

**ENHANCING THE EXCITEMENT AND LEARNING RETENTION IN  
THE CLASSROOM: THE POWER OF MAGIC**

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**ABSTRACT**

The basic differences between good education and excellent education is the dynamism of the instructor and exciting materials. This paper is designed to introduce educators to one of those materials. While not totally novel and unique, magic activities are becoming more and more widely utilized to enhance the excitement and learning retention of the education process. The main focus of this paper is to present several magic effects that can be performed with little or no magic training. They can also be easily customized to be utilized as icebreakers and/or energizers, or used as complete interactive exercises to enhance the management education process. The old proverb that "A lesson taught with an entertaining facet is a lesson retained" is still alive and well.

**INTRODUCTION**

It is common knowledge that magic has been a part of daily life exhibiting itself in many areas such as philosophy, religion, and medicine since the dawning of time. Eventually, magic became a very popular form of entertainment. Whether it was the legendary escapades performed by the great Houdini or the magnificent feats of grandeur currently being performed by contemporary great magicians such as the likes of a David Copperfield, magic remains a consistent means of captivating the attention of highly interested and excited students.

Thus, I will present a multiplicity of some simple but effective magic exercises that will allow any educator, who does not have the time and developed skills of a professional magician, to confidently and successfully enhance the quality of their classes with the mystique of magic. To use magic as an

effective presentation, you do not have to be a professional. While a great deal of magic involves hours of work and/or very expensive props, a great deal does not. A lot of what we call magic is nothing more than the laws of *statistics*, mathematics, physics, and other natural laws at work. Once you understand how the natural law works, you have "no fail" magic at your convenience. In addition, many magic tricks are nothing more than basic behavior control which looks impressive, but are really quite simple in principle. No matter what the participant does, you are always in control and can produce an effect that looks like a successful feat of magic.

The positive comments you will receive during and after your classes will rival any other positive responses you have received in the past. I cannot describe for you the feeling of awe you will experience as your class responds to your first feat of magic. Then, when you describe how this fare of the mystique is germane to your learning topic, you will understand this is one point they will not readily forget. This is the real purpose of education and that is to provide material in a fashion that has true staying power. Once you have experienced all of the positive aspects afforded you by using magic in your teaching, I assure you, you will become as enthusiastic about it as I have become!

However, it is imperative that you use just enough magic to keep the students' interest and enthusiasm. You must make sure your use of magic is germane to your area of education. Finally, and most importantly, you need to explain the magic effect in light of the associated learning topic. In other words, you debrief your class on what learning occurred from your use of magic just like you would with any other pedagogical tool.

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Below are a few basic rules that anyone utilizing magic must follow to be successful:

1. Unless the effect is public domain, never reveal how you do an effect. If pressured to explain how you did the effect, smile and say "Very well. Thank you."
2. Never perform the same effect twice at any given presentation.
3. While the effects I am going to introduce to you are, for the most part, self-working, make sure you have practiced a couple of times until you feel comfortable doing it.

Now let me show you how to present and debrief some of my favorite magic effects.

### THE HOTBOOK

**PURPOSE:** Closing Energizer

**EFFECT:** As a closing energizer, the educator completes his or her presentation by nonchalantly picking up a book and placing it in sight for the entire class. The educator then calmly states that the presentation was inspired by material contained in this book. Now with a great deal of enthusiasm the educator encourages the audience to read this book because it contains some really important and "hot" information. Upon opening the book, a flame will appear from the book giving the appearance the book has caught on fire. The educator faces the class as if nothing is happening and conjures up some brief points relevant to the presentation that are contained in the book. After about two minutes the book *is* closed extinguishing the fire. The educator puts the book down and very seriously states with a straight face "Yes, that book really contains some hot stuff."

**PREPARATION:** The Hot Book can be purchased from any magic dealer and is completely self working.

**DEBRIEFING:** After a presentation has been completed it *is* often a nice touch to close your

presentation with an effect that will leave a lasting impression on your students. The Hot Book will definitely accomplish this. The Hot Book is extremely easy to use and can be readily used for other effects!

### POINTER ON DEMAND

**PURPOSE:** Icebreaker

**EFFECT:** The educator begins his or her presentation which employs a visual display such as an overhead transparency or a slide projector image. The educator fumbles around his or her materials stating to the class that he or she is looking for a pointer with which to call attention to some details appearing on the visuals. In disgust the educator states in embarrassment that the pointer is no where to be found. In order for the presentation to continue, the educator apologizes to the class for being so unprofessional. The presentation begins with the educator using his or her index finger as a pointer. Then the educator looks upward while extending his or her left hand and asks the students if they too can see a pointer floating in the air. They of course respond no. Immediately following the students' negative response, the educator reaches up with the right hand and grabs a three foot pointer right out of thin air. The educator then continues the presentation as the students sit in awe.

**PREPARATION:** The pointer is really an "Appearing Cane" which looks very much like a pointer. The "Appearing Cane" can be purchased from any magic dealer and requires approximately five minutes to become familiar with how it works. With about ten minutes of practice, you will have a magic effect that you will use constantly.

**DEBRIEFING:** Since this effect is primarily an attention getter, there is not much to debrief I normally, in a joking fashion, tell the students that as a professional educator I must always be prepared for the unknown. One of the advantages of

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knowing a little bit about magic, if I forget something, I can always conjure the item up.

### THE MULTIPLYING VALUE OF LEARNING

**PURPOSE:** Icebreaker demonstrating the value of learning

**EFFECT:** The educator holds up both hands in a semi-fist position with thumb and index finger pointed in direct view of everyone in the classroom. One hand holds nothing between the pointed thumb and index finger while the other hand holds a nickel between the respective fingers. In a very profound and serious tone of voice, the educator tells the students "you can put no effort into this presentation (extending the hand with the empty thumb and index finger) and receive no benefit from the presentation (opening my full hand revealing it to be totally empty)." Then, in a more positive tone of voice state "Nor you can invest a little effort in the presentation (extending the other hand with the thumb and index finger holding the nickel) and receive a goodly amount of benefit from the presentation (a slight movement of the hands then magically changes the nickel into a half dollar). Next, with the half dollar extended, state very positively "and if you are willing to invest a lot of effort in the presentation you can realize tremendous value for your efforts." As soon as the educator has said this, gracefully produce a second half dollar with the empty hand. To put the final touch on this effect, toss both half dollars in the air and the original nickel has vanished.

**PREPARATION:** Place a small amount of nonpermanent caulking compound or magician's wax on the back side of the nickel. In the natural opening on your left hand between your forefinger and thumb grip two half dollars in a circular fashion. They will be concealed from view by the students when you grasp the nickel with the tips of these fingers. After you have emphasized the value of the students' putting a nickel's worth of effort into your presentation, cover your left hand with your right

hand and force the nickel to adhere to the top half dollar. Then project both half dollars toward the class, concealing the adhered nickel sandwiched between the two half dollars, which will appear to the students as one half dollar. Then to complete the effect, gently take the front half dollar with the nickel stuck behind it, into the tips of your right forefinger and thumb.

This will leave the second half dollar in your left finger tips giving the students the sensation that you changed a nickel into two half dollars. To convince the students that the nickel has truly disappeared, gently toss both coins into the air giving the appearance that the nickel has disappeared. Since the coins are rotating in the air, the students will never see the nickel.

**DEBRIEFING:** The primary purpose of this effect is to demonstrate the exponential value that can be gained by students investing only a small investment on their part. A very simple magic routine that leaves a lasting impression on the benefits to be derived from aggressively investing efforts in a presentation. And as is the case of most icebreakers, you have made some progress in overcoming the frequent reluctance of many students of having to go to "another presentation."

### TOMMY'S MOTHER

**PURPOSE:** Icebreaker and/or actively listening exercise

**EFFECT:** State to your students that a major impediment to effective communication is our normal tendency not to engage in effective listening. To get the students involved, go into the class to "borrow some money." As almost everyone scrambles into pockets and purses, quickly procure a penny, a nickel, a dime, and a quarter. Returning to a central point, deliberately explain to the students that despite the fact that we all know the importance of listening, very few of us really

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actually do it. Involve the students by informing them that you are going to tell them a story which has a question at the end and are they listening? You will get a few people to say yes. Again, in a louder tone of voice ask them again “are you listening?” This time you will get a more enthusiastic “YES.” Having set the stage, tell them if they know the answer or have heard something like this before, just write down the answer in order not to destroy the effect for the rest of the class. Now demonstrate your point by calling attention to the coins in your hand and by asking them to answer the following question. “Tommy’s mother had three children. She named her first daughter Penny (hold up the penny for all to see) and she named her second daughter Nicolette, (hold up the nickel for all to see). What did she name her third child (hold up the quarter)?”

Generate even more class enthusiasm by asking “Who is absolutely sure they have the right answer?” You will be amazed at how few hands go up and at the varied reactions when you ask them to repeat for you the question you asked them. This little feat has tremendous effect when they realize that Tommy’s mother named her third child Tommy, of course.

**PREPARATION:** Just collect a penny, nickel, dime, and quarter from the students to create some class interaction and anticipation.

**DEBRIEFING:** The primary purpose of this effect is to demonstrate that while people think they are listening, there is plenty of room for improvement. We know we speak at a velocity that is far below the mind’s ability to process. This allows time for the mind to wander, daydream, and just get bored. The main response you receive from this effect is that you “tricked them with the coins.” In magical terminology, the coin activity is called “misdirection” and is the secret to a vast multitude of magic.

As I process this communication icebreaker, which could become the basis for a complete communication session, I explain how our working environment is full of misdirections, e.g., telephone calls, unannounced meetings, and distractions of all kinds. That is the reason we must really work hard if we are to have effective communication.

### CRAYONS TO SILK

**PURPOSE:** Team building, Problem solving, Creativity exercises

**EFFECT:** State to your class that there many advantages of working in teams and putting down their ideas on flip chart paper. It helps to facilitate team building, provide novel solutions to old and tiring problems, and could generate some new and innovative ideas. But to make the process really effective, the teams must express their ideas on the flip chart in the form of images, icons, etc., but no words. The reason for this is to get the creative juices flowing. State there is something magical about this process. Produce a box of crayons in your left hand and hold a few sheets of paper in front of the box of crayons. Remove the paper, open the box, and pull from the box three very colorful silks.

**PREPARATION:** Purchase Samuel Patrick Smith’s “Crayons to Silk” at your local magic dealer. It’s a great deal because you can use it for other team building exercises. Very easy to use.

**DEBRIEFING:** There are a multiplicity of reasons for dividing a class into groups and to have them jot down their creative ideas in a picture format on large sheets of flip chart paper. It creates a relaxed and jovial classroom environment that is quite conducive for team building, problem solving, and creative exercises. From prior experiences, I know there will be some reluctance to engaging in what may be perceived to be a “childish exercise.” This fail proof piece of magic generates a great deal of excitement and an atmosphere free of the original reluctance to participate in the drawing exercise.

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### TWENTY ONE

**PURPOSE:** Most preferred co-worker, quality control, regression analysis

**EFFECT:** A volunteer comes forth and deals out twenty one cards at random. The cards are laid face up in three columns of seven cards each. The volunteer is asked to select a card that could represent his or her most preferred co-worker or a defective product that should warrant further inspection. The volunteer then goes out into the classroom, writes down the card of choice on a piece of paper, and gives it to another person for safe keeping. Then the volunteer is simply asked to point to which of the three columns the selected card is in without divulging the selected card. You randomly pick up the columns of card into your hands and then deal them face up in rows of three until each row contains seven cards apiece. After about three iterations of this procedure, you collect the cards and deal them out into several small lot sizes face down. The volunteer then selects lots that are felt to contain the defective cards until only one card is left face down. Imagine their surprise when you turn the card over and it is their selected card.

**PREPARATION:** There is no actual preparation, but the process needs to be described for you to preform another “no fail” magic effect. The volunteer freely selects any twenty one cards. It doesn’t matter which ones they are. You then in a somewhat messy fashion lay out the cards face up in three rows. Don’t be concerned yet whether or not you have exactly seven cards in each column. You can then make sure the count is correct. The less professional you execute this process the more you distract your students. Once you have three rows of seven cards, have the volunteer make the mental selection and give it to another party in writing to insure the integrity of the trick.

Volunteers have been known to change their mind to put one over on the educator! Then have the

volunteer point to the column containing the selected card.

Here is the important part. You always want to pick that column second so that it winds up in the middle of the pack. Therefore, I will ham it up and pick up one of the other two columns in a haphazard fashion in order to divert attention from the fact that I always place the selected column in the middle. With all of the cards in your hand, you turn them over so that the pile is face down and then, very carefully, deal them off the stack and place them face up in rows of three until each column has seven cards. Do this process about three times. Then note the fourth card in the middle column. This is the selected card. At this point, make a comment that you are frustrated and pick up the columns with the selected card again in the middle. Place the cards face down in squares of four. Place the first two piles next to the volunteer. Then place the next square as far from the volunteer as possible and as close to you as possible. As you lay down the next square of four, **PLACE THE ELEVENTH CARD AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SQUARE** because this is the selected card and you don’t want to forget where you put it. Then lay out the rest of the cards in any fashion you like. Have the volunteer point to packs of cards. If they are ones that you know does not contain the selected card just pick them up and discard them face down. When the pile pointed to contains the selected card, remove all of the other piles. Then push the pile of four toward the volunteer and spread them apart from each other. Have the volunteer point to two cards. If the selection does not contain the selected card, discard them. If the selection contains the selected card, discard the other pile. This technique is called the “magician choice” which allows you to discreetly keep the cards you want in play. Then the volunteer points to one of the remaining cards. Using the “magician’s choice” again discard this choice. Turn over the last card which is the selected card!

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**DEBRIEFING:** To this day, this is my favorite magic effect because of its versatility and simplicity. The trick is based upon a simple mathematical procedure that forces the eleventh card to the middle of the deck leaving ten indifferent cards on top and ten indifferent cards on the bottom. You can use this principle to select a boss, a co-worker, a teammate, or a quality defective item. Since this effect is considered a public domain effect you can reveal how you did it. Thus, you can see why explaining how this effect was accomplished by pulling off the outer points and forcing a card to the mid point can help explain regression analysis and other statistical procedures. From a human behavior point of view, another beauty of this exercise is the tendency of a student not to invade the space of an authority figure. Thus, by placing the selected card close to you, you have a high probability of that pile being picked last. This is also valuable information on human behavior to share with your students.

### RED & BLACK CARDS

**PURPOSE:** Production scheduling and human resource applications

**EFFECT:** You ask for a volunteer from the class to help you with this project. You are sitting behind a table and you have the volunteer sit to your immediate left. You have just given a presentation on the various methods of scheduling jobs through a processing system and you want to demonstrate how simple these scheduling concepts are. You have a deck of cards in your left hand face down. You deal the first card off of the top of the deck and lay it down face up. It is a black queen. You ask the volunteer what color the card is. The response is that it is a black card. You deal off the next card which is black and place it face up about half way up on top of the black queen. The volunteer again responds that it is a black card. The next card you deal off the deck and place a couple of inches along side the black cards. The volunteer states that it is a red card. Then you state, "well let's pretend these are jobs to be scheduled and our scheduling rule will

be the color of the cards." How much easier could you make this scheduling process?

Then you take the next card off the top of the deck face down. You ask the volunteer what color the card is and of course he or she doesn't have a clue. You comment that after your fine presentation on scheduling, the volunteer can do it by just taking a random guess. If the volunteer guesses black, you place the card face down on the black cards already on the table in a neat column. If the volunteer guesses red, you place the card face down on the red cards already on the table in a neat process. You repeat this process until about half of the deck has been placed down.

Next, you inform the volunteer that he or she is doing such a fine job, that you are going to reverse the scheduling process. You are now going to place the cards that the volunteer guesses as being black on the red column and the red cards on the black column. You and the volunteer schedule the remaining cards. You now collect both column of cards one at a time and spread them out face up. The cards are in perfect order as you had scheduled. Each column has exactly half of the red cards on the top and exactly half of the black cards on the bottom. While the class stares on in amazement, you politely take credit for giving a highly successful presentation on scheduling.

**PREPARATION:** Simply take a deck of cards and place all of the red cards on top and all of the black cards on the bottom. To add some misdirection to the effect, I place a couple of black cards on the top. When you do the reverse process, this is going to place the black cards on the bottom. To make the effect clean, before I turn over the columns, I very nonchalantly pick up the two face up black cards in the first column and move them to the bottom as I turn over the column. Nobody will ever notice. If you get heckled about shuffling the cards first, simply reply that as you are doing the effect the cards will get a through mixing. Also, the

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more you ham up this effect the more benefits you will derive from it in terms of students' enthusiasm.

**DEBRIEFING:** This is probably my second most favorite effect. It is guaranteed to work everytime unless you get carried away with the excitement that it generates and don't pay attention to what you are doing. Also, it has a multiplicity of uses. It is an excellent way to close a presentation on a variety of scheduling processes. It can also be used in a host of human resource applications. This effect can be used to randomly divide a class into groups by varying the number of cards to match the number of students in the class. Or the cards can be used as surrogates to separate the class into groups based upon demographic, Myers-Briggs types, Type A and Type B personality types, etc. The more times you use this effect, the more opportunities you will find to use it in other applications.

### **EYE POPPER!**

**PURPOSE:** Customer quality service

**EFFECT:** You are making a presentation about the increasing attention being paid to increasing the quality of customer service. You mention how you have noticed increased levels of quality in the many areas of customer service. You mention that you have noticed tremendous efforts being exerted in the medical field. And jokingly you mention how even the level of quality of hospital food has increased. You state that last week you even stopped into a local hospital cafeteria to grab a bite of lunch. While you make this statement you hold a very nice looking spoon up with your left hand for the class to view. While you were eating you thought you might as well get your eyes examined. At this point you bring the spoon up to one of your eyes and remove your eye ball. The eye is shown to be on the spoon and your socket is empty! You then replace your eye and state what a productive morning it was. You had lunch and your eye fixed at the same time!

**PREPARATION:** Just purchase Steve Spill's EYE POPPER! at your local magic dealer. It is self working and can be used immediately.

**DEBRIEFING:** This *is* definitely one of the most dynamic icebreakers on the market. It can also be utilized to generate a very enthusiastic discussion on how the level of quality in the area of customer service has been consistently improving in order for service organizations to survive and prosper.

### **COLOR-CHANGING STREAMER**

**PURPOSE:** Just-in-time inventory techniques

**EFFECT:** You state to your class that "you are the proprietor of a local men's clothing store. A customer comes in and is looking for a scarf. You show him a very fine black scarf. He states that it is quite nice but he really would want one that was a little more colorful. You tell him that you have taken advantage of the just in time inventory management system and that the black one is the only one you have in stock. The customer states again he likes the scarf but would really like one more colorful. Since you also know the value of customer service, you wave your hand gesturing to your vendor and instantaneously the black scarf changes into a very colorful scarf.

**PREPARATION:** Simply purchase the Color-Changing Streamer from your local magic dealer. It is very durable and is ready to use.

**DEBRIEFING:** This is an excellent icebreaker to close out a just-in-time presentation or to begin a discussion on this inventory management technique.

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