

Training 101

A B R A C A D A B R A !

Mastering the Mystique of Magic

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Feats of magic, performed by professional magicians, have thrilled audiences since the earliest of times. Now, any trainer can master the power of magic to enhance the effectiveness of a training workshop—just by following a basic, 10-point guide. The guidelines are simple. But they can enable a trainer—without the time to develop the skills of a professional magician—to transform workshops through the mystique of magic.

Interested in creating a little magic of your own? Here are the 10 tricks you should have up your sleeve.

Become acquainted with magic as a training tool.

When I began to research the use of magic as a training tool, my findings were sparse, to say the least. Sure, I found information on organizations that use professional magicians for specific purposes. But there is very little on how a typical trainer can work magic into her or his areas of expertise. So it is not always easy to learn about the ways in which magic has been used as a training tool. The area is just not well documented.

But you still can find useful resources (for some suggestions, see the box, "Magical Mystery Sources," on page 19). Start with your local library. Find some simple books on the history of magic and on how to perform magic tricks. You'll be amazed at how your imagination will generate ways for you to incorporate



Michael Nortrup

some of the most rudimentary magic routines into your standard training workshops.

Select just one or two magic effects that are foolproof—or, as magicians say, "self-working." Think about how you can work them into your workshops.

Try visiting a local magic shop. Magic-shop employees will gladly demonstrate some simple effects. They can also introduce you to more detailed books on magic. Again, my advice is to progress slowly. Start with one item, and see how well you can make it work for you.

Another valuable means of obtaining information on magic is to join an amateur magic club in your community. The club's members will demonstrate their most successful effects and can help you improve your own efforts at magic tricks.

At first, you'll go through a trial-and-error process of finding the kinds of effects that work for you. As you learn, you'll become more and more successful at finding items that

You don't have to be David Copperfield to pull a formidable training tool out of your hat.

complement your training style and your particular areas of expertise.

Realize that even a beginner can successfully use magic in a training workshop. You don't have to be an expert.

Most magic performed in the training arena is done by professional magicians; organizations seek out pros, because pros know what they are doing. But you don't have to be a professional magician to use magic as a training tool. What you have to do is to find effects that fit naturally into your standard workshops, and then move on from there.

Once you've selected a few effects and have used them successfully in your own area of expertise, your self-motivation will levitate. You may develop an insatiable zeal for more and more material to enhance your workshops.

Overcome your fear

of failure. The first time you stood in front of a group of people to conduct a workshop, you were probably terrified of making mistakes. Similarly, you will most likely be afraid of making mistakes when you try your first magic effect.

There are several things that you can do to eliminate the fear almost immediately. First, select a simple effect. For your first efforts, choose a magic effect of which you feel confident. You should have a complete understanding of how it works.

Of course, confidence and competence don't guarantee success. Think about the use of humor in training. You may have a joke you've been telling to classes for years, with good results. But you never know. The next time you tell it, it's possible that nobody will "get" the punch line. That happens with humor. It happens with magic, as well. You can alleviate the frustration of such moments by gaining the empathy of your audience, from the start.

Try a simple introductory statement. Tell participants that you are not a professional comedian or magician, but that—in order to help cre-

ate and maintain a relaxed and positive learning environment—you will attempt to provide some humor or magical fun. Later, if something doesn't play well, you can have some fun with your audience by saying, "I told you so!"

We have all heard comedians turn real "moaners" into crowd pleasers. Trainers can do it, too. At times, I've gotten more training mileage out of a magic trick that didn't work than I normally do when it does work.

Enhance training humor with magic effects. Most trainers have already discovered how effective it can be to use humor in the training process. Now, discover the humor of magic.

Magic and humor together create a dynamite combination in the training environment. And the nature of magic lends itself to humor. Many

magic effects are extremely funny. And you can work them into a variety of training topics. As you become more comfortable with magic, you will find opportunities to use humor as you "set up" for a magic effect.

Learn "no-fail" magic.

A lot of magic effects involve hours of

work, as well as expensive props. But many do not. A lot of what we call magic is nothing more than the laws of statistics, mathematics, and physics at work. Once you understand how the natural law works, you have no-fail magic at your fingertips.

In addition, many magic tricks are nothing more than basic behavior control. They may look impressive, but they are really quite simple in principle. No matter what the participants do, you are always in control. You can produce an effect that looks like a successful feat of magic.

Experience the enthusiasm and excitement a little magic can generate in a training session. The positive comments you will receive during and after your workshop will rival any rave reviews you've received in the past.

You'll feel awe when audience



Abra Cadabra! Favorite Training Tricks

Thinking of trying your hand at sleight of hand? Below are descriptions of some of my favorite magic tricks, with details on how I use them in training workshops.

An icebreaker. My favorite icebreaker is one that demonstrates the value of training. I hold up both of my hands in direct view of everyone in the workshop. One hand is empty. In the other, I hold a nickel.

I say, "You can put no effort into this training program (extending the empty hand), and you will receive no benefit from it." Next, I extend the hand holding the nickel, "Or, you can invest a little effort in this training program," I say, "and receive a vast amount of benefit from the training." A slight movement of my hand then "magically" changes the nickel into a half-dollar.

Next, with the half-dollar extended, I say this: "And if you are willing to invest a lot of effort in this training program, you can realize tremendous value for your efforts." As soon as I have said that, I gracefully produce a second half-dollar, this time from the hand that was just empty. It's a very simple magic effect that leaves a lasting impression about the benefits of aggressively investing efforts in a training program.

Another coin trick. This next effect is one I use when I conduct sessions on improving communication. I begin by stating that, despite the fact that we all know the importance of listening, very few of us actually do it. Having set the stage, I demonstrate my point by calling attention to a penny, a nickel, and a quarter in my hand. I ask trainees the following question:

"Bobby's mother has three children. She named her first daughter Penny." I hold up the penny for all to see. "And she named her second daughter Nicolette." I hold up the nickel. "What did she name her third child?" I hold up the quarter.

Now, I generate more audience enthusiasm by asking, "Who is absolutely sure that he or she has

the right answer?" I'm always surprised at how few hands go up, and at the varied reactions I get when I ask the trainees to repeat aloud the question that I asked them. The little feat has tremendous effect on trainees when they realize the answer: Bobby's mother named her third child Bobby, of course.

The main response from trainees is that I "tricked" them with the coins. In magic terminology, the coin activity is called misdirection. The misdirection ploy is the secret to a vast multitude of magic tricks.

I process the communication-related "magical" effect by explaining to trainees that our working environment is full of misdirections such as telephone calls, unannounced meetings, and other distractions.

Magic colors. To get their creative juices flowing, I divide trainees into groups, give them flipcharts, and ask them to draw some images that symbolize their thoughts about the training topic. But from experience, I know that some trainees will be reluctant to engage in what they see as a childish exercise.

To overcome their reluctance, I produce a box of crayons. I wave some drawing paper over the box of crayons, while I state that these fun-filled exercises are the key to creating magic solutions to our many challenges. Then I open the box. The crayons have magically turned into three colorful silk scarves.

This magic effect serves as an energizer that gets even the most reluctant trainees involved.

Tying teams together. This next magic effect is an appealing technique to work into a team-building training session.

First, I produce three silk scarves of different colors, as brilliant as I can find. I tell trainees that the silks represent individuals who must work together as an effective team. The different colors stand for varying personality types or aspects of cultural diversity. One by one, I place the silk scarves into a clear tube, while continuing my lecture on the benefits of coming together as a team.

The climax comes when I blow

on the tube. The silks fly into the air, knotted together in a "team."

Perception illusions. Before I perform the following effect, I hold a short discussion on the ramifications of the fact that different people see the same things differently. Then I prove that our own eyes can deceive us.

I produce a scarf that is half red and half white. I tie a knot in the white half—a white knot—and I tie a knot in the red half—a red knot. I ask trainees if they see the white knot, and I ask them if they see the red knot. After they have answered yes, I glide my hand gently down the scarf. To the trainees' amazement, the knots reverse colors. I comment that things are not always the way we perceive them. Then I glide my hand gently up the silk. The knots revert to their original colors.

Other excellent magic effects also illustrate issues of perception. Some involve ordinary coins and cards that change size or color, or wands that magically turn into flowers. In my favorite effect, coins or cards disappear, even when they are in a trainee's possession. Later, they reappear on the trainer or in another part of the room.

Card tricks. For statistical process control training, I use a variety of card tricks to emulate jobs to be scheduled and product lots that contain defective products. They can be a powerful statistical-training tool. Here is my favorite effect in training for defective-product detection:

A trainee comes forth and deals out a certain number of cards, at random. I lay the cards face up and ask the volunteer to select a card that could be a defective product, warranting further inspection. Then, I have the volunteer go into the audience, write down the name of the card he or she has chosen, and give the slip of paper to another person for safekeeping.

Then I ask somewhat immaterial questions of the volunteer, while picking up the remaining cards and laying them down, face up. After a few iterations of this procedure, I then collect the cards and deal them out into several small

lots, face down. The volunteer then selects lots that he or she guesses do not contain the "defective" card. In the end, only one card is left face down. Imagine the trainees' surprise when I turn the card over, and it is the defective-product card that was selected at the beginning!

Closing routines. All of my training sessions literally end with a flash. To accomplish this, I choose either of my two favorite magical effects.

The first one I'll describe is commercially available as the "Hot Book." After I have summed up the learning objectives that the training session accomplished, answered any last-minute questions, and thanked trainees for their participation, I casually produce a textbook from my briefcase. I observe that the issues we have addressed are really "hot" topics, and that they are contained in the book.

Then I open the book, and a two- or three-foot flame shoots out.

I preface the second effect with pretty much the same comments. But this time, I reach into my pocket and produce a book of matches. I strike a match, which is designed to sparkle, stating that "we began the workshop with a glitter of knowledge" on the topic. Now that we have completed the workshop, I say, "I hope that you are very enlightened on the topic."

Then I toss the still-flickering match into the air, generating a large but completely safe ball of fire.

But how do you do them? Magicians are pledged not to reveal the "secrets" of their magic effects in open forums such as magazine articles. But most people can figure out from my descriptions that effects like the ones I've discussed are accomplished through techniques of misdirection, sleight of hand, or other gimmicks.

When asked how I did a particular magic effect, I generally respond, "Very well, thank you. And I trust that you enjoyed it." If someone persists in wanting to know how an effect was accomplished, I refer him or her to a magic book or store.

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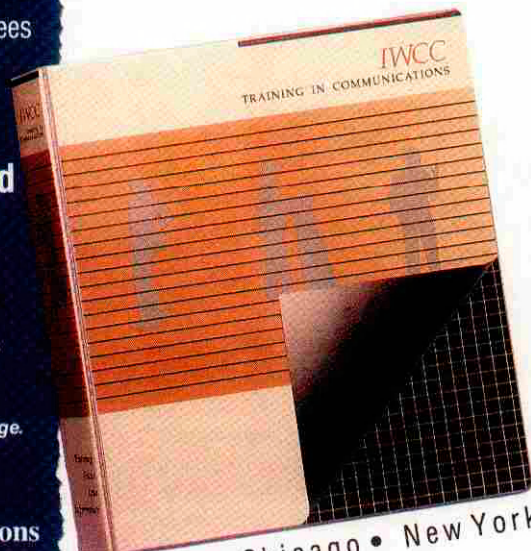
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members respond to your first feat of magic. Then, when you describe how this fare of the mystique is germane to your training topic, you'll know that you've covered one point they will not readily forget. And that is one of the real secrets of effective training: to present material in a way that gives it true staying power.

Experience the creative potential of magic. You can experience the creativity-generating potential in many different ways. Magic builds the kind of relaxed environment that is so necessary for creative thinking. Also, magic is energizing. And energized groups are creative groups.

Many magic effects are public domain, so you and your class can manipulate and adapt them. In that way, magic effects become a tool for creativity-building. For example, you could start by describing a magic effect to participants. Then, have them conceive of many different ways to accomplish that effect, before you demonstrate your method. Or, perform a feat of magic first, and then

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A Basic Guide To Training With Magic

Remember 10 important points for creating magical moments in your training sessions.

- ▶ Become acquainted with magic as a training tool.
- ▶ Realize that you don't have to be an expert magician to successfully use magic in your workshops.
- ▶ Overcome your fear of failure when using magic in training.
- ▶ Enhance your training humor with magic effects.
- ▶ Learn "no fail" magic.
- ▶ Experience the enthusiasm and excitement a little magic can generate in a training session.
- ▶ Experience the creativity-generating potential of magic.
- ▶ Learn how to be sensitive to your training audience when you use a magic effect.
- ▶ Maintain the information-transfer effectiveness of a training session that incorporates a touch of magic.
- ▶ Learn to invent your own magic effects or customize existing ones to meet your training needs.

have them conceive of the many different ways you might have accomplished it. In either case, you have the makings of an excellent creativity-enhancement workshop.

Be sensitive to your training audience when you use a magic effect.

For most magic effects, you will need a volunteer from the audience. Realize that your volunteer will not be as comfortable in front of the audience as you are. So take care to be particularly polite and to do everything possible to make the volunteer feel at ease. As you become more comfortable with performing magic, you will learn to sense how much joking you can get away with without embarrassing a volunteer. Until you develop that sense, don't risk making a trainee feel uncomfortable.

After you have completed a magic effect with the volunteer, be gracious. Request a round of applause from the audience for the volunteer. Positive recognition of a volunteer will leave other audience members eager to get in on the next effect.

Magical Mystery Sources

Would you like to add magic effects to your training bag of tricks? You don't have to look far for help. Books explain how to create the illusions you're after, and magicians' organizations are eager to promote the use of magic. The following resources can help you get started.

Magic References

- ▶ H. Allen. *Sleight of One Liners*. Daytona Beach, FL: Harry Allen, 1991.
- ▶ D. Arch. *Tricks for Trainers*. Resources for Organizations, 1993.
- ▶ Friedhoffer. *Magic Tricks, Science Facts*. New York, NY: Franklin Watts, 1990.
- ▶ K. Fulves. *More Self-Working Card Tricks*. New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1984.
- ▶ F. Garcia and G. Schindler. *Magic With Cards*. New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1975.
- ▶ *GENII: The International Conjurers' Magazine*. Box 36068, Los Angeles, CA 90036.
- ▶ W.G. Gibson. *Professional*

Maintain the information-transfer effectiveness of a training session that incorporates a touch of magic.

Most trainers would agree that we can have fun while we work. But we must not lose sight of the main objective of classroom training, which is the transfer of knowledge.

Every trainer will occasionally have an audience that responds with overwhelming enthusiasm to ice-breakers, energizers, and humor. In such cases, a trainer might be tempted to "play to the audience," even at the expense of the transfer of knowledge. Don't give in to the temptation. Use just enough magic to keep participants' interest and enthusiasm. Make sure your use of magic is relevant to the training content you're trying to get across to trainees.

In other words, after you perform a feat of magic, debrief trainees. Discuss the learning that occurred from your use of magic, just as you would discuss the effect of any other training tool.

Magic for Amateurs. New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1974.

▶ H. Hay. *Learn Magic*. New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1975.

▶ B. Herz, with P. Harris. *Secrets of the Astonishing Executive*. New York, NY: Avon Books, 1991.

▶ J. Hugard and Braue. *The Royal Road to Card Magic*. London: Faber and Faber, 1975.

▶ *Magic Magazine*. Stan Allen and Associates, 7380 South Eastern Avenue, Suite 124-179, Las Vegas, NV 89123.

▶ *M-U-M*. The Society of American Magicians' monthly magazine, Box 338, 26855 Saunders Meadow Road, Idyllwild, CA 92549.

▶ D. Roper. *The Comedy Magic Textbook*. Norcross, GA: David Ginn Publisher, 1991.

Magic Clubs

▶ The Society of American Magicians, Box 510260, St. Louis, MO 63151; 314/846-5659.

▶ International Brotherhood of Magicians, Box 192090, St. Louis, MO 63119-9998; 314/351-7677.

Learn to invent your own magic effects or to customize existing ones to meet your training needs.

As you gain knowledge and enthusiasm about training with magic, you will face times when you'd like to have a magic effect to integrate into a part of your workshop, but can't find one. Good trainers are imaginative. They are constantly developing, modifying, and enhancing the materials they use in their workshops. Do the same thing with magic tricks. If you've identified an effect you like that doesn't quite fit, modify it so that it does. If what you want doesn't exist, develop it.

You don't have to be an ingenious inventor to adapt magic effects or create your own. I've adopted many little gimmicks from children's magic tricks to use in executive-level workshops. For example, tricks with cards and coins are great for illustrating people problems as well as statistical-control problems.

Maintain your magic toolbox; don't discard effects, just because you've already used them. Put a different twist on an old effect that worked in the past. You may find that it can be used just as successfully as part of a totally different learning experience.

An entertaining facet. "A lesson taught with an entertaining facet is a lesson retained." That old proverb is still alive and well. A workshop that has a touch of magic can spark audience interaction while offering a flash of the mystical.

So, what have you got up your sleeve? If you can pull out that magical combination of audience interaction and mystique, you may find that it enhances the effectiveness of all your training endeavors.

"Training 101" is edited by **Catherine M. Petrini**. Send your short articles for consideration to "Training 101," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.