

## A Modern Merlin Helps Corporations Work Their Magic

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He Teaches Executives Tricks  
Such as Root-Beer Float;  
No Ledger Legerdemain

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NEW YORK—Bill Herz thought it would be funny to levitate a can of root beer at a sales meeting for A&W Brands Inc. in Scottsdale, Ariz. So he taught an A&W executive how to do just that, and it brought down the house.

Root beer float: Get it?

A New York magician with a master's degree in business administration, Mr. Herz makes his living teaching magic to corporate executives. No, he can't turn red ink black, or make a raider go poof in a puff of smoke. But he can do a lot of other things to help businessmen enliven their routine corporate or public appearances.

He can show a chief financial officer how to instantly transform the company's product into a box stuffed with cash, keeping his audience awake. He can show executives how to tell, without looking, which playing card was chosen by an employee across the room, impressing any spear-carriers who doubted the boss's all-seeing power and wisdom.

### Salesman Becomes a Donkey

"I get a request once a week to teach this or that chairman to cut someone in half," says Mr. Herz. "I could teach these guys to make an elephant appear or a piano float. But these things can be expensive, and besides, we don't want the audience to stop listening to the speech."

Mr. Herz's fees range as high as \$50,000 for an entire production with major illusion, and he charges from \$750 to \$1,000 to teach one or two simple tricks. (Read on to the end, however, and you will learn how to do a trick with your business cards—free of charge.)

A Chevrolet sales manager wanted to graphically demonstrate at a sales meeting how salesmen shouldn't behave. He hired Mr. Herz to help turn one into a donkey. The can of A&W root beer wasn't levitated just for laughs: The company's marketing managers wanted to emphasize their new grocery-store promotion for root-beer floats.

At a Fuji Photo Film USA Inc. meeting in Chicago last June, says Steven Solomon,

general manager of the computer media division, "Our marketing manager did a rope trick, and our national sales manager put a new product into a glass box and then turned it into money. These are not your typical silly tricks."

Mr. Herz, 33 years old, has been doing tricks since he got a magic set for his 10th birthday. "I was always small as a kid," he says. "Magic got you attention." He has worked as a Fuller Brush salesman, a booker of entertainment for Club Med and a designer of production promotions. He quit the last job in 1980 to go into the corporate magic business under the name Magicorp, which has handled as many as 300 meetings and trade shows a year.

In 1987, Mr. Herz was in London showing Terence Newcombe-Bilham, marketing manager for Liberty Life Assurance Ltd., the tricks he planned for the insurer's annual sales meeting. "Can't you teach me a trick?" Mr. Newcombe-Bilham asked. He wound up doing the entire show.

That persuaded Mr. Herz to focus on teaching magic for executives to perform themselves. He says none of his pupils ever miss a trick. "Between you and me, I could teach a monkey," he says. He reads speeches, consults with executives on points they want to emphasize, invents tricks and provides props. He himself still performs on many occasions.

One afternoon, Mr. Herz is teaching four tricks to a franchising executive from Rhode Island who has traveled to the magician's sunny apartment in downtown New York. The Rhode Islander, Peter Cotton, says he once opened a meeting by shooting a starter's gun. Now he wants to top that at a meeting of Management Recruiters International Inc., of Cleveland; he heads the Eastern region of its Sales Consultants division.

Mr. Herz first demonstrates the four tricks. "Everybody gets upset when they see how easy the tricks are," he says, noticing Mr. Cotton's discomfort. "Believe me, people will be amazed. They love to be fooled."

Mr. Cotton grows apprehensive at learning that, among other things, he will be bouncing around the stage balancing a Ping-Pong ball on his nose. "I'm shaking my head because I can't believe I'm doing this," he says. "And I'm not sure I can remember all the lines you gave me." "Don't worry," says Mr. Herz. The lesson continues.

Several weeks later, Mr. Cotton stands before 385 franchisees and account executives in a hotel ballroom in Teaneck, N.J. All wear name tags and yellow buttons proclaiming the meeting's theme: "The Magic Is You."



Bill Herz

"We've had a great year, and next year will be even better," Mr. Cotton tells his audience. "How do I know? It's in the cards. Let me show you some ESP." He tosses out a deck of cards into the audience, and three women each pick a card from it. Mr. Cotton is expected to identify the cards. He ad-libs to heighten the suspense. "Cynthia, I'm not getting your card," he tells one of the women. "Think of nothing. Feel nothing. Pretend it's 9 a.m. in your office."

Suddenly, Mr. Cotton calls out the three cards, correctly, and the crowd applauds. After lunch, he magically balances the Ping-Pong ball on his nose. (A bit of glue helps.) Introducing speakers at the next day's session, he performs a number-guessing and another card trick.

In the end, the troops give Mr. Cotton rave reviews and facetiously ask whether he is available for birthday parties. A franchisee writes that this was "the best meeting I ever went to." Now Mr. Cotton says he has a new problem: "How in the hell am I going to top this?"

### The Business-Card Trick

Six of your business cards are laid out in a row, face up, on a desk or table. You ask someone to pick a number between one and six. Beginning with the card at one end of the row, you count cards up to the number selected, pointing to each card as you do. The card on which you end the count is turned over. It proves to be the only one of the six with a message on the back side that says, "You will pick this card."

Preparation: Write the message on the back of one of the cards and place this card fourth down from the top in the stack of six cards.

Execution: Deal the cards in front of you from left to right so that the top card is farthest to your left and the sixth card is farthest to your right. Say to the other person: "There are six cards here. Give me any number between one and six." The key is that you know you want the *fourth card from the left*: The trick is learning how to land there every time.

If the person says "one," you spell the word one aloud as you point to the cards from right to left. At "e," you will be pointing to the fourth card from the left. You say, "This is the card you picked," and push it forward. Turn over the other five cards, none of which have a message on the back. Then ask the person to turn over the remaining card, which does bear the message.

If the person says "two" or "six," you spell the number aloud as you point to each card from right to left. At "o" or "x" you will be pointing to the desired card. If the person says three, count in numbers to three, pointing to the cards from right to left. If the person says "four," count in numbers from left to right. For "five," spell the number from left to right.

Remember the magician's code of secrecy and don't give away the trick.