

FUNDAMENTALS

A Trick for Your Trade

Relieve tension, and set the tone for learning, with this basic card trick.

By Steven Albrecht

Are you looking for a lively demonstration of a learning tool to kick off your next learning session? Try this simple card-guessing trick.

In addition to helping trainees focus on how to use learning tools, this flashy card trick, when used at the beginning of a seminar, also sets the mood for creative teaching and the intentional learning that follows. I suggest using it during a training program in which the participants don't already know each other, such as a public seminar. It's also highly effective for dealing with partici-

pants who come into a session acting as if they already know the material. It helps to focus participants' attention clearly on you, the trainer, and smoothes the transition into learning. In addition, the card trick reminds the audience to use simple but effective tools in business situations that call for intelligent shortcuts, such as problem-solving and brainstorming sessions, team processes, staff meetings, training sessions, and so on. It lowers tension and sets an expectation that the rest of the seminar will be unique, fun, and creative.

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The deal

To pull off this trick, you'll need an ordinary deck of cards in its original cardboard box. Cut a small, square thumbnail-sized hole in the bottom right corner of the card box. Place the deck of cards back in the box with the card suit and number visible through the hole in the corner. The trick is now easy to complete: You determine a participant's card by looking at it through the hole in the box. Here's how to feign your own magic act.

Stand up in front of the room and present the group with your special deck of cards (still in the box). Say, "I'm holding an ordinary deck of cards. I'm

going to use it to show you how easy it will be for you to use the tools we will learn in this program."

Next, remove the deck from the box and hand it to one of the participants near you. Hold the card box discreetly in one hand, covering the hole with your palm. Ask the participant to show everyone his or her "best Las Vegas or Atlantic City card shuffling technique."

After the person shuffles the cards at least once, ask him or her to hold the cards face down and fan them out in a semicircle. You can then solicit another nearby participant to choose one card from the deck. As he or she prepares to do that, turn your back to the crowd and ask the person to show the other participants the card he or she chose from the deck.

Next, instruct that participant to hide the card from you once everyone has seen it. He or she can then tell you that it's "safe" to turn around again. When you face the group, tell the person holding the card to place it on the bottom of the deck (held by the

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first participant), facing the same direction as all the other cards, and hand the deck back to the person who first shuffled them.

As you carefully hold the card deck box in your hand, ask the person who shuffled the cards to put them back into the box, with the design side up and the face side down. Hold the card box tightly, with the "hole side" of the box facing down in your palm and your thumb on top.

Once the participant has pushed the cards back into the box, step back away from the group and take a quick peek at the number and suit of the chosen card through the hole in the box. Make a showy, even comical display, by placing the cards against your forehead and explaining that like a clairvoyant, you've been blessed with the gift of ESP.

As you pretend to guess the card, make your first attempt wrong, but only slightly. For example, if the card is a three of clubs, guess that it's three of spades. Ask participants, "Is that correct?" The group will usually tell you

"no." But before they can correct you, tell them the actual card.

Wrap up the trick by thanking the group members for their participation and tossing the cards on to the table, acting as if you're ready to move on without explanation. Let the tension build for a moment or two and then hold up the box for the room to see and say, "You know, if you cut this little hole in the box the trick is much less difficult than you might think." Most likely that declaration will be countered with some groans from participants. Answer them with this segue into your lesson: "So you see, this is a perfect example of using tools to your advantage."

This simple card trick is an effective icebreaker that sets the tone for the learning that follows. It's a unique and easy way to illustrate how the tools that will be discussed during the training session are memorable and easy to master, use, and repeat. It also encourages participants to think creatively and have fun. So, give it a try and enjoy their amazement.

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from "The Mindreader Icebreaker" by Steve Albrecht. It can be found in *The AMA Trainers' Activity Book*, edited by Carolyn Nilson and published by AMA-COM Books.

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