

Execs learn tricks of the trade to motivate their sales staffs

by Mary Jung
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A sales executive sawed one of his best sales reps in half, stood between the torso and thighs, and announced to the audience, "Although it may appear otherwise, effective sales strategy indicates that you can't be in two places at once."

The sawing was an illusion; the message was real.

This scene was part of a meeting designed by Bill Herz, owner of Magi-corp Productions Inc., New York. Herz specializes in performing magic at corporate meetings and teaching executives how to do the tricks.

When a company wants Herz to help with a sales meeting, the company usually will tell him the theme of the meeting in advance, and Herz will design one to five tricks, which go along with the theme, for the sales director to perform. He said most executives can learn the tricks after 10 to 15 minutes of rehearsal.

Herz performs at a lot of sales meetings because companies want something dynamic to motivate their salespeople. He also does performances and teaches others to perform at press conferences, product introductions, and trade shows.

Ninety percent of the time, Herz works with marketing directors and often has to sign secrecy agreements because he is privy to new marketing plans as much as a year before they're made public.

Herz believes magic is a strong communications tool because it's something the corporate audience doesn't expect.

"It's visual, and it actually involves the audience," he said.

A speech is "much more memorable when you visually see someone communicate the point," Herz said, instead of just hearing the presentation and perhaps watching a few slides or charts. Magic also "can enhance the speaker's personality" and make executives better speakers.

He emphasized that the speech is still the most important aspect of the presentation and that magic should be used only to highlight the key points.

But not all executives are receptive to using magic, Herz said. The ones who are willing to try magic tricks usually are good speakers and see the need to communicate efficiently with the audience.

Welcomes challenge

Dull communicators, on the other hand, scoff at the idea of using magic, but Herz welcomes the challenge of working with them. He mentioned one CEO who wasn't receptive to the idea of using magic in his presentations, but "now the CEO won't get up without a trick," Herz said. People who once thought his speeches were boring now look forward to them.

When Herz encounters executives nervous about making their presentations, he tells them that though they know what they're going to say, the audience doesn't, so if they make a mistake or change their speech a little, the audience won't be aware of it.

Herz admitted, "Before every show, you're nervous... but that's a re-



It's showtime! Magician Bill Herz and his able-bodied assistant—in this case TV star David Frost—combine their skills in a feat of prestidigitation. Herz is a hit at sales meetings, where he uses illusions to discuss reality.

ally good element. If you're not nervous, you don't care about your audience."

Magic not only "adds life" to an otherwise dull meeting, according to Herz, it can reduce tension as well. One example he offered was a magic theme party he staged for Vintner's International Inc. after it acquired Seagram's Wine Coolers. It was a personnel meeting including employees from both Seagram's and Vintner's.

Eased tension

Everyone at the meeting was a little tense, according to Herz, and worried about what was going to happen, if they were going to lose their j...

Herz had magicians placed around the meeting room performing various tricks. He said it helped to put the employees at ease and was a "good ice-

breaker" because, even though the employees didn't know each other, they were able to turn to one another and say, "Did you see that?" or "How did he do that?"

A&W Beverages Inc., White Plains, N.Y., is another company that has used Herz's magic, according to Rick Park, advertising manager at A&W, who said the magician has given the company "a lot of good ideas."

Park said A&W first used Herz five years ago for a sales promotion that was tied into magic. The company received a very good response to his performance, Park said, and has used him three or four times since. He has introduced its cream soda into a new market and entertained at a national sales meeting.

Besides performing magic and
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Execs

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teaching executives magic tricks, Herz has designed magic premium booklets. For Georgia-Pacific's Coronet paper towels, Herz created a magic booklet that showed how to do several magic tricks—all with paper towels.

He also created a magic booklet for A&W that included four tricks that could be done with A&W bottles and cans.

Magicorp was founded in June 1987, but Herz has been performing magic professionally for more than 12 years. He said he's been interested in it since he was 8 years old.

Herz said he "never could shake it [magic]," not even while he was going for his MBA at Cornell. And once

he graduated, he even used a magic trick on his resumé to get potential employers to respond. It was effective; he said he got an 88% response rate, although not all of them were job offers.

Eventually, Herz did find a job at a promotions company, but he said after nine months in the "real world" he'd had enough and wanted to work on his magic full time.

Herz said his family and friends were "very supportive" of his decision to make magic his career. In fact, "they were surprised I took the 'real' job in the first place," he said.

Initially he performed at nightclubs, but he said they were boring, the crowds were "seedy," and the hours were terrible. He then discovered that there was a market for magic in business, and he decided to alter his act to appeal to corporations.

Unlike the nightclub environment, Herz said, "the corporate audience is

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usually a pretty sophisticated audience," and with corporate functions he gets to try new things all the time, instead of doing the same act night after night.

The different personalities of the companies and their executives fascinate Herz, and he said he tries to take

this into account when designing tricks. He also tries to find information on the speaker's background and reputation in the company.

Herz cited one example where the executive who was scheduled to speak was known as a "no man"—he was always saying "no." He had the executive perform tricks around the word "no."

Although Herz does no advertising, he has been successful in getting clients by word of mouth. In less than two years in business, Magicorp's profits have risen to \$200,000.

"I love what I'm doing, said Herz, who hopes to open a branch office in California.

But that's not his ultimate goal. He'd like the president of the U.S. to call him up and say, "I need you to teach me a few tricks for a speech I'm making." 