
Lecture for LAFCM
ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
Remarks for Christian Conjurers

February 2009

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Paul the Apostle recognized that the Christian life was one of constant improvement. He readily admitted that he had not yet "arrived" as a follower of Jesus Christ, but was constantly pressing forward. Far from being discouraged because he had not yet apprehended, he realized that each step forward opened for him new joys in the Christian walk, new power, new insights and new power. Such forward progress was looked upon with eager anticipation.

Such is also the nature of performance arts. We never get the sense that we have arrived but are constantly evaluating, seeking feedback, rearranging, learning and growing so that we can be the best we can be, not for our glory but for God's glory. So then, there is always room for improvement. The magic presented in this lecture is not necessarily explained. One reason for a lack of explanation is that the effects involve purchasing commercial items. Another reason is that it is not the "tricks" which are taking center stage but instead the presentation of magical pieces. Please do not misunderstand: these presentations still need work and welcome feedback. We are all in this journey to create *wonder* in the minds of our audiences, many times with the goal of directing the hearts of those audiences to the One who is altogether Wonderful!

Demonstrations:
Title of Effect:

Psalm 34:7 - Delight thyself also in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Title of Effect:

II Cor. 5:21 - For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Have you ever seen a second rate film trying to portray a first-rate Christian message? What did it do to the message? Did it weaken the message? Did it subject the message to criticism? Did it entice people or repel them? Our form of theater is no different. Let's take a look at what some in the conjuring field suggest for improvement:

IMPROVING ON OUR ROLE:

(Magic & Showmanship - pp. 37- 45 & 52-53) Henning Nelms reminds us that every conjuring theme has four elements:

1. Who is involved? The *personalities*.

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2. What is being exhibited? The *phenomenon*.
 3. Why is the routine being performed? The *purpose*.
 4. How is the purpose achieved? The *proof*.

IMPROVING ON OUR CONSTRUCTION:

Exposure creates a horrible distraction drawing attention away from our message. Yet, we do have secrets to conceal, we have moves to hide in the effort to present an excellent theatrical framework through which to present our message. How then can we improve in protecting those sensitive areas?

In *The Books of Wonder* by Tommy Wonder and Stephen Minch (pp. 59 - 63) we read an essay called *The Architect*. In this article Wonder tells us something of creating a magical effect. In this he speaks of:

1. Order:
2. The Working Order:
 - a. The Dream:
 - b. The Technical Details:
 - c. The Building:
 - d. It's Ready -- Time for Adjustments:
3. Be-Cautious About Being Too Rigid:

IMPROVING ON OUR PRACTICE:

This is the difference between success and failure, isn't it? Success involves more than talent. In his book, *Talent is Overrated*, Geoff Colvin introduces us to what he calls "deliberate practice" (pp. 65 - 75). Just how does this type of practice differ from the kind with which we are most familiar?

1. It is designed specifically to improve performance:
2. It can be repeated a lot:
3. Feedback on results is continuously available:

4. It is highly demanding mentally:

5. It isn't much fun:

Illustration from the life of comedian Chris Rock.

IMPROVING ON OUR CASTING:

As soon as you decide to perform in a particular place on a specific occasion, ask yourself what role or roles you can most readily convince your audience to adopt. The simplest procedure is to analyze your likely audience by mentally filling out the following questionnaire:

1. How many people?
2. Male, female or both?
3. Average age, mixed ages?
4. Highbrow or lowbrow?
5. Type of occasion: light or serious?
6. Previous preferences (if any) indicated by people whom you expect to be present?
7. Approximate total time that you can take up and still "send them away wanting more"?

Form the habit of scanning the audience for prospective volunteers as soon as possible. The spectator who catches your eye will also catch the eye of others. There are no universal rules for selecting "volunteers" -- even a showoff may be an asset in some situations. Nevertheless here are some suggestions from Mr. Nelms:

1. Pick a pretty girl in a bright dress. However, don't use a real beauty, or the audience will watch her rather than you. If you use a man, he should be odd in some way that will not suggest either pity or embarrassment. A large man, or one who is tall and thin is a good bet.

2. Determine the role you will have the spectator play.
(Magic & Showmanship - pp. 58-62) Henning Nelms kindly lists for us a variety of roles in which an audience member may be cast.
--Helper
--Subject
--Lender

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- Inspector
 - Pupil
 - Contestant

Whenever a routine calls for a "volunteer," form a clear idea of his role while you plan your presentation. Try to decide what qualities you would like him to have. Then search for a satisfactory candidate as soon as you have the opportunity to look over the audience.

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It would do us well to treat those who assist us with grace and dignity. They are more nervous than we are. We should take full responsibility when a spectator doesn't follow instructions or misses a crucial step and thus foiling our little plan. Be polite, courteous, helpful without seeming to be patronizing or speaking in a condescending manner.

IMPROVING ON OUR COMBINATION OF MESSAGE & MAGIC:

It has been said that when it comes to "message magic" that the message weakens the magic or the magic weakens the message. Granted, we want to stay away from cheapening our message. We also don't want to present the most glorious message of all with a weak form of presentation. So what about it? Let's close by brainstorming about what it is that weakens our message and magic. Then we can brainstorm about what can strengthen it. After all, there is always *room for improvement!*