

CREATING ENCHANTMENT

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Can I really be the one to invent something new in magic? Where do I even begin? What if I'm not creative? There are many ways to invent or discover new magical illusions, skills, sleights, presentations, or even genres.

DISCLAIMER – This document is intended to inspire you to be original and to help you create many new illusions and presentations of your very own. In so doing, I've listed many of my own works-in-progress as examples. Feel free to use these as examples and as seeds to grow your own ideas, but please refrain from stealing these ideas outright. The ethics of magic is an entirely different subject and stealing ideas or presentations only stifles the very creativity we seek to nurture. Thank you.

SEEDING YOUR IMAGINATION

Always be on the lookout for new ideas, objects, or situations which you can turn into something enchanting.

Sometimes you may get inspired by watching another magician, actor, comic, singer, dancer, or performer. While it's wonderful to get inspired by these individuals, be careful that you don't copy their styles or acts. Remember to be yourself.

Even everyday routines like shopping can contain a wellspring of ideas. I personally like to walk around stores and just imagine what I could do with every item on the shelves. You can find ideas in shopping malls, jewelry stores, clothing, arts & craft stores, furniture, electronics, office supplies, grocery stores, & restaurants.

Here is just a sampling of the possibilities...

- Have a prediction printed on the back of a T-shirt.
- Perform the linking rings with diamond or pearl necklaces.
- Crazy-Man's Handcuffs with gold bracelets
- Vanish a borrowed, signed dollar bill and have it reappear on the inside of a picture frame.
- Pour water into a glass bowl and then visually mold the water into an aquatic sculpture.
- Levitate a couch or chair.
- Produce a flower in an empty vase.
- Ask your co-worker to pick a card and lose it in the deck. Without leaving her sight, have her check her e-mail to see a message titled "Queen of Clubs."
- Steal the flame from a lit candle.
- Absorb the light from a neon sign.
- Saw a stapler in half and restore it.
- Cause the typed words on a piece of paper to rearrange themselves.
- Read someone's mind over a cell phone.
- Linking Ring Doughnuts
- Have a number prediction written in catsup on someone's hamburger bun.
- Fruit in Impossible Location
- Melt your arm through a solid table.
- Float a drinking straw in mid-air.
- Heat up a bowl of cold soup with a wave of your hand.

Few of these are shockingly new concepts to most seasoned magicians and I'm not going to tip the methods.

WHICH CAME FIRST: THE METHOD OR THE EFFECT?

Magicians often ask this question when soliciting advice about creating new illusions. Do you begin with a method or sleight and then find applications for it, or do you start with the illusion idea and work your way backwards to find a solution?

This is the wrong question to ask. These are both valid approaches and you shouldn't limit your imagination by only choosing one or the other. In fact, these aren't even the only 2 choices!

I often get asked, "Where do you come up with all of your ideas?" I draw inspiration from many different facets of life for making magic. You just have to keep an open mind. And never worry about price when dreaming your dreams. You can always scale the vision back and cut corners in the beginning, and then evolve it over time. Or you can let the idea germinate for weeks, months, or even years until you are able to realize it. It's a good idea to keep a journal of your ideas so you don't forget them later.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Start with the effect.

Ever since I was a child, I dreamed of being able to turn invisible. What would it look like if you really had that power? How would you prove it: floating objects, footsteps in sand, splashing in water? Would you put on a ring or a cloak, or simply fade away? Would you be completely invisible or merely transparent, like the cloaking device in the movie "*Predator*?" (Be wary of the "too perfect" principle when selling the effect to your audience.) If you were invisible and you drank a glass of milk, would your audience be able to see the milk inside you? There are no right or wrong answers. For years, I've read books and worked on countless designs until I answered these questions and came up with solutions for each of the problems. Now if only I could get the proper funding to build it!

Start with the method.

Steve Beam's "[Semi-Automatic Card Tricks](#)" books are an excellent example of this. Steve invents a new method or sleight, and then brainstorms effects designed to take advantage of it (along with laugh-out-loud patter). Look at it from every angle and try to milk all the possibilities. Then show your fellow magicians and they'll often give you even more good ideas or a slightly better handling. It doesn't even have to be a new sleight. Let's face it—if you can force a card, you can come up with original routines.

Start with the music.

Listen to each song on the radio and ask yourself, "What does this song mean? What act could I do with this as the background music?" The songs don't have to be about magic—look inside yourself and find the magic within them. Depending on your favorite type of music, many songs may not apply. But you only need one or two inspirations to have a good musical act in the middle of your show.

David Copperfield often incorporates contemporary music into his stage illusions to keep him current. For example, Copperfield performs a vanishing duck routine to the tune of "*Shake Your Tailfeather*."

I've drawn up plans to do a levitation illusion based on the religious song, "*You Raise Me Up*." I got this idea when I was watching youth members at church perform a spiritual dance routine to the song, waving giant ribbons through the air.

For those of you who grew up in the 1980's, imagine the heart-thumping drums of Bon Jovi's "*Lay Your Hands On Me*" slowly building to a crescendo. The magician doubles over in pain on the stage as 2 extra arms grow out of his body. After performing some manipulations with all 4 arms, more and more arms keep growing out of his body as the song progresses until he's a huge mass of arms. The magician performs magic with the extra limbs, shakes hands with the audience, and eventually returns to normal as the song climaxes with a solo spotlight on the center of a darkened stage.

Start with the lighting.

I like experimenting with many different sources of light and energy to make magic seem, well, more magical! I'm convinced that Rocco's ubiquitous *D'Lite* can be one of the most magical experiences you can give to your audience if presented correctly. My stage illusion, *SoulCatcher*, began by crossing a romantic love story with my experiments with lights. Don't underestimate the importance of R&D. Every other industry invests in it; so should you.

If you ask a child or even an adult to draw a picture of magic, here's what they typically draw: a top hat, a bunny rabbit, a wand, and some stars. The first 3 items we understand. *But why do they draw stars?*

In my lifetime study of magic, I have never, ever seen a magician produce stars. The stars represent the mystic power and energy which the audience secretly hopes are the catalysts for the unexplained events they are about to witness. In books, cartoons, and movies, magicians and wizards always seem to possess the uncanny ability to control and project energy to achieve their magic. In your imagination, when you think of a wand casting a spell, you immediately conjure images of stars sprinkling down to grant your wishes. The stars are subconsciously ingrained in our depictions of magic.

And yet, no magician in the history of magic (to my knowledge) has ever projected energy or produced stars! We are convinced that what the audience really wants is yet another way to find the 4 Aces in a deck of cards.

That is one of the life goals I've set for myself, my humble contribution to our glorious art of deception. *We need to put the stars back into magic.*

Start with the props.

See the above section, "SEEDING YOUR IMAGINATION." Some props don't even know they're props yet. To my wife's chagrin, I've bought many random objects over the years with the noble intentions of "Some day, I'm going to do something with that."

Start with improving an existing magical effect/prop.

Don't be afraid to use props you already own in new and different ways. A Vanishing Deck, for example, can be used for productions as well as vanishes. An Invisible Deck can be presented as a cell phone trick. You can even combine props, gimmicks, and sleights to form something totally original.

Start with the environment.

When you're walking outside, imagine doing magic with leaves, rocks, water, sand, animals, or clouds. Maybe you're going to visit another country like China, France, India, or Spain and you want to customize illusions to their culture. When you're at work, perform magic with computers, office equipment, chairs, rubber bands, etc. When you're eating, visualize magic with food. Become "Magic-Aware."

Short story: I completely freaked out my sister and family over Christmas by vanishing her selected card and making it appear inside the pancake she was eating! It's now grown into a fish story in my household, getting bigger over time.

Start with an emotion.

Most magicians think magic should only produce mystery or laughter. The human experience has a much broader palette and so should your magic. Love, hate, joy, pain, anger, sorrow, greed, melancholy, regret, wistfulness, happiness, thankfulness, embarrassment, fear, horror, playfulness, surprise, vengeance, jealousy, gullibility, excitement, hunger, empathy, spirituality, hope, faithfulness... Paint with a bigger brush.

Start with your favorite hobby or interest (outside of magic).

Jeff McBride recommends in his master class that you make a list of the tricks you know and a second list of your non-magic interests. Then draw lines between the two lists and see if you can combine the two while simultaneously conveying your human interest to the audience. Be yourself. Tell *your* story so the audience can resonate with it.

Start with the audience's experience.

What do you want the audience to experience? Do you want them to be a passive or active participant? Are you looking for an illusion where magic happens around the audience, to the audience, with a volunteer, or with borrowed objects from the audience? Do you want the volunteer to end up with a souvenir they can take home? A complete show will likely have the audience experience all of these things at different times to increase texture. Levitating yourself evokes a different response than, say, levitating your silver ball on stage with a black cloth, levitating your assistant on a table, floating a borrowed bill, or making a (non-stooge) audience member be suspended in mid-air. Will you be performing for lay audiences or magicians? Who is your target audience? You do different magic for a stage show than you would for birthday parties and rest homes. Tailor your magic to your target audience.

Start with the audience's senses.

While magic is first and foremost a visual art, let's expand our horizons. The standard human being has 5 senses: Sight, Sound, Touch, Taste, and Smell. (OK, perhaps women have 6.)

What if we took away sight? Could you still do magic?

I once had the challenge and pleasure of performing for a blind man who went to my church. Throughout his entire life, no one had ever shown him magic. Imagine going through life without ever experiencing magic. So, I pulled out my sponge balls and made them multiply in his hands while his sighted daughter watched. After performing several more effects, I worked my way up to what would be a very emotional illusion for my blind friend—the Finger Chopper. I let him and his daughter examine it thoroughly and made sure they were physically and emotionally ready before we attempted it. It took a lot of courage and trust for him to let me make a metal blade penetrate through his finger, his primary conduit to the universe around him. After it was over, he cried and said it was the most wonderful experience.

You don't have to perform for the blind to take advantage of the other human senses. How could you enhance your effects with other senses? Would your illusion benefit from the addition of music or sound effects? When you're doing the arm-twisting illusion, let the people around you feel so they know it's your real hand and arm. If you're out to dinner with your friends, invite them to bite into a roll to find their vanished bill. Instead of producing a fake rose, produce a real one and give it to your volunteer so she can "stop and smell the roses." If you can't bring the real senses to your audience, incorporate adjectives and elements in your scripted patter that conjures imagery, sounds, smells, and tastes in their mind.

Start with a deadline.

Every month our local I.B.M. Ring meets and defines a meeting theme in advance. This is one of my favorite excuses to invent new, topical illusions. I consider it a challenge each month to create something new, even if it's something I make up on the day of the event. They're not all good, but they're all good experience. Magic meetings, conventions, competitions, and upcoming shows are all great motivators for the creative spirit.

Start with a name.

Sometimes you can run across a cool word or name and build an effect around it. I did this a lot when creating illusions with crystals and gemstones, oozing pipe dreams out of simple words or phrases. In fact, that's an enchanting name right there—"Pipe Dream!" I'll let you unlock what it means and invent that illusion.

Start with a genre.

Let's consider some existing genres in magic. These are not exhaustive, but a large percentage of magic falls into one or more of these categories.

- Close-Up Magic
- Stage Magic
- Parlor Magic
- Card Tricks
- Coins/Money Magic
- Mentalism
- Rope Magic
- Illusions / Grand Illusions
- Magic for Kids
- Escape Artist / Publicity Stunts
- Endurance Artist
- Street Magic
- Comedy Magic
- Animal Magic

Set aside some time to brainstorm ideas in each of the various categories. Then ask yourself, are there any categories other than this? Can I invent my own new genre? The answer is a resounding "YES!"

For the past ~10 years, I've been passively documenting a number of different genres and presentation styles with the goal of inspiring magicians to create something new or present it in a different way. I hope to one day compile all my notes into a book to contribute something back to the art of magic. Some genres/presentation styles are completely new and others are forgotten or rarely used genres I'd like to see revolutionized. I don't have time or space to list them all here, but here's a teaser—it has a lot to do with putting the stars back into magic! The important thing is, if I can do it, so can you.

Remember, we're magicians. Nothing is impossible!