headline faces out as the spectator opens the flap.

It may seem like a big deal to be making when talking about direct mail, but keep in mind that people are very busy. Giving them a fast, easy look at the headline will give your letter the best chance at being read. All of these little things do add up, and they've been tested by master marketers such as Jay Abraham and Dan Kennedy, people who mail thousands and thousands and in many cases millions of pieces of mail every year.

Stamps

Okay, you've got your letters loaded and ready to go. We've already covered the most effective ways to address the envelopes in an earlier section. Now we come to postage.

Please don't take the advice of many armchair experts and well-meaning friends when they suggest you get a meter machine from the post office because of all the money you'll save. Don't believe it!

First of all, and most seriously, there have been documented cases of mail carriers throwing out metered mail. Scary but true!

Secondly, when many people see a meter stamp on a piece of mail, they automatically assume that it's junk mail and will throw it out. After all, how many pieces of personal mail come metered? Remember to throw out any idea that doesn't hold up the idea that what you're sending must look as close as possible to personal mail.

Also, and this may elicit a chuckle from some people reading this, studies have shown that putting on a stamp crooked will generate a better response! Strange, but true. I now drive my wife nuts because I automatically put my stamps on whatever I'm mailing crooked, regardless of what it is.

I can't say that I've actually tested the crooked vs. not-crooked theory, but at this stage of my career, I'm prepared to accept a few things on faith.

Dropping Your Mail

Finally, when dumping your mail, studies have shown that it's best to try and get the mail into the person's hands on a Tuesday. Why? Monday people are still grumbling about being back to work from the weekend and Wednesday people are thinking about the weekend again.

What this means is, if you're mailing locally, that is, within 100-150 miles, dropping your mail on Saturday will give you the best chance for it to actually arrive on a Tuesday. Of course, with the postal system, there's no guarantee, but it's good to try.

Again, these little things do add up.

Please keep in mind all of these tips and bits of advice whenever you mail, regardless of what market. Now let's take a look at the shorter letter that I use, typically for the second step in my mailing sequence.

The One-Page "Handshake" Letter

A lot of what I've done with this letter sort of goes against conventional wisdom. I used some of my own ideas as well as a few things by master marketer Jay Abraham and even a few suggestions by my wife.

The results of this letter, which I typically send out as my second letter of my mailing sequence at the beginning of the school year, were an astounding 4.5%. I attribute it to several factors: first of all, it's my second contact, so a great many respondents were reminded of the first letter by this one. Second of all, it's shorter, which will appeal to those people that were not as inclined to read the longer letter.

Third, it's softer, less "in your face" than most direct mail pieces that many of us have used in the past.

My wife hates the hard-sell stuff, and since she's a hairdresser, she has a LOT of PTA moms, principals, and teachers as regular customers, so she's been able to do quite a bit of informal research for me, getting into their heads and finding out what they respond to. As it turns out, some will respond to the hard-sell stuff while others are turned off by it.

I originally started using this letter as an experiment, just to see if what my wife learned had any merit. I call it the "handshake letter" because it's intended as a friendly greeting for those people who didn't respond to the first letter. It's also intended to convey the fact that I understand that readers are very busy, by use of the first line right after "Dear Friend" or "Dear Principal _____."

You'll also notice that I chose not to use a huge headline with this letter. Again, while this goes against conventional direct mail wisdom, it has worked extremely well for me in a brand-new market with no exposure. In essence, the first sentence serves as a low-key headline.

Opening Greeting

I stole this line from Jay Abraham. By stating that you'll be fast right up front, hopefully the reader will be persuaded to take a few moments to read the letter.

I came up with the idea of putting the entire sentence in bold along with underlining it, which helps draw the eye to it very quickly. I've found this opening statement to be very helpful in other direct mail campaigns that I've used as well.

Introduction

From here, we move to the introduction, where I list my name, why I'm writing, and my experience. Again, it's much softer. Many teachers that I myself have talked to have stated that they distrust a sales letter with a big headline. While I agree that the hard-sell direct mail sales letter work well and will always work, I've found the softer approach effective as well, so I use both methods to reel in as many prospects as possible.

Program Thumbnails

The second paragraph briefly covers what my programs are and what they entail. At this point, I just give enough info so that readers understand what each program is about. There's no sense in trying to go into a hard sell, here. A one-page letter is far too short. If you try to use a one-page letter for anything other than getting someone to request more information, chances are you will fail.

Program Tidbits

The third paragraph then gives some details about my programs, such as the fact that I guarantee the kids will be 100% under control, the fact that I have different versions of the programs based on the age groups, what each program includes, such as magic, music, audience interaction, etc. This paragraph tells them that my programs give them what most schools are looking for in their assembly programs. Remember, in marketing, the best approach is to simply find out what your prospect wants and give it to him/her.

Guarantee

The next paragraph briefly covers my killer guarantee (which I have to thank Dave Dee for). Hopefully, this guarantee will ease some of their fears –after all, this letter is intended for people who have never heard of me. By stating the guarantee even in this tiny letter, it will help encourage people to respond because guarantees do help ease fears in the sales process.

Call To Action

The next paragraph refers to my first letter very briefly. Using the two letters in this sequence, I've had many school officials tell me that this letter caused them to refer to the longer letter, forming an effective one-two punch to get people to respond. I also use this paragraph to encourage them to respond while at the same time reassuring them that I won't pressure them...a call to action. Nobody likes to be high-pressured in a sales situation, so it's a good idea to mention that when writing to prospects.

P.S.'s

After the "sincerely, your name," I then go into the first P.S. that points out the fact that my calendar is filling up quickly, in order to build a sense of urgency in the prospect's mind. You need to give them a reason to call right away—if they put your letter down, they may forget. This is an important idea in marketing.

The second P.S. is of critical importance, for it refers to the back of the letter, where I reproduce an entire letter from a school. I included one of my testimonial letters for this course, because it's important to put something on the back. I highly recommend putting a killer testimonial letter from a school if you've got one, or at least several smaller quotes, like I included as well.

This really builds credibility, so don't overlook this. One final point with the shorter letter – only use SCHOOL testimonials. As I said before, many magicians

make the mistake of using testimonials from companies or worse, birthdays, which in the eyes of school officials, looks *very* bad. Don't do it if you can help it.

Phone Scripts

I'm not going to spend a lot of time dissecting the phone script line by line, because most of the information in the script has been covered earlier in this course, where I outlined what school officials wanted from an assembly presenter. Hopefully, you're beginning to appreciate the foundation that I tried to lay down earlier.

To clarify, in case anyone reading this is wondering, I do not cold call schools. This script idea is simply a way to handle any and all incoming phone calls. As I indicated earlier, I do get schools that call me from different sources, such as direct mail, referrals, phone book ads, and so forth. Having a phone script makes your job of selling your services much easier and much more professional.

Think about it. You've just spent a bundle of cash sending out these letters. You've worked your butt off getting the letters put together. Your tongue is falling off because of the gross envelope glue (just kidding) and now the phone rings.

Now how do you handle the call? "Uh-huh, I can do your school." Not good!

People can judge a lot about a presenter over the phone. I've been told by many clients that they decided to book me simply because I sounded vibrant and confident over the phone.

Although I cover this in greater detail in my Phone Script Book (email me if you want details), basically you want to sound polished and confident over the phone.

Basically, to start off the script that I use, I answer a lot of the school's concerns right away before I even get into the "meat" of the programs. I start off by telling them what programs I offer, then I launch right into control concerns, clean humor, the fact that I've got different versions of each program, the fact that I'm experienced and insured, the fact that I include Teacher Support Materials (don't worry, we'll cover it later), and then I ask them if they'd like to hear about any particular program.

After the brief program descriptions, I talk about the "Fast Set-Up" programs, which set up so fast as to not disrupt their day, the audience participation, visible magic, and this is very important, the fact that the magic used in the show ties in directly with what concept I'm covering. VERY big deal! I then describe some of the effects because the schools are a little curious about the magic that I use.

This is an important point, too: DON'T use magic terminology when describing effects. Don't say "silk," say hanky. Don't say "produce," say "magically appear." It's like listening to a mechanic yammer about your car's repairs as you wonder what

half of his words mean. Use terms the prospect understands! Try your descriptions out on your non-magic friends to see if they understand what you're talking about.

From there, I talk about the differences in the "Big Show" options, to really get the prospect excited. I should point out here that I explain absolutely everything before I give the prices, unless of course they have received my long letter that has the prices listed.

After I talk about the "Big Show," I cover my guarantee and then I recap all of the benefits of my offer and then give the prospect the opportunity to ask questions...and then I shut up! Give your prospect the information they need, and then let them talk. Too many magicians keep yammering without listening to the prospect. Silence can be golden, because that's the time the prospect has to mull over everything you've said.

At this point, one of three things will usually happen...

More Questions

One possibility is that after reading your script, the person you're talking to will have more questions. That's fine, and I actually encourage it. For one thing, it keeps the sales process going and it gives you the opportunity to clarify anything in your script the prospect wasn't sure about.

Again, these people are typically very busy and in the case of many of the PTA's I've worked with, not very organized. They may have ten other things on their mind, and they may want clarification. Obviously, this is why you need to know your information front and back.

This is very often the point where they'll ask you just how it is you're able to use magic to illustrate your concepts. You see, in my time as an assembly performer, many principals have mentioned how thankful they were that my material and magic actually tied in with what I was presenting. Too many schools have been burned.

This is a good place to explain one of your clear-cut, easiest-to-understand tie-ins. For me, I use the "Snowstorm" and explain how with reading, kids have limitless opportunities as I explain the snowstorm effect. This always generates a very favorable response.

The point is, be confident that you can answer any question they give you, I'm often asked about performing requirements, such as do I have to have a stage or is the gym floor acceptable? You really need to decide these things now, before the first call comes in. By the way, the best assembly presenters aren't thrown off by being asked to perform on the floor. They adapt!

You may also be asked if the school is required to pay a deposit. Again, it's your choice. Personally, I don't bother with a deposit for schools, merely because I've been told what a pain it is to get a check cut. However, with time, things change, and I'm considering taking deposits because some of my recent school clients have expressed a great deal of surprise when I tell them I don't require a deposit.

We'll get more into this topic in a few moments, in the booking section.

Check In with The Committee

A second possible outcome is that the prospect will need to take what you've told her (almost always a her) to the committee—the PTA group, teacher group, or informal planning committee. Smaller schools often just have to run things by the principal.

It's at this point (when you realize that you're not going to get a definite answer one way or the other) that you need to leave the prospect with a feeling of urgency. I do it by saying something like this:

“Great! Take my info to the committee, and if they have any questions, please let me know. Also, my website has plenty of pictures and testimonials if they want to see anything (I only add this if they don't have any letters or physical materials from me and they just called me out of the phone book or a referral or whatever).

“I also just want to point out that I do about 30 programs a month, so if you do decide to book my program, I do recommend calling soon to avoid losing your date.”

This accomplishes a great deal of my desire to create a sense of urgency in her mind. Very often, it will often have a side benefit of the person asking if you can “pencil the school in.” I use this as an opportunity to ask permission to call the prospect if a certain amount of time passes without further contact—48 hours after the meeting she's talking about works for me.

By agreeing to “pencil” someone in, you've instantly received permission to call them if they don't call you back right away. I don't like to call unannounced, as psychologically it comes off as begging. However, by penciling someone in per THEIR request, a follow-up phone call is expected because as a busy professional, you can't be expected to hold a date very long. It's all very logical.

Book The Date

The third most common scenario after they have listened to your proposal is that the person you're talking to is the person who's got the power to book, whether it's the head of the PTA or the principal or what have you.

I've noticed this happening a lot, especially after I send out direct mail. I'll very often have several school officials call me up to ask a few questions about availability and performance requirements and then they want to book right away. I like those calls!

Actually Booking the Show

When the prospect decides to book, the first thing you should do is thank them! It's common manners to thank the customer who has decided to invest in your product or service. Heck, I even did it at the beginning of this course, because I truly am thankful whenever someone decides to go with my services.

I think this idea may fly in the face of many struggling amateur magicians. They seem to think, based on my encounters with them, that they feel entitled, that because they can do things that elicit gasps of amazement that they're on a higher level than everyone else. What they don't understand is people still have the capacity to say "no" to your offer.

I've noticed this in almost every other industry as well, most often with large corporations. No one thanks the customer! Without the customer, there would be no business. Think about it.

Anyway, excuse me while I climb off my soapbox...Okay, I'm done, for now.

Client Information Sheet

The second thing you want to do when a client decides to book is to confirm the date and time and make sure you check your calendar to make sure you've got the date and time open. Once you've checked everything, start filling out a Client Information Sheet. You'll see mine in the section of this course where you'll see all of the letters, fliers, etc. It's valuable because it keeps you organized.

As you begin filling it out, you'll confirm the date, times, and fee for your show. Quick point: don't say price or fee to the client. Say investment. Much softer and less threatening, like we talked about.

Who To Send It To?

You'll also want to confirm the address of the school as well as the name of the person you should put "ATTENTION" to in order to send the performance agreement and other paperwork to. Many PTA people will ask you to send the stuff to their house. That's fine; just make sure that you also have the correct address for the school on your file! I didn't once...thank goodness the school was only a few blocks away!

By the way, the “performance agreement” I talked about is what you might think of as a contract, but I never use the word contract. Explain to the client that you’ll be sending two copies—one for her to sign and send back and one for them to keep for their records.

I explain the agreement in a very casual, conversational tone. I don’t want this to sound dark and heavy, or legal. The smallest things can trigger buyer’s remorse in people!

Who’s Got the Check?

From there, I then ask who the person will be responsible for issuing my check to me on the date of the performance. This is important because the person hiring you may not even be able to attend the show, especially if it’s the PTA who books you. I’ve booked several shows where I never actually meet the person who booked me face to face.

Payment That Day, Please!

I then very nicely but emphatically emphasize at least twice that full payment is expected the day of the program. Over the last 12 years, I’ve probably had about 6 instances where the person “forgets” to have the check waiting for me. I’ve always been paid, but I don’t like waiting for my money.

Which Program?

At this point, because a lot of schools are used to dealing with scatter-brained presenters, I re-confirm which program they’ve selected, even though it’s usually the first thing they blurt out when they get you on the phone.

If you’re like me and you offer a bunch of different programs to schools, this is obviously something you want to get right.

What Kind of Package?

Here you’ll want to confirm what package the school wants. This would apply if you decide to use my “Fast Set-Up” VS. “Big Show” ideas, but it also applies to how many shows, i.e. one show or are they going to split up the grades, as many schools do.

If they do elect to split up the grades, I then remind them that the two shows will be a little different from one another, to reassure the client that they’re getting their money’s worth.

How Many Kids?

I also ask the client for a rough “guess-timate” of how many students will be in each assembly because my performance material can alter a little, depending on how many kids are watching.

Where Will I Be Performing?

This is important. Here’s where I ask where I’ll be performing. In most cases, they’ll tell you that up front, because many presenters adopt a snotty attitude if the performing conditions aren’t exactly to their liking. Grow up!

Personally, I only ask the question so that I know what I can get away with. For example, I do a great “Dancing Hanky” effect, but because of thread/lighting concerns, I never even attempt it unless I’m on a stage.

Setting Up

Here’s where I ask some of the crucial questions. A lot of the time, I’ll be asked to perform at 9:00 or 9:30 for my first assembly, which is fine by me—that gives me plenty of time to do other programs at other schools later in the day.

The only problem, as I see it, is because my shows take a little time to set up, I need to get into the school early, like 45 minutes before my programs. This gives me enough time to bring in my equipment and also set everything up.

I’ve never had a school say no to my requests to getting in before 9:00 to set up. However, because it’s so early in the day, it’s good to let them know when you’re arriving so that if there’s a special door that you have to go to that early or anything like that, you’re giving them the opportunity to tell you so that you’re not stuck trying 5 sets of doors that morning like I have in the past. Ugh!

You’ll also need to stress that while you’re setting up, you’ll need the area clear of other people. This can sometimes cause a few minor headaches, which we’ll cover in the section on *problems at the show*. For now, just make sure the client understands how much time you need to set up and, this is very important, how much time you need to pack up when you’re finished.

I also explain that I’ll need a space roughly 12 feet wide by about 8 to 10 feet deep to perform, as well as access to one power outlet. This is usually the point where the client is stunned by the fact that I haven’t asked for three tables, two chairs, a microphone from the school, and a bowl of green M&Ms. Again, this really puts the client at ease, especially if they’ve already seen my website, which has several pictures of my backdrop and set-up.

Again, the pictures aren't professional or anything, but the fact that I fill the stage and ask the school for almost nothing in terms of accommodations is very powerful and effective.

Finishing Up

As you finish the booking conversation, assure them that the paperwork will be sent out the next day and they should receive it very soon. Be sure to tell them everything they'll receive, which in my case includes: two copies of the performance agreement, a color flier 'advertising' the show to get the kids and staff excited, a copy of the Teacher Support Material for whatever theme show they selected (obviously if it's just a 'for fun' show, this won't apply), and some testimonials from past clients. I like to throw that in again to help reduce buyer's remorse. We'll cover the testimonial sheet in the next section, as I discuss the mailing of the paperwork.

After that, I ask them if they have any additional questions from me and I remind them that they can call me at any time if anything comes up. Nice and friendly.

Directions

You may have noticed that I was very thorough in the above suggestions on what to do and ask when the client books, with one exception. I didn't ask for directions!

When I was in Pittsburgh, I learned to rarely trust the directions that clients gave me. Most of the time, they were dead wrong. I'm sure I wrote down my fair share that were wrong, but regardless, getting from show to show in Pittsburgh was problematic at best, due in no small part to the fact that Pittsburgh as a whole seems to be in a constant of road repair. It's still that way to this day because I occasionally go back to that area for a show. Ugh.

Over time, I've come to trust Mapquest.com for my directions. Out of the nearly 1000 shows that I've done in the Buffalo/Niagara Falls areas, I think I may have discovered a legitimate error by Mapquest 3 or 4 times. I'll take those odds, and besides, that's what cell phones are for anyway.

I've had a lot of people disagree with me about Mapquest, but even if you get directions from the client, consider using Mapquest as a backup and as an easy way to get a time estimate so that you'll know how much travel time you need to allot between programs.

Analyzing Some of The Components for The Client

Now that you know how I handle the booking of a program, I want to cover the things that I send the client once a program is booked as well as my Customer Info Sheet, web site, and a few other thoughts.

Customer Info Sheet

In the very last section of this manual, you'll find all of the sales letters, fliers, phone scripts, etc. that I use in my own school work. Included in that section is a little something that I cooked up many years ago as a way to make my own life easier and more organized.

Obviously, I'm talking about what I call the Customer Info Sheet, which I alluded to earlier. This sheet is simply a fill-in-the-blanks easy filing system for keeping track of your shows. Over the years, the concept has evolved from a generic sheet that covers every market that I work in to the current form, which is one customized version for each market.

Once you understand the school one that I've included, you'll easily be able to adapt the idea for any market you choose.

At the top you'll see spaces for the name, address, etc. of the school you'll be working. The dates, amount due, and other such areas should be self-explanatory. Other areas are a bit more curious, such as the "How Did They Hear of Us?" space. I use this because I like to know how my customers come to me. At the end of a month, season, year or whatever, I can tally up how every customer came to me. If my numbers are low in a certain area, it usually means that I have to devote more time and energy to a specific area.

Elsewhere, you'll see spaces to check for what kind of show the school booked as well as what package. When I'm talking to someone on the phone, I want to be able to fill the form out quickly and easily so that I can devote my attention to the client.

I usually print the directions from Mapquest on the back of the page. The whole form keeps me organized and in control. I've seen too many agents and party planners scribble important client info on the side of their calendars, which I think is a crucial mistake.

My thinking is this: Since we as magicians spend most of our "working" time in front of people, we've got enough on our minds. By staying organized, it's one less facet of the business that we need to worry about.

These sheets, which are intended for my eyes only, go into my day runner, in the corresponding month.

Teacher Support Materials

These beauties took me forever to write. Since I've included three different theme shows with the System, it's only fair to include the teacher support materials with

each program. The purpose of the Support Materials is to give the teachers and administrators some project or discussion ideas to use in class after you're gone. In my eyes, it helps extend the life of the program, thus increasing your perceived value.

It's also something extra to include that not only separates you from the bone-headed competition but it also positions you in the minds of your clients as an expert on your subject and therefore higher in value than just a person doing tricks.

As you look at each, you'll notice that I tried to keep each one short, only three pages or less. Teachers are very busy and won't want to read 6 or 10 pages or materials. I've seen other school courses where the Teacher Support Material breaks down each and every routine or trick, which is nice in theory, but I feel too long in the real world.

My materials start off with a couple of quick paragraphs explaining to teachers the objectives of both my program as well as the support materials that they're holding.

From there, I launch right into some ideas for discussion/project ideas in class. As you'll see if you read them, none of the ideas is difficult, nor do they require a lot of effort by the teacher. The ideas themselves are meant to be fun and in most cases are examples of similar things that I had to do in class as a kid, and they stuck with me, so I feel they have a lot of merit.

Of course, one of the most obvious ideas is to ask the students what they liked about the show and then try to remember what the trick had to do with what I was talking about in the assembly. I feel that this is a perfect strategy, because if you've done a good job, the kids are going to be itching to talk about the show anyway, which is a perfect opportunity to reinforce the lessons of the show.

The last idea is to spread the word, which serves two purposes: First, I really do believe in the lessons that I put forth and I feel to spread the word makes sense and may just help the problem a bit. Secondly, spreading the word also helps YOU to get more recognition.

If you have any questions about the Support Materials or if you have any suggestions about ideas to add, please contact me.

Color Flier

I like to send at least one copy (sometimes as many as six, depending how much color ink I've got in my printer that day) to the school along with everything else that I send to the school when I book a show.

I feel that sending along a color flier gives the school the opportunity to get the kids excited about the incoming assembly. They'll see the fliers throughout the school and begin to ask questions, which could hopefully open up the topic for conversation in class before the program even comes in, which can only be a good thing for the school.

I customize each flier with the title of the program, a few highlights of each show, and a sort of sub-head that further explains the show. At the bottom, I always customize each one with the date, time, and location of the program. I've seen a lot of assembly presenters just supply the school with some larger posters (admittedly nicer than mine) but then just leave a blank spot at the bottom for the school to write in the info themselves.

I guess there's nothing wrong with that, but I feel it's a good thing to customize your material as much as possible, especially with an 8 x 11 flier such as this. I've got the picture loaded on my hard drive of my computer and then I use a graphics program called Print Master to put "text boxes" right over the picture. It's really easy to simply change the info at the bottom for each school and print up a few copies.

Testimonial Sheet

This little testimonial sheet works wonders for me. I often put it on the back of a letter or flier, or I'll send it along with the other materials after I've booked a show. I'll also put several like it in the info pack, which you received if you bought the Deluxe version of this course.

In this context, sending it along with the contract and support material, I'm using testimonials to negate any buyer's remorse feelings. As you can see, my school clients, especially the principals, have been very happy with my work.

Also notice, and this is straight Dan Kennedy stuff, that each separate testimonial begins with a short underlined/bold quote, with the bulk of the testimonial underneath in regular text. This is directly taken from the "double readership" idea that I covered earlier and helps make the quotes stand out from one another.

Also, I usually send this page along with the underlined/bold quotes in blue ink, which really makes them pop off the page. It's an effective piece.

Performance Agreement

Most of the schools you deal with HAVE to have a contract, although I personally never refer to it as a contract, even if the client does. A contract is a necessity when working with schools simply because they need an invoice in order to obtain the money. School Assembly Funds travel a pretty complicated route on their way to your check!

As you'll see when looking at mine, I've got all the bases covered. It's very official looking, which schools like, because like I said they've been burned before by very amateurish performers who didn't bother to show up or whatever.

My agreement has spaces for all the important information, such as dates, times, fees, addresses, and even a space for your contact to sign when she sends you back a copy.

In the main body of the agreement, I've also listed the set-up times that I need as well as what I need to do a good show, which again isn't much. Unfortunately, some clients don't read the main body, so even though I have certain passages in bold, sometimes the check is made out to the wrong name or the client "didn't realize" that I needed "that much" time to set up, and other such happenings which tell me that they didn't read it thoroughly.

For that reason, you really need to verbally go over everything with clients both at the time of the booking and again a few days before the show. It's just the nature of the beast.

I should also point out that if you do business under a business name—mine is "Phantasms Magic Productions"—you can expect that some of your checks will be made out to your business name, or your personal name, or something from outer space. I've got my business account set up so that I can deposit checks made out to my business name or my personal name. It's just easier.

It pays to be friendly with your bank representatives, too. I recently had a check made out to "Phantom Magic," but my bank cashed it anyway. A friend of mine, a fellow performer, has as his business name "Stage Left Magic," which I like. Well, a client recently had his check made out to simply, "Magic."

I think the next time I have to make out a check for car repairs, I'll simply make it out to "Car Doctor," or simply "Mechanic." Really!

I'm often asked if my agreement is legally binding. My answer is...probably not. Dave Risley once told me that a halfway decent lawyer can beat any contract. I believe him!

My feeling is this: the agreement is just there to make both parties feel better. I've never ever had a big problem getting paid, and every school I've worked for has been pretty accommodating. I feel that if a school really were to give me a hard time about paying, chances are I probably did a crappy job and didn't deserve to be paid!

Agreement Cover Letter

Like a lot of what I covered about verbally confirming everything and doing what you can to reduce buyers' remorse, this is another weapon in your arsenal. The cover letter should be the first thing the client sees when they open up your envelope of materials.

As you can see, my cover letter has my letterhead on top, which I think gives a professional touch to what I do. In the letter, I thank the client once again for choosing my services. I then reiterate that my experience has satisfied many clients, at which point I again name-drop a few schools in their area, which gives me a lot of credibility.

From there, I reiterate that I'm looking forward to working with this new client. As you can see again, all of the groundwork I laid out earlier pays off now, as all of this stuff is inter-connected.

From there, I tell the client what is included in the packet, such as Teacher Support Materials, if it's a themed show, the color flier, the two agreements, and so on.

The rest of the letter simply asks the client to sign one copy and send it back to me. I also list my address on this letter as well as the agreement itself, although some clients periodically ask me what my address is "because they threw away the envelope with the return address." It happens, so expect it.

How To Send This Stuff

I prefer to send this packet of info in a larger envelope, such as a 9 x 12. Sure, it's more postage because it's a larger envelope, but I think it makes an impression on the client. It also prevents the envelope from being folded.

Again, I prefer to hand-address this packet. Yes, they should be expecting it, but sometimes someone else retrieves the mail and if it looks like anything other than personal mail, your material may get tossed. Lesson learned the hard way.

Web Site

Obviously, I don't send my website in the packet, but I didn't know where else to stick this section.

If you don't have a website up, whether it's due to finances or lack of time, let me refer you to three sources: first, check out tripod.com. It's how I got started, even though I no longer use them. They have no-advertising-banner plans for less than \$5 a month, which is a steal. They have simple templates, which allow you to design your site quickly and easily, with none of that html code writing or any of that confusing computer stuff that I know nothing about.

These days, though, a WordPress site is even easier to get up and running...but you'll need to be dynamic with your site – that means the site will adjust itself to wherever people are looking – computer, phone, tablet, etc. For decent ranking in search engines, this is a MUST.

Check out my site at www.ElementarySchoolAssemblies.com. This is a GREAT site that I just had done in the winter of 2015. It's mobile friendly, with a blog, lots of content, videos, etc. It wasn't cheap but schools can be big bucks. Make yourself look like a pro! The company who did this site is a local Western New York company so as long as you are not in my market, I'll be happy to share their info with you! (These days I try to stay within 200 miles of home.)

Key point: my site is a dedicated site to schools and libraries – NO birthdays, NO corporate, etc. You cannot successfully market your services to schools with a “Magic for all occasions” site! Also, notice that there's a TON of text on my site. I follow the same benefit-rich copy techniques outlined earlier in this manual.

Another resource: www.godaddy.com. Their domain names are CHEAP! I'm talkin' like \$12 for a full year. THAT'S a good deal! Get an easily remembered domain name that people can recall and spell easily. I have several other sites – high school, college, corporate, etc. Each market is a SEPARATE website. In this day and age, that's what's needed for long term success.

Resource number three is Tim Hall, a great corporate magician. Go to his website, www.timhallinfo.com and contact him about his course on putting forth a professional appearance. His ideas are fantastic, and even the most expensive ideas that Tim gives you can be adapted if you're a cheapskate like me.

I think a website is a much-needed tool for school magicians because many schools go to my site to check out pictures and testimonials long before they ever call me because it's non-threatening. Because my site is so strong, the prospect is half-sold before I say anything. Again, my pictures are not professional at all, but because they're obviously from the “real world,” it gives me much-needed credibility.

I plan on adding more “studio shots” later, but for right now, my site works quite well.

Now that we've covered show development, marketing & booking the shows, it's now time to turn to the next section, **Before the Show**, to get some ‘real world’ tips on making sure you prepare for your show in ways that will help things run smoothly.

Before The Show

As you read through some of these tips, many may seem like common sense, but as I've learned in conversations with many magicians over the years, it's the commonsense things that often are forgotten or ignored.

Double-Check Your Show

Boy is this a biggie. Before you heave all of your equipment into your car, double-check everything. Make sure you've remembered all of the props for every routine. Some professionals even use a checklist. Dave Risley actually has a separate case for each of his themed daycare shows. The point is, there's nothing worse than being 100 miles from home and realizing you've forgotten an important piece of equipment.

Notice I said "equipment," as this applies to any sound equipment you may have, including batteries, extension cords, and so on.

Speaking Of Batteries...

A quick note on batteries. If you use regular batteries, replace them often. If you use rechargeable batteries, make sure that they're fully charged. I use regular batteries for my wireless microphone (rechargeables don't give me very good results) and I always toss the battery after two shows, because if I try to push a third, the mike starts cutting out on me halfway through the third. It pays to know your equipment.

However, I do use rechargeables for my CD player (as it's one less thing to plug in at the show), which work very well. I try to charge them once a month. In the past, I've forgotten a couple of times and wouldn't you know it, no music for the show. Bowling shoe ugly.

Also, and this is important, bring back-up batteries. Expect the unexpected. Maybe the fresh batteries you just bought had been sitting on the shelf in the store for six years. By taking extras, at least you'll be in a position to put in fresh batteries for your second assembly at the school, if you're booked that way.

The Emergency Kit

This is an idea that I also cover in my "How I Quit My Job in Six Months" course. Basically, I was told of this idea by a part-time magician in the Pittsburgh area. The idea was to basically carry a small "tool kit" to every show of simple things that are easily forgotten, broken, or lost.

What I did after hearing of this neat idea was to run to Wal-Mart and buy a very small tackle box in the sporting section. Mine is roughly six inches by eight inches,

maybe smaller. I carry this little bugger in the bottom of my roll-on table at all times—it never leaves.

In the box are the following items: several rubber bands—the kind best for the “unlinking rubber bands” trick. I also use rubber bands for a very effective silk production in almost every show I do. I also have a small packet of flash paper, like 3 or 4 slips—a very small amount, which won’t cause any horrific accidents if it’s a hot day...I also have some colored electrical tape because I do a “silk to egg” routine and I use electrical tape for the ‘hole’ that you peel off at the end. I occasionally forget to cut out new “holes,” so in addition to the tape, I also have a few spare “holes” stuck to the underside of the lid of the box. I also carry different kinds of thread and a few other items in the box.

I suppose I should add in a couple of extra mouth coils because I use mouth coils a LOT and I know one of these days I’m going to lose one or find that the one that I brought has been put together too tightly or whatever.

The whole point here is to carry a small kit of things with you that you can use in the event of something breaking, getting lost, or whatever. It’s saved my butt on numerous occasions.

Double-Check Directions

Take the time to look over your directions and make sure everything is easily understood. In my case, I use Mapquest, and I like to check my directions to make sure I understand what they tell me. Every once in a great while, I’ll get a direction that says something like “Take the exit” or “Turn left on unmarked road.” Ugh!

This usually isn’t that big of a deal to me because I know my areas so well, and it’s STILL more reliable than most of the directions I’ve received from customers in the past.

If you’re new to your market and you’re not doing 30 shows a month quite yet, it might be a good idea to ‘scope out’ your school a few days before the show. I don’t do this anymore because I’m just too busy, but to someone new to school shows, this can be a great way to relieve some tension. After all, if you’re new to school performing, it can be nerve-wracking at first, and on the day of the show, you’ll probably have a lot on your mind.

Confirm That Check!

This is something I wish I didn’t have to write about, but I do. I feel it’s a good idea to call your school client a few days or even a week before the date of the program and make sure the check has been taken care of. I still forget to do this on occasion and

every once in a while, the client informs me (usually AFTER the program) that whoever was supposed to take care of my check is out sick.

This really bugs me, especially when the school has booked me eight months in advance, which is the situation I found myself in very recently. Eight months, and I had to wait an extra 10 days for my check. The really infuriating thing about it was the fact that the person who actually booked me appeared to be very well-organized and called me several times to make sure there was no last-minute details.

I should have politely said, “No, everything’s fine. We’ll just need to make sure the check is in place,” or something like that.

It’s something I still forget to do and like I said, I’ve always been paid, but I occasionally have to wait a week or two to get paid.

Personally, I feel a little funny calling up the client to make sure they took care of the check. It sounds a little insulting, so what I do is make a general ‘confirmation call,’ to assure the client that I’m going to show up, remind them of my set up/break down time, and then I’ll innocently ask if she’ll need a receipt for the check that day.

This little technique works wonders, as it usually triggers a spark in the client’s mind. Most of my clients say, regardless of whether they need a receipt or not, “That’s right, I’ll have to remember to stop by the office on my way to the gym/auditorium/cafeteria. They’ve got your check in the safe.”

On occasion, the well-meaning but somewhat scatter-brained client will say something to the effect of, “Oh! I’d better make sure it’s in the office like the they said it would be.” At this point, I politely say something like, “Well, if there’s a problem, please call me BEFORE the show. I just need to know what to expect.”

This is a very effective technique, because I’ve almost subliminally triggered them about the check and then I very slyly ‘nudged’ them to check on the status of the check without overtly saying, “Hey, make sure I’m going to get paid!!”

Remember, even if you’ve done nothing wrong, you’ll get a LOT further with a smile than a cross look on your face. Things stick in people’s minds and it’s really easy to come as unlikable and difficult to work with even though you didn’t do anything wrong.

Receipts

I always bring a receipt with me to every school show. For one thing, it’s a professional thing to do—you certainly don’t want to scrawl out something on the back of a grocery receipt...that technique may work great for mentalists doing preshow work, but it’s terrible for giving receipts.

Remember, you're trying to project the image of a business, and a good business is well organized and well prepared. I now carry an actual receipt book in my car as well as a credit card swipe-thingie in case the client (especially birthday moms) can't find their check. I now take credit cards, which impresses the heck out of people.

The other huge benefit to offering a receipt, regardless of whether it's requested or not is to use a little advertising. If you turn to the receipt that I use, provided in the back of this manual, you'll see that it's got my letterhead with all of my contact info at the top—very handy in case they need to call me again—and, in addition to the expected blanks for names, addresses, etc., I've also got the names of all of my shows listed so I can supposedly quickly check off which show the client purchased.

This may be true, but by listing your entire line of school programs, you're letting the client know what else you offer. In my case, I list specific school programs that I offer, such as my theme shows, my fundraiser program, and so on.

Please note that I am NOT listing EVERY show that I offer, such as “birthdays, daycares, trade shows, churches, grand openings,” etc. That's right up there with “Magic for All Occasions,” which is a terrible phrase and should never be used in ANY marketing for your business (I'm serious about that), because it makes you look like the other “hacks” out there.

I first learned of this technique by Dave Dee, whom I later learned picked it up from Dave Risley.

Evaluation Forms

I used to take at least six evaluation forms with me to every school show that I did. I don't do it nearly as much anymore because I have so many, but when you're just getting started or especially if you're running a new program, I consider it a must.

I should point out first that at the top are several of the shows I offer schools, with the same psychology being used as in the receipts—that it will let people know about my other programs without being obnoxious. Since the person has to check off which show I did that day, it's not seen as “advertising” in the strictest sense.

Why So Many?

I used to bring at least six with me for a couple of reasons. First of all, I'd pass them out before the show, usually three or four per assembly along with the verbal request that the person drop off the completed form before I left. Passing out several assured me that I'd get at least one back to use for testimonials. If I'd brought back just one, the person that I selected may have been too busy to drop it off.

Secondly, when I was just starting out in schools, having so many testimonials come back meant that I could get a really good idea of how good my show was. If six people picked apart the same aspects of my show, it usually meant I had some serious work to do. If five people raved about the show and only one said it was mediocre, it meant I didn't have nearly as much to do...but since I'm essentially a perfectionist, I would tweak things a bit and try to get 100% total praise.

Thirdly, some people would return the sheet to me with all of the boxes checked off, with almost always the most favorable responses checked, which is fine, but I really like it when the person writes in their own comments. These are the most useful for testimonials later.

If you flip to the Marketing Materials section, you'll find mine. My evaluation form was heavily influenced by both Dave Dee as well as a nameless magician who offered a great idea that I heard on the audiotapes from a Dave Dee marketing weekend. Unfortunately, I can't give the guy his due credit because I couldn't make out his name on the tape.

The idea, however, was golden and it influenced both Dave Dee's evaluation form as well as my own. I'll get to it in just a second.

Why The Form Works on So Many Levels...

As you'll see when reading mine, the form asks readers to fill out the form primarily by checking off boxes or filling in letters of choices. When taking these forms later, you can ethically use the phrases that they checked off as testimonials, complete with "quotes" around them.

You see, people are extremely busy, as I've mentioned for the 483rd time in this course, so to get testimonials, I try to make it as easy as I can. I do, however, have a few blank lines toward the bottom of the sheet along with the line, "If you were to talk to another school official who was considering using this assembly presenter for his/her event, what would you say about him and his program?"

This phrase is worded in such a way as to prompt the most interesting and detailed responses. It's a phenomenal idea and is the main reason why I've been able to get so many fantastic testimonials over the years. Notice that I changed the originator's wording to say, "assembly presenter" as opposed to "performer," which is one of those little details to set you apart as a speaker and not just a guy who does tricks.

The Reality of Using Evaluation Forms

I should point out to beginners that this form does not mean you'll instantly get a bunch of testimonials raving about your show if it's not any good. In fact, I recently got a not-so favorable testimonial from a Reading show I just did. I did the first show and in

this particular show, I started off with the Vanishing Cane to Silks, which is my standard opener. Well, this day I didn't load the silks properly and the cane jammed. Even though I'd been doing it for years, mistakes occasionally happen.

I then did the second show right after at the same school and the same day and this time the cane was fine...and the testimonials I received RAVED about me. In fact the quotes written in were some of my best ever.

I think the "X" factor here was the fact that I screwed up an effect, the *first* effect, so badly that it stuck in people's minds, blocking out the rest of the show.

My point here is that evaluation forms, in addition to getting you much-needed quotes to add credibility in future marketing efforts, will also give you honest feedback. If teachers don't like what they see, they will let you know.

Instead of being afraid of this, embrace it and use it to improve. I did.

How The Forms Can Benefit You in Different Ways

Remember earlier in the course when I talked about techniques for getting credibility when you're just starting out? This evaluation form is the cornerstone. First of all, let me point out that for some reason, most magicians start out doing birthday shows because they believe that they're the easiest to perform.

Most family entertainers with any degree of experience will probably tell you that birthdays are actually rather difficult to do well when compared to other children's events. But because they're the easiest (compared to other markets) to book, many magicians mistakenly assume they're the easiest to perform.

Sorry, I was lecturing again. Anyway, let's assume you're a beginner and you've been doing birthday shows and your act is legitimately very good. Well, sooner or later, if your marketing skills are halfway decent, you'll get some calls from people looking for entertainment for family fun nights at schools, end of the year celebrations, and other such events where themed shows are not needed.

This can be a great starting ground, as it can give the beginning school magician the experience necessary to get really good at engaging the attention of several hundred kids without the added pressure of communicating your messages.

Take advantage of these opportunities to gain as many testimonials as you possibly can. First of all, you'll get valuable honest feedback that you can use to improve your stage techniques (including control, blocking, movement, etc.) and you will collect some great testimonials to use when you start actively marketing schools for theme shows or whatever programs you decide to push.

Now that we've covered some of the essential pre-show preparations, let's turn now to the next section, **Arriving at The Show**. I told you I'd be thorough!!

Arriving At the Show

Again, a lot of this may seem obvious to the old pros out there, but boy could I tell you stories that I've heard...

Arrival

This should be obvious but get to the school early! If your time estimate has your travel time at say 30 minutes, give yourself 10-20 extra minutes or perhaps more if you even suspect you're going to a large metropolitan area. People in different markets will have to adjust this tidbit of advice accordingly.

Also, consider the time when you'll be traveling. Will you hit the morning rush hour? That may affect your travel time quite a bit.

How Early Should I Get There?

As far as when to arrive, I figure out how long it will take me to set up a particular show. For example, let's say I'm doing my Bullying show and the client has selected the "Big Show" option. For that, I need a little less than 30 minutes to set up. I also know that it will take me usually no more than 10 minutes to get everything into most schools, regardless of where I'm performing. I usually round that up to 15 minutes just to be safe.

I also take into account that it may take a few minutes to actually find the person I need to talk to. So far, we're up to 45 minutes total, give or take. For that reason, I'll usually arrive at the show about an hour before show time. Due to knowing my show set-up requirements so well, this gives me anywhere from 15 to 25 extra minutes to find the contact person and deal with any other problems, which due pop up from time to time, through no fault of my own, which is the topic of a later section.

You may need to adjust this based on your show but try not to give yourself too much extra time. Remember, the area in which you're performing may be used for something else right before your allotted set up time.

Before You Get Out of The Car...

...check your appearance! Too often I'll have a two-hour drive or more to some shows and I'll loosen my tie and do other things to make the trip more comfortable. Carry a lint roller with you, too, so you can remove any unsightly dog hair or random bits of fuzz. If it's been hot out and you've had the window down, don't forget to check your hair.

If I'm doing several shows in one day, I'm often forced to eat on the road. Make sure you check yourself to make sure you didn't spill catsup on your pants!

Introduction

When I do find the contact person, I always try to introduce myself as the assembly presenter. It's a little something to try and position myself above the usual entertainers that I've encountered.

More often than not, what I'll do is head straight to the main office and enlist the aid of the staff there to help me track down the right person. By arriving early, it allows me to make these introductions in a calm, pleasant manner. There's nothing worse than arriving late for a show and trying to scramble. NOT a professional picture!

During the introduction, it's important to smile pleasantly, even if you've only had four hours of sleep. Appear awake and eager to please, but not manic. Manic scares people.

Thank the person again for the opportunity to work with them. This is usually the point where I'll casually ask if they need a receipt, another subtle reminder about the check.

Easy To Work With

The mantra that I've been practically chanting since the beginning of this course applies here, too.

Polite

Be pleasant to everyone you meet. You're likely to encounter several teachers, staff, and even students during your trips unloading your vehicle. One cross look or grumble can work its way back to future decision-makers. Be nice to everyone, even if the shortest trip from your car to the performing area is $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile. It does happen. Be prepared to deal with it and smile.

Make No Demands

Other than the necessity of setting up and the need for electricity, I make no demands when I get to the school. If the stage is covered with equipment, I do my best to move it myself. If the stage/performing area is a lot smaller, I make adjustments as best as I can.

If the performing area is super-tiny to the point where I can't fit the larger props for a "Big Show," I will very politely explain the situation and ask the person if I should cut it out. Usually they're very accommodating and we usually wind up altering the performing area in some way.

Some Problems You May Encounter

Occasionally, you will run into unforeseen problems. I cover a few of them below, in the little section about custodians, but there are a few more you should be aware of.

The biggest are scheduling conflicts. What if you're slated to do your show in the gym and the phys-ed teacher was never told? If you're on a tight schedule, there's not too much you can do other than smile and explain very politely that you need the minimum set up time for your show.

Most of the phys-ed teachers that I've met are rather gruff individuals on the outside but are very understanding on the inside. Usually they'll offer to restrict the kids to one half of the gym away from you or they'll bring the kids outside or they'll cancel the class all together. The important thing is to be polite and smile. It's not your fault and it's not their fault. Usually the principal offers to escort me to my performing area, so if it's in the gym, I generally don't even have to chase away a phys-ed class—the principal does it.

The same scheduling mishaps can occur in an auditorium. Very often, I'll be scheduled to do my program at 9:30 or so in the morning and the band is in the auditorium rehearsing. The band teachers are usually the kindest people in the whole school (in my experience) and will usually offer to have the kids rehearse off the stage, in the ground, where an orchestra would be, in front the first row of seats.

While it's not the best arrangement for setting up, at least the kids are off the stage and out of your hair. If you've got a backdrop, you've also got most of the cover you may need to keep certain things a secret.

If things are too tight as far as scheduling, space, time, etc., offer to your contact person to downsize your show. Leave the decision in their hands. Incidentally, I feel that if you keep your set up time at or below 30 minutes for even your biggest daytime assembly program, you probably won't encounter many problems. Thirty minutes is not an unreasonable demand, and like I said, most school officials try to be as helpful as possible. Very often they're looking forward to the event, as it's a break from the norm for them, too!

Once again, the point is, be nice and smile. Remember what I said: despite the undeniable excitement from the kids, for the staff you are an intrusion. How you handle mishaps may be the only contact many staff members have with you. Word travels, so only give people good things to say about any contact they have with you.

Be Especially Kind to The Custodians!

This was something I learned early on in my school-performing career. Not only is it good manners to be polite to everyone that you meet, but the custodians can help in several unexpected ways.

First of all, in an effort to be helpful in preparation for your show, very often the staff will have shoved any and all band equipment or school play equipment (including sets, backgrounds, props, chairs, etc.) to the back of the stage...completely burying your access to the electrical outlets.

Most of the stages I've encountered often have additional outlets located in the most unusual of places. The custodians can often save you long periods of frantic searching.

Also, many stages that I've encountered in some schools don't have freestanding stairs built right into the stage. Since I use a lot of volunteers for my shows, this presents a problem.

Very often the custodians will be able to dig out a set of freestanding stairs that are meant to be pushed up to the edge of the stage. This has saved my butt more than once.

Custodians also are very helpful in locating lights or even people. Very often they'll know the scheduling for different areas and times for the school better than high-ranking school officials.

Be nice to them. They can help you a LOT...plus it's only polite.

Set Up Your Show

I don't think I need to elaborate much here, except for the obvious things, like doing a sound check to make sure your system is working properly. You'll need to do another one when the performing area is full of people (since the sound levels are obviously very different when a room is empty versus when it's packed with several hundred people), but I'll cover how I do that in the next section.

Pass Out Evaluation Forms

Right before I start the show, after I've got everything set up, I'll ask some of the teachers to fill out evaluation forms. I explain to them that they'd be doing me a big favor as it gives me quotes to show other schools, etc. Again, they are doing you a favor, so be polite.

I also try to get a form to the principal. For whatever reason, I've found that principals usually give me the strongest testimonials. My theory is that they don't have 35 kids in a classroom staring at them so even though they're very busy people it's at

least a little easier for a principal to hole up in the relative sanctity of his/her office to take the two minutes needed to fill out my evaluation.

Now we've covered some of the finer points when you arrive at the school, I'll give you a few "survival tips" for the show itself.

During The Show

Here are some basic things to keep in mind during your show.

A Simple Stress Reliever

This may seem silly, but right before you walk out to face your audience, press your palms together, with your fingertips pointed upward. Now press hard, the palms against each other. Press as hard as you can for about 5 seconds. Now release!

This is a very simple tension release method I learned years ago. If you're really nervous before a show of any kind, doing this will release some of the tension. It's nothing earth shattering, but it helps me a little from time to time.

Program Yourself

People will judge you fairly quickly, and when you're in front of an audience of five or six hundred kids, I think it's safe to say that when you're first starting out, you may be a little nervous. Kids, however, can smell fear. Actually, all audiences can, but kids are especially adept at it. Here's a little tip to consider that worked wonders for me when I was first starting out.

Try to "program" yourself! If you've read *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill, you'll understand what I mean. The basic concept, for this purpose, is to think and believe in your confidence and subconsciously it will seep into your facial features, how you walk, etc. Again, that's an extremely oversimplification of what Hill talks about in his life-changing book.

For stage work, right before you face your audience, think a thought something like this: "I'm going to make sure these people have the time of their lives!" It doesn't have to be those exact words but try thinking something about how everyone's going to really enjoy him or herself.

Thoughts like this really do help to "program" you for success. Our subconscious mind is an incredibly powerful thing. I've found that if I dwell on something that upsets me, I can later feel (when I realize what I'm doing to myself) how tense my muscles are.

For programming yourself, both for stage work, goal setting in your personal life, and more, I highly recommend you pick up Hill's book. I should also add that if you use his techniques on a regular basis (not just right before a show) you'll have the confidence inside to project yourself as a winner all the time, not just on stage.

It can be life changing!

Check Your Audio Level

While I covered how you should obviously do a sound check before your show, I feel it's just as important to do one before you actually start the show. When your audience is in the area with you, it changes the dynamics of your sound. Add to that the fact that not everyone will have the same tastes as you and you can see why it's a good idea to double-check your level.

Here's what I do. Once the principal (or whomever) has introduced me, I walk in front of my backdrop, center stage, and say, "Thank you very much for that introduction. Before I start, teachers: how's my volume? Too loud? Too soft?" At that point, I'll get confirmation from a few teachers. After all these years, I've got it down pretty well, but I like to check anyway.

Do A Great Show by Having Fun!

This is somewhat related to the "Programming Yourself" section I touched on a moment ago, but I just want to delve a little deeper. As anyone who's done this for a while knows, putting on a good magic show involves wearing several hats. You have to be the scriptwriter if you write your own material. You have to perform your material, you have to connect with the audience, and so on.

I think, and this is just my opinion, that for people to really invest their emotions in your show (any show, not just a themed show), they need to believe that you're at ease up on stage. They need to feel that you're having a good time.

Remember when I said audiences can smell fear? Well, they can sense nervousness, tension, and almost any other emotion. They can also sense feelings of enjoyment. If you're having fun, it will show, and your feelings will be contagious to your audience.

What I'm trying to say is, have fun! I really feel that full-time magicians, regardless of what market they perform for have one of the greatest jobs in the world. Sure, it can be stressful for a variety of reasons, but if you are going to do this full-time, do yourself a favor and step back and look at the big picture.

You get to amaze people, get them to laugh, and have fun! I don't know about you, but I hated my day job with a passion. I was just miserable in life in general because of it. The day that I gave my two-week notice to my boss was possibly the most liberating day of my life.

I don't think many people would become full-time magicians if they truly loved their day jobs. I know of some people who are part-timers because they still love their day job and they also love magic, and for those people, I say good for you—you have two passions in your work.

My point of view, as a full-timer, is that I'm thankful to be where I am and I'm doing this because I want to, not out of necessity. I believe that 99% of the time, this shows in my work, and as a result, people enjoy my shows, not because I'm SO AMAZING, but because we all have fun together.

When you go out on stage and throughout your whole show, have fun!

Eye Contact

I know I covered this in detail earlier, but a little reminder doesn't hurt. Don't forget to make eye contact. It's one of the most effective ways to make those personal connections with the audience.

Volunteers

I hope I don't step on any toes with this suggestion, because my intention is a good one. This suggestion involves the selection of volunteers.

If your audience of students is a mix of different ethnic groups, I think it's a really good idea to make sure that you select a 'mix' of volunteers throughout the show. In this age of political correctness, people notice things like this.

There's really not a whole lot else I can say about this other than use your common sense and try to be aware of this idea in your work. It may seem like a trivial thing to talk about in this course, but I've been in audiences, watching other magicians' shows as an audience member, and if certain ethnic groups aren't represented by volunteers on stage, it does cause hurt feelings sometimes.

Now that we've covered some simple survival tips for the show itself, let's jump to an often-neglected section, what to do **After the Show**.

After The Show

It's understandable that when you've done a good job performing, that you may just want to pack up your stuff and leave so that you can bask in the "post-show glow," but there are a few things you should do to not only reinforce those good feelings in those who hired you but also plant the seeds in their minds for future performances, whether at the same school or other neighboring schools.

Evaluation Forms/Letters

Try to collect those evaluation forms before you leave. As I said earlier, people are forgetful and if you don't get them right away, your chances drop that you'll get them at all.

The teachers are usually busy herding their classes back to their rooms and trying to maintain general order so I usually don't bother them, but I will seek out the principal and try to get hers if I can. Like I said, I usually get the best testimonials from principals anyway.

A lot of professionals will tell you to request a letter on the school's letterhead. If you can get it, that works wonders. I've got a few really good ones, but in my experience (and it may just be me) I've found it to be rather difficult to get school officials to come through with a letter. I feel that it's because they're so busy.

Getting them to check off a few boxes and jot down a couple of sentences is usually much easier, but there's no reason NOT to try to get letters. I just don't hold my breath on it.

I'll give you a really easy technique for increasing the odds of getting an actual letter. First, I should point out that this is how I got nearly all of my testimonial letters from the different companies that I've performed for (holiday parties, summer picnics, banquets, etc.). For some reason, I find it much easier to get a letter from a company than a school.

Anyway, after the show, send a letter requesting a testimonial letter from the principal. Obviously, this won't work if the principal was not able to watch your show. In the request, mention how you know they're really busy, but that a letter from someone of their position would mean a lot to you. Buttering them up works wonders.

With the letter, include a stamped and addressed envelope for them to use. Providing them with the stamped envelope really works wonders. Remember, they're busy and you need to make it easy for them to do you this favor. Mention in your request the fact that you included the stamped, addressed envelope.

Also in the request, briefly mention that you'd like their thoughts on how effective you were at communicating your messages, controlling the audience, and making sure everybody enjoyed themselves. This gives the principal an idea of what to write about.

Finally, and this is the Big Secret, include a small gift in the envelope, perhaps taped to the top of the request letter. Some ideas would include: a free pizza gift certificate, a gift certificate for that person's local mall, or my favorite that I learned about from Dave Dee, a Blockbuster Video Gift Card!

Finally, and this is important—don't mention the little gift in the request letter. That way, the gift becomes an unspoken mini-guilt trip! More often than not, the person feels obligated to send the letter.

As I said earlier, I've used this technique to get a nice thick stack of letters from companies that I've performed for, which really carry a lot of weight when you send copies along to potential clients...but that's a whole different market.

Your "Info Pak"

If you've put together an information package that's colorful and easy to read, then you can bring one along with you to your show. After you've performed, when your contact hands you the check, thank her and offer her your information pack. It's an easy way to both let them know about your other programs and provide a great way to make sure they can contact you in the future.

Many times, this technique can really work wonders. I recently did a Self-Esteem show for a school. As I was resetting my equipment for the second show, my two PTA contacts came over to tell me how much they enjoyed the show and then they asked me whether I did other programs.

I assured them that I did and whipped out my 'info pack' and handed it to them. By the time I'd packed up my equipment after the second show, they'd booked two Bullying shows with me for a couple of months later! Don't overlook this idea.

If you'd like to check out a copy of my info pack, contact me. It's nicely comb-bound, full of color, and is jam-packed with killer testimonials. You can look at mine and get some ideas on how to structure your own.

People obsessed with colorful brochures, slick graphics and the like will want to point out any graphic flaws that I made, but I designed it myself and I can attest to the quality—I receive compliments on it all the time—and its effectiveness, as it results in bookings for me all the time. Maybe some day I'll spend the money and get a graphic designer to spice it up, but right now I just don't see the need.

If you have a home graphics program of your own, you can easily put together your own package. I also highly recommend getting a comb binder. It makes your promo material look really professional. I bought mine for \$60 at Office Max and now I've got a completely separate information package for each market that I perform in.

The fliers that I use in my packet are similar to the covers of the actual program scripts elsewhere in this course.

One last thing: when listing testimonials in your letters, website, or wherever, use the teacher's/PTA person's/Principal's actual name and city, along with the school. DON'T go the cheese-ball route and use a person's first and last initials for a testimonial. It looks made up! Always at least use the person's last name.

Thank You Note

Regardless of whether you decide to try and get a testimonial letter, it's still important that you send a "thank you" note to the person who hired you. At the end of this course in the materials section, you'll find my thank you note. I just change the personal information, print it up, and away it goes. Most professionals will tell you that it's much better to hand-write a thank you note, and I wholeheartedly agree, but my handwriting is so bad I don't think anyone who don't know me personally would be able to read it.

Nevertheless, it's something I do plan on changing. The point is, send a thank you note simply because, so few people do it anymore. It really adds a nice personal touch to your dealings with your clients.

Bounce-Back Coupon

An alternative to the thank you note is an idea I got from my wife. Her father used this gem for years when he was the general manager of a restaurant. I altered the idea with another idea from a Dan Kennedy tape package that I have.

Near the end of the materials section you'll find what I call my "bounce-back coupon." It's simply a thank you note with a coupon at the bottom that I whipped up on Microsoft Word.

As you can see by reading it, I'm not only thanking the client for choosing me but I'm also "bribing" her to send me additional work. It's been said that word-of-mouth advertising is the best advertising, but it takes forever to get it going and it takes a lot of work, too.

By offering a monetary incentive, you're increasing the odds that your client will actually send you referrals. By offering a small discount to the potential new client, you're also increasing the odds that they'll actually remember to respond.

I've got a space right in the coupon where I print the client's name so if the referral can't remember the name of the school or person who gave it to her (surprising but very common), I've got it right on the coupon so that I can send the referral reward right to the correct person.

You'll also surmise, from reading this letter, that I include a dollar at the top of the letter! Strange but true! When people open up a letter and find a dollar at the top of a letter, *they're going to read it*. That way, everything that I'm saying will stick in their minds longer. This technique works wonders for me in many different markets.

Which To Send?

I usually send the thank you letter to the principal because it lists my other programs, which is very important. I then send the bounce-back coupon to the person that booked me so that I can hopefully get other bookings. If the principal was the person who booked me, then I have to choose. I'll base my decision on how I "read" the principal. Some people consider themselves "above" coupons, so for that kind of person, I'll just send the thank you note.

Enter Customer Names into A Database

Regardless of what kind of bookkeeping system you use, it's important to keep your past customers in a data base of some kind. I explain mine in my course, ***How I Quit My Job in Six Months...And You Can Too***. There are a lot of easy-to-use programs out there for small businesses, some of which are designed specifically for magicians.

The point is to keep your customer files intact and up to date. It makes contacting them easier for future repeat bookings, not to mention keeping track of exactly what you did for them, when you did it, and the fee charged. This is all very important when a repeat client calls you.

Maintain Contact!

Master marketer Dan Kennedy says that every month you don't contact your past customers, they lose their value by 10%. It's scary! You can keep in touch with your past customers in several ways. I also mail to them throughout the school year as well as other times, such as holidays specific months, such as Red Ribbon Week, and so on. I also sometimes send out a fun newsletter with puzzles, movie reviews, and more.

Now that I've given you everything that I know about the school market, it's now up to you to check out the Marketing Materials Section next for the actual letters, scripts, etc. that I use in my own work.

Marketing Materials Section

As I've said, I've included everything that I use. As you go over these materials, bear in mind that you will have to make moderate changes so that this material is synergistic with your own programs, because every good performer has his/her own style. This is especially true with the phone scripts, which covers specific information about the effects that I do.

1. Long Sales Letter
2. Short "Handshake" Letter
3. Phone Script – Bullying Show
4. Phone Script – Self-Esteem Show
5. Phone Script- Anti-Drug Show
6. Customer Info Sheet
7. Performance Agreement Cover Letter
8. Performance Agreement
9. Principal Testimonial Sheet
10. Teacher Support Materials – Bullying
11. Teacher Support Material – Anti-Drug
12. Teacher Support Material – Self-Esteem
13. Evaluation Form
14. Receipt
15. Bounce-Back Coupon
16. Thank You Note



ENTERTAINING MAGICAL EDUCATIONALS

Cris Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: johninfo@msmregjck@hotmail.com

TO: Schools Wanting High Quality, Affordable, Educational & Entertaining Programs for Their School

FROM: Cris Johnson, The Area's #1 Educational Assembly Entertainer

Dear Friend:

It's difficult to find professional, curriculum-based assembly programs that fit into your budget, isn't it?

Top-notch assembly programs usually cost \$400 or more - a price that many Western New York schools simply can't afford.

To make the problem worse, time constraints often don't allow for programs that are merely entertaining. You need to bring in programs that are...

Entertaining and Educational

Finding an affordable program that meets these criteria is almost an impossible task.

Almost.

I can help. My name is Cris Johnson. I have worked with area schools in Western New York and Pennsylvania to bring them the most beneficial school assembly programs for years.

I'm well aware of the stifling budget restrictions that your school is forced to operate under.

Because of the lack of funds, quality assembly programs are almost a thing of the past.

But that's where I can help.

I can help you and your children get the kind of quality assembly program that you all deserve.

Here Are Three Good Reasons to Listen to Me...

One: I am a full-time professional children's educator, presenting programs that my Pennsylvania and New York school clients rave about, including Springville Elementary School, Oak Orchard School, South Davis Elementary School, Dunkirk School #3, Southside School, Dorothy B. Bunce School, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Our Lady of Victory School, and many many others.

Two: As you'll see, I have a truckload of letters and testimonials from schools and other satisfied clients, which attest to the quality of my programs. Any educator can talk about how great he or she is---it's more important to see what OTHER PEOPLE think of him.

Three: As I mentioned, many of my clients are school administrators such as yourself. Obviously with something as important as an assembly program, you want someone who has extensive experience in presenting programs to children

Here's How My Series of Assembly Programs Are Going to Benefit You and Your Students...

I offer several educational programs that have received rave reviews. My **Character-Building Series** is designed to provide your school with a curriculum-based series of important programs that will entertain students while teaching them important life lessons. While also effective as a series, each program is suitable as a stand-alone program.

- **"We Say No!"** - teaches students the dangers of drugs, why it's important to stay in school, and the benefits of a drug-free life.

Here's what school principals have to say about this program:

"...The 'drug free' and 'stay in school messages were incorporated in a very entertaining assembly. Great program! Enjoyable & educational!"

-Paul Ludwig, Interim Principal, North Collins Elementary

"Your program holds kids' attention, gets the message across, is fast-paced, and lots of fun! Excellent!"

-Barbara Partell, Principal, Dorothy B. Bunce Elementary

- **"I Love to Read!"** - Teaches kids why reading is important, how you can do anything if you're a good reader, and why it's important to take care of your books. For older groups (typically grades 3-5), dyslexia is discussed as well.

Here's what school officials have to say about this program:

"Cris did a wonderful job of using his magic to support our P.A.R.P. program. Outstanding and very easy to work with!"

-Scott Tellgren, Principal, Springville Elementary

“They loved it! Cris was very easy to work with! It was really fun and informative!”

-Colleen Puma, Teacher, Highland Elementary

- **“Yes I Can!”** - My popular self-esteem magic show encourages kids to recognize the fact that it’s who you are on the INSIDE that matters, why you should never give up, and the value of teamwork and getting along with others.

Here’s what school officials have to say about this program:

“The message was GREAT! The kids were really attentive! He really related our ‘kindness’ theme to his show. Excellent!”

-Nicole Goyette, Teacher, Oak Orchard Elementary

“His presentation was wonderful! I like how he presented magic with a message! Outstanding!”

-Donna Gawlik, Teacher, St. Vincent De Paul School

- **“No Bullies Allowed!”** - My most topical program teaches students the value of respecting others for whom they are, stressing the fact that we are all special inside. The program also gives some strategies for dealing with bullies, including the fact that it’s okay to approach teachers and adults for help.

Here’s what school officials have to say about this program:

“Excellent! Cris was very accommodating. He incorporated our themes into his show. His management was very good as we had a large crowd (over 450).”

-David Lovering, Principal, South Davis Elementary

“Outstanding! Excellent messages about working together, including everyone, that we’re all different!”

-Ms. Oliverio, Teacher, Cuba Elementary School

- **“Magic & Animal Antics Fun!”** - Of course, I also present fun magic-filled programs for holiday, carnival, or end-of-the year celebrations!

Here’s what other school officials have to say about this program:

“PHENOMENAL!”

-Sharon Jester, Teacher, Our Lady of Victory School

A File Drawer Full of School Testimonials Prove My Programs Are of The Highest Quality

People sometimes ask me, “Cris, aren’t some of those testimonials made up?” Nope. Why would I make them up when I have a file drawer literally full of signed,

honest-to-goodness testimonial letters and evaluation forms? Besides that, it's considered fraud if you make up testimonials and you go to jail for it!

Here's What You Need to Know About ALL Of My Programs...

The lessons are presented in fun ways that the kids can relate to and participate in. The programs incorporate all of these different features:

- ☞ **The children are in control for the entire program.**
- ☞ CLEAN humor keeps kids laughing with absolutely NO off-color or inappropriate material!
- ☞ **Optional "FAST Set-Up" show makes sure the program doesn't disrupt your day**
- ☞ Professional, clean-cut presenter with over 13 years of professional experience
- ☞ **Teachers' support & class discussion materials and fliers for every program**
- ☞ Ultra-easy for you: we need NO sound equipment...we bring it all!
- ☞ **Flexible, easy programs can be presented virtually whenever and wherever you like**
- ☞ Loads of audience participation!
- ☞ *Plus A LOT more!*

What Kind of Magic Do You Use to Illustrate Your Concepts?

Although each program is different, this will give you some idea of what you'll see:

- Plenty of VISUAL magic EVERYONE can see!
- **A beautiful "Snowstorm" showers the stage with confetti!**
- A "Floating Puppet" dashes out to the audience, making kids laugh like crazy!
- **Set to music, a volunteer helps with a funny trick with tissue paper and dancing!**
- A magic "Dancing Hanky" dances 6 feet behind the presenter, causing kids to howl with laughter!
- **A beautiful sparkling backdrop, music, and TONS of join-in fun keep these high-energy programs moving!**
- And a LOT more!

Warning: Do NOT Bring in Any Educator That Does Not Meet These Three Criteria...

The sad fact is that there are many assembly programs that aren't very good. They're a waste of your time, your children's time, and your teachers' time. I thought it'd be helpful if I presented a few criteria that'll help you choose assembly programs that would be worth your while.

1. **Only bring in a presenter who is a full time professional and actually makes a living as an assembly presenter.**

As I mentioned, I have been a professional entertainer and speaker for over ten years and train other entertainers. Many of the people doing assembly programs are part-timers or amateurs just trying to make some extra money.

2. ***Only bring in a presenter who has LOTS of testimonials from other elementary schools and larger children's programs.***

Anyone can come up with two or three testimonials. You want to make sure they have an abundance of testimonials. Some people will try to deceive you with testimonials from birthday parties and other small events. Don't fall for it! You want to make sure the person you're hiring is an expert at assembly programs and other large events.

3. ***Do NOT bring in any program that doesn't offer you a complete money-back guarantee.***

This is the "ultimate test" of whether someone has a strong conviction about what they're offering or if they're just full of hot air. If a performer really believes in the quality of their program, they shouldn't hesitate to guarantee it.

Speaking of guarantee, here's my exclusive:

Better Than Money - Back Guarantee

My guarantee is simple and straightforward. If you're not completely satisfied that my program entertained the children and taught them important life-lessons, you get 100% of your money back PLUS I WILL DONATE \$100.00 TO YOUR PTA just for wasting your time.

That's right. ***You get the complete fee refunded PLUS \$100.00 dollars!***

I can't be fairer than that, can I? There's no risk for your school whatsoever. But here's the truth:

If you read all the testimonials I've given you, you know that ***you don't have anything to worry about.*** You won't be disappointed. You won't want your money back.

In fact, out of the hundreds of programs I've done, no one has ever requested their money back!

The point is you will be thrilled with the program - guaranteed.

Here Are the Important Details You've Been Waiting For...

Each program is 40-45 minutes long. I've created two versions of each program, one appropriate for grades K-2 or K-3, and the other geared for grades 3-5 or 4-6.

For maximum effectiveness, it's best to separate the grade levels and have no more than 400 people per assembly.

"Wow, This Sounds GREAT, Cris! How Much Are They?"

The investment for the first assembly is just \$600. A second assembly, held on the same day, is only \$125. We also have a "BIG SHOW" option with even BIGGER magic the kids LOVE, including these additional effects (depending on which program):

- We FLOAT a child in the air! (Safe & fun!)
- LIVE birds appear from thin air!
- The birds magically change into a live ferret!
- Other BIG effects kids LOVE!
- State-of-the-art sound system covers HUNDREDS of students easily!

Any program can be upgraded to a "BIG SHOW" for only \$50 more for 2 back-to-back assemblies, or \$25 for one assembly.

But I Have Big Savings for You!

If you call before October 1, 2004 to schedule a program for anytime during the '04/'05 school year, you can get two "FAST Set-Up" back-to-back assembly programs for just \$675 or \$825 for the Big Show Option! **You save \$50.00 off the regular price of \$725 for two Fast-Set-Up programs or \$875 for two back-to-back "Big Show" programs!**

Obviously, my schedule for the year will fill up quickly once everyone gets this letter. Keep in mind it's going to all the public and private elementary schools in Niagara, Erie, Genesee, Wyoming, Chautauqua, and surrounding counties.

**It's Simple to Bring This Program to Your School...
IF YOU ACT NOW!!**

To make sure you get the date and time you want while saving money, I urge you to pick up the phone and call me now at (716) 283-1373, BEFORE October 1, 2004. Please call me right away so you don't miss this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Cris Johnson, The Educational Assembly Entertainer

P.S. Remember to call before October 1, 2004 to book your assembly program for anytime and save an additional \$50.00 off two back-to-back assemblies.

P.S.#2: Don't forget to ask about my other programs, such as my Fundraising program...which costs the school NOTHING!



DEAN KASSAS MAGIC OF EDUCATION

Cris Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: johnsoncsm@netnet.com

Dear Friend:

I'll make this fast.

My name is Cris Johnson and I'm writing to let you know of the motivational assembly programs that I offer to schools in your area. I currently offer four programs that other schools in your area have found extremely beneficial. They include:

No Bullies Allowed! – A program that encourages students to respect the rights and feelings of others. It also teaches three simple techniques to cope with bullies.

I Love to Read! – A funny, interactive program that encourages kids to read by showing how valuable reading can be, both for fun and for careers later in life.

We Say No! – A fun and informative anti-drug show that teaches kids about some of the dangers of drugs, why school is so important, and how they can have a great life by saying **NO to DRUGS**

Yes I Can! – My ultra-popular self-esteem program encourages children to feel good about themselves, never give up if they're having problems, and encourages teamwork.

I've developed different versions of each program for younger grades such as K-3, older grades such as 4-6, or special programs for the entire school, and I guarantee the students will be 100% under control regardless of group size. The programs use audience interaction, magic, music, squeaky clean humor, and visual, fun props and optional live animals to encourage your students to have **good character, use good judgment, and respect the rights and feelings of others.**

Don't forget about my "**Better Than Money Back Guarantee:**" If you're not completely satisfied that my program entertained the children and reinforced important life lessons, you get 100% of your money back plus I'll donate \$100 to your PTA/PTO.

I understand that you're busy. Maybe you didn't get a chance to read my first letter. No problem. Just give me a call at **(716) 283-1373** and we can talk about it in more detail. There's NO obligation—I'll just answer any questions you may have to help you make a decision.

Sincerely,

Cris Johnson

P.S. Response to my first letter has been unbelievable so my calendar IS filling up quickly. Why not call me right now while it's still fresh in your mind? Call **(716) 283-1373 right away.**

P.S. #2: What past clients have to say about my programs is far more important than anything I could tell you. Check out the other side of this letter to see what a recent school client had to say!

SCHOOLS-Anti-Bullying Show

“No Bullies Allowed!” is a program perfect for kicking off a ‘No Put downs’ campaign, or any kind of program schools are using to encourage kindness, respect, reduce bullying, and reduce name calling. This program was developed with the assistance of a school in Orchard Park, NY.

This program motivates children with the important point of treating each other with respect and how respect is something you have to give in order to receive, and how we’re all important people inside, no matter what our individual strengths and likes/dislikes are. Three non-violent techniques for dealing with bullying are also given for students experiencing problems.

Any humor used in the program is squeaky-clean. There’s no fire or anything dangerous in my programs. For your piece of mind, though, I am fully insured. Also, with the program, you receive a color flier, customized with the dates of your programs, to duplicate and hang up through out the school.

With the quality & experience of my programs, the students will also be 100% under control at all times, regardless of the size of the group. They’ll be eager to pay attention to the clean humor, amazing magic, music, and audience participations that I use to enhance the program’s concepts and as a result will hang on every word and important idea.

For maximum effectiveness, I’ve also developed 2 versions of this program: one for younger grades on their comprehension level and one version for older grades with more sophisticated segments. In fact, in the older students’ assembly, I really drive home the idea that it’s up to the older students to set an example for the younger kids...and how when the older 5th & 6th graders move on to junior high and senior high school, they will then be the younger kids...and would they want to be laughed at or pushed around? The children really appreciate the differences, but of course one assembly can also be presented to all grades, balanced for the different ages.

Each program also comes with support materials to use after the program. It’s my belief that while assemblies are very valuable, for them to have MAXIMUM impact, it’s good to have follow-up materials. I provide a few pages of classroom discussion and project ideas for teachers to consider. These can be used to “extend the life” of the assembly program long after I’m gone, to help ensure that the program has lasting positive effects.

With my programs, you have two different program options. For the first option, the “Fast Set-Up” Option, the program consists of a 40–45-minute motivational program featuring audience participation, funny and amazing magic, music to enhance certain routines, clean non-offensive comedy to keep kids laughing while they learn, and more. The show sets up FAST, about 15 minutes once I get my equipment inside the building, meaning minimal disruption of your day & schedule.

Since it’s an interactive show, I use a lot of volunteers, and ALL the kids get to help out in some way, which is important because kids don’t like to just sit and watch. They like to be involved. The kids are encouraged to react in CONTROLLED ways that I set up at the beginning of the program and monitor through out the program.

The show is very professional looking, with a large glittering silver 12’ backdrop, music to enhance the event, and a wide variety of colorful tables, props, and effects to give the show a professional, enjoyable look and feel. Any magic used is clearly visible for several hundred kids to easily see and enjoy. Also, anything used in the program is DIRECTLY tied into the lessons—magic and humor isn’t done just for the sake of fun. It all has a point to it.

Here’s a small sample of what to expect: a routine with a magic book which a student from the audience uses to shoot word cards printed with different put downs and

different complimentary words across the stage for a magical message about the necessity of respect! One segment features 10 students on stage holding hands—with different colored gloves, it features an amazing feat of magic, but most importantly, it features a powerful message of diversity and how there's a place in the world for everyone to fit in. I also feature a "Mind Reading" segment for the older groups—in this, a teacher actually reads the mind of a student—it's funny, entertaining, and focuses on the idea that it's okay to turn to the school's administrators...we all think alike in many ways and adults are here to help. In addition to other segments, the appearance of an indoor "Snowstorm" emphasizes the idea that the concepts in the program are worth spreading beyond the school.

This ending is guaranteed to leave them talking for days afterwards. Remember, everything ties into the lessons.

While everything I just described is visible and appropriate for hundreds of people, for larger groups some schools want our "BIG SHOW" option, where I can bring larger effects that will keep students excited and even more involved and attentive.

In the "BIG SHOW" option, I also make LIVE birds magically appear from thin air, and at the end I transform the birds into a live ferret! The kids really do remember this for weeks and months, making it even easier to refer back to the assembly when following up, along with other larger effects to really drive home the important ideas in this program.

It does take a bit longer, about 30 minutes or so, to set-up a "Big Show" option once I get all of my equipment inside.

I also provide my own PA system with wireless headset microphone so everyone can hear everything clearly. Bringing my own sound system means that there's NOTHING the school has to provide me other than access to one power outlet!

I'm a children's motivational specialist, so I really know how to interact with everyone, and I make sure the entire program is family-friendly, with CLEAN humor that won't offend anyone. I've performed for several schools in New York and Pennsylvania over the course of the last 10 years, so I know EXACTLY how to perform for large school groups.

The entire program is SO EASY for you. I don't need any tables or sound equipment of any kind from you, all you need to do is sit back, relax, and take all the credit!

The "Fast Set-Up" Package is available for \$525 for one assemble and \$695 for 2 shows. For less than 100 people, one assembly is available for \$175.

The "BIG SHOW" option is available for only \$650 for one show and \$825 for two programs.

With every program I offer, I have an unconditional better-than-money-back guarantee: If you're unhappy with the program for any reason, not only do you get the program free, but I also donate \$100 to your PTA/PTO fund! Don't worry, though, in 14 years, no one has ever taken me on my guarantee!

You're getting a program that's clean with NO inappropriate or offensive material, no sound system worries as we provide our own, a clean-cut, professional appearance, teacher classroom support materials, a colorful flier you can duplicate and hang around the school, 14 years of professional experience with testimonials from happy school clients to back up everything I've said and is extremely easy to work with. I know I gave you a lot of information, so do you have any questions for me?

SCHOOLS-Self-Esteem Show

“Yes We Can!” is a program perfect for kicking off a ‘No Put downs’ campaign, or any kind of program schools are using to encourage kindness and respect or reduce name calling, and motivating kids not to give up.

This program motivates children with the important point of treating each other with respect and how respect is something you have to give in order to receive, and how we’re all important people inside, no matter what our individual strengths and likes/dislikes are. Powerful visual techniques, magic, and humor are used to explain why giving up is not a good option!

Any humor used in the program is squeaky-clean. There’s no fire or anything dangerous in my programs. For your piece of mind, though, I am fully insured. Also, with the program, you receive a color flier, customized with the dates of your programs, to duplicate and hang up through out the school.

With the quality & experience of my programs, the students will also be 100% under control at all times, regardless of the size of the group. They’ll be eager to pay attention to the clean humor, amazing magic, music, and audience participations that I use to enhance the program’s concepts and as a result will hang on every word and important idea.

For maximum effectiveness, I’ve also developed 2 versions of this program: one for younger grades on their comprehension level and one version for older grades with more sophisticated segments. In fact, in the older students’ assembly, I really drive home the idea that it’s up to the older students to set an example for the younger kids...and how when the older 5th & 6th graders move on to junior high and senior high school, they will then be the younger kids...and would they want to be picked on? The children really appreciate the differences, but of course one assembly can also be presented to all grades, balanced for the different ages.

Each program also comes with support materials to use after the program. It’s my belief that while assemblies are very valuable, for them to have MAXIMUM impact, it’s good to have follow-up materials. I provide a few pages of classroom discussion and project ideas for teachers to consider. These can be used to “extend the life” of the assembly program long after I’m gone, to help ensure that the program has lasting positive effects.

With my programs, you have two different program options. For the first option, the “Fast Set-Up” Option, the program consists of a 40–45-minute motivational program featuring audience participation, funny and amazing magic, music to enhance certain routines, clean non-offensive comedy to keep kids laughing while they learn, and more. The show sets up FAST, about 15 minutes once I get my equipment inside the building, meaning minimal disruption of your day & schedule.

Since it’s an interactive show, I use a lot of volunteers, and ALL the kids get to help out in some way, which is important because kids don’t like to just sit and watch...they like to be involved. The kids are encouraged to react in CONTROLLED ways that I set up at the beginning of the program and monitor through out the program.

The show is very professional looking, with a large glittering silver 12’ backdrop, music to enhance the event, and a wide variety of colorful tables, props, and effects to give the show a professional, enjoyable look and feel. Any magic used is clearly visible for several hundred kids to easily see and enjoy. Also, anything used in the program is DIRECTLY tied into the lessons—magic and humor isn’t done just for the sake of fun. It all has a point to it.

Here's a small sample of what to expect: a routine with a magic book which a student from the audience uses to shoot word cards printed with different put downs and different complimentary words across the stage for a magical message about the necessity of respect! One segment features 10 students on stage holding hands—with different colored gloves, it features an amazing feat of magic, but most importantly, it features a powerful message of diversity and how there's a place in the world for everyone to fit in. I also feature a "Mind Reading" segment for the older groups—in this, students actually read MY mind in an important lesson about one word they need to keep in mind when talking to other people. In addition to other segments, the appearance of an indoor "Snowstorm" emphasizes the idea that the concepts in the program are worth spreading beyond the school.

This ending is guaranteed to leave them talking for days afterwards. Remember, everything ties into the lessons.

While everything I just described is visible and appropriate for hundreds of people, for larger groups some schools want our "BIG SHOW" option, where I can bring larger effects that will keep students excited and even more involved and attentive.

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It does take a bit longer, about 30 minutes or so, to set-up a "Big Show" option once I get all of my equipment inside.

I also provide my own PA system with wireless headset microphone so everyone can hear everything clearly. Bringing my own sound system means that there's NOTHING the school has to provide me other than access to one power outlet!

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The "Fast Set-Up" Package is available for \$525 for one assemble and \$695 for 2 shows. For less than 100 people, one assembly is available for \$175.

The "BIG SHOW" option is available for only \$650 for one show and \$825 for two programs.

As an added incentive, I also have my Piggy-Back Refer-A-Friend Program—once we settle on a date, if you refer another school in your area to book my program on the same day, BOTH schools will save \$50 off of two back-to-back programs or \$25 off of one program. However, if you refer any other school to book any other time, I'll still give both schools a \$25 savings on whatever programs selected.

With every program I offer, I have an unconditional better-than-money-back guarantee: If you're unhappy with the program for any reason, not only do you get the program free, but I also donate \$100 to your PTA/PTO fund! Don't worry, though, in 14 years, no one has ever taken me on my guarantee!

You're getting a program that's clean with NO inappropriate or offensive material, no sound system worries as we provide our own, a clean-cut, professional appearance,

teacher classroom support materials, a colorful flier you can duplicate and hang around the school, 14 years of professional experience with testimonials from happy school clients to back up everything I've said and is extremely easy to work with. I know I gave you a lot of information, so do you have any questions for me?

SCHOOLS-Anti-Drug Show

“Drug Free, That’s Me!” is a program perfect for kicking off “Red Ribbon Month” or any kind of program schools are using to encourage students to say ‘no.’

This program helps motivate children to say no to drugs by showing them how drugs can hurt you, why it’s important to stay in school, and how you can have a GREAT life by saying ‘no’ to drugs. Powerful visual techniques, magic, and humor are used to explain why your life is so much better if you’re clean.

Any humor used in the program is squeaky-clean. There’s no fire or anything dangerous in my programs. For your piece of mind, though, I am fully insured. Also, with the program, you receive a color flier, customized with the dates of your programs, to duplicate and hang up through out the school.

With the quality & experience of my programs, the students will also be 100% under control at all times, regardless of the size of the group. They’ll be eager to pay attention to the clean humor, amazing magic, music, and audience participations that I use to enhance the program’s concepts and as a result will hang on every word and important idea.

For maximum effectiveness, I’ve also developed 2 versions of this program: one for younger grades on their comprehension level and one version for older grades with more sophisticated segments. In fact, in the older students’ assembly, I really drive home the idea that there are no ‘safer’ drugs as some pushers try to say. The younger children’s assembly stresses the fun in life you can have without drugs and the older students’ assembly focuses more on the harmful effects of drugs. The children really appreciate the differences, but of course one assembly can also be presented to all grades, balanced for the different ages.

Each program also comes with support materials to use after the program. It’s my belief that while assemblies are very valuable, for them to have MAXIMUM impact, it’s good to have follow-up materials. I provide a few pages of classroom discussion and project ideas for teachers to consider. These can be used to “extend the life” of the assembly program long after I’m gone, to help ensure that the program has lasting positive effects.

With my programs, you have two different program options. For the first option, the “Fast Set-Up” Option, the program consists of a 40–45-minute motivational program featuring audience participation, funny and amazing magic, music to enhance certain routines, clean non-offensive comedy to keep kids laughing while they learn, and more. The show sets up FAST, about 15 minutes once I get my equipment inside the building, meaning minimal disruption of your day & schedule.

Since it’s an interactive show, I use a lot of volunteers, and ALL the kids get to help out in some way, which is important because kids don’t like to just sit and watch. They like to be involved. The kids are encouraged to react in CONTROLLED ways that I set up at the beginning of the program and monitor through out the program.

The show is very professional looking, with a large glittering silver 12’ backdrop, music to enhance the event, and a wide variety of colorful tables, props, and effects to give the show a professional, enjoyable look and feel. Any magic used is clearly visible for several hundred kids to easily see and enjoy. Also, anything used in the program is DIRECTLY tied into the lessons—magic and humor isn’t done just for the sake of fun. It all has a point to it.

Here’s a small sample of what to expect: Addiction is covered with a magic effect with alcohol bottles that seem to multiply on their own, ending with 9 bottles appearing. I constantly say during the piece that I only wanted ONE bottle for the trick, but I wound up with a lot more, and then I explain addiction. Another segment features a funny effect with a student pulling a 50-ft colorful streamer out of my mouth. I encourage the students to laugh

and say how silly it is to have something like that in you...and then I talk about how silly it is to put things in you that don't belong there and relate it to drugs. I also feature a "Mind Reading" segment for the older groups—in this, a student actually performs an amazing mind reading effect with the Mona Lisa painting and it all ties into school being the last piece of a puzzle if you want to have a fun, successful life. In addition to other segments, the appearance of an indoor "Snowstorm" emphasizes the idea that the concepts in the program are worth spreading beyond the school.

This ending is guaranteed to leave them talking for days afterwards. Remember, everything ties into the lessons.

While everything I just described is visible and appropriate for hundreds of people, for larger groups some schools want our "BIG SHOW" option, where I can bring larger effects that will keep students excited and even more involved and attentive.

In the "BIG SHOW" option, I also make LIVE birds magically appear from thin air, and at the end I float one of the students in the air! The kids really do remember this for weeks and months, making it even easier to refer back to the assembly when following up, along with other larger effects to really drive home the important ideas in this program.

It does take a bit longer, about 30 minutes or so, to set-up a "Big Show" option once I get all of my equipment inside.

I also provide my own PA system with wireless headset microphone so everyone can hear everything clearly. Bringing my own sound system means that there's NOTHING the school has to provide me other than access to one power outlet!

I'm a children's motivational specialist, so I really know how to interact with everyone, and I make sure the entire program is family-friendly, with CLEAN humor that won't offend anyone. I've performed for several schools in New York and Pennsylvania over the course of the last 10 years, so I know EXACTLY how to perform for large school groups.

The entire program is SO EASY for you—I don't need any tables or sound equipment of any kind from you, all you need to do is sit back, relax, and take all the credit!

The "Fast Set-Up" Package is available for \$525 for one assemble and \$695 for 2 shows. For less than 100 people, one assembly is available for \$175.

The "BIG SHOW" option is available for only \$650 for one show and \$825 for two programs.

As an added incentive, I also have my Piggy-Back Refer-A-Friend Program—once we settle on a date, if you refer another school in your area to book my program on the same day, BOTH schools will save \$50 off of two back-to-back programs or \$25 off of one program. However, if you refer any other school to book any other time, I'll still give both schools a \$25 savings on whatever programs selected.

With every program I offer, I have an unconditional better-than-money-back guarantee: If you're unhappy with the program for any reason, not only do you get the program free, but I also donate \$100 to your PTA/PTO fund! Don't worry, though, in 14 years, no one has ever taken me on my guarantee!

You're getting a program that's clean with NO inappropriate or offensive material, no sound system worries as we provide our own, a clean-cut, professional appearance, teacher classroom support materials, a colorful flier you can duplicate and hang around the school, 14 years of professional experience with testimonials from happy school clients to back up everything I've said and is extremely easy to work with. I know I gave you a lot of information, so do you have any questions for me?

Phantasms Magic Productions SCHOOL Info Sheet
Customer Info.

School Name: _____ Show Date: _____

Contact Name _____ Phone # () _____

Date Booked _____ Show Time _____ **Number** of Guests _____

Approx. Age of Guests _____ Mailing Address _____

Deposit amount \$ _____ Date Deposit was Received _____

Total Amount Due \$ _____ How Did They Hear of Us? _____

Show information

Type of Event _____ Type of Performance:

___ No Bullies Allowed

___ Stage show

___ We Say No

___ Walk around/ Strolling

___ I Love to Read

___ Both

___ Yes I Can

___ Magic & Animal Antics

Assembly Package Info.

___ Fundraiser

___ Magic Classes

___ Big Show

___ Fast Set Up

___ Indoor ___ Outdoor

___ One Show

___ Two Shows

Total Number of Books Needed: _____

Stage Show Special Effects

___ Snowstorm

___ Bird Cage

___ Dancing Hank

___ Levitation

___ K.A. Pred.

___ Other _____

___ Animals

___ Guillotine

Special Notes (i.e.: no animals, no music, etc.)



PHANTASMS MAGIC PRODUCTIONS

Cris Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: phantasmsmagic@bellsouth.com

Dear Ms. Hedreen:

I want to thank you for choosing my services for your upcoming school event. My assembly programs of funny magic, live animals, and join-in fun are guaranteed to make events unforgettable, successful, and fun!

Other schools who have utilized my services include Springville High School, East Amherst Middle School, Our Lady of Victory School, North Collins Central School, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School, Southside School, Dorothy B. Bunce School, and many other schools and companies.

I look forward to working with *you* and making *your* event the most fun ever!

Enclosed is the performance agreement we talked about. Please look it over carefully and make sure I got everything right! I've also included a flier you can duplicate and hang around the school for each event. **Please note the included "support materials" for teachers for after the programs. I know everyone will find them helpful!!**

Please make sure the check is made out to **Phantasms Magic Productions on the day of the event.**

There's no deposit to worry about—simply sign one copy of the agreement and return it to this address:

Cris Johnson
PO Box 4004
Niagara Falls, NY 14304

If you have any questions, please call anytime!

Sincerely,

Cris Johnson



PHANTASMS MAGIC PRODUCTIONS

Cris Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: phantasmsmagic@tdi.net

Performance Agreement

Thank you for choosing Phantasms Magic Productions for your assembly program needs. Below you'll see the relevant information regarding your upcoming event. Please double-check all of the details to make sure both parties (from here on referred to as the Client and the Performer) are expecting the same times, prices, dates, etc.

Any and all payments by check or money order should be made out to
PHANTASMS MAGIC PRODUCTIONS.

Please send one copy of this agreement to: **Cris Johnson, PO Box 4004, Niagara Falls, NY 14304.** The agreed-upon balance is due at the event before the program starts.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please be aware that any deposits are non-refundable in the event of cancellation of events due to weather, changes in Clients' schedule, or any other occurrences out of the control of the Performer.

In the extremely unlikely event that that the Performer must cancel, any and all monies will be promptly refunded.

The Client, after reading this agreement, shall understand that the Performer requires the following at the performance site: (1) between 20-45 minutes ***private set-up time***; (2) Access to an outlet for music/special effects; (3) Adequate space for the performance to be conducted in an enjoyable manner for the guests

The Performer, understanding the nature of live events, agrees to be flexible on the agreed start time of the performance by fifteen minutes. Due to the heavy nature of the Performer's show schedule, we must insist that the Client observe this practice.

Phantasms Magic Productions provides the area's *most unique & enjoyable* assembly programs and guarantees your event will be unforgettable!

Please sign one copy and return it to the address above. Please keep the other copy for your records.

Client Name: **Forest Elementary** *Contact:* **Jeanne Valley**

Date of Event: **June 10, 2005,** *Time of Event:* **9:05-1:25**

Location of Event: **250 North Forest Rd., Williamsville, NY 14221**

Type of Performance: **end of the year event** *Length:* **30 minutes each**

Total Amount: \$ 625 *Deposit Amount:* \$ 0 *Agreed-Upon Balance:* \$ 625

Client Signature: _____

What Other Western New York School Principals Have to Say About Cris Johnson's Motivational Assembly Programs

"I do not hesitate to recommend "Phantasms Magic" to any school group."

"...The 'drug free' and 'stay in school' messages were incorporated in a very entertaining 40-minute assembly. I do not hesitate to recommend "Phantasms Magic & Entertainment" to any school group."

*Paul J. Ludwig, Interim Elementary Principal
North Collins Central School, North Collins, NY*

"Excellent!"

"Your program holds kids' attention, gets the message across, is fast-paced, and lots of fun! Excellent!"

*Barbara Partell, Principal
Dorothy B. Bunce Elementary School, Pavillion, NY*

"Cris was very easy to work with!"

"Excellent! Cris was very easy to work with and the kids were very involved!"

*Cathy Joynt, Principal
Oak Orchard Elementary School, Medina, NY*

"...wonderful job..."

"Cris did a wonderful job of using his performance magic to support our P.A.R.P. theme...He was very easy to work with...Outstanding!"

*Scott Tellgren, Principal
Springville Elementary, Springville, NY*

"Very Professional!"

"(For the fundraiser program) Very good marketing package! Easy to work with, organized and well prepared, great tricks, very professional!"

*John Warren, Principal
Dunkirk School #3, Dunkirk, NY*

"Outstanding!"

"Cris was very accommodating. He incorporated our themes into his show. His management was very good as we had a large crowd (over 450). Outstanding!"

*David Lovering, Principal
South Davis Elementary, Orchard Park, NY*

"Excellent!"

"The drug information was given to students in everyday examples and could be easily understood. Excellent! "

*Sharon Gutowski, Assistant Principal
St. Amelia School, Tonawanda, NY*

"Outstanding!"

"Excellent program! Cris was very easy to work with! Outstanding!"

*Kathy Moser, Principal
Northern Chautauqua Catholic School, Dunkirk, NY*



ANTI-BULLYING MAGIC ILLUSTRATIONS

Cris Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: johninfo@msmagick.com

“No Bullies Allowed!” Teacher Support Materials

Dear Teachers:

I’ve put together this small packet of materials to help maximize the impact of my upcoming assembly presentation. It’s my belief that while any quality assembly program can be effective, it needs some form of reinforcement, discussion, etc., in order to have a lasting impact.

This program was developed with the assistance of an area elementary school. The techniques for dealing with bullies and concepts were provided by that school and were not something I just thought up. That being said, being a presenter with a magic background, it probably isn’t a great leap of the imagination to realize I was picked on quite a bit as a student, and completely understand how this topic is so important in schools today.

With my Anti-Bullying program I really want to convey to children the idea that we’re ALL special. My idea is that if this is a school-wide assembly event then if there’s a bullying problem, bullies will be in the audience! Therefore, making an effort to teach kids the idea that we are ALL important & special regardless of our income level, ethnic background, whatever, then maybe the bullies out there will begin to understand the idea that just because someone is “different” doesn’t make them a suitable “target.”

With that in mind, I’ve come up with a few discussion/small project ideas for after the program:

An overview of some ideas to maximize the impact of “No Bullies Allowed!”

- I. During the program, I use magic to illustrate the idea that we should all learn to judge people not from the outside, but from the inside. With “fads” and “cool” clothes, and the “right” shoes bombarding our kids every day, there’s never been a more important time to try to instill the idea into kids that these things *don’t matter*. Of course, with as inquisitive as kids are, they want to know why:
 - A) Open the matter up for discussion—some kids’ families don’t have money so it’s not fair to judge them if they don’t have \$100 shoes.
 - B) It’s also wrong to force everyone to like the same things or risk being ostracized.

These and other important ideas can be used as discussion points.

2. During the show, I convey the idea that we are ALL special inside, no matter what our interests or skills may be. We're each also different and unique from every other person, and that's a GOOD thing. An exercise that we did when I was in 6th grade – I'll never forget this, as it was so unique – was to break students up into pairs and we had to give our partner a compliment to the entire class. It really made us think, especially if we didn't know the person that well! I'll never forget it because as a resident "different" kid, I was terrified... would I actually GET a compliment? I did, though. Try this exercise with your class. Try to separate peer groups. Set your own parameters on what is and isn't an acceptable answer.

3. I also stress the fact that a bully isn't to be feared. My thinking is that kids should NOT live in fear. It stunts social development, self-confidence, etc. Instead, I offer a possible explanation of why a bully acts as he or she acts. Regardless of the reason he or she acts the way he or she does, I think it's important that kids learn to deal with a bully, not to fear the bully. My theory (and I got picked on a LOT as a kid): It's sort of like dealing with a rattlesnake: you want to give it a wide berth, respect, whatever, but NOT fear. Fear paralyzes you and causes a host of other problems.

Start a discussion in class. Encourage the class to offer their own ideas why a bully acts that way – fear, frustration, bad influences, etc. The truth is, there is no one answer. The more possible answers kids have, the more they may be able to understand a problem without fear.

4. During the show, three overall techniques for dealing with bullies are discussed:
 - (1) Tell an adult about the bullying,
 - (2) Stick with a group of friends, or the "safety in numbers" idea and
 - (3) avoiding the bullyQuiz students to see if they can remember each of the lessons.

5. Ask students what their favorite parts of the show were. Nearly every student will be able to remember at least one "trick." That's fine, but then *they should each be asked what the "tie-in" to that trick was.* If not, ask other students for help, and keep the discussion going that way. It's an enjoyable way to "relive" the fun aspects of the program while driving home the important points we want the kids to remember.

6. Start a discussion about the different forms of bullying, such as name calling, physical violence, etc. The kids need to recognize that bullying takes different forms.

7. One of the last things I talk about is how important is that we spread the word! Tell kids to tell parents what they've learned. If the school has an **official anti-bullying policy**, make sure the kids are sent home with it. If the students at your

school have siblings at other schools pass on this information. Photocopy the flier enclosed with this material and pass it out!

Thank you for taking the time to reading this. I sincerely hope you & your students have as much fun watching my program and discussing it as I did putting it together and performing it for schools like yours!

Sincerely,

Cris Johnson



CRIST JOHNSON'S MAGIC OF DISCUSSIONS

Crist Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.cristjohnsoninfo.com

email: CristJohnson@tdfnet.com

“Yes I Can!” Teacher Support Materials

Dear Teachers:

I've put together this small packet of materials to help maximize the impact of my upcoming assembly presentation. It's my belief that while any quality assembly program can be effective, it needs some form of reinforcement, discussion, etc., in order to have a lasting impact.

With my Self-Esteem program I really want to convey to children the idea that we're ALL special. My idea is that we need to recognize and celebrate each person's unique abilities, personality traits, etc. Therefore, making an effort to teach kids the idea that we are ALL important & special regardless of our income level, ethnic background, whatever, then maybe kids out there will begin to understand the idea that just because someone is “different” doesn't make them a suitable “target.”

Kids also need to understand that having the healthiest self-esteem in the world will not prevent failure – it's inevitable. They need to know that it's important never to give up! Just because they failed once doesn't mean they'll fail the next time. **They need to have the BELIEF that they can and will succeed if they keep trying.** Quitting accomplishes nothing.

We also need to instill the idea that kids can ask for help – from teachers, their parents, etc. In today's world, certain tasks can seem like a world of a burden on kids. They need to recognize that their plight is not hopeless. They also need to realize the value of teamwork, that the saying “two heads are better than one” is true in many situations.

With that in mind, I've come up with a few discussion/small project ideas for after the program:

An overview of some ideas to maximize the impact of “Yes I Can!”

1. During the program, I use magic to illustrate the idea that we should all learn to judge people not from the outside, but from the inside. With “fads” and “cool” clothes, and the “right” shoes bombarding our kids every day in the media, there's never been a more important time to try to instill the idea into kids that these things *don't matter*. Of course, with as inquisitive as kids are, they want to know why:
 - A) Open the matter up for discussion—some kids' families don't have money so it's not fair to judge them if they don't have \$100 shoes.

- B) It's also wrong to force everyone to like the same things or risk being ostracized.
- C) Bring up the idea that in many cases, the items are unrealistically priced. What about those less fortunate?

These and other important ideas can be used as discussion points.

2. During the show, I convey the idea that we are ALL special inside, no matter what our interests or skills may be. We're each also different and unique from every other person, and that's a GOOD thing. An exercise that we did when I was in 6th grade – I'll never forget this, as it was so unique – was to break students up into pairs and we had to give our partner a compliment to the entire class. It really made us think, especially if we didn't know the person that well! I'll never forget it because as a resident "different" kid, I was terrified... would I actually GET a compliment? I did, though. Try this exercise with your class. Try to separate peer groups. Set your own parameters on what is and isn't an acceptable answer.
3. During the show, three "lessons" or themes are discussed:
 - a. It's not who we are on the outside, but who we are on the inside that counts.
 - b. Never give up, and
 - c. The value of teamwork & why it's okay to ask for helpQuiz students to see if they can remember each of the lessons.
4. Ask students what their favorite parts of the show were. Nearly every student will be able to remember at least one "trick." That's fine, but then *they should each be asked what the "tie-in" to that trick was.* If not, ask other students for help, and keep the discussion going that way. It's an enjoyable way to "relive" the fun aspects of the program while driving home the important points we want the kids to remember.
5. One of the last things I talk about is how important is that we spread the word! Tell kids to tell parents what they've learned. If the school has fliers and other hand-outs, make sure the kids are sent home with it. If the students at your school have siblings at other schools pass this information. Photocopy the flier enclosed with this material and pass it out!

Thank you for taking the time to reading this. I sincerely hope you & your students have as much fun watching my program and discussing it as I did putting it together and performing it for schools like yours!

Sincerely,

Cris Johnson



DEFINITIONS MAGIC OF ADDICTIONS

Cris Johnson

phone: (416) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: johninfo@smmccjck@tdi.net

“We Say No!” Teacher Support Materials

Dear Teachers:

I’ve put together this small packet of materials to help maximize the impact of my upcoming assembly presentation. It’s my belief that while any quality assembly program can be effective, it needs some form of reinforcement, discussion, etc., in order to have a lasting impact.

With my Anti-Drug program I really want to convey to children the idea that drugs can and will hurt you. With humor and fun, I convey the idea that it’s silly to put things into your body that don’t belong there. Addiction is covered, as well as the idea that when drugs destroy part of your brain, it’s gone...you don’t get it back.

Of course, every detail about the dangers of drugs can’t be conveyed in a 40-minute assembly. For that reason, one of the keys of the program stresses the importance of school, where students can learn the details of what we learn in the program.

We also need to communicate some of the benefits of a drug-free life and how a person’s options in life are literally limitless if they stay away from drugs.

With that in mind, I’ve come up with a few discussion/small project ideas for after the program:

An overview of some ideas to maximize the impact of “We Say No!”

1. During the program, I use magic to illustrate the idea that by staying in school we can learn or be anything. For an exercise, go around the classroom and ask each student what they want to do/be when they grow up. Have them each check out a book related to that subject and do a book report on it. Remember, it’s supposed to be fun, so make sure each student selects something he or she really enjoys.
2. During the show, three “lessons” or themes are discussed:
 - a. How drugs can hurt not just the person taking them but also those around him/her.
 - b. Why it’s important to stay in school, and
 - c. The benefits of a drug-free life.

Quiz students to see if they can remember each of the lessons.

3. Ask students what their favorite parts of the show were. Nearly every student will be able to remember at least one “trick.” That’s fine, but then *they should each be asked what the “tie-in” to that trick was.* If not, ask other students for help, and keep the discussion going that way. It’s an enjoyable way to “relive” the fun aspects of the program while driving home the important points we want the kids to remember.
4. One thing some drug-users & pushers do is come up with new and exciting-sounding “street names.” Have a discussion with older students about current street names. Encourage kids to talk about why they get their names...ostensibly to sound more ‘appealing’ and ‘cool,’ and then deal with the reality of the drugs. Here’s an idea: *Come up with realistic street names, based on they really do to you.* It could be fun!
5. An obvious topic of discussion is to go through different drugs and discuss their effects on you...*but expand upon it and discuss how the drugs affect your daily life.*

Thank you for taking the time to reading this. I sincerely hope you & your students have as much fun watching my program and discussing it as I did putting it together and performing it for schools like yours!

Sincerely,

Cris Johnson



PERFORMERS MAGIC OF EDUCATION

Cris Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: johninfo@smogjck@hotmail.com

Performance Evaluation

Your Name _____ Date _____ Event _____

Please check appropriate box for your event: ___ Other _____ ___ Fundraiser
 ___ "No Bullies Allowed" ___ "We Say No"
 ___ "I Love to Read" ___ "Yes I Can"

Thank you for taking the time to fill this out. Please read the question and then print the letter that most closely matches your response on the line next to the question. You are welcome to share additional thoughts on the bottom or back of this page. Thank you!

1. _____ **How would you rate the program?**
 A. Excellent B. Good C. Fair D. Below Average
2. _____ **In your opinion, did the program:**
 A. Enhance your event and make it successful B. Not enhance your event
3. _____ **What was your group's overall response to the presentation:**
 A. They loved it! B. They enjoyed it C. They did not enjoy it
4. _____ **Was your performer easy to work with?**
 A. Cris was very easy to work with! B. No
5. _____ **If the performer gave a message, please rate the quality of the content.**
 A. Outstanding! B. Good C. Fair D. Below average E. N/A

6. **If you were to talk to another school official who was considering using this assembly presenter for his/her event, what would you say about him and his program?**

Do you know of any company, group, or organization that could use this type of program for one of their functions? Please give us their names and we'll send them free, no obligation information. Thank you!

Name _____ Company/Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____



CHRIS JOHNSON MAGIC OF REDUCTIONS

Chris Johnson
phone: (716) 283-1373
website: www.chrisjohnsoninfo.com
email: chris@csmsmagick@tdfnet.com

Receipt For Services Rendered

School Name: _____

Contact Name: _____

Date of Program: _____

- Nature of Program:
- _____ "We Say No!"
 - _____ "I Love to Read!"
 - _____ "Yes, I Can!"-self-esteem show
 - _____ "No Bullies Allowed!"
 - _____ Open House
 - _____ Holiday Party
 - _____ PTA Adult Banquet
 - _____ "Family Fundraiser"
 - _____ OTHER _____

Total Investment: \$ _____

THANK YOU!

Ask about our new "Stress Reduction" Program for teachers!!



CRIS JOHNSON'S MAGIC PRODUCTIONS

Cris Johnson

phone: (716) 283-1373

website: www.crisjohnsoninfo.com

email: Cris@crisjohnsoninfo.com

May 19, 2004

Dear Principal Livingston:

Thank you very much for inviting me to present my *"Year-End Fun Magic Show"* to your school group. I had SUCH a great time! I hope my performance was fun and enjoyable for everyone and that your event was made more successful as a result.

I've added you to my mailing list, and you'll soon be receiving my monthly newsletter! It's loaded with games, movie reviews, and more!

I wanted to give you some quick "snippets" of my other programs in my **Character-Building Series**:

- ***"We Say No!"*** – An important program that teaches kids the dangers of drugs, why you shouldn't try drugs even one time, how to be a leader not a follower, and the benefits of a drug-free life.
- ***"No Bullies Allowed!"*** – A timely program designed to teach kids how we're ALL special people, why we should get along with others, and three safe, non-violent strategies for dealing with bullies.
- ***"Yes I Can!"*** – Our self-esteem program teaches kids how it's who we are on the INSIDE that counts, why you should never give up, and why it's important to get along/work well with others.
- ***"Spring Carnival Fun!"*** – Of course, some schools want to send the kids into summer vacation with a REALLY fun show!
- ***"Fundraiser Magic!"*** – This program has earned literally HUNDREDS of dollars in ONE night for schools in the Western New York & Pennsylvania area with almost no work...really!

All programs are available for different age groups and sizes. Please feel free to call for further details & testimonials from other satisfied clients about each of these programs.

I hope we can work together again in the future!

Thanks again!

Best,

Cris Johnson

Wrapping Up

Well, that's everything. I've given you absolutely everything that you'll need to start making money in the school market. Be sure to go over the other materials that came with this course, such as the actual transcripts of the programs that I present.

Before I close, I just want to add that unlike a lot of so-called marketing "experts," I really wanted to include important info on performing on stage, and some of it may not translate quite as well on the written page because we're talking about visual things here. If you have any questions about anything in this course, don't hesitate to contact me. I decided a while back that I wanted to be accessible to my customers without placing myself on a pedestal and charging ridiculous fees for consultation.

You've already invested in this course, so if you have any questions, you can contact me at: crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net. Thanks again.