



Adding Persuasive Appeals

We have heard of Robert-Houdin's famous quote that "A conjuror is an actor playing the part of a magician." Many who agree with Robert-Houdin passionately argue that good magicians should study the principles of acting, in order to maximize the effectiveness of their performances. I do not disagree. However, I would suggest that a conjuror is also a *rhetorician* articulating the part of a magician.

As Aristotle stated over 2,000 years ago, rhetoric is "any available means to persuasion." During the time of Aristotle, magicians — also known as *goetes* — used the power of language to persuade people of their magical powers. And magicians also persuade audiences about the amazing nature of the magical feats, creating a sense of awe, wonder, and astonishment.

What I want to offer is that the critical part of Aristotle's definition is the word *means*. In other words, how do (and how can) we, as magicians, persuade? What are some ways that we use persuasive techniques to resonate and connect with audiences?

Every magician wants to connect or relate with the audience in some way. The magician wishes to forge a bond with the audience and create a sense of mystery and wonder. To connect or resonate with the audience is to ensure that the spectators appreciate and enjoy the performance, and feel that it has value and a sense of wonder to it.

But the question still remains: By what means do magicians connect with the audience? We do so through *appeals*. Appeals are tools that we can use to compel or "hook" our audiences, to help persuade them that what we are doing is truly magical. Persuasive appeals enhance the moments of awe and wonder in our performances. There are at least four types of appeals that we can use: logical appeals, emotional appeals, credibility appeals, and forms of identification. Each of these forms of persuasion can substantially improve the way we connect with our audiences.

Logical Appeals

Most of us attempt to persuade the audience that the impossible is possible. If we do an Egg Bag routine, we try to persuade the audience that the bag is a typical bag. If we perform an Ambi-

tious Card routine, we need the audience to know that the deck is a regular deck. These communicative efforts are called *logos* or logical appeals to reasoning. In other words, the persuader uses logical reasoning to convince the audience that what he is doing is valid, legitimate, and real.

There is another way of looking at logical appeals. When audiences ask "How did he do that?" after an effect, they are not just in a moment of awe and wonder. They are also seriously puzzled or they are pondering how the effect was done. When all options, especially obvious ones, are eliminated as possible explanations for the method, then the audience asks this question.

Let's take an obvious example. The magician walks onto the stage, then shows a box on a cart to be empty. The cart is wheeled around 360 degrees, and the audience can also see behind the cart to know that there are no mirrors. Once done, the magician closes the sides of the box, dances around it a bit, then removes the sides to reveal a large cat or an assistant or a pot of gold. The audience is stunned and amazed. They immediately think there must be something about the box — but wait, the magician showed it empty. Or maybe there was something about the cart — but wait, we saw it wheeled around. Well, then there must have been mirrors — but of course we saw through the cart, as well. All obvious explanations have been dismissed. The magician has provided "proof" that the effect was nothing other than amazing and wondrous magic.

Emotional Appeals

The second way we may appeal to the audience is through the use of emotional proofs or *pathos* appeals. A routine that stresses winning the lottery (or some other commodity) or connecting with a loved one, or perhaps a story that resonates with the audience, such as a narrative about freedom or about rebirth — any of these, and others, can evoke passionate feelings in the spectators.

Common emotions such as grief, joy, relief, anxiety, fear, love, and freedom can be tied to any number of magic effects. Coin and money tricks obviously can play to an audience's sense of financial plight or desires. Card effects can emphasize friendship, betrayal, love, and so

on. Torn-and-restored or cut-and-restored tricks can offer ideas about rebirth, freedom, and escape, or any number of emotions tied to human connectedness. Acts that use animals can provide a metaphor for the human condition or show compassion. And the list goes on.

But why stress emotions at all? Adding an emotional appeal to one's act increases the likelihood that the audience will pay attention to and find value in the effects. The emotional appeals also help highlight the likeability of the performer. And emotions add meaning to the routines. As we will discuss below, the meaning behind the effect is really what magic is all about in the first place. We might even say here that magic without emotion runs the risk of losing the human element that is so vital.

Credibility Appeals

A third way to persuade a group is through *ethos* or credibility. *Ethos* may involve several different factors, namely a sense of goodwill for the overall society, reputation and integrity of the performer. Overall, *ethos* means "credibility," which involves the general impression or reputation of a person to others. A magician with an established reputation — say, David Copperfield — will already have *ethos*. A magician who is unfamiliar to the audience must create *ethos* in the first few minutes of the performance and maintain that credibility for the duration of the act. *Ethos* can be sustained by keeping the audience's attention. In other words, *ethos* is not only established by reputation but also earned by hard work during the show.

Conviction and likeability also add to creating a sense of *ethos*. If a performer has conviction — we might also say passion or charisma — in what he is doing, the audience is much more likely to take him seriously. Or if it is a comedy routine, the audience is much more likely to take him humorously.

A magician who fails to establish a connection of credibility with the audience will most likely flop in the performance.

Identification Appeals

A final way to connect with an audience is through identification. To identify with an audience is to find common ground with the people

in it. Identification implies finding similarities with the audience. This can provide a very useful way for the entertainer to establish a meaningful connection. Everyone dreams, and many people share similar dreams, such as flying, escaping from oppressive conditions, and so on. The theme of dreams can provide many ways for the audience to identify with the performer.

Another way to encourage identification is to establish a character that people find relatable. Mac King, for example, has a persona that seems comfortable and relatable to an audience. David Kaye's "Silly Billy" is a character that resonates with children because they want to be around someone who is funny and who shows them respect.

A magician who, during routines, taps into elements he has in common with the audience is considered relatable. He can identify with members of the audience and they in turn identify with him. Identification, then, is a connection based upon meaning. When we share meaning, we can identify with one another.

Enhancing Your Repertoire

Persuasion is more than a magician showing that he is using an ordinary deck of cards (a form of *logos*). Will showing that you have a typical deck of cards add impact to your Card Through Window effect? Absolutely. But wouldn't it add even more impact to offer more than one form of persuasion to the spectators? You can persuade them that you are confident in your ability to do something magical. You can persuade them that what you are doing is something of interest and value. You can give them a way to feel an emotional connection to your routine. Those elements will hold their attention and keep them coming back for more!

Different audience members are persuaded differently, so offering more than one appeal increases the possibilities for connecting with a greater number of people. Besides incorporating a variety of persuasive appeals into your magic, consider adding or emphasizing the following:

- Treat your audience as human beings, not as props. This will add credibility and emotional connection to your performance.
- Involve your audience as much as possible. Participation enhances your likelihood of connecting with the audience and it allows you to maintain audience interest by subtly commanding attention.
- As Steve Cohen writes, "Suggest; don't state." In other words, use the power of language to suggest your persuasive message instead of directly articulating it. This not only increases audience involvement, but it also adds to your credibility and likeability. Directly stating — instead of showing — you have a typical deck of cards, for example, draws attention to the fact that you are doing something suspicious.
- Choose every word carefully and meaningfully for maximum impact. Many magicians

and theorists have written elsewhere about the importance of scripting, and I just want to add that words have power and you should use a thesaurus to identify the most potent words for your scripts.

- If you do a silent routine, you should emphasize your facial expressions and body gestures the same way that other magicians use words. And if you use words, you should also be mindful of your gestures and expressions.

- Think like an audience member — preferably, a non-magician. Don't perform certain effects just because you enjoy performing them. In order to connect and resonate with your audience, perform effects that identify with them and with what they enjoy.

Also remember that all appeals provide *meaning* to your magical performance. In actuality, all appeals are about meaning. Effects are essentially symbolic in nature, as they represent issues that occur in our daily lives, such as unity, death, love, frustration, resolution, and so on. As Eugene Burger reminds us, magic "functions symbolically to awaken us to another realm of experience: the magical dimension that points us toward the mystery that lies behind and beyond all experience." As we have discussed, persuasive appeals can enhance the symbolic nature of magic by highlighting the meaning behind the effects.

Additionally, we can use the persuasive appeals of logic, emotion, credibility and identification to connect with our audiences in an attempt to show how the impossible is possible. Some of us can incorporate these appeals into our routines to add impact and value to our audiences. Others may already be using these techniques, but understanding how they function will enhance their performances. **M**

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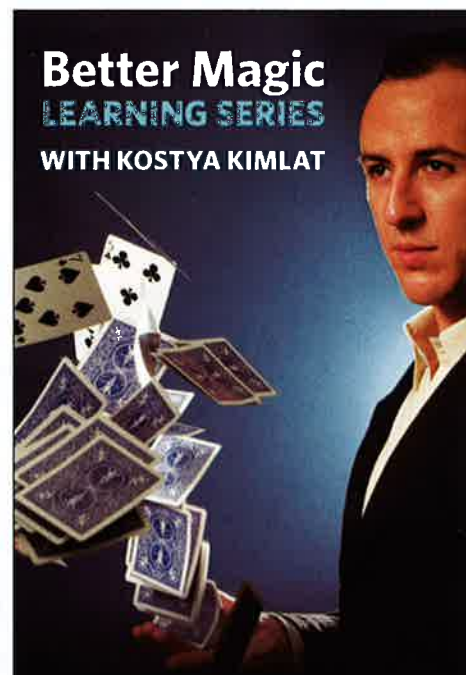
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