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On With the Show

Before you consider performing a single effect for even one person, you must plan your routine. Otherwise you stand a good chance of rambling pointlessly to a weak conclusion. Worse than that, you will be overly concerned with "what comes next" and you'll miss all the opportunities for entertainment. Your performance becomes nothing more than a series of demonstrations — "For my next trick, I take this, do this, and look what happens." In this first section, you'll learn easy ways to avoid the common pitfalls associated with poor planning. You will also learn a powerful technique that allows you to structure your entire show, and every single effect within it, for maximum entertainment value.

■ A guy walks into a bar...

It's happened to most of us at one time or another. I know it has happened to me. You are telling a joke you heard somewhere, and you get to the punchline, but no one else finds it funny. Or maybe they just don't get it. So, you try to explain the joke, and even when they do get it, they still don't think it's as funny as you thought it was when you heard it. You didn't intentionally set out to tell a lousy joke. You remember laughing at it so much the first time, that you wanted to share it with others. Then, why did it bomb?

Timing — The elusive component to the art of interactive communication. Environment — The location and situation in which the interaction takes place, including the perceptions of all people involved. Delivery — The manner in which the information being processed is conveyed. These are the three components that can affect an audience's reaction to any performance. Remember these by their initial letters as TED. I like to equate them with another famous Ted — the character, Ted Baxter, on the old *Mary Tyler Moore Show*. If you recall, Ted Baxter had the worst timing and delivery of any newscaster in history. He was also completely unaware of situations and events occurring around him (his environment). In real life, his actions would have been disastrous, but in a sit-com, that is often the nature of humor. For the character Ted Baxter, bad timing was perfect, ignorance of environment was laughable, and poor delivery was priceless. But, be warned, try that outside of a character and you will quickly lose everyone's interest.

How can you use the elements of TED to improve not only your joke-telling skills, but also your magical performing skills? How do you control the factors which affect these elements? The answer is simple. All you need to do is plan ahead. Poor planning will often lead to disastrous results. Occasionally, things fall into place all by themselves with little help from you, but just don't bet on it. Definitely, do not stake your reputation as a magician on the chance occurrence of fortunate circumstances.

PLAN AHEAD



The reason a joke is funny the first time you hear it, is because it is not the first time for the person telling it. Even if that person never actually told anyone else the joke, they have thought about how it will sound, what they should say, and when it would be a good time to tell it. I've heard that professional comedians know that a joke will be funny the first time they tell it, because it *isn't* the first time.

Now it's time for you to do some advanced planning of your own, beginning with what you already know. You cannot make qualified decisions without an organized knowledge base. Therefore, I want you to make a list of every trick and/or routine you currently know or are actively attempting to learn. Do it now! If I seem overly adamant about this, that's because I am. Don't put off until tomorrow, what you should have done a long time ago. Use the space on the next page to list the name of each effect followed by a single letter grade of A, B, or C. A = an effect which you like to perform, that seems to be entertaining for an audience, and does not contain anything which you find difficult to perform flawlessly. B = an effect which you can perform adequately with a little more practice, or one which plays to a pretty good response for most audiences. C = an effect which you have yet to master, or one which audiences do not seem to like. If you do not take a few minutes right now to complete your list, then you are probably not serious about being a better performer.

A,B, or C	Name or brief description of the effect
A	CHINESE LINKING RINGS
A	COLOR MIXER
B	NEEDLE THRU ARM
C	DANCING CANE
B	COLORING BOOK
C	VANISHING BIRDCAGE
B	MOUTHCOIL PRODUCTION
A	TRAVEL
A	

Checking it Twice

Alright, I'll assume that you have finished your list, but if you haven't, it's not too late to go back and do it. The next few steps of the planning process rely on the information in your list. So, if you don't have one, some of this will be pointless. Also, it's a good idea to update your list from time to time (whenever you have made significant progress in learning new material), and keep a current list handy to remind yourself of all the effects you know. It will give a positive boost to your level of confidence as you watch your list grow. Some things, however are not necessary to list. Unless you work exclusively with coin magic, for example, it is not necessary to list every coin vanish and palm variation with which you are familiar.

Now that you have completed your list, you are probably wondering what to do with it. The next step is really very simple. You must have at least nine effects listed that you can perform, or will learn soon. That's only nine effects required, but if you have more (and most of us do) that's even better. If, for some reason, you have fewer than nine effects, I suggest that you acquire a book of magic tricks and routines — *any* magic book will do. Read it, and make a new list as you are reading through it. This, in my opinion, is the best way to discover a variety of new tricks that interest you.

Why would I choose the number "nine" for the amount of tricks you need? What is so important about that particular number that makes it better than any other? There must be a reason... and there is. The reason involves a method used by many writers of long, fictional novels to organize their storytelling in the most entertaining, and least confusing, way possible. The result of the process is known as a *triple-trilogy*. If you read extensively, then you may have encountered a novel, or a series of novels, in this form.

Typically, a triple-trilogy has three major story lines which are, in turn, divided into three parts each. This gives the writer nine parts (each with their own distinctive function) in which to frame the interaction of the characters. The structure of a particular novel might look like the grid shown here.

	<i>Intro.</i>	<i>Expo.</i>	<i>Conc.</i>
Novel 1 <i>Premise</i>	1	2	3
Novel 2 <i>Action</i>	4	5	6
Novel 3 <i>Climax</i>	7	8	9

As you can see by examining this grid, each of the three planned novels will begin with an introduction, then continue with the exposition, and finish with a conclusion. The function of an introduction in each case is to supply background information on important characters and set them up in a situation with a particular agenda of problems to solve or dilemmas to face. The exposition, or body of the work, concerns how each of the characters deal with their particular problems and interact with one another. The conclusion provides the solution to the majority of the problems and shows the results of all important actions taken during the exposition. This structured framework provides enough room to experiment freely while guiding the story along a meaningful course.

Examining the grid further reveals that each novel has its own distinct purpose in the set. **Novel 1** will contain plenty of useful information throughout to establish firmly the nature of the story. You will be treated to detailed explanations of characters and their background. All of the information supports the premise upon which the story is built. **Novel 2** will concentrate more on what is happening to previously introduced characters as they face new information. It may reference the first novel, but does so only to advance the action and keep the story moving. **Novel 3** brings all characters and situations together to create the most difficult challenge for them to face. This novel's climactic moments utilize everything which has preceded by tying together the loose ends, and accomplishing the objective of the story.

If you haven't figured it out yet, you will be organizing your magic show using a somewhat similar structure. The function of each of the nine parts of your show will be a bit different from those of the novel, but the purpose is much the same. You want your show to move along a meaningful course from beginning to end while providing an entertaining mix of actions. However, before you start to organize your show, I'd like to explain a little bit about the principle upon which all of this structure is based.

The principle I am about to share with you is undoubtedly the single most important principle of information exchange known to anyone. In the case of entertainers, the information to be transferred to an audience is entertainment. Comedians perform comedy routines, singers sing songs, magicians make magic. The amount of appreciation an audience has for the entertainment determines its *entertainment value*. You can increase the entertainment value of your magic by structuring the way you deliver it to your audience.

You must successfully set up the premise of your magical effect, carry out the necessary actions to lead the audience along the correct paths, and finally, reveal the unexpected climax that has resulted.

The principle you will be using is known as:

THE SERIES OF THREE

Series of Three Principle

If you have never heard of this principle, then you are in for a meaningful enlightenment of enormous proportions. If you are lucky enough to already be familiar with this principle, then you can probably attest to its usefulness. Either way, I hope to present the Series of Three principle in a way that will not only show you its basis in universal human psychology, but also make it easy to utilize and apply to increase your magic's entertainment value. If you'd like to do more reading on the subject of the Series of Three, check out Tom Ogden's book *Tri-Anything*. The following is my view of the psychological nature of this principle.

Everything tangible, and most things temporal, have a beginning, middle, and an end. Whether the item in question is a solid, liquid, or gas (even if it is a thought, emotion, or image), it starts at a certain point by defining itself, continues by existing within applicable guidelines, and ends when it is unnecessary or obsolete. Throughout time human consciousness has been affected by this rhythm of beginning, middle, end. The rhythm has become a part of many common actions. When a race starts, someone says, "Ready, set, go!" When two people lift a heavy box to move it, you'll hear, "Okay, now lift on three." If things don't seem to be going well, remember that "the third time's the charm."

In fact, you'll find examples of the things grouped in threes almost everywhere you look. Try children's stories and you'll get the "Three Little Pigs," "Three Blind Mice," and "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Actually, that last story contains so many groups of three that it is a nearly perfect example of using the principle to enhance the action. Goldilocks tries the first bowl of porridge which is too hot, then the second which is too cold, then the third which is "just right." The same for the three chairs and the three beds. Is it any coincidence that she tries three kinds of items? Also, the first part of the story involves the bears deciding to go for a walk while their porridge cools, the second part involves Goldilocks breaking and entering, and the *third* part has the bears discovering the missing porridge, broken chair, and sleeping intruder in another series of three. Just for fun, try finding the groups of three in the "Three Little Pigs" story; there are quite a few.

After a while, you will begin to notice things in your daily life which are grouped into a series of three — three meals a day (breakfast, lunch, dinner), three phases of a stoplight (stopping, waiting, continuing), three sections of daily activities (work, play, sleep), three medals in the Olympics (gold, silver, bronze). I'm sure you get the idea. Why do you think we don't award a fourth place copper medal? Because it just doesn't feel right. Things which are grouped in threes seem more natural and are more readily accepted than things which are not. By properly planning your effects as a series of three, people will feel more comfortable with your presentation and you will be more effective at successfully creating purposeful, entertaining magic.

Now, let's use your list of effects to plan a show that is based on the triple-trilogy structure. On the next page, you will find a form which you can copy and use to organize your show. There are three sections with three individual tricks (or routines) in each. Each one of these sections can stand alone as its own complete mini-show, just like each of the novels of a triple-trilogy can be read separately (although they work better as a set). If you need a shorter performance for any reason (like being one act on a variety showcase), select only one of the sections that is appropriate for the purpose. Each section of the full show performs a specific function intended to increase the entertainment value.

The first section functions as a "get-acquainted" time period to warm up the audience and break down any resistance they may have. Your main purpose should be getting them comfortable with you. You can use lighter, comedy material or serious manipulation depending upon your style, but mainly you should establish yourself. During this time, you also establish a connection with the audience and begin to read their reactions and learn about their responsiveness.

The second section is a good time to feature your versatility and skill. This is the point in the act where you can prove your worth as a magician and take control of the audience's emotions. If you use this time to convince them that you can do just about anything you want, then the rest of your show will be easy and your reputation as a professional performer will grow.

The third section is intended to leave a lasting impression and use your control over the audience's emotions to your advantage. This section features what you consider to be your strongest effect — your blockbuster. Also, you will strive to make people want to see you perform again by giving them some memorable images.

When you get a chance, go out and get a few copies of the form on the next page so you will always have a blank one to plan other shows. Follow the directions here to fill one out. You can see that the form is conveniently divided into three major sections with space for three effects in each section. There are some notes which suggest the kind of effect you may want to feature at each particular spot in your show. Since most magic routines can be presented in a wide variety of styles, you may wish to alter your performing style to fit the suggested functions during each of the nine phases. I have discovered that the following presentations seem to work well for most audiences.

Item 1 — The First Impression.

The first thing you do when you walk out on stage tells people what to expect from the rest of the show. This effect should be brief, visual and non-challenging to the audience's intellect. It should grab their attention, not require it. Usually a quick production or vanish works the best. Also, using something unexpected, like fire or animals, will make most people watch.

Look at the first list you prepared which contains all of the effects you can do. Try to find an effect which

Triple-Trilogy Show Planning Form

EFFECT OR ROUTINE

BEGINNING, MIDDLE, END

LIST OF PROPS

NOTES OR REMINDERS

SECTION ONE — Warm up & learn about the audience.	_____			
	First Impression			
	Running Time :			

	Get Acquainted			
	Running Time :			
SECTION TWO — Display your versatility and skill.	_____			
	Unique, Different			
	Running Time :			

	Visual and Quick			
	Running Time :			
SECTION THREE — Create some positive memories.	_____			
	Relaxed, or Lead-In			
	Running Time :			

	Showstopper, Blockbuster			
	Running Time :			

A Lasting Impression				
Running Time :				

fits the above description of a good opening effect. It is preferable, if the effect also received the grade of "A". When you find an effect that you think is appropriate, write its name or brief description on the line above "First Impression" on the Show Planning Form. This will be the opening effect in your new show. If you already have an opening effect in an existing show which you feel meets the criteria, then by all means, write that one in the space provided.

Item 2 — Getting to Know You.

At this point, after getting the attention of your audience, you enter into an interactive time which allows the audience to gauge your personality. The effect here should have a lot of magic happening and should be a fully-developed routine that requires many steps to complete. Strive to relate to the audience on some level, whether directly (by having someone help) or indirectly (through the use of humor or storytelling). Give them all the information they need to decide who you are, or who your character is. Take your time with the magic here, but only to enhance your personality.

Again, look at your first list and locate a routine which will allow you to relate to the audience. Select something which contains a series of magical surprises (preferably three), and write it in the second location on the Show Planning Form.

Item 3 — Wrap it Up.

To finish off the first section of your new show, do something that is direct, to the point, with one very easy to understand effect. You should try a trick that uses a minimal number of props, and a simple series of actions to perform. If you intend to do a running gag (a joke which is repeated to increase its comic value), then this is a good place to introduce it. Find this effect and write it into the third location.

Item 4 — What's New?

Select your most unique effect and perform it here. This can be something quirky, offbeat or unusual that is not typical of your style. This will refresh the audience's attention by changing the pace of the show. If you normally perform to music, you may want to do a short speaking interlude, or vice versa. Also, this is the place in the show to try out any new effects you may be rehearsing before deciding whether to give them a permanent location. Once you have a show you feel comfortable with, I suggest you test only one new effect (at the most) per performance to ensure that your rehearsed material will carry you in case the new effect does not play well. Take a moment to examine your list and decide which trick you'd like to write in here.

Item 5 — Make It Fast.

Insert a fast, flashy, tempo-enhancing effect to renew the energy level. Picking up the pace momentarily here keeps the audience excited about what to expect next. Select something that happens suddenly, perhaps

something with an unexpected kicker ending (the audience thinks something is going to happen, but something else even more magical does). Again, if you are featuring a running gag, this is probably the best spot for the second phase of your running gag.

Item 6 — Old Faithful.

Do the classic of your repertoire or something which takes considerable skill which you have worked long hours to perfect. At this point, with their concentration fully peaked, the audience should be in a highly receptive mood for more "serious" magic. This is not to say that you can't do a comedy bit here, but it should be a skillfully executed one. Any routine that you feel has traditional, universal appeal will work here.

Following the conclusion of Item 6, if you are going to take an intermission, do it here. The audience will want to return to see what else you have to offer, but they will have a feeling that the first half of your show was complete.

Item 7 — You Deserve a Break.

Give the audience and yourself a chance to sit back and relax without having to concentrate too much. The effect featured here could be referred to as "fluff" and will appear almost unnecessary, but its value is immeasurable. By doing something almost non-magical, you will lower the audience's guard and set them up for the next item. In fact, you may want to use this spot as an introduction to the next item. Explaining what it is, what's going to happen, why it is significant, inspecting the necessary props, and so on. Whatever you decide, it has to be done in an entertaining way.

Item 8 — Full Throttle.

Bring out the showstopper. Let the audience know you are near the end of the show by performing your most amazing blockbuster routine that defies any logical explanation. Build this routine to the pinnacle of amazement during this time, and give it everything you've got. Make the audience think that there is nothing which can follow this effect. Find the best routine on your list and write it in here.

Item 9 — A Lasting Impression.

After the audience has reacted to your blockbuster routine above, thank them for showing their appreciation, then (almost as an afterthought) offer to do one more thing. Contrary to popular belief the showstopper does not close the show. The last part of any professional show is either the encore or the curtain call. It's the performers' way of saying good-bye and thanks. When it's time to say good-bye to your audience, you want to regain their friendship by bringing yourself back to their level. To close the show, do something quick, silly and charming. You will remind the audience that your purpose is not to make fools of them, but to entertain. If you have been setting up the running gag, this is when you perform it with the final payoff.

Bite Size Pieces

Planning any major series of events, like a magic show, can seem an overwhelming task at first glance. However, if you have been following along with these instructions and have completed the initial part of the Show Planning Form, you are well on your way to creating manageable parts of the whole series. These parts are known as *bite size pieces*, since they help you avoid biting off more than you can chew. Your nine effects are still just a little too big to work with, but that's an easy one to fix.

Look at the heading of the column to the right of your nine effects. It is entitled "Beginning, Middle, End" to reflect the nature of the series of three. In the three spaces directly to the right of each effect you will write a brief description of what happens at the beginning, middle, and end of each. For some tricks this is easy, but for more complicated routines, you may have to decide if they contain a series of three, and re-work them if they don't. I've listed a few examples here to show you how it's done.

As you can see, when you break your routines into these pieces, your objectives become much clearer and it is easier to achieve them. When you realize that the *Professor's Nightmare* (for example) begins with some meaningful way to show the ropes un gimmicked and different lengths, then it is simple to come up with a way to do that. Looking at the middle, you discover that the purpose is to make the ropes appear the same length. Given that simple objective, you can come up with some entertaining way to make that happen. Finally, the end of the *Professor's Nightmare* consists of changing the ropes back to their original lengths. When you do this successfully, you have completed a series of three parts with definite objectives, and the audience responds. Try writing out the beginning, middle, and end of all nine of your effects or routines. If you have trouble with any of them, write the end first since it is the critical point to which you are leading, then work in reverse.

When you have completed dividing your effects into their respective parts, you will have a list of twenty-seven objectives that reads like an outline for your show. If you focus on each of these twenty-seven objectives in

turn, and fulfill each of them to the best of your ability, trying to make each one as meaningful and entertaining as possible, then you will be performing a show which has purpose. You will create professional magic which feels "polished" and complete. Audiences will subconsciously anticipate each climax and be ready to respond. You will easily lead them from one part of your show to another without ever having to wonder, "What comes next?" The entertainment value will increase dramatically.

Does it Really Work?

Occasionally, when I'm discussing the Series of Three Principle with a group of magicians, one of them will think that it isn't a sound theory. He may point out examples of things that are grouped in fours (like suits of a deck of cards), or twos (like your eyes), and say that we are just noticing the groups of three because we are looking for them. I don't deny that he is correct, but not completely.

The Series of Three involves the passage of time, not just grouping objects. Humans naturally tend to group objects, but the nature of time forces events to happen in three parts. That is why it's called the *series* of three, and why it is psychologically sound. No-one is consciously aware of your use of the principle unless they are looking for it, but it works anyway. As long as time continues, the principle will work in the morning (1), afternoon (2), and evening (3).

<u>LITTLE RED SILK</u> First Impression Running Time 1:37	<u>SLOW PRODUCTION OF SILK</u> <u>VANISH SILK</u> <u>ONE-HANDED PRODUCTION</u>
<u>HAT TRICK</u> Get Acquainted Running Time 5:41	<u>CARDS, FLOWER, HAIR GAGS</u> <u>BALL IN HAT ROUTINE</u> <u>RABBITS & STUFF</u>
<u>PROF. NIGHTMARE</u> Wrap It Up, To The Point Running Time 3:05	<u>EXAMINE ROPES</u> <u>STRETCH TO SAME LENGTH</u> <u>CHANGE BACK TO DIFFERENT</u>
<u>M&M MOUTH COIL</u> Unique, Different Running Time 6:37	<u>COSTUMING</u> <u>MOUTH COIL</u> <u>WATCH STEAL REVELATION</u>
<u>CANDLE UP THE NOSE</u> Visual and Quick Running Time 0:55	<u>LIGHTING CANDLE</u> <u>MATCH TO SILK</u> <u>VANISH CANDLE</u>
<u>LINKING RINGS</u> Dexterity, Skill, Classic Running Time 6:14	<u>EXAMINING RINGS</u> <u>DO AS I DO</u> <u>THREE RINGS EACH</u>
<u>DOUBLE YOUR MONEY</u> Relaxed, or Lead-In Running Time 1:52	<u>GETTING MONEY OUT</u> <u>CHOOSING TWENTY</u> <u>REVEALING GAGS</u>
<u>BURNT TO THE CORE</u> Showstopper	

Back to You, TED

Remember Timing, Environment, and Delivery? The planning you just did will improve your timing considerably, but will not affect the environment or delivery. In fact, if you use the Series of Three Principle to plan each and every action in your show, you will be credited with a knack for perfect timing. The following ideas will help with improving your awareness of your environment and naturalness of your delivery.

Natural Magic

As you work on each part of your show, look for situations in which magic is a natural result of your interaction with surroundings. Examine your situation at every moment within your show. Look at what props are around you or are going to be introduced. Think about what you are saying and doing, and how the audience is responding. See if any of your examination leads you to create “natural” magic that appears spontaneous.

If you produce a required prop instead of merely picking it up, or if you cause an effect to happen as if you just thought of it, or if you “accidentally” do something wrong and magically fix it, then you give the audience the impression that you are in control of the situation no matter what happens. This is highly applicable in impromptu situations when it should appear as if you didn’t expect to be asked to do a trick (even though you’ve been carrying around a cigarette-thru-quarter for weeks), but it should also be applied to your planned routine.

Economy of Motion

Falling under the heading of Environment is a principle dealing with economy of motion. It simply means, moving as little as possible to achieve a desired effect. On stage it generally involves the placement of props so that everything you need at any given moment is within easy reach. Also, secret moves are covered by other necessary natural actions (turning to pick up a silk, you load the billiard ball in your hidden hand). In close-up, the principle involves the same basic ideas already mentioned, but also encompasses the movement of fingers, hands and arms to a greater degree.

To use the economy of motion principle to your advantage, decide what action must be done and then do it in the most direct way possible. Always look for a way to accomplish more than one thing at the same time (put an object down as you pick another one up), or a way to cover your secret move with a natural action (load a ball under a cup as you tip it forward to dump the first ball off).

Audience Psychology

Generally the most critical factors in your environment are the type, size, and demeanor of your audience. Plan your performance with your audience in mind. Try to identify with their expectations. When you have a good idea how your audience will react, you can use that

information to your advantage. If you work for a group of card players, you’ll want to dazzle them with your second deal, false shuffles, and one-handed cuts. You might even give them a gambling demonstration to show your skill. Although this kind of routine would be well received by card players, I doubt if Jimmy’s friends at his fifth birthday party would like it nearly as much. To please any audience, give ’em what they want. Don’t give them what you like to do. Just because you have a favorite trick, doesn’t mean that everyone will agree.

The main problem with performing magic for people is that many of them become defensive, thinking that you are trying to trick them to make them look foolish. Your objective should be convincing them that you are performing only to amuse them. Win their confidence and trust, then do nothing to destroy it. Keeping the audience on your side is the only way to keep them happy.

Wabi (Wah-bee)

You probably have no idea what “wabi” is. If you do, you are very fortunate. I didn’t know until recently. I have Michael Ammar to thank for introducing me to this principle. Wabi is a Japanese word for which there is no English equivalent. It means: A flawed detail that creates an elegant hole. Basically, when something is perfect there is no appreciation for its unique qualities. The closest I think American culture comes to this idea is when we look at a rusty, old antique and say, “It has character.” Wabi can give your magic *character*. Earlier, you broke your show into parts to make it run smoothly, but what if it doesn’t?

When something unexpected happens during your performance, the audience will get a feeling that the moment is happening only for them, creating a unique memory. Keep your composure and use any occurrence to your advantage. If it’s funny, laugh; if it’s surprising, take credit; if it’s serious, handle it. Don’t worry about destroying the structure of the Series of Three. That’s what makes the flawed detail so memorable — it doesn’t belong. By using the principle of Natural Magic mentioned earlier, you can plan moments which appear to have flawed details.

Tour Guide

To make your delivery more direct with less pointless rambling, take a hint from a tour guide. They point out the important details in an interesting way. A tour guide is completely knowledgeable about the area they are showing, but only tell you what you need to know to appreciate it. If it doesn’t add — it detracts. The route you choose for your magical, mystery tour determines what the audience will perceive and remember.

Give them just enough information to draw their own conclusions. People don’t need an entire picture to tell you what they see. A sketch is sufficient to provide the necessary background information. If you are holding a deck of cards, saying, “Here I have a deck of cards in my hand,” is really unnecessary.

Behind the Scenes

Now you know what effects will be performed during your show and you are aware of all the various principles of presentation that you can use to enhance them. Before you rush right out to round up an audience, there are a few important things to do which will help you be more organized. When you know that everything is ready to go before the show starts, you can concentrate on what's happening without being distracted by unexpected details or last minute problems. This sections covers some areas that will prevent Murphy's Law from making a mess of your well-planned show.

What's My Line?

I've been around theatre all my life. My parents were always actively involved in musicals and plays at our local community theater. I actually made my stage debut at a mere two years old, riding a tricycle across the stage during a musical comedy. As I grew older, I accepted slightly more challenging roles. I continued performing throughout high school and college, and I still occasionally trod the boards when I feel the urge. In twenty-five years of theatre experience I have yet to see a successful show without a script. The script is the essence of the production. It is up to the actors and actresses to give it life. Without a script, there is no purpose to the production.

Why should your show be any different? Unless you specialize in improvisation (where the entertainment value is derived from the lack of a script), you need to know what to say and do at every given moment of your performance. As a magician, you have the distinct honor of being the scriptwriter, director, and the star. In most cases, the star is only as good as the director allows him or her to be, and the director is only as good as the material in the script. Very few performers or directors transcend beyond the limits of a weak script.

I'm not saying that you have to write your entire show out word for word, action for action. Although, if you did, you would learn so much about your presentation that you couldn't help but improve it. If you have the time, and ability to write well, then you should fully script every effect you do. Most of us do not have the time, not to mention ability, to consider this task. However, that does not mean that no script is required at all. Even if you never write a word, you should decide what you are going to say.

Use your twenty-seven bite size pieces of your show and apply the principles of presentation to them to generate the actions and words which feel right to you and accomplish the objectives. You will probably want to jot down a couple of notes to remind yourself of a particular phrase or joke you'd like to include. As you discover what needs to be said, try using words which are specific and descriptive. Instead of "three different lengths of rope," try "three different lengths of strong, cotton cord." Certain words sound better together than others because of their consonance, alliteration, or juxtaposition. An extensive knowledge of words will help here. If you feel your vocabulary is limited, you will benefit by expanding it. Writing a script may help you discover new ways to say the same old thing.

The Elephant's Trunk

You may have heard that elephants are perfect tourists because they never have to pack a trunk. Instead, they carry their trunks with themselves everywhere they go. Although, to an elephant, packing a trunk may be as plain as the nose on his face, it takes some proper planning for most people. And, unlike the elephant, we have a tendency to forget stuff.

I've arrived at shows without my trusty thumbtip, which is used in my opening effect, so I had to quickly think of some other way to start my show. Hopefully, the audience was not aware of the difficulty, but I was not as calm, cool, and collected as I should have been. Of course, it was a lot better than the time I forgot to prepare some fake money for my burned bill into rope effect, *Burnt to the Core*, and I ended up actually burning a twenty dollar bill. That was a costly mistake that I never made again. Following that little mishap, I decided to write a packing list for my show.

The list simply tells me every prop I need for each effect, even if it is something as obvious as a thumbtip. I refer to the list as I place each item into my magic trunk, then again as I set each item up at the show. If I happen to forget something as important as the fake money, at least I won't be in the middle of the performance when I realize it. As you may have already noticed, the Show Planning Form provides a space to list all of the props for each of your nine major effects. Make a complete list here and use it as I do to save yourself unnecessary misfortune.

ODDLE, END LIST OF PROPS

2 OF SILK	THUMB TIP, RED SILK
RODUCTION	
IR GAGS	'LECTRICK DECK, WILTING FLOWER,
ROUTINE	HAT, RED BALL, BLACK BALL, CUBE,
FF	BALLOONS, TORTOISE TO HARE
ES	SHORT, MEDIUM & LONG ROPES
E LENGTH	
0 DIFFERENT	
	SACKET, RUSTY...

Practice vs. Rehearse

It's the fourth quarter with less than a minute to go. Your team is trailing by four points. You are the quarterback and it's your third down. Following the snap of the ball, you shift back as your team members swing into precise, choreographed action. Spotting your intended receiver, you release a beautiful, spiralling pass which heads directly into his hands. He dives in for a touchdown and you win the game. You and your teammates are heroes.

The above scenario could have played quite differently if you neglected to practice your pass, or if the receiver neglected to practice his skills. Without the proper training, you cannot perform at a professional level. If you put a weekend, sandlot football team up against some NFL pros, there is little doubt that the competition would be one-sided to say the least. Even though coaches refer to every phase of the training process as practicing, there are actually two distinct parts. Individual training, and team training. Since the whole team must interact as a unit during the second phase, it might more precisely be called rehearsal.

Practicing

Practice, as far as I'm concerned, applies to individual moves or sleights or actions that must eventually be done without conscious effort. These are the pieces that create whole effects. Just like the quarterback practices his passing technique by repeatedly throwing the football, you should practice until your actions are second nature. As you repeat your sleights over and over, try to be aware of the positions of your fingers and the function of each action you take to complete the move. The more natural the moves become for you to complete, the more you will gain a professional smoothness and a feeling of confidence.

When learning something like the classic palm (where you need to carry out natural actions while secretly hiding an object), you should keep an object palmed as you go about your normal daily activities. When you've done this long enough, you'll feel so comfortable with an object palmed, you'll almost forget it's there. You can also use this method to become less self-conscious about wearing a thumbtip.

Rehearsing

When the moves have been acquired, it is time to get the team together and try everything from start to finish. First, you're going to run some key plays until you can do them flawlessly. Just like the football team, you should rehearse each of your individual effects from start to finish until you can perform them without difficulty. Repeat the series of moves and lines until you can do them without hesitation. Also, you should be so familiar with your material that you can pick it up from any point if you happen to be interrupted. As each effect becomes solid, you should time it to determine how long it will take to perform during your show. When you

have a good idea of the average time for each effect, you can write that time into the space provided on the Show Planning Form. Add up the times to find the approximate running length of your show.

Once you have each effect committed to memory, you can begin to rehearse the entire show. Set everything up exactly as you will when actually performing it, then take a short break. During this time, think about each effect and visualize how it will look, what you will do and say, and how you will begin and end each part of the show. Once you feel you are ready, begin your show and work completely through it without stopping, regardless of any mistakes or problems you encounter.

Following your run through rehearsal, write down any notes to yourself about things that went well, things that need work, or ideas that you had to improve something. There is a place on the Show Planning Form to do this. After completing these notes, set everything up again. This time, before you begin, look over your notes and decide how to apply them. Visualize the solution to any problems, and think about how to incorporate your new ideas. Then, run your show again from start to finish. Keep repeating this cycle over the course of a few days until you know that you can perform the whole show without any problems.

The more time you spend on your rehearsal, the more comfortable you will be in front of a live audience. If you work out all of the normal problems encountered when trying to organize an entertaining show before you get to the stage, you will avoid the common "rough edges" most new performers have.

TIPS

NOTES OR REMINDERS

SILK	DON'T WEAR WATCH
UTING FLOWER,	WORK ON LOAD OF TURTLE
K BALL, CUBE,	
TO HARE	
LONG ROPES	
LOVES, GLASSES	DO WATCH STEAL ON JACKET.
10FT COIL	WHAT IF THERE'S NO WATCH?
YELLOW SILK,	
CANDLE	
RED RAYON	

Mind Your Business

Having prepared, rehearsed, and perfected a professional magic show, now you'd probably like a chance to perform it for someone other than your family, pets, or loved ones. Getting bookings and building up a reputation as a quality performer can take a little time but does not require an unusual amount of effort. The best advertising for your show is your show. You should search for every opportunity to perform regardless of the pay for about one year. Most of your well-paying jobs will be a result of someone approaching you following a good performance or a referral by someone who remembered you and knows how to contact you. This section covers the three most important areas of the business of show business.

MAGIC

by **DAN HARLAN**

Bringing a Sense of Wonder
and Enjoyment to Parties,
Banquets, and Special Events

517-839-0296



Here's My Card

When you are finished with a particularly good show (as many of yours will be now that you understand the components), and people approach you about booking you for another show, you should be able to respond by giving them your business card. When anyone compliments you on your skills, whether they mention booking you or not, give them a card and tell them, "Thanks, and if you ever need someone to entertain, call me." When you are out socializing and you perform a trick, people ask how you learned magic, reply by giving them a business card.

Business cards are an inexpensive way to show that you are professional. They are also a practical reference for people who may be able to get you more shows. Before you go out and perform, get yourself some business cards and keep them with you always. When designing a card, keep in mind what is important. There are three main pieces of information that should appear:

1. Phone Number
2. Your Name
3. What You Do

Everything else is just extraneous, although having an attractive graphic can increase people's interest in the information given.

I'll Check My Schedule

I used to have little slips of paper scattered around my house with information about shows written on them. Perhaps I'd jot a few notes on the calendar, but I really wasn't organized. In an attempt to track all of my bookings, I designed a performance schedule on which to record all of the information. I placed a pile of these sheets next to the phone to use when I got a call for a show. To my surprise, something even better than mere organization happened as a result of using these schedules. On the phone, I sounded very professional as I asked all of the required information called for on the form. I could instantly address any problems or conflicts by having all of my upcoming bookings at my fingertips. Also, if someone asked for references, I could pull out a stack of past schedules and begin listing all my satisfied customers.

Written in Stone

Not all shows require a contract, but you are always less likely to face last minute re-scheduling if you have one. A sample contract is provided on the next page on which you may place your address. Sign and send two copies to your contact requesting the return of one signed copy.

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

HOLD SENT CONTRACT CONFIRMED DONE

DATE: / / TIME: : am pm

LENGTH: min. TYPE: _____

LOCATION: _____

CONTACT: _____

HOME: () - WORK: () -

ADDRESS: _____

OCCASION: _____

GUEST OF HONOR: _____

NO. OF GUESTS: _____

AGE RANGE: _____ \$.

Performance Contract

Date		
------	--	--

The following agreement is to confirm your request for entertainment by the undersigned performer at the event described below. Please sign and return one copy of this contract with the required deposit and other requested information (see Comments below, if any). If you do not intend to sign this contract, inform us at the above address.

Purchaser:

Regarding:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Home Phone:

Business Phone:

Thank you for the privilege of entertaining:		
Appearing will be:		
This performance shall consist of:		
Set-up at approximately:	To begin at:	until:
Total contract price agreed upon:	Deposit payable with contract:	
Balance payable in full to PERFORMER upon completion of this performance:		

ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The PURCHASER agrees to insure a suitable and safe place for the PERFORMER to appear and perform. Commencement of this event, together with the physical delivery of this contract is deemed to be an acceptance of all terms by the PURCHASER. Any Comments below or attached contract riders are hereby made part of this contract. The PERFORMER's obligation to perform is subject to detention by sickness, accidents, riots, strikes, inability to perform, means of transportation, acts of God, any act or order of any public authority, or any other condition beyond the PERFORMER's control. In the unlikely event that the PERFORMER is unable to appear as agreed, the PERFORMER's liability will be held to providing a substitute of equal merit or scheduling a similar performance at another mutually agreed upon date if either option is possible, but shall not extend to any damages sustained by failure of the PERFORMER to appear, or by the inability to acquire a substitute. Events postponed due to inclement weather must be rescheduled.

--

Signature of Purchaser
Please keep one copy for your records

--

Signature of Performer

Comments:

I Can't Think of Anything to Say

The ability to be creative and original is a valuable skill which anyone can learn to cultivate. Everyone is born with a vivid imagination that knows no limits, but experience and other factors force us to collect and store information in structured ways that limit our vision. The next few pages will offer some guidelines to help you use your information structure to discover your own originality.

Question Everything, Including the Answers

If Necessity is the Mother of Invention, then Discontent is the Father. Discontent leads to questioning what is and searching for what might be. Force yourself to be dissatisfied with whatever you are currently doing. That doesn't mean it's wrong, just don't assume it's right. Ask, "Why do I say what I say? Why do I hold my hand this way? Why do I use a piece of rope? Why do I throw away three cards? Why are there still six left? Why should someone else care? Why am I dressed this way?" and a million other questions. When you answer one, question the answer. You'll notice that "Why" is a powerful question, because the result gives a reason, but you might ask other things as well. "What would someone else do or say? When should I ask for a volunteer? When shouldn't I? Where will I put the scissors while I tie a knot? Who am I?" Answering these questions will give your magic a purpose and your actions a sub-text that people can relate to. Questions will also lead you to explore new solutions.

What Do You Know, Anyway?

Use your existing knowledge and expand it by studying things which interest you, besides magic. Do you enjoy movies, sports, computers, puzzles, woodworking, jello, reading, etc.? Draw connections from your life to your magic. Give your performance a context to which people can relate. Talk about your last fishing trip, or a new pet, or your favorite color, or your mother's cooking, or washing your car, or running a marathon, or whatever. Give the objects you use a context as well. Avoid items with no symbolic or literal meaning. Ask yourself, "What is this thing?"

Substitution Solution

Use an object with similar properties instead of that which is commonly used. Instead of Linking Rings, how about Linking Ropes, Linking Coathangers, Linking Finger Rings, Linking Hack-saws, Linking Picture Frames, Linking Dog Collars, Linking Rubber Bands, or Linking Playing Cards? I'm sure you get the idea. Instead of using playing cards, what about business cards, paper money, photographs, collectible sports cards, a loaf of sliced bread, individual cheese slices, a stack of books, credit cards, etc.? You can also substitute things which you know in the presentation. The rope becomes a fishing line, a parachute rip-cord, a water-ski tow rope, a symbol of life, a worm, a shoelace, a spiderweb, a piece of spaghetti, and yet it is still a rope. By creating a comparison between two things, you set up a metaphor which can carry the presentation. An excellent example is "Kannible Kings" which, without the extended metaphor, is just a vanish of some cards. Apply substitution to your effects.

Stoopid is as Stoopid Duz

Are you easily embarrassed? "Let's rate your embarrassment response. A: High, B: Hello, C: Good Evening." The members of Monty Python created some incredibly original comedy just by being silly. You can too. Not just comedy, either. You can create more original ideas if you allow yourself to be stupid. Do not judge the merit of your ideas as you create them. Try anything, without regards to the outcome. Evaluate only when you're off the beaten path surrounded by unknown territory, otherwise you will force yourself to remain safe in your rut. You'll get negative feedback from most others, but press on, anyway.

STRUCTURED CHAOS

Creativity resists structure. It needs openness and room to move freely from concept to concept. It is chaotic and unpredictable. If you arrive at a foregone conclusion, ending up where you decided to go, then you are not being creative. Creativity is a journey with no map, no destination, no agenda, no schedule, and no expectations. Just hop in your car and go. Better yet, walk, or ride a horse, or a motorcycle, or a bicycle, or fly a plane, or hot air balloon. The balloon is probably best since you have the least control and you just have to take the scenery as it comes. Your mind is now open and directionless, filled with unrelated ideas with no structure. This is great! This is inspirational! This is a big waste of time!

There is a problem with pure creativity. Nothing ever gets done. You can create in your unlimited imagination forever, but what then? If you try to present an audience with your wandering mental processes, what will they think? It will make no sense. You must take the results from your journey (snapshots, if you will) and put them in a structured order into your scrapbook, so it all makes sense. Throw out the boring ones, or the blurry ones, or the poorly developed ones. Keep only those images that support your central theme. The reason most vacation pictures are boring is because there is no interesting theme, except "Look how much fun we had while you were here working your butt off." To help you sort out your thoughts, I have provided a little worksheet. Copy it so you'll always have a blank one.

You can start filling the sheet out anywhere; you don't have to start at the top, but I will explain the sections in order. The Name/Description can be as specific (Matrix) or as general (Horror Movies) as you like. In one or two sentences, describe What Happens, "Four coins travel from four corners to arrive under the same card," "A bunch of goobs remain camping in the woods as they see their friends sliced into lunchmeat by an escaped lunatic." List the props you would need,

"Four cards, four coins (maybe a shell), a pad," "Half a dozen goobs, one lunatic, incompetent policemen, knife, pick axe, chainsaw, ice pick, jello, assorted camping supplies." Now, list some things you might substitute, "Balls, cups, poker chips, rubber bands, staples, seashells, compact disks, soap, wristwatches, teabags, matches." And now, for the Matrix routine... Okay, relax, it was just a little joke.

Does anything in the routine have Symbolic Meaning? Coins are Wealth. Cards are Fun, Gambling, Evil. Traveling is Escape. Four Corners are Seasons. Togetherness is Family. Goobs are Sheep. Lunatic is Oppression. Blood is Life. Camping is Freedom. Chainsaw is Technology. Next, write in the General Meaning of the actions. Not "Coins moving about," but, "Movement," or "Travel," or "Collecting," or "Attraction," as you see it. Be as general as you can. Think about some scenarios in which this type of action might take place. Write a few of these thoughts after What Can it be About? I have given the first answer, "anything," to get you started, but you should be more specific. The Matrix may be about "A square-dance, a family vacation to the four corners of the Earth, a tax collector getting money from others, a day at the beach, a bunch of goobs escaping from a lunatic by hiding in the same tent." Whoa! That's a nifty idea for a Matrix!

For the section about Context you just need to explain how the audience will relate to the action. Such as, "Metaphor for a Horror Movie, or My Summer Vacation on a Crowded But Friendly Beach, or A New Way to Pay Taxes." For your Purpose, you must decide how you fit into the action, "I am a lunatic, or I am the coin in the corner and the card is my beach towel, or I'm the Tax Man." There is also a Beginning, Middle, End section to allow you to work out the details of the performance using The Series of Three Principle. Each of these parts has three spaces to further assist in breaking down the action.

Creative Performance Worksheet

Name/Description of Effect:		
What Happens:		
Props:	Subs:	
Any Symbolic Meaning?		
General Meaning:		
What can it be about? anything,		
What is the context?		
What is your purpose?		
Beginning	Middle	End

WHY SHOULD ANYONE CARE?

Entertainment comes in various forms to suit a variety of tastes and interests. Treat your performance as a piece of music, or a painting, or a sporting event, or a book, or a meal. Some people prefer pork, or poetry, or pole vaulting, or Picasso, or punk rock. Some don't. No matter what though, everything has its own style and an audience which values it. Do you have your own style? Everyone does, but is it the one you want your audience to see? The best way to develop your style is through your script. The words, actions, emotions, and expressions you use comprise your script, whether you have written it down or not. This is a performance, after all. It is theatre. You are acting. You have an audience. Even if you are doing a pocket trick for a friend, you have the same opportunities and responsibilities as the performer in a Grand Stage Musical

Spectacular Extravaganza televised to millions. You both can succeed or fail based on your interpretation of your script.

I suggest that you study what you can about the theatre and how plays, movies, or television shows are put together. I prefer to study live theatre since that is mainly what we do and it is the basis of all other performances. It has a long and fascinating history. You may choose to read about its history, or study a few scripts from the library to see how they are written, or better yet, you may join an amateur theatrical group for some first-hand experience. There are many capacities in which to work, both on stage and off, but you will learn more than you ever thought possible no matter whether you're in front of the lights or behind them.

MAGICIAN: A group of four teenagers decided to go camping, [Puts coins at corners of close-up pad] and play a little cards. [Flourishes] They set up camp in the middle of the woods. Each teen had their own tent. [Covers each coin with a card, sets deck aside] Although the teens were "in-tents," it was supposed to be a quiet night, but [becoming more psychotic] they didn't realize that a lunatic had escaped from a nearby mental hospital and was wandering through the woods... with a knife! [Produces switchblade] He quietly crept up to Suzy's tent while she was sleeping, and threw it open. [Snaps up card and stabs knife where coin should be, but it's gone] Fortunately, Suzy had decided to spend the night with Bobby! [Turns over other card to reveal two coins. Replaces card] The lunatic continued to the next tent. He peeked in to be sure someone was there. [Lifts card showing coin. Replaces card] Chris was sound asleep. The lunatic grabbed his knife, flung open the tent, and stabbed... [realizing coin is gone] but Chris also decided to spend the night with Bobby! [Shows three coins] I'd make some comment, but I don't know if Chris is a girl or a boy, so I'll just say, "What a nice 'change'." [Replaces the card] Frustrated and angered I, I mean, he ran to the next tent and slashed it open, [Stabs knife through back of card] only to find it empty. [Lifts impaled card] Jimmy had joined the jam. [Shows four coins] Yes that's right, the four teens had all gathered together to... play cards. How nice. Of course, once the lunatic discovered that all four goobs were sharing the same tent, it was an easy matter for him to slice each one into lunchmeat while their friends looked on in horror. I love a story with a happy ending.
