An abstract painting by Peter Wardell featuring a complex composition of overlapping geometric and organic shapes. The palette includes vibrant red, deep purple, black, and white. A central purple triangle contains a pattern of yellow wavy lines and dots. The overall style is expressive and gestural.

52 IDEAS

PETER WARDELL

INTRODUCTION



In 2011 I felt the need for a project that would quite literally force me to write a blog post every week - the contents of this book(let) are proof that I succeeded.

I use that term loosely and only in regards to the fact that I managed to write every week. The quality of the writing however is not included in that description of success. Some of it is very good, (IMO), some just good and of course there are some posts that stink, but I have included them in this book just as they appeared on the blog, for better or for worse. I have not re-read the posts or edited them to any extent. You have been warned.

I also realise that many of the posts refer directly to my profession, corporate entertainment and more specifically magic. However I believe that a lot of what is written is applicable to almost any profession. Simply remove the words, magic, magician etc. and replace them with your own and the majority of the time it should still make sense.

The role of the magician may seem to be very niche but ultimately it is a profession that simply seeks to communicate with it's target audience and make a positive impact on them.

In short it is probably not a great deal different from your own. I am not a mysterious figure who hides behind a shield of smoke and mirrors, (sorry), I am a creative entrepreneur who spends a large portion of his time looking for ways to better the service I offer, be a good dad and partner and to make a difference to the world in some way. That is really what these posts were meant to be about.

As you read through the book you will make your own judgements as to whether I was successful in conveying my ideas and I am always happy to hear what you have to say. Please get in touch via my website:

www.peterwardell.com

Just be civil. I'm a performer and I bruise like a peach.

Pete

(Just to let you know some of the links in this PDF are affiliate links, which means I'll make about £0.01 if you buy something!)

Cover Image - Four aces (Simultaneous Composition) by Olga Rozanova

CHAPTER 1

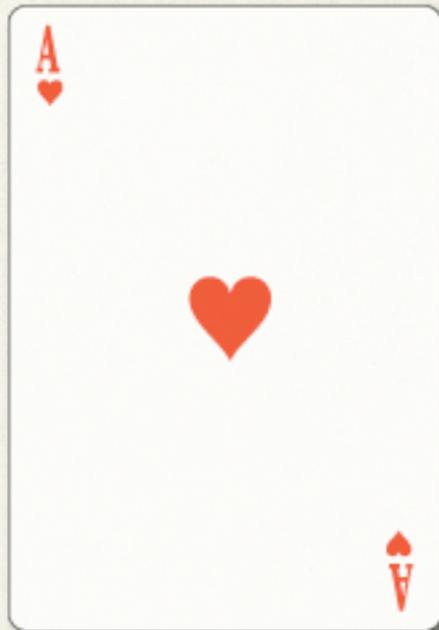
HEARTS

JACK OF HEARTS BY OLGA ROZANOVA



ACE OF HEARTS

MEANING



A magic trick without meaning is a puzzle. The same is true for most things in life, which is fine if you're looking for a puzzle but most of us would choose amazing over confusing. At the heart of everything you do there should be meaning. If what you do has meaning then you have the potential to create something amazing. Without meaning it becomes very hard to dedicate yourself, your heart just won't be in it and it becomes harder and harder to keep yourself motivated.

When a street performer draws a chalk circle on the ground he isn't just creating the space to perform. The line creates a boundary that helps contain the energy of the performance as well as quite literally, outlining his intentions to perform. It's the starting point of a new world full of potential. That simple chalk line provides focus and purpose and that's what meaning is, a central focus, a defined purpose. Meaning doesn't just guide you but it also acts as a signal to others as to your intentions.

If you don't have meaning for what you're doing then it is by definition, meaningless.

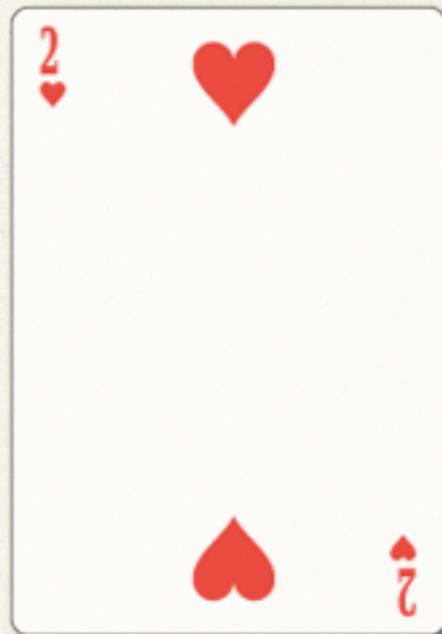
You need meaning. You need a chalk circle. That chalk circle is the line that separates the performer and the audience, you and the world, and if that boundary isn't clearly defined it's almost impossible to control the performance. When your boundaries are blurred your interactions with others will become blurred and you'll start to confuse their thoughts and ideas with your own. You risk being lost in the crowd.

It's difficult for me to stress how important finding a significant meaning is.

There are some people and religions who believe that we are born with a pre-determined meaning to our lives and they say that when we die we'll meet the person we were supposed to be in heaven. Now that might be true but I would suggest that it's probably a bit late by then and that you need to find your aim in life now, before you run out of ammunition. I can save you a bit of time by quoting author [Patrick Dixon](#) who simplified a universal meaning down to 4 words – “build a better world”. That's the easy bit. What you need to do is define what you mean by “better” and what you mean by “world.” Your world could mean the actual “world”, it could be the skin that your in, or it could be any one of the infinite possibilities in between.

TWO OF HEARTS

STAND STILL



In my days as a street performer in Covent Garden I would often see lost tourists standing on street corners referring to their A to Z and then looking up at the street names trying to get a bearing on where the hell they were. The important thing was they were standing still. They didn't carry on walking from street to street hoping to see something they recognised because they were not familiar with the territory. If they had they would have been walking, lost, for a very long time indeed.

This applies for anything that is lost, I was once told that the best way to find something that is lost in, say, your office, is to tidy your office. You don't tear through the drawers and piles of paper leaving a greater stream of chaos in your wake - you tidy up. Dispose of the rubbish that you come across that might be concealing your lost whatever it is, and methodically clear spaces. You may not find what your looking for but you have a tidy office and you will probably have found a few other things in your search that you thought had gone forever.

The feeling you get when you stand on the cobbles of one of the largest street pitches in the world, looking out at the potential is wonderful if not a little terrifying.

In contrast the common advice given to new or would-be performers is to learn skills outside of Magic, absorb different performing experiences, it focuses on piling on more stuff. It is good advice to give but only after a certain point. If you set out on this journey of learning and adding to yourself before you actually know what is at your core then the effect can be that you bury the real you underneath and the second most common piece of advice, "be yourself", becomes impossible. (This second piece of common advice is also, in my opinion, useless). Take the Street Show analogy from the Ace of Hearts post. The performance space is usually clear of people before the chalk line is drawn. If you watch experienced performers you will see them move spectators away from the space before they begin to build a crowd. The reason is that if you set about building your audience by simply stopping people and gathering them together without your performance space defined you would never be able to get the distinction of performer and audience that you need to make the show work. You need to create a clarity in your position before the show can begin.

The feeling you get when you stand on the cobbles of one of the largest street pitches in the world, looking out at the potential is wonderful if not a little terrifying, but it is a definite starting point and a key to success. Everyone needs to know who you are and only you can create that understanding, but first you need to know yourself.

By allowing yourself to stop and take stock of where you are and what you have, you can gain a great understanding of who you are and what you need and desire. Life isn't about the constant push forward and the quest for the new, sometimes it is about just you and your perspective.

3 OF HEARTS

WHY?



As magicians we often encounter the question "How did you do that", but if you ever encounter the question "Why did you do that" then you know your in trouble. This isn't about motivation of action during performance but about your reason for being a magician in the first place. In the previous post I suggested that we should stand still and take stock, allowing ourselves the time to get a better understanding of who we are as individuals outside of magic. Now with that clarity we need to ask the question WHY? WHY magic and WHY me?

Ask the question WHY? WHY magic and WHY me?

What are you real motivations for wanting to be a magician. If your immediate answer is money then I am going to suggest that you get a job that will guarantee you a great income, there are much easier ways to make a living than being an entertainer.

Being a magician is a lifestyle choice not a financial one! Yes you can with hard work make a good living from performing magic but trust me that can't be your priority. Reasons that may resonate with you are: freedom, engaging with others, being your own boss, travel, the sheer love of performing etc. The

reason should be one that is driven by an intrinsic motivation, an emotional not a financial hook. In order to get to the real answer to the why question, you very often have to answer the question repeatedly. Toyota's founder Kiichiro Toyoda established the habit of the 5 whys, asking the question why 5 times, (the clue was in the name), until the answer was stripped bare.

Once you have established that magic has the purpose you require, (and there is no guarantee that it has), you need to ask Why ME, to establish if you are suitable to a career in magic. Again hammer out the answer and don't stop asking why until you are fully satisfied that you have exhausted all possibilities. The truth may hurt but it will be the truth that allows you to move forward knowing that you are travelling in the right direction. The purpose to all of this is to make sure that you are pursuing your dream and not the perceived reality that comes from watching other people. We all want to be just like the guy on TV but the truth is we aren't all like him, we are however all capable of great things.

Once the questions of Why Magic and Why Me have been answered you need to seek a commonality in the answers, the thing that links the two together. This is the point where you should focus the majority of your attention because this is where your values and your aspirations are met. This is the sweet spot!

Seek a commonality in the answers. This is the sweet spot!

My Personal WHY's

I realise that this is all a little abstract and so possibly I should lead by example. Finding my own personal WHY's has been a journey that has taken more than 20 years and in truth is still ongoing. At this present time in my life if I stand still and ask the questions WHY, the answers are not the same as I would have arrived at 10, 5, or even 3 years ago. My answer to the WHY magic question is "memorable communication", it's that simple. I trained as an actor many years ago so performing is a general WHY, but why magic is much more specific. The Why me answer involves a degree of ego, but that's fine. I feel that I have achieved a level of success and have gained a wider range of experiences than most people in magic. My achievements provide me with my credibility and they encompass the skill set that would have been my original answer, (15 years ago I would have probably answered the Why Me question with "I am a strong performer with a natural understanding of comedy"). I still think this holds true but now I have proved that to myself and the wider world I can cite my achievements as my reason. The resulting commonality is effectively what you're reading now and other projects such as the [Magic State of Mind Interviews](#) - I want to share as much as I can with others so that they can benefit from my experience and my position in our community. There is no ego involved in my current endeavors because I haven't proved myself yet, but the purpose is there and that is where I find my inspiration. This may all seem a little contrived and artificially intellectual and if that is how you find it then feel free to say so in the comments, but please don't dismiss the sentiment.

As individuals we are responsible for our place in the world, I just want to ensure that I'm in the right place for me and I want you to feel secure in your place too so that you can start the process of building something really meaningful.

❖ *Start With Why - Simon Sinek*

4 OF HEARTS

GRATITUDE



The difficulty in writing a piece about gratitude is that I may begin to sound like your mother - nobody wants that.

Gratitude is more than just saying thank you. Very often we see gratitude as a response to something that has happened that means something to us. In this respect we are very good at acknowledging the big things but sometimes it is the little things that matter and yet are often overlooked. The act of gratitude should not only stem from what something means to you but also to what it means to others. For example if someone gives you very little you may feel that your level of gratitude should reflect that, as the gift means in real terms, very little to you.

However if the giver has nothing to begin with then the act of giving anything has huge meaning to them and that is what your gratitude should reflect. Gratitude has more to do with them than it does you. Gratitude also has the power of creating a positive mental attitude in both parties - it's a genuine win/win.

It has also been shown to make you, (the Grateful one), happier and healthier so it has clear physical as well as psychological benefits.

Gratitude has more to do with them than it does you

To bring this back to where I feel we as performers need to develop our gratitude I want to consider the act of standing still that I talked about in a previous post. Once we are in a situation that allows us to look around and see what it is we have then we can begin to appreciate our position. If we can be grateful for the opportunities that we have already then it will be possible to build on those opportunities rather than looking around for something better. The grass is typically always greener on the other side of the fence, however that mind-set isn't a positive one and focuses us on what we don't have rather than on what we do. Yes, it is important to extend our grasp in order to motivate us towards improvement, but the act of gratitude isn't one of stagnation it is a positive driving force.

The grass is typically always greener on the other side of the fence

I personally want to build my speaking career but if I simply look with envy at those who have achieved that success and simply wish I was there then it will never happen. I need to be grateful for the vision, for the proof they provide that it can be done and I have to be equally as grateful for the small steps available to me now. The steps that will help me reach that goal. Gratitude is a state of mindfulness that enables us to squeeze every positive drop out of every possible situation.

It requires you to be pro-active, to look for the reasons you should be grateful even in the most difficult situations. This is all very "hippy" so here are some concrete examples:

- If you have very little work at the moment be grateful for the time you have to focus on yourself and family - this is reflection.
- If you are stuck creatively be grateful for your previous successes and the creativity of others - this is inspiration.
- If you don't get the job / gig you wanted be grateful for the feedback and the opportunity - this is motivation.
- If you are struggling to master something be grateful for what you have already mastered - this is your foundation.

Yes this is a little idealistic and life isn't always ideal, but there is always something to be grateful for and that can very often be enough. Being grateful focuses you on what is really important in your life. If you have asked yourself the WHY question you will have an understanding of what you really value and therefore you will appreciate and be grateful for those things more. In difficult times or even when you are simply running low on energy and motivation the sense that there is something more important can make you smile and spur you on.

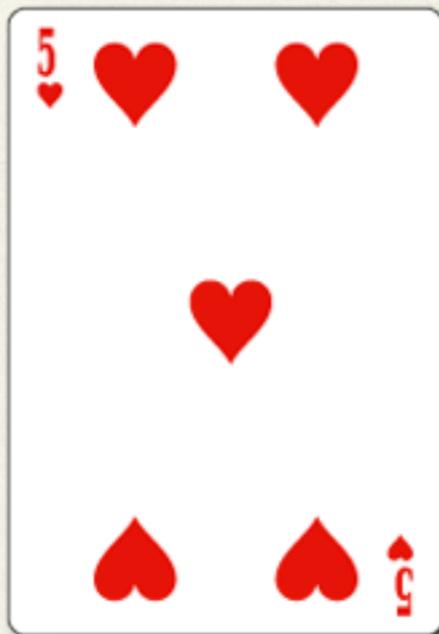
None of this is easy. In the process of writing this I struggled with my own sense of gratitude for what I felt were situations robbing me of the time I needed to achieve the seemingly endless list of tasks I have. However, on reflection, I am lucky and I am grateful for the lifestyle I have created by

choosing a less than regular occupation. The point is that sometimes I have to force myself to acknowledge it and I don't always succeed. By making gratitude a central influence in your life and work you open yourself up to a brighter future simply because you choose to see it that way.....okay, that's enough, I've started to sound like your mother.

I nearly forgot, thanks for reading.

5 OF HEARTS

GENEROSITY



"Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared." - Buddah

Generosity is not always appreciated but it is always the right thing.

Maybe you feel that you are generous enough, that you do enough, or give enough and that a lecture on generosity is the last thing you need. You're probably right. Please bear in mind that generosity isn't just about giving, it's about giving of yourself. People who love what they do find it easy to be generous, they are simply following their heart. Artists and performers are constantly giving of themselves because that's what they were born to do. It's a need not a should. However generosity isn't just about giving of yourself, it's about giving of yourself willingly. If you are sick to death of the thing that you call work, or you are simply doing it to pay the bills, then you will struggle to give freely and you will resent every extra drop of sweat or second of your time that is wasted on a cause that

you don't believe in. Still generosity isn't just about giving of yourself willingly, it's about giving of yourself willingly without the need for recognition or reward. Have you ever wondered how teachers, nurses, or anyone for that matter who endures long hours of work in the service of others for relatively little financial reward, carry on? It's because they have a vocation, and the reward is built into the job itself.

Generosity is a pre-requisite.

Are you still feeling generous?

So what does this have to do with you anyway? You're a magician not a monk! You ARE an artist, you ARE willing, and THIS IS your vocation. Well now you need to ask yourself, "Am I making a contribution?"

"Art is a personal gift that changes the recipient. The medium doesn't matter. The intent does."

Seth Godin, [Linchpin](#)

You can produce and perform as much as you like, as willingly as you like and for absolutely no reward but if it doesn't make a difference, if it fails to ignite a spark in someone else, then, excuse the expression, you are pissing in the wind. You are scratching your own itch, satisfying your own urges and that is a waste of your time and your talent.

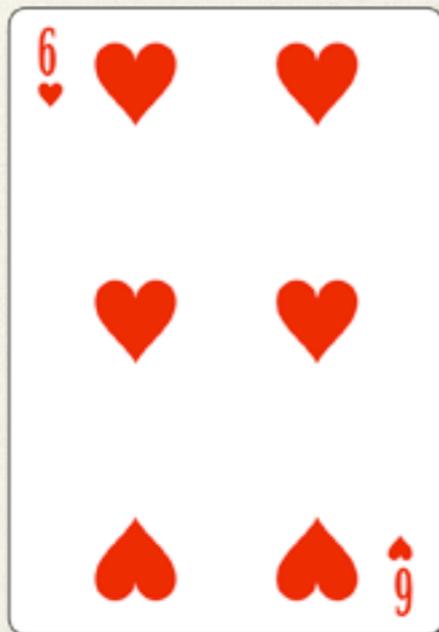
We are all unique individuals with something to offer and yet somehow the majority of us manage to remain invisible

and that is not generous, that is not generous at all. The reason, I think, is that we are scared. Scared to be judged, scared to be wrong, scared that we will not be appreciated. Generosity demands that we are bigger than our fears, that we rise to the occasion, swallow our pride and make a difference. Generosity means to lead by example. Getting what you want can be perceived as selfish, but if you're getting what you want by showing others the way then that is the ultimate in generosity and it proves that life doesn't have to be a Zero Sum game. Don't accept less than you deserve because that also lacks generosity, not only to ourselves but to everyone else involved. Your input is essential, as long as it is a contribution, a force for change and directed so that others can understand what is required, so that they can better themselves and better their contribution.

We will build our profession up to the level of art when we start to see ourselves as artists and we will increase our value only when we decide to contribute. Both of these require huge amounts of generosity and both will make you happier.

"The gift is to the giver and comes back to him..." Walt Whitman

ACCOUNTABILITY



The ancient Romans had a tradition: whenever one of their engineers constructed an arch, as the capstone was hoisted into place, the engineer assumed accountability for his work in the most profound way possible: he stood under the arch.

If there's one thing that will save your sanity and make your life as a performer more meaningful, I believe that it's taking accountability for everything you do. Any one who seriously wants to be considered as a significant individual and succeed as a performer must be prepared to take full accountability, not only for their actions, but their lives. We operate in a society that seems to rely on finger pointing and the allocation of blame, the result is a weakened foundation on which to build anything meaningful.

Accountability is your way of regaining control.

Standing on stage on your own, or performing live in any situation, you have no choice but to accept full accountability. Once you have drawn your circle on the ground and gathered your crowd you have nowhere to run and hide. It's the part of performing and speaking that terrifies people and it's the aspect

of what we do as performers that separates us from the crowd. It's the reason a cabaret performer earns 5 times the fee of a close-up performer for a fraction of the time performing. They are standing alone, do or die, fully accountable. Fear of failure is the fear of accountability, it can be crippling, it will stop you from taking action and it will ruin your career. However taking full accountability has the opposite effect, it is empowering and it will set you free. It will release you from the fear, make you stronger and enable you to perform better. Accountability embraces the possibility of failure and faces it head on. True failure is only possible when something goes wrong and you don't learn from it, so take accountability and mistakes will still happen from time to time but real failure will be impossible.

Taking full accountability means having complete confidence in yourself and the choices you have made, arrogance on the other hand blinds you to your mistakes and removes all accountability and all real control.

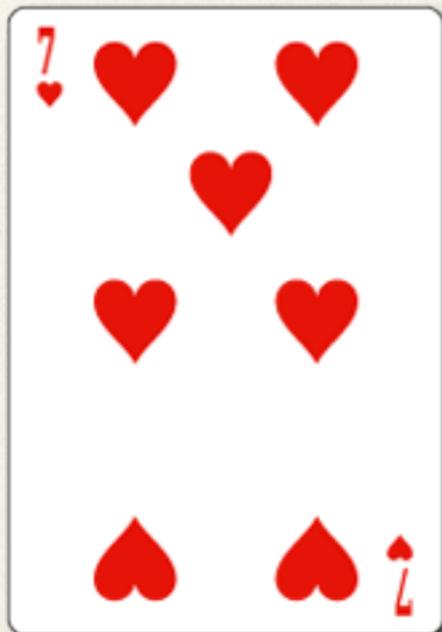
Performers will often tell you that there is no such thing as a bad audience. What they're really saying is that if you die on stage it's all your fault and that's true to an extent, you took the gig after all. In my opinion there are bad audiences, sometimes you just can't win them over for reasons outside of your control but you are still accountable for your own experience. When it all goes wrong the easy way out is to blame something outside of yourself but by doing that you are side stepping a chance to learn and get better. Over the years I've encountered drunks and drug addicts, I've been

abused, insulted, and threatened with physical violence, (and that's why I don't do kids parties.) The truth is however that I'm not directly accountable for those people or their actions but I am truly accountable for myself and if I can learn from those experiences then I haven't failed I've simply moved a step closer to success.

So how do you become accountable? Simple. Stand under the arch. Tell everyone that you are responsible for your actions, ask for feedback on whatever you do and stop blaming the rest of the world when things go wrong.

8 OF HEARTS

LOVE



Choose a job that you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life - Confucius

This is a Valentine's Day special, it's all about what you love.

One of the problems we face with doing what we love is knowing what that one thing is. How can we be sure? I can't give you an answer to that because I imagine it's different for everyone. It's little like meeting the love of your life in the relationship stakes I suppose.....[cue the harp music]

We all experience different partners, (some more than others), and we all fall in love at some point, (some more than others), but when you meet the person who you feel like you could spend the rest of your life with, you just know. Those of us who are married or in long term relationships know that the path to happiness isn't always smooth, we how hard you have to work.

Sometimes you feel that it isn't worth it and you want to throw in the towel, so what's stopping you? Love my friend, love!

If you are in a loveless relationship that is squeezing the life out of you, get out. It can be extremely hard and painful but the eventual sense of realising you deserve better is your reward. You know it was the right thing to do. Some people however have affairs, they don't feel happy in their relationship so they look outside for comfort, they're torn poor souls. If they're so passionate about their "bit on the side" why don't they run away with them? Because they're scared it will be the wrong choice, afraid that they won't love them as much if they become their one and only. But if that person makes you that happy, if you find that you can't wait to see them again and you think about them every waking moment, then they might just be the one. You should make up your mind, stop playing around and concentrate on making one relationship the best it can be, or get out and find your soulmate. You can't spend your life unhappy, giving only a fraction of yourself to the wrong partner, you must be prepared to break away and follow your heart. But be careful, passion burns brightly, it is very distracting and can fade quickly. Maybe you should just be "good friends" and leave it at that. However if you blur the lines and fail to treat this "good friend" with respect, if you use them for purely selfish ends, you run the risk of treating them no better than a whore and everybody loses.

Also consider this: when you go home to your partner and they open the door, does their smile light you up from the inside out, does the comfort in their voice soften the hardships of the day and their embrace feel like home. I know It may feel dull at times, too familiar, too ordinary, but

that is part of true love, that's the comfort you only experience when you're with the one you should be with. As for the lack of enthusiasm you feel, you have the power to re-ignite the fire, create the passion within your relationship and that should be your goal. Don't abuse your loved ones affections, nurture them and you can grow together.

[In a parallel universe.....]

We all experience different jobs, (some more than others), and we all love our job at some point, (some more than others), but when you find the job you feel like you could spend the rest of your life doing, you just know. Those of us who are married to our work or have long term careers know that the path to happiness isn't always smooth, we know how hard you have to work. Sometimes you feel that it isn't worth it and you want to throw in the towel, so what's stopping you?

Love my friend, love!

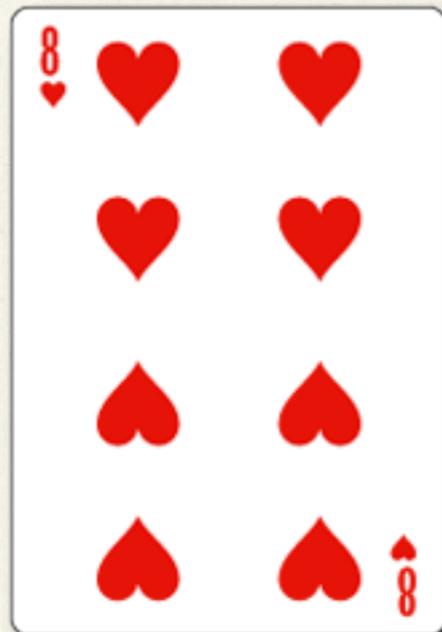
If you are in a job that is squeezing the life out of you, get out. It can be extremely hard and painful but the eventual sense of realising you deserve better is your reward. You know it was the right thing to do. Some people however moonlight, they don't feel happy in their job so they look outside for comfort, they're torn poor souls. If they're so passionate about their sideline why don't they do that full time? Because they're scared it will be the wrong choice, afraid that they won't love it as much if it becomes their one and only source of income. You should make up your mind, stop playing around and concentrate on making one job the best it can be, or get out and find your calling. But if it

makes you that happy, if you find that you can't wait to do it again and you think about it every waking moment, then it might be the one. You can't spend your life unhappy, giving only a fraction of yourself to the wrong job, you must be prepared to break away and follow your heart. But be careful, passion burns brightly, it is very distracting and can fade quickly. Maybe you should just be "an amateur or semi-pro" and leave it at that. However if you blur the lines and fail to treat this interest with respect, if you use it for purely selfish ends, you run the risk of treating it no better than a cash cow and everybody loses.

Also consider this: when you go to work does the sense of achievement light you up from the inside out, does the reward soften the hardships of the day and the knowledge you have gained feel like home. I know It may feel dull at times, too familiar, too ordinary, but that is part of true love, that is the comfort you only experience when your doing what you love. As for the lack of enthusiasm you feel you have the power to re-ignite the fire, create the passion within your work and that should be your goal. Don't abuse the opportunities it offers, nurture them and you can grow together.

Choose a job that you love and you'll never have, want or need a day off work in your life - Me

DO IT FOR NOTHING



If you want to feel rich, just count the things you have that money can't buy.

I've always been someone who has believed that you should get paid what your worth and in not dropping fees unless there are rewards elsewhere. So how is it then that I am writing a piece about doing it for free? Well Hearts is all about finding meaning in your work and working for nothing is something that strips away the financial purpose and focus allowing you to explore your real motivations and creative depths. Please don't misunderstand me, I am not for a second suggesting that you stop earning a living and work your entire life for free, but I think there are times when not having money involved in the equation can be liberating and rewarding in so many other ways.

Become an Amateur.

The obvious "doing it for free" is charity performances and yes we should all do our bit. This is so obvious I won't be discussing

it here and it's not really the point of this post. My intention is to make you think about your performance as though you were an amateur. Why? Well amateurs have a unique place in magic in that they are free to create without the rigours of a paying audience being applied to their creative process. I should also make it clear that by amateur I simply mean someone who doesn't make their living from magic and it in no way implies inferiority. As a working professional we always have an eye on application and functionality, pocket management and ease of re-set. This has meant that over the years we find ourselves moving towards the same fixed spot in the distance and so our repertoires converge, with the same handful of effects rising to the surface, the ones that tick all the boxes that the worker requires. In order to grow you need to allow yourself the luxury of doing it for nothing, creating for the sake of creating. Even the "magic creators" suffer from the money-trap and the result has been a market place flooded with unusable, half-baked effects that were created purely as products to be sold to the masses. They too need to occasionally create with no other thought than to create. Some of the most brilliant magicians in history have had a "real job", which enabled them to play with magic, and playing is the most creative thing you can do.

Give it Away

This ideal of "doing it for free" can come from sharing. Professional magicians are generally afraid of sharing what they know, worried that someone will steal their "stuff". There is an easy solution - give it away. Make it free and

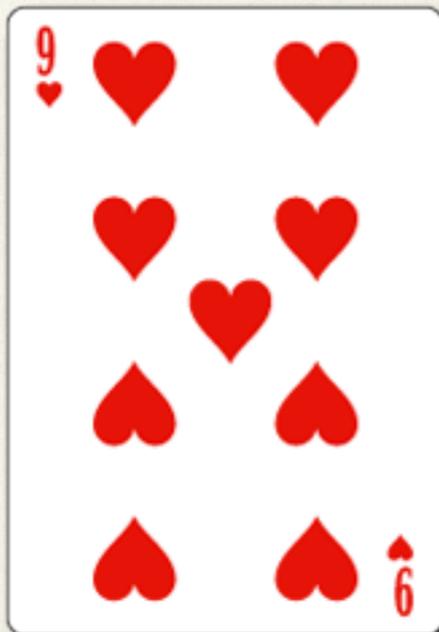
available to everyone. If you perform then share your performance stories, advice and yes routines. If you invent, share your concepts and creative process. I'm not saying give everything away but I'm advising that you give away more than you sell. This is the route to abundant creativity because when there is no financial pressure, you can play and you will enjoy the process far more. In the midst of this creative playtime there will be a few gems that you will hold onto, that you will polish to perfection and that you will eventually perform or promote.

I don't like to hold myself up as an example but the process of creating the Magic State of Mind and writing these posts has been a personal revelation. By sharing my time and knowledge, free to anyone who wants it, I have learnt a great deal about my own creative reserves. I feel more inspired, I have no-one telling me that I'm doing it wrong and I have become more comfortable with the process. People can of course make suggestions but I'm doing it for nothing, essentially for myself, so there's no demand to deliver a particular product and that is very liberating.

While I have been writing this post I have been hearing great things about a young performer whose close-up act is by all accounts incredible. The descriptions I have heard, (I haven't seen the act myself), are of creative excellence and I think it would be safe to say that it wasn't an act built to order or with money in mind. I would guess it was the result of a freedom that comes from having no motive other than to create Art.

9 OF HEARTS

LET GO



A university professor went to visit a famous Zen master. While the master quietly served tea, the professor talked about Zen. The master poured the visitor's cup to the brim, and then kept pouring. The professor watched the overflowing cup until he could no longer restrain himself.

"It's overfull! No more will go in!" the professor blurted. "You are like this cup," the master replied, "How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup."

Okay so I'm not a Zen master but the point, I think, is clear - you need to let go of some things if you want to have more of something else. I wrote about this a while ago on my own personal blog.

We all fill our careers in magic with a great deal of stuff that we just don't need. This can be actual physical stuff, props etc. or

the arsenal of moves that we acquire without necessity and it can even include the thoughts that occupy our minds, such as ideas, projects, opinions and most destructive of all, resentments. The problem is that all of this "stuff" is taking up space, or "mental RAM" (for those of you who have read GTD). With the magic related "stuff" we have the added problem of feeling a need to use it at some point. That trick you've had sitting on your desk for a year for example, must be used or so you tell yourself, and just the fact that you can now do a single handed bottom palm means that you must find an effect to fit the move into. It's all contributing to a kind of mental fog that makes it difficult to see your real purpose as well as draining your mental, physical and emotional resources. Do you need these things or do you just want them? We need to learn to let go.

When you don't get the big TV gig but your best friend does, you can beat yourself up about it or shake it off, put it down to experience and work towards getting the next TV gig, (if that's really what you want). Alternatively you can get less talented friends but I wouldn't recommend it. Sitting and hurling abuse at the TV or negatively criticising another performers work simply because you think you should have got the gig will do nothing for you other than to raise your blood pressure and prevent you from moving on. I'll admit that hurling abuse is sometimes a way of letting go and if that's what it takes then so be it, but don't carry that feeling around with you, life really is too short. By letting go we create the capacity to learn more and ultimately have more of what we want.

So how do you know what to let go of? Well if you find yourself spending time on something that isn't moving you towards your end-goal then you should probably let go. If you have taken hours to learn a move or sleight that you have no outlet for then let go. If you have a room full of "stuff" that does nothing but collect dust then let go, (I have recent personal experience of this and I know the difference it can make).

The nagging doubt you have that, "maybe one day" you'll need a particular prop, or that certain move may prove to be right but that's when you need it, not now. The drive and the motivation you will have then will be more focused, the results easier to achieve and the outcome more rewarding.

Letting go is essential if you want to move forward and with clarity. It may be wrench initially but the space you create is space for pure opportunity.

10 OF HEARTS

FLOW



A lot of what I've written so far has been about stripping back and finding a leaner more meaningful approach to your magic. So what happens when you finally reach your core, when you've stripped back as far as you can go? Well then you have clarity and focus, then you are able to "flow".

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi , (I'm pleased this isn't a podcast), a Hungarian psychology professor and the proposer of the concept of Flow describes it as: "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost." (Geirland, John (1996). "Go With The Flow". Wired magazine, September, Issue 4.09.)

Compare this to the feeling you may often have when you are performing. If you have had some of the same experiences as I have had then the feeling will be more like a rabbit caught in the headlights than an expert "using your skills to the utmost."

However there are times, and the more experience you gain the more often these occur, when you are so totally "in the moment" that the whole world seems to fall away. In performance these

moments are what we strive for, performing with every atom of your body involved, no ego just you doing what you love to do.

Flow in performance for others comes as a result of mastery not competence. Being competent can actually prevent you achieving flow as it allows you to succeed without mastery, it's good enough and get's the job done. People often stop at competent for that very reason, improvement is no longer necessary. To move on from competent and to achieve mastery requires you to have deep rooted personal commitment and motivation. You may experience flow on your way to competence, practising for hours on end, but under fire in live performance only mastery will do. I often experience flow when I'm running, also known as "runners high", but I have not mastered running for others, just for my own pleasure, I can run however I'm not a world class runner by any stretch of the imagination. Mastery can occur at each stage of development, infact it should be a prerequisite of moving on, and at each stage you may experience flow. Ultimately it is about "hours in the saddle."

In our profession we often look at those with incredible skill as gifted and this can result in a closed or "fixed" mindset that has us believe we could never achieve that level of expertise. These people are not gifted, they have talent and they are committed, it is that commitment that has brought them their gift, not divine intervention. Part of their talent is persistence and determination, internal factors they control, and if they can do it then you can to. These people have

what is called a Growth Mindset and they believe that through hard work and continuous learning they can improve, and so they do. Of course there are restrictions as to what can realistically be achieved, (I will never win the London Marathon for example), but mastery is available to us all.

You may have heard or read about the 10,000 hour rule for mastery - that's how long it takes to become an expert according to Malcolm Gladwell, author of *Outliers: The Story of Success*. 10,000 hours! That's why you need to strip away and make sure your pursuing your real passion so you don't waste time on mastering something that means nothing to you. Mastery allows you to step outside of the physical actions that are required to get results. The actions become second nature, you are able to perform and stop demonstrating - you can experience flow.

"The way to learn to do things is to do things. The way to learn a trade is to work at it. Success teaches how to succeed. Begin with the determination to succeed, and the work is half done already." - Mark Twain, writer and humorist.

OTHER PEOPLE



Being a performer is not always easy. The freedom that the profession gives us can be exhilarating but it can also be the biggest reason that we fail to meet our potential. Motivation on a personal, day to day level can be a hard thing to achieve and no matter how passionate you are about your work you will have days when nothing gets done. So what's the solution or at least what is a meaningful approach to this aspect of what we do? I think the first thing to do is realise that it is a job. I wish I had grasped this simple idea when I was a street performer. Instead I allowed myself the luxury of being an itinerant performer and generated large personal debts, (you were allowed to in those days), giving little thought to the future. I wouldn't change it for the world but I wouldn't recommend it either.

So lets get back to motivation, what's the most inspirational tool there is that can help you stay focused? I believe it's something that we all need and most already have - other people.

The people you associate with play a huge part in the level of success you achieve and in the way you perform in life and as a magician. Our circle of friends and acquaintances is probably

the most important factor in our professional lives outside of our own personal drive and ambition. It's so important that we surround ourselves with people who not only support us but also those who challenge us to meet our potential.

Family

Ironically the people who we are closest to emotionally, (family and partners), are often the same people who through no fault other than they care will be the ones who throw a spanner in the works. They will question your abilities, dismiss your ambition and shake your confidence daily - ("Oh Cecelia!"for the Simon & Garfunkel fans). Why? Because they want you to be safe, they don't want you to fail and the easiest way to achieve that is to protect you. They may also be afraid that if you change, (that is succeed), their position in your life will change and they're already happy so they don't want that to happen! Give them your assurance, explain to them that with their support you can create a life that benefits everyone. Without them you will have a real struggle to move yourself forward, with them you are unstoppable.

Friends

Then you have a circle of close friends, people you've known for years, people with "normal jobs" or other performers. Some of these friends will moan and complain about everything and anything, for them it's all doom and gloom. They are like emotional black holes. This may sound harsh but for your own sanity and progress keep these people at arms length, don't be dragged down by their deadweight.

Real friends are the ones who inspire you, cheer your successes and help you over your failures. They are honest about who you are and what you have done. Real friends are invaluable.

Mentors

There is another individual who isn't necessarily a friend or a family member but who can have a massive impact on your career - a mentor. In "The Element", Ken Robinson describes the 4 roles of the mentor as:

1. Recognition - seeing your potential.
2. Encouragement - helping you to see your potential.
3. Facilitating - guiding you towards your potential.
4. Stretching - moving you beyond what you thought was your potential.

I would advise everyone to seek out a mentor, regardless of the level of success they have already achieved. A mentor will hold you accountable, demand your respect and you will find them by looking forwards not backwards, or if you are fortunate they will find you.

We are by nature social creatures, we need to share who we are with others in order to flourish and I owe a great deal to a handful of people who have taken the time to stop their own busy lives in order to help me make mine better.

YOURSELF



This is the penultimate post in the Hearts section, a section that was dedicated to finding more meaning not only in your magic but in your life as a magician, at whatever level. My feeling at this point is that I should begin tying up some loose ends and maybe look for some kind of "core message" in all of this.

Some Bad Advice

I'll start by undermining a piece of advice that I hear people offering all the time when it comes to performing magic - "Be yourself." Please under no circumstance be yourself when you perform magic or do anything involving a third party for that matter, unless of course you are so close to perfect that being anything else would be a step backwards. "Be yourself" is really another way of saying make no effort, don't worry about what other people think, your right they're wrong, screw the lot of 'em. If I call round to you're house for tea, (and I'm still waiting for the invitation), and you insist on being yourself, the you that you would be if I weren't there, then what the hell is the point in me being there? A relationship on any level is a two way street, it's give and take, with the emphasis being on give. It's not

50-50, it's not even 80-20, your responsibility in any interaction lies with you, which means, and this sounds a little confusing, their responsibility also lies 100% with them, whoever they may be.

Expect nothing but be prepared to give everything.

My point is that to be better magicians we have to strive to be better people. You weren't born clutching a deck of cards and although you may have sold your soul to the angel-backed temptress very early on in your life, you were a person before you were a magician. You can work at the performance and the business aspects of the profession and you will probably do well, but if you work on the person that you are you simply can't fail. (I have to concede that this is a point that has been made by many "self-help" and "motivational" guru types in the past but it is a well worth repeating). What we do is literally who we are. We don't do magic because we are magicians, we are magicians because we are people who do magic and the better the person the better the magician, ALWAYS. I know that some of you are now shaking your heads and citing examples to yourself of "great magicians" who were by reputation complete bastards, but what you're thinking of is only an element of the magician, and probably one of the least important elements of them all, the tricks.

The ability to build a great life with magic is the ability to build a great life, (with magic).

Be The Best Of Yourself

So if you shouldn't be yourself who should you be? Am I suggesting that we all assume the character of a Chinese mystic, a Victorian gent or a Svengali? Absolutely not, nor am I saying that character presentations are the wrong thing to do - everything is still possible if you start with the thing you know best. But please don't be yourself, instead strive be the BEST of yourself. It's time, (and it always has been), to realise that as professionals, as performers, as artists, we are far more than the tricks we perform and the secrets that we desperately cling on to.

So the next time someone offers you the sage advice "Be yourself", look them straight in the eye and reply,

"I can do better than that."



MAKE A DIFFERENCE

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded. Ralph Waldo Emerson

The biggest shift that you can make as an individual in terms of finding your meaning comes when you realise that actually it has nothing to do with you, but really it's all about everybody else. You can strive to achieve perfection, wealth or fame but it's worth nothing without everybody else. You are relative to the rest of the world and your purpose should be to make a difference.

When you perform try to ask yourself, "How can I make a difference to my audience?" Is showing them a card trick really the main aspect of what you do, that you think will have the

biggest impact on their day or life? Does it really matter? I'm not dismissing magic as a powerful element of what could be an incredible experience, but I do see it as that, an element. Events that change people are experiences, if they fail to make a difference then they are just events. How many events have you been a part of? Personally and regrettably, I have been involved in thousands. Thousands of opportunities to make a difference, to create an experience, and instead I was "doing tricks" and so became part of an event that would fade with time. I know this may appear to be me starting to bang on about my usual, "It's not the magic. it's about you", but in truth it's all about the magic, or to be more precise it's all about being a magician. I simply want to reframe the way that we look at what we do.

Magicians are not just entertainers or at least we don't have to be just entertainers. We are story tellers, ice-breakers, influencers, motivators, friends, guests, hosts, flirts, facilitators, leaders and the list goes on. To be more succinct we are Communicators. That's not a position to be taken lightly or even (as is often the case), dismissed altogether. Every interaction brings with it the opportunity to make a difference to someone. We are fortunate that our profession allows us not only to have more focused interactions than most people, but that those interactions are already out of the realm of the everyday and are therefore already on the way to being an "experience". I am not suggesting that every presentation should be monumental or epic in how it affects your audience, that would be nonsense, I would like to think however that you will approach these situations with the

thought that you can make a difference to these people and create a positive shift in their emotional, physical or mental state.

John Archer, in a [recent interview](#) with me said that he felt his role as a comedian, someone who made people laugh, was a privilege and I couldn't agree more. I would add that all of us who are free to express ourselves in a way that we have chosen and that can benefit others are privileged. We have to make sure or privilege doesn't turn our heads and our hearts away from what is fundamental to our personal success and happiness, making a difference to other people.

CHAPTER 2

SPADES

QUEEN OF SPADES BY OLGA ROZANOVA



ACE OF SPADES

CREDIBILITY



People don't care what you know until they know that you care.

If I told you that your credibility was based around four key elements: Knowledge, Focus, Enthusiasm, Care & Concern, how would you divide it up? Perhaps you think that knowledge is the most important factor, that what you know must be the source of credibility. Well according to Graham Jones at [The Credibility Pyramid](#) the percentages look like this:

Knowledge 10%

Focus 15%

Enthusiasm 25%

Care & Concern 50%

It would seem that people are more concerned about the way you communicate your knowledge than the actual depth of the knowledge itself. This remember is how people determine your credibility and not how you should go about building it. You need to know your stuff, that's your responsibility and your obligation, but don't expect anyone to ask you how much you know. They only care that you have the requisite knowledge for

the situation that's relevant to them, ("So what if you can cut the cards with your feet, where's the card I chose?"). It is the foundation of your credibility but not the part that people see nor in truth consider too much and to an extent they will just assume it's there. It better be, if it isn't there you'll be found out.

Focus is about clarity. How single minded are you about your intentions and how clearly do you express them. Don't feel the urge to show off your knowledge, (they don't care remember), and it will probably confuse the issue anyway. The key here is to demonstrate not only that you have access to the right knowledge at the right time but that you have the understanding to be selective as well.

Enthusiasm implies that you care about what you do. Energy and drive are infectious and we are drawn to enthusiastic people. This energy and enthusiasm comes from the well of knowledge that you have, the focus you employ means that you can direct it like a bullet and the result is incredibly powerful.

Care and concern rate a massive 50% of your credibility score. Your audience, (spectators, clients, prospects, students, readers etc), need to know that you care about them, that you are concerned about their well being. They need to feel that they are in safe hands before they can relax and trust you. You have all this power at your fingertips, your knowledge, your focus, your enthusiasm and if you abuse it you will destroy your credibility. Your ability to adapt and adjust your approach to different situations, to recognise that

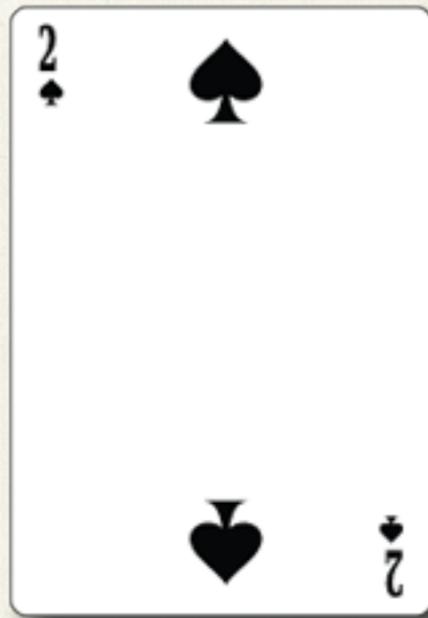
every interaction requires you to be considerate, these are the skills that will enhance your credibility quicker than any others.

Over the next 12 weeks as we deal through the Spades, I'm going to explore ways in which we can build our credibility. It's the foundation of a successful career and the backbone of all sales and marketing, so yes it is important.

We are in an industry where we seem to pride ourselves on the fact that we are "incredible" and "unbelievable." We need to make sure that is only true for the magic we perform and not for the reputations we build

2 OF SPADES

EXPERTISE



I realise that in the last post I indicated that only 10% of your credibility is dependent on your knowledge and here I am telling you that to become credible you need to become an expert! How can that be? Surely you can learn the bare minimum and then apply it with focus, enthusiasm, care and concern? Those of you who have read "[The 4 Hour Work Week](#)" will know that you can become an expert in just 4 weeks, simply read the right 3 books and join a few groups - job done.

The difference that Tim Ferris points out in the book however is being an expert or being "perceived" as an expert. As long as you know more than the people you're pitching to you have expert status, and that's all they care about remember - the fact that you know more than them. But is that credible?

In the land of the blind the one eyed man is king.

Credibility is based on I believe, a different kind of expertise. It requires your knowledge to have been tested and refined, not just learnt and repeated. It's the reason medical students aren't just allowed to become "Doctors" the day they graduate, even though they have the facts in their very clever heads. No offence

to medical students but as patients "we" feel they lack credibility until they have been tested under fire. Medicine is however a huge subject with the ultimate consequences for those who screw up - for entertainers the stakes are not so high, credibility however is just as important.

This doesn't mean years of toil to become an expert because the development of expertise can be and should be refined to a narrow subject matter. I know very few expert "Magicians", performers who know everything about everything to do with magic, but I know and admire many magicians who are experts at one or two things and subsequently have huge amounts of credibility. The beauty of this refined expertise is that it cross-contaminates and creates an overall sense of credibility. People who have mastered one area are very often "perceived experts" in other allied areas. They have built credibility through a core of expertise which raises their understanding of the broader subject matter. Their expertise "snowballs" and so does their credibility.

You must understand what you know.

Knowledge on it's own isn't power. It has the potential to be powerful but only if you use it correctly and true expertise lies in the ability to understand what you know and to know when it is relevant. Experts understand the "curse of knowledge" and choose wisely when it comes to deciding what is and isn't appropriate. I've seen some of the greatest sleight of hand magicians in the world perform the "simplest" tricks and create moments of pure theatre and I've

also seen naive performers deliver highly complex routines that fall flat, just "because they can."

There's an old story which highlights this perfectly and you may have come across before. I'm going to tell it anyway.

A giant ship engine failed. The ship's owners tried one "expert" after another, but none of them could figure out how to fix the engine.

Then they brought in an old man who had been fixing ships since he was a young. He carried a large bag of tools with him, and when he arrived he immediately went to work. After looking things over, the old man reached into his bag and pulled out a small hammer. He gently tapped something. Instantly, the engine lurched into life. He carefully put his hammer away. The engine was fixed!

A week later, the owners received a bill from the old man for ten thousand pounds.

"What?!" the owners exclaimed. "He hardly did anything!"

So they wrote the old man a note saying, "Please send us an itemised bill."

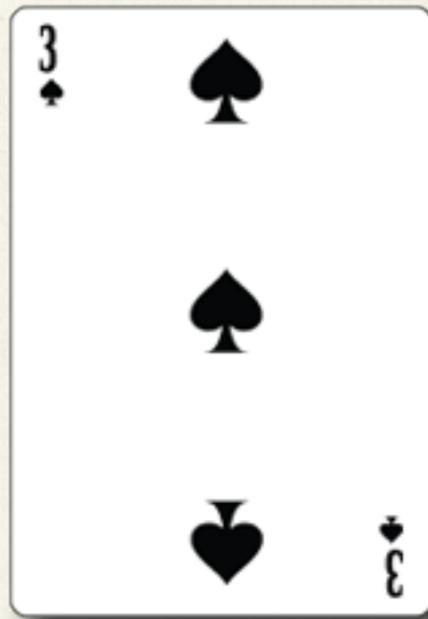
The man sent a bill that read:

*Tapping with a hammer..... £ 2.00
Knowing where to tap..... £ 9,998.00*

You probably already know enough to be an expert but you have to take the time to understand what it is you know. Refine your knowledge to the point of expertise and let that be the foundation for your credibility

3 OF SPADES

WRITE



There are several reasons why I think that starting a blog is a good idea for building your credibility. It may seem an obvious thing to do but there are very few professional magicians who are blogging to build credibility, most are driven by the desire to produce SEO, (Search Engine Optimisation), benefits and that, depending on the quality of the writing could possibly have the opposite effect. Keyword heavy posts that offer no real value to the reader are not really worth the pixels there written on but they still take time and effort. I personally think that if your going to write something why not give it some real value outside of SEO.

If there is one thing that I have changed in the last few years that has had the most significant effect on my career it has been the discipline of blogging regularly. I have found that blogging, both with the [Magic State of Mind](#) and 52IDEAS, (as well as the almost silent [peterwardell.com](#)) has helped me to establish a credibility that would not have been possible otherwise. The post I have written have enabled me to share my knowledge, they have demonstrated my focus and enthusiasm, and hopefully they have shown that I genuinely care about how

people approach magic as a profession. Not only that but I they have meant that I have also started to build a credibility with a wider audience outside of magic. The actual, sweat and tears creative process has also brought about a clarity in my thinking that I lacked before.

Blogging is a way of organising and filtering your thoughts, it allows you to map out your experiences in a way that is not only beneficial to your audience but also invaluable to yourself. It is the beginning of understanding what you know.

"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." Einstein.

A key element is to write for yourself not about yourself. Blogs that simply explain what it is that you've been doing are of little value to anybody and will fail to gain you credibility points, unless of course you're already famous, in which case it is unlikely you will be writing it yourself anyway. I'm not saying that you shouldn't have a personal blog but as a performer your personal presence on the internet colours your professional image. You are the product and you need to be careful what you write as it may come back and bite you on the backside one day.

To position yourself as an expert and build your credibility your blog must try to meet the credibility criteria:

Knowledge - Your posts should show that you understand your subject matter. If you are writing about the work / gigs you do, why not start by explaining the brief you had and discuss the process you went through to find the solution. One of the best examples of this is David Airey's Graphic design blog. (I love this Blog). Alternatively you can use other people to provide the knowledge by interviewing them, you'll learn stuff and gain credibility!

Focus - Avoid trying to be all things to all people and pick an area of magic (or whatever your subject is), that you are genuinely passionate about. You can find a great example of this on Dave Britlands blog, Cardopolis, almost entirely card magic and he's been doing it for 9 Years!!

Enthusiasm - The best way to demonstrate your enthusiasm is through consistency. It isn't easy to post every week especially when life gets busy, however some people manage 2 or 3 posts a day - the king of this is in my mind Seth Godin. You can, (and should), read his blog [HERE](#) (N.B. To see Seth Godin and business guru Tom Peters talking about blogs [watch this.](#))

Care & Concern - It's important that your blog delivers real value, helps people, and answers questions they may have. It isn't just about building credibility it also makes great business and marketing sense. Other peoples questions also provide you with an almost endless source of inspiration as well as offering you opportunities to build a reputation as someone who can help.

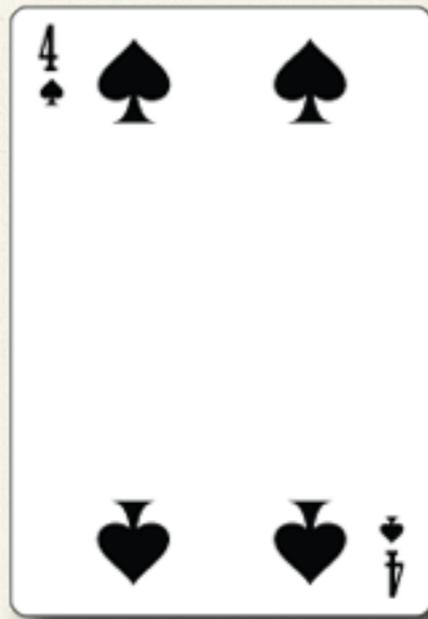
All of this is hard work. It isn't a quick fix but the personal rewards are substantial.

What are the reasons that you haven't started a blog? Have you started one but failed to keep up with posts? I'd love to know what your experiences with blogging have been.

(If you would like to start, or if you are struggling to maintain a blog, then I may be able to help. If there is enough interest I may put together a short course on blogging aimed at entertainers. Just a thought.)

4 OF SPADES

AUTHENTIC



In my last post I talked about writing and the benefits of doing it regularly and publicly. If you do pursue this route then eventually you will hear the voice inside your head writing for you, editing and critiquing. It's this voice that will stop you from saying things you don't really mean or believe - it's your voice and it is the voice of authenticity. It can take a while for it to become clear and you have to listen carefully but it's there and it always has been.

Authenticity is not really a building block of credibility but more of a core element that colours everything you do. In the post *Queen of Hearts* I warned against "being yourself" and now it may seem that I'm about to contradict myself. Being authentic however is so much more than being yourself, it's more about being true to yourself and representing your ideals.

Authenticity, for me, is doing what you promise, not "being who you are". [Seth Godin](#)

Your authenticity is directly linked to your meaning and it requires that you live the life which allows you to pursue your

meaning. All a little bit Existentialist but what does it have to do with credibility?

In order to maintain the effort required to build credibility you have to be sold on the idea of what it is you are aiming for. It has to satisfy your own personal set of values and enthuse you if you are to stand any chance of succeeding. It has to meet the promise that you make with yourself about the way you live your life, it has to be authentic. Writing blog posts day after day on a subject that means very little to you will end badly, as will pursuing a career that isn't what you want. Performing magic that leaves you dead on the inside, while you smile inanely on the outside is not authentic even if it is convincing.

Being authentic may lose you friends and followers but it will earn you credibility with those who stay. You know the old saying "you can't please all of the people all of the time", well that's what being authentic is all about and it's a hard pill to swallow, realising that some people might not like you is never easy. However it has been said that if you're not making enemies then your doing something wrong.

I'll leave you with a quote from one of my favourite comedians and one of the most authentic performers ever.

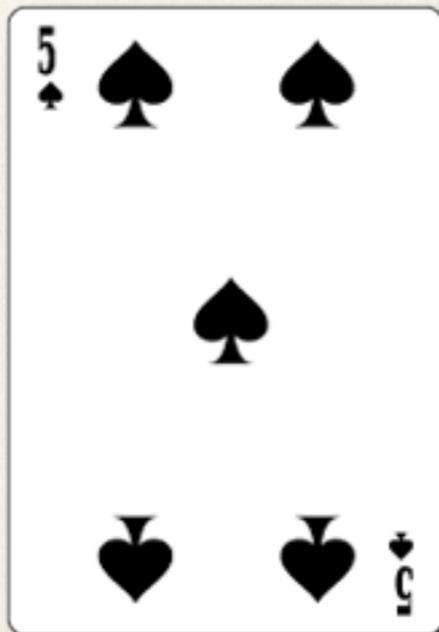
It's brilliant:

Hi folks. I'm very tired of, uh, doing comedy. Very tired of traveling. Very tired of staring out at your vacant faces looking back at me, wanting me to fill your empty lives with humour you

couldn't possibly think of yourselves....good evening. It's good to be back, wherever I am, and I always love it when I'm here. I've been doing comedy for 11 years, folks, so bear with me while I plaster on a fake smile and plough through this shit one more time....I'm kidding folks. It's magic every fucking night." Bill Hicks

5 OF SPADES

HONESTY



I know, I know, you are honest. Straight as an arrow, pure as the driven snow. You've never lied or stretched the truth, and everything you do is 100% above board. Well done.

Now for the rest of us.....

When I told my client that of course I could *****, (fill in the gaps to suit your own particular situation), I wasn't being totally honest with them. I had never done it before and didn't have the skills required. Surely that's a bad thing? My credibility must be shot to pieces. The fact is that although I was being less than accurate with the truth to the client I was being totally honest with myself, I knew I could *****, and I did. (When I was an actor I knew at least three people with horse riding on their CV who'd never been on more than a seaside donkey ride).

The most difficult person to be honest with is yourself and if there's one person you should always tell the truth to it's you. The moment you start fooling yourself about your own ability is the exact same moment that you risk your reputation. I've been there, I've committed the sin of convincing the client before I convinced myself, only to realise too late that I wasn't ready.

That led to one of the most difficult and damaging performances, (if I can call it that), of my professional career. I've written about it before and you can read the painful details here, but it was a lesson learnt the hard way.

Liar, liar pants are on fire!

However the problem can also be flipped on it's head, you can tell yourself you can't when actually you can, and you know you can, you're just a bit scared. My son tells me he doesn't like cheese, the little fibber, he's never tried it and we "grown ups" do the equivalent all the time with those things that push us outside of our comfort zone. I can't loose weight, I can't do cabaret, I can't speak in front of an audience. Liar, liar pants are on fire! When the lack of honesty is geared this way we risk more than just our credibility, we risk our future and may never meet our full potential. Look around, the world is full of people who refuse to tell themselves the truth one way or another.

"AS IF!"

Self-help experts tell us to act "as if", basically pretending something is a certain way until eventually it is that way. It's a useful technique but must be employed with care. If I told you I was a Hollywood lead you could quite rightly reply in the tone of a sarcastic teenager, "AS IF!"

It's not easy to be honest with yourself and we all have to trick our brains and our bodies at times just to get through the day, but when it comes to what you are expert in, what you do for a living, then you need to take a deep breath and

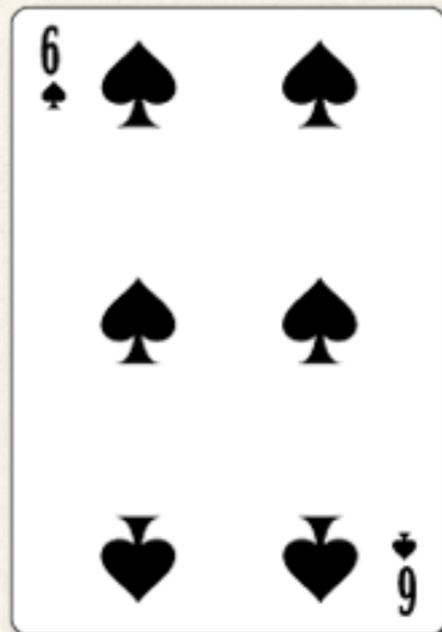
then a long hard look at the facts before you draw your conclusion. Maybe you're not quite ready for the corporate cabaret, so tell the client what your concerns are and recommend someone who is. Your credibility will soar, and so will future opportunities. But if you're just a bit scared, you've done the groundwork and in truth you need to make that step to break free of your current gravitational pull, then grasp the chance with both hands, (shaking probably), and push through the anxiety. You will surprise yourself.

As for the personal failure I mentioned, I recently found myself in a similar situation. I was offered a job that I was unsure about and I very nearly gave it to someone else. This time however I thought about the distance I had travelled since my public humiliation, I considered what I had learnt and the work I had put into my own improvement - I took the job having never done anything quite like it before. It was good, not great but good, and to be honest I know it will get better.

What's the biggest lie you've been telling yourself and is it holding you back or maybe damaging your credibility? Be honest.....

6 OF SPADES

STORY



Everybody has a story. The point you are at in your life at the moment has been determined by a unique set of events and responses particular only to you. If you look around at other people they may appear to be in a similar situation to you however their journey will have been totally different to yours. Your story defines you and subsequently differentiates you from the crowd. It is absolutely authentic, and therefore a powerful tool in building your credibility. I am not for a minute suggesting that you use your life story in full as the basis of all your communications, but I think it is important that you allow it to influence the way you present yourself. Fighting it may result in a "persona" that is impossible to convey effectively and difficult to sustain.

So how do you use your story effectively? Maybe your move into performing and magic was your way of escaping your own backstory, well that's a story in itself and it's what is fueling your transformation.

You can't hide from you own life and remain authentic so try to use it to feed your current endeavors.

Your life and your story are the best resource that you have and even if it is never exposed in your performance it can drive that performance forward. Emotional memory is a technique used by actors and relies on the performer being able to recreate an emotional state that they themselves experienced in their lives, it is not about pretending or faking it but about genuinely feeling the emotion. It is what makes a performance authentic.

Your story isn't just about emotional memory but also about the actual experiences. When you see another magician perform an effect that moves you in some way you may want to try and recreate the trick. So you take the "trick" and the lines and attempt the delivery but the result will be a copy, lacking in authenticity. A better approach is to aim to recreate the experience, to use your personal view of the performance you saw and relay that, not the trick, to your audience. Explore what it was about the performance that made you feel the way you did, look at your side of the story, your experience for inspiration. The same applies to any medium that has a profound effect on you, a movie, a painting, a song etc.

It is your response to it, your experience that makes it unique, the medium stays constant, your story changes.

I realise this is a little vague so I'll use my own story to try and help clarify what I mean.

I first saw Street Performers working years before I saw a street magician, and I remember being struck by the simplicity of the medium. The directness of the

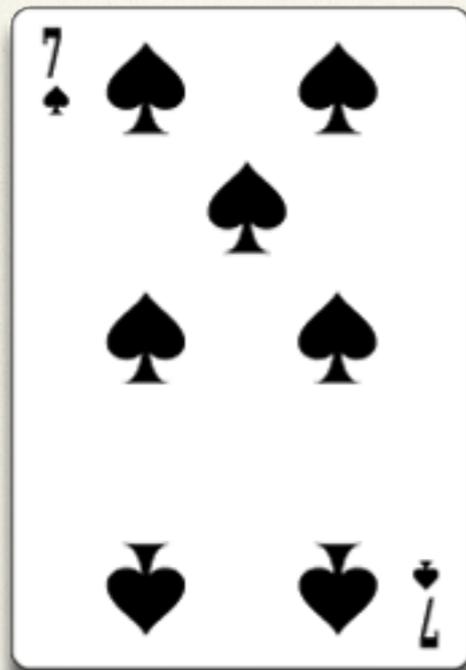
performance, the creative freedom it seemed to offer the performer were what struck me and it was those elements I wanted to instill in my own performance. I may have been over romanticising the lifestyle, (in retrospect I WAS over romanticising the lifestyle), but I wrote that story for myself. When I eventually became a street performer myself I was still drawn to those elements, and I didn't "chase the money" as much as I maybe should have but felt compelled to perform in a way that was true to my understanding of what street performing meant. As a result I never became a "great" street performer in terms of making money but I did earn the respect of my peers and established my credibility as a performer.

(No, still no clearer!)

The beauty of your own personal story is that it is being written every day and that means you have a never ending source of inspiration. Don't run away from who you are or where you have come from, harvest your experiences and share them directly or indirectly, but share them. It is who you are.

7 OF SPADES

FEEDBACK



If you are wondering what you can do to build your reputation, increase your sales or simply strengthen your credibility there is a simple solution - ask for feedback.

Feedback is the breakfast of champions. Ken Blanchard

It's such a simple thing to do and yet I would be pushed to find a professional magician who actively seeks feedback from their clients. I'm sure there are a few but on the whole we tend to gauge our effectiveness by the results that happen in "real time", audience response etc. Maybe we're protecting ourselves from the possibility that the feedback we get may not be 100% positive. Also the people we actually perform for are not usually the individuals who booked us so there might be a tendency to think that asking for feedback is a pointless exercise. This is a pretty myopic view of the experience we provide as professional magicians and makes the assumption that the only part of what we do that is important is the performance itself.

If you want to really understand how you are perceived within the industry, or any industry for that matter, feedback is essential. More importantly by seeking feedback and taking a

pro-active approach you are demonstrating a desire to improve and that conveys your genuine concern for the client.

It's important to understand the purpose of feedback, it's not to massage your ego but to allow you to improve what you do. This means that in order for feedback to be effective it has to be specific. Being told that something worked or didn't work is only valuable if you are told why. Sure, there are always positive comments about the stuff you do all the time and have already established work well, but that will not help you improve, it may even have the opposite effect and stop you making improvements if you rely on it too much.

Go looking for feedback because then you are in control.

If you actively seek feedback you can ask for opinions on a specific area that you know needs working on, rather than just being told for the umpteenth time that you were (generically) great. Being pro-active allows you to spread the net a little wider than just getting feedback on your performance. A client who loves your performance may focus purely on that element and if you aren't specifically asking for feedback on your booking system, your contract, your business approach or any other aspect of their experience with you then you'll probably never know how they are perceived. These are areas that most of us have to a point that is "good enough" and tend to overlook. However I personally feel in an over crowded market place these are the areas that offer a massive opportunity for us to build value for our clients. Also make sure you ask the people who matter,

who's opinion you trust and who you know have your best interests at heart. By controlling the approach you take to getting feedback you make the feedback itself more valuable. Another key benefit to seeking feedback is that you can prepare yourself for it. It won't always be positive and that's a good thing, however it doesn't make it any easier to take. According to Phil Rich Phd. there are 2 styles that people adopt when receiving feedback:

Negative/Closed Style

- **Defensive:** defends personal actions, frequently objects to feedback given.
- **Attacking:** verbally attacks the feedback giver, and turns the table.
- **Denies:** refutes the accuracy or fairness of the feedback.
- **Disrespectful:** devalues the speaker, what the speaker is saying, or the speaker's right to give feedback.
- **Closed:** ignores the feedback, listening blankly without interest.
- **Inactive listening:** makes no attempt to "hear" or understand the meaning of the feedback.
- **Rationalizing:** finds explanations for the feedback that dissolve any personal responsibility.
- **Patronizing:** listens, but shows little interest.

-
- **Superficial:** listens and agrees, but gives the impression that the feedback will have little actual effect.

Positive/Open Style

- **Open:** listens without frequent interruption or objections.
- **Responsive:** willing to hear what's being said without turning the table.
- **Accepting:** accepts the feedback, without denial.
- **Respectful:** recognizes the value of what is being said and the speaker's right to say it.
- **Engaged:** interacts appropriately with the speaker, asking for clarification when needed.
- **Active listening:** listens carefully and tries to understand the meaning of the feedback.
- **Thoughtful:** tries to understand the personal behavior that has led to the feedback.
- **Interested:** is genuinely interested in getting feedback.
- **Sincere:** genuinely wants to make personal changes if appropriate.

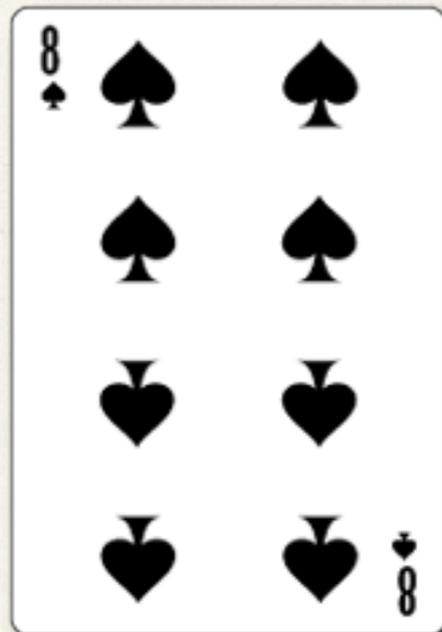
[Source article: SelfHelp Magazine 1999]

It is clearly more beneficial to adopt the positive style which will make seeking feedback a powerful strategy in building your career. You can't allow your fear or pride stop you from maximising your potential. Asking for feedback is tough but the rewards are worth it.

Do you implement a system that allows you to seek feedback? What areas would feedback have the most impact on in your magic business and performance? I'd love to hear how you use feedback to your benefit.

8 OF SPADES

LIMITS



Do you have a line drawn in the sand that you just won't cross? Are there some jobs that you wouldn't consider regardless of the fee? I know it's a little dramatic but I think it's important to know what you are and are not prepared to do. This isn't the same as the things you don't want to do. I've taken jobs dressed as a Biker Mouse from Mars and other cartoon characters which I really didn't want to do but at the time I was an out of work actor and this was the kind of work that was available. It didn't offend me or contradict any personal values, I simply didn't want to be dressed as a giant rodent. Of course as an out of work actor the money helped and the contract went towards me being able to get my Equity card so I did the jobs - squeak, squeak.

There have been jobs however that seemed much more desirable, better fee, better venue etc. but I've turned them down. I'll make it clear this isn't a regular thing, but occasionally there will be a gig that I just can't bring myself to do. For example when I was a street performer a wealthy politician who represented a political party that I couldn't align myself with

asked me to perform at a prestigious event, I made my excuses and turned down a substantial fee. Some might say this was foolish and they may have a point. Tolerance and the right to an individual opinion are one of the luxuries we enjoy in a democratic society so surely I could have looked past his political stance and simply seen it as a gig. Yes, I could have done that but I made my decision based on the values I held at the time, I did the right thing for me.

In our business we are often asked to perform for people who turn out to hold totally different values to ourselves. As professionals we smile and do the job, we sometimes endure the ridicule or even abuse of those people who feel they are better than "the performer", simply because we are working "for them." (The expression "performing monkey" springs to mind). We have, I'm sure, all had the client who is so far removed from our reality that their behaviour leaves us a little dumfounded and disgusted. What is important is that we keep a firm hold of our own personal values, that we don't allow ourselves to be shocked into a behaviour that contradicts what we believe as individuals.

....you can't build your credibility on "what you're going to do".

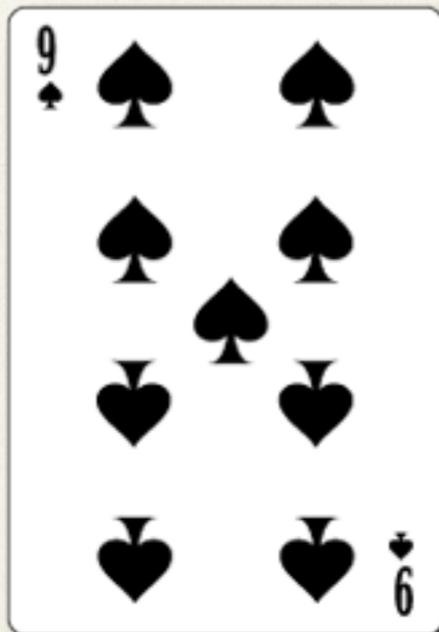
We all have to make compromises in order to survive, the secret is to only compromise those things that really don't matter much. I can dress up as a mouse, have the piss taken out of me by some drunk in a suit, because it really doesn't matter, I'll get paid and the drunk will wake up with puke on his shoes. What matters is that I haven't compromised my

own set of values. I know of some performers who will turn down jobs for fear of compromising their artistic integrity and that would be a wonderful position to be in but I can't afford it! The majority of us need to take the work that pays and that we don't want to do so that we can pursue the work that might not pay but we do want to do. This is The "Sex & Money Theory" that Hugh Macleod talks about in "[Ignore Everybody](#)" and it makes artistic sense. If I can't afford to pursue my artistic dreams then my art will never be created and I'm not an artist! Being an "if only..." performer is a pointless journey and you can't build your credibility on "what you're going to do".

Learn to compromise without stepping over the line. Your short term "sacrifices" may mean you can benefit from a longer term goal.

9 OF SPADES

SELF BELIEF



Whether you believe you can do a thing or not, you are right. Henry Ford

When I was at school we had a maths teacher by the name of Mr Davies. He was Welsh, and looked a bit like Tom Jones. The thing about Mr Davies is that when he walked into the room, the room always fell silent. He didn't raise his voice, he didn't need to. We just knew as students that this man demanded and deserved our respect. He was a brilliant teacher and he knew it, we did too.

Self belief is not the same as arrogance. Self belief flows from a deep understanding of what it is you do, how you do it and most importantly why. Arrogance doesn't need any of these things but exists in the belief that they don't really matter.

When you have a deep rooted belief in who you are and what you are capable of it forms an "invisible force" around you that doesn't repel but quite the opposite, it attracts. Self belief is at the heart of charisma, confidence and credibility. But it has to be founded on something. You can't just wake up and say "I

believe in myself" because as I'm sure I've mentioned before you are the hardest person to convince. Bravado and arrogance are the result of trying too hard at the wrong things and falling too short with what is really necessary.

Self belief is not about the future but is fixed in the exact moment that you are in now. You carry it with you and is not an "ideal" that you project into the future in the hope that you'll catch up with it. It is something that you nurture and grow, a facet of you character that is shaped by you everyday, regardless of your personal successes and failures. You can be nervous and have self belief, you can fail and have self belief, and you can have achieved absolutely nothing and still have self belief. In fact when you have achieved absolutely nothing self belief is sometimes all you have. One of the dangers of success on the other hand, is that you can begin to doubt yourself. Other people will tell you that you're great and their over inflated opinion of you can get ahead of your own self held belief. A gap will form and you can either race ahead and fill it with hot air and bullshit or you can begin to loose faith. Alternatively you can fix your feet firmly in the present and keep true to yourself.

Life as a performer is a series of incremental steps that will hopefully lead us to our desired outcome. At each point in the journey we need to believe in ourselves and I mean really believe in ourselves, before we move forward onto the next challenge. This doesn't mean we won't experience fear or failure but it does mean we are better equipped to deal with them. Fear and failure can be managed, doubt is much more

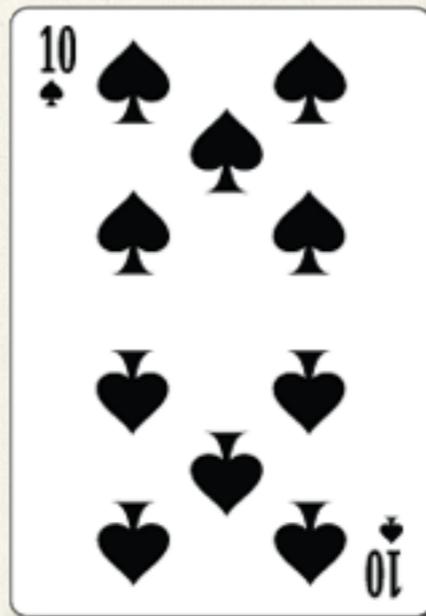
difficult to overcome. Doubt will chip away your credibility until there is nothing left.

Remind yourself every day of why you can do this job.

Allow yourself the time to know (NOT think), that you are brilliant at being where you are now and everyone else will know it too.

10 OF SPADES

TEACH



"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far go together"

A key to building credibility is to position yourself as a leader in your industry. This is not the same as becoming an expert because it is focused on sharing information as opposed to collecting it. Sharing your knowledge and helping others to achieve their goals is one of the most valuable and rewarding approaches to building credibility.

If you are uncertain about the benefits of giving away your hard earned knowledge just look at the proliferation of information marketing that is taking place all over the internet. Smart people are giving away their best advice because they realise that it will establish them as an authority and create a band of loyal followers who will, when the time comes, be prepared to pay for more of the same. Marketing IS teaching and vice versa.

As magicians we have a natural aversion to sharing our secrets and those of us who are members of the Magic Circle are sworn to keep our lips tightly sealed. But magic tricks are not all we know. We are part of a bigger industry and our knowledge base is extremely wide and yet very few magicians are sharing

that information with the outside world. For example if you have been in the business for any length of time you will have a wealth of knowledge about the way events are put together and how entertainment fits into them. For the average client this is valuable advice and by sharing it you create a broader relationship than you would as just an entertainer. Maybe you have learnt a huge amount about marketing your small business, again great knowledge that you could and should share.

The biggest realisation is to see your knowledge not in terms of other people in the industry but from the perspective of the recipient. You may only rate yourself as a 4 out of 10 in terms of what you know and that may be the reason you feel you aren't "credible" however for those people who rate themselves at 1, 2 or 3 you're an expert. Also, as long as you're continuously learning, (and you should always be learning), then you will always be ahead of someone. If you are relatively new to the "professional" magic scene for example you may feel that you have little advice to offer. That may be true if you are looking at the people who are now your new "competition" but what about looking back over your shoulder and looking at the journey you have already taken. What information did you seek out and what strategies did you develop in your struggle to turn pro? That's information others want to hear.

There is always someone following in your footsteps which means there is always someone to teach.

The internet makes it possible for us all to share our experiences and our knowledge and we should embrace that opportunity not recoil in horror at the thought that we might be "helping the competition." If you are established or just more established than some, fertilise the environment you're growing your business in, it can only help.

JACK OF SPADES

PERSIST



We must all suffer one of two things: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret or disappointment. Jim Rohn

I'll be honest I wasn't looking forward to writing this post. It's my little boy's birthday this weekend, I've also had a lot of unfinished jobs around the house to attend to and so writing a post that felt tired before I'd even started was not an inviting prospect. In short this post very nearly didn't happen. I could have made an excuse and posted it late or even let the whole project slide, the impact on the world would I'm sure have been minimal. The impact on my credibility however would have been a little more serious. I would have left the door open for doubt and that as I've mentioned in a previous post, is very dangerous.

Let me talk about running for a little bit. I run. I'm not a great runner but I get a sense of satisfaction from hauling my carcass around a 5 mile stretch of road every other day. If you run you'll know the feeling of hitting your stride and soaking up the miles ahead with relative ease. You will however also know the feeling of utter despair that can sometimes hit you when your

heart and mind both agree that running was a bad idea and I felt a little bit like that when I sat down to write this post.

...focus on being a runner and the act of running.

The thing that keeps you going when your stamina, belief or purpose temporarily desert you is nothing more than sheer bloody mindedness and commitment to the cause. It's true that anything worthwhile requires hard work at some stage and although we are lucky enough to have chosen a profession where work and pleasure are sometimes the same thing, there will still be times when you want to give up. You will struggle to see the light at the end of the tunnel, you may suffer financial hardship or loose faith in your own ability and you will want to get off the ride. We spend more time getting the work than we spend doing the work and this can make our ["4 Hour Work Week"](#) a seemingly endless struggle.

I know this from personal experience. I watch younger, less experienced and less capable (in my opinion), performers get more work and make more money than I do and yes it pisses me off, but then I have to smile. They're not luckier than I am, they all work hard to generate the gigs and in all fairness they deserve it more than I do. When I really look at what they're doing I realise that actually I'm playing a completely different game to them. It's like starting a Marathon and half way round remembering you never expected to win and so instead of feeling defeated as every spritely octogenarian speeds past you, you decide to enjoy the scenery. You shift your focus away from the race, and focus on being a runner and the act of running. When you finish you will be

surprised at how well you did, you may even have overtaken some of those people who made you so anxious and more importantly you will have enjoyed the experience.

So what does this have to do with credibility?

Well I suppose my point is quite simple: don't give up. Finishing builds credibility. If you feel like it's all too much then focus on the daily tasks and the mundane. Get them done. It's hard sometimes but if you stop you will struggle to start again. You need take make sure that every day you take at least one step in the right direction, make one call, send one email, write one article. Just do one thing if one thing is all you can do and your credibility will continue to grow.

QUEEN OF SPADES

UNREASONABLE



"The reasonable man adapts himself to the conditions that surround him... The unreasonable man adapts surrounding conditions to himself...All progress depends on the unreasonable man." George Bernard Shaw

I recently [interviewed Bill Herz](#) one of the most successful corporate magicians in the world today and one of the aspects of the conversation that struck me was his professional "unreasonableness". By that I mean he would ensure that his surrounding conditions would be altered to suit his requirements. He makes sure that the tables and chairs in the venue are positioned correctly, that the right music is playing during dinner prior to his performance, in fact he pretty much makes sure that everything is set to make his performance go smoothly.

Now I am very guilty of the opposite and talking to Bill made me realise that I was doing nothing less than shooting myself in the foot.

You see as a former street performer I have always prided myself on my ability to perform "anywhere" and in any situation, actually I was just too polite to kick up a fuss. I didn't want to rock the boat and seem like I was being unreasonable. **BIG** mistake. The message I was actually sending out was that I wasn't really in control of my own performance, that I didn't care enough about the outcome and that it didn't really matter. This Gung-ho approach has led to me delivering some pretty second rate performances over the years, with my energy being used to "make it work" despite of the situation, instead of using it to deliver the experience that was intended and paid for. I hang my head in shame.

This type of "unreasonable" is what sets performers like Bill Herz apart from the masses. It's what moves careers forward and builds a huge wealth of credibility with clients. They see you take control of your element of their event and they love you for it. It shows you have a deep understanding of what you do, that you are focused on your involvement and keen to get it right, but most importantly it shows you care. (See this post for more information on the Credibility Pyramid). It moves you away from being a commodity and into the realms of being a consultant and a trusted part of the event experience. Everybody wins.

The person who knows what you do best is you and you are obligated, if you are charging for your service, to make sure you do it to the best of your abilities. If you're shouting because the sound system sucks or the audience is a hundred

feet away due to the dance floor then you have the right to change the situation. It does require that you stick your neck out and/or have a rider on your contract that makes some "unreasonable" requests, (such as the audience should be able to see you), and the reasonable client will understand. Your credibility and progress, as Mr Bernard-Shaw stated, depends on it.

KING OF SPADES

BLUE OCEANS



This is the final post in the Spades section on Credibility and it's also the half way mark of 52IDEAS.

My decision to choose credibility as a topic was made because in an industry that is unregulated and over populated, credibility seemed to me to be a great asset and it is a key to success both in the arts and in business. Our job is more than magic, it's to sell the concept of ourselves to the market place and then deliver on that promise. It requires more than just talent and the skills specific to our particular medium, we need to draw from aspects of art, business, and, well pretty much everything life has to offer. We must have a clear vision of what it is we are trying to create and then we need to choose the right tools for the job, not just those that can be found in our magic box of tricks.

Being a great magician is not enough. If no one has ever heard of you then you can be a genius, the best in the world but the truth is the world doesn't care and truthfully you won't be missed. Your mission is to make the world care. Credibility is not about you it is about everybody else. Without others

credibility is irrelevant because it's other people's perception of you that gives you credibility in the first place. You can't tell people you are credible they have to make that call themselves.

You can no doubt convince people that the "card is lost in the pack" but can you convince them that you are worthy of their attention? It's a hell of a lot tougher. Learning to sell your vision is as important as the vision itself. It's about the "grand illusion", you as a magician, a performer, a credible act! This is marketing and it is happening every time you walk out of the door so please feel free to take control of it.

What does your current marketing say about you? Do you actually know? Does your website focus on you or does it focus on shaping people's perception of you? Are you in control of your personal brand or do you feel that it's not important? Are you conscious of the image you portray or do you feel that is too contrived? I'm asking because I'm genuinely interested, I'm not making a judgement call, there is no right or wrong answer.

Form Follows Function

We suffer from having a single, predominant function of professional magic, namely to perform close-up magic to make money. Form then follows function and the result is a sea of similarity as everyone shapes themselves to achieve the same end. But there are so many ways to engage with the outside world and so many opportunities to establish yourself and your credibility. It's a little frustrating therefore that we find ourselves as magicians thrashing around in the same

small sea, like sharks around chum. The concept of "[Blue Oceans](#)" is that you swim away from the "Red Oceans", where the masses are competing and find clear water - Blue Oceans. Establishing credibility when you have the full attention of your audience is far easier than shouting to be heard.

If you can redefine your function in magic, re-imagine your future and then choose the right tools to express that vision, you have a chance to swim in the clearest waters possible. You will not just be the market leader you will be the entire market. One of the most striking examples of this is [Dan & Dave Buck](#). They created a whole new Blue Ocean, and they used the tools of great design, stunning video and of course the internet to let people know. They didn't invent the art of flourishing they perfected it, redefined it and now they own it. They are the biggest fish by far in that part of the ocean.

You might think that it's all been done, that there are no new Blue Oceans in magic but someone, somewhere is about to prove you wrong

CHAPTER 3

DIAMONDS

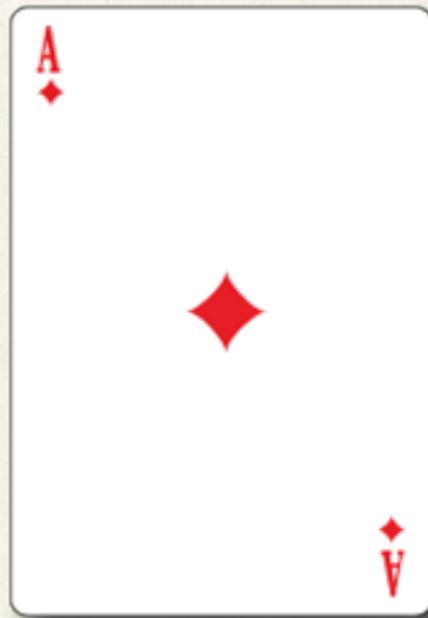
QUEEN OF DIAMONDS BY OLGA ROZANOVA



ACE OF DIAMONDS



PROFITABILITY



This is a tricky subject where the arts are concerned. Making money!

The irony for me is that I have spent six months preaching that it's not about the money and here I am on the verge of telling you it is. If you want to pursue a career in magic then you will of course have to make a living from magic. I know a lot of extremely talented performers and magicians who are flat broke and who need to subsidise their performing with another job or who simply live on the bread line. This is very upsetting as it would often require little more than a shift in thinking to make them profit from their talents. I must point out now that I am not one of the magic elite who have created a thriving business from performing magic, and I am certainly not wealthy so perhaps I am not the right person to be talking about profiting from magic. However I do believe that my own lack of wealth generation is not due to a lack of business understanding but is more a case of shifting focus, (or lack of focus - which I will discuss), and so I will offer my perspective in the hope that it will shed some light on what is required to be a professional, profitable magician.

Magic has an interesting dynamic in that it can be extremely lucrative and it is possible to make a great income from performing just close up magic at corporate and private parties. However it also has a strong artistic element that struggles with the money making side. It's a little like the music business, you have the classical musicians who perform for the sake of the art and then you have Hip-hop which revels in the whole rags to riches ethos and actively promotes commercialism. Okay so that's a huge generalisation on my part but hopefully you get my drift. There are two distinct approaches to being a magician.

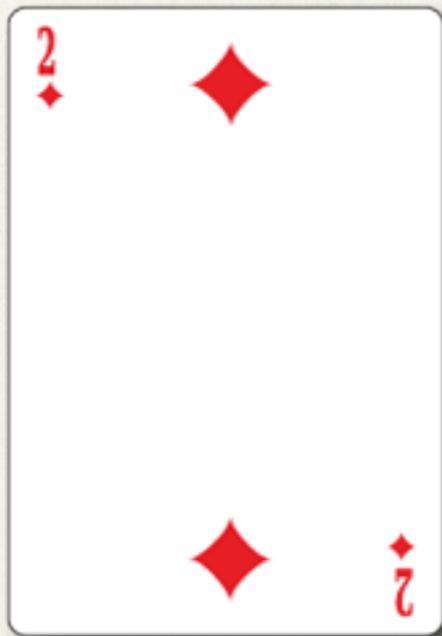
The Sex & Cash Theory

It is important to be able to separate out the art from the business, however they do co-exist and in the majority of cases business is the stronger of the two. Art may perish on it's own but businesses can and should be self sustaining, their sole purpose is survival. In ["Ignore Everybody"](#), author Hugh Macleod introduces the "Sex and Cash Theory" and implores us to accept the fact that we need to do the jobs we may despise but make us money, in order for us to keep our art alive and he states that as soon as you accept this your career starts moving ahead faster. Magic has sex and cash in abundance! You can simply do the cash jobs and milk the profession for all it's worth, but if you do this and never dip your toe into the more "non-commercial" side of things I think you're missing out. Equally if you simply perform magic for the "sex", the pure enjoyment of the art, then you may loose touch with what is relevant and that is the kiss of

death to any art form. (I'll be exploring how to sustain a career when we get to the Clubs).

TWO OF DIAMONDS

NEED



Have you ever taken the time to establish what you really need? Do you know what your minimum requirements are on a weekly or monthly basis? I realise that this isn't going to be the most poetic or magical post I've written in this series but it may well be one of the most important. If you don't have a really good grasp of your financial obligations then it is impossible to know if you're making enough. It's not rocket science and yet few of us I imagine have taken the time to analyse the numbers and that is a mistake. I'm not preaching, but I am someone who has, in the past, failed to stay on top of what's going out and what's coming in and I know the problems it can cause.

If you are going to achieve success as a professional performer you either need to learn the basics of profit and loss or have someone close to you who has those skills. Either way you need to know the bottom line. This isn't just a practical necessity but it also key to you setting your personal goals as a performer. You have to know what you need before you consider what you want. Do you know what your fixed costs are each month? Do you know what your variable costs will amount to?

We often talk in terms of our own industry related currency when an expense or purchase is imminent. How often have you referred to the cost of the holiday you're booking for example as "a couple of gigs"? Maybe you then look at the diary and see you have "a couple of gigs" and so don't worry about the expense ignoring the fact that those "couple of gigs" are actually needed for the tax bill or the mortgage? It's easy to let the fact that we can make lump sums of money override the expenses that occur everyday just to keep you afloat.

As performers and artist we can become engrossed in a particular project or dream and this can lead us to neglect the foundations that we are building that dream on. What we want must always take second place to what we need when it comes to the financial side of our business.

Take the time, and it won't take long, to calculate what leaves your bank account every month, (fixed costs), and then based on previous months calculate what you spend on essentials such as food and clothing, (variable costs). The total of these two numbers is the bare minimum that you must earn each month to survive. Exceed this total and you're in profit. Now you can calculate the costs of what you want each month and add that to your monthly requirements. Average out what you earn each gig and it's easy to see how many paid gigs you need to be doing to achieve this total. (Phew!)

If you can regularly hit this target your on your way to creating a great life for yourself. You'll have the peace of

mind that enables you to embark on those projects that really excite you and that my friends is the real target

THREE OF DIAMONDS

WORTH



Sometime ago I wrote [a post about knowing your own value](#). It was prompted by being undercut for a job that I felt I was ideal for and my chagrin at being unable to do anything about it. Here I go again....

I used to be part of a group of small businesses that met every 3 months to discuss how things were going and to offer a degree of accountability. Each meeting we would set ourselves business goals and then report back to the group on our progress. A few years ago at the meeting just before Christmas I arrived in a state of dismay at the lack of work that I had and the financial difficulties I was in. One of the group, a more "traditional" businessman, (and a bit of a pain in the arse if the truth be told), told me that I should "drop my prices" and do every job possible. His advice made me extremely angry, (admittedly I was tired and emotional), and I never went back to the group. This businessman clearly didn't believe I was worth what I was charging and no doubt he would book another, cheaper magician if he needed to and that's perfectly fine. His perception wasn't based on me personally, he'd never seen me work, but on his understanding of magicians in general. Also

he was more than likely comparing my fee structure to that of his own industry and was unable to reconcile the two.

My argument, and one that I still stand by, is that dropping your prices does not get you more enquiries. Only once you have established yourself as the cheapest does that become the reason people call you and by then the damage is done. You're the cheapest and that's a very deep hole to be in.

Personally I would rather be a magician worth something sitting at home with no work than a magician worth nothing sitting at home with no work. The financial value to me may be the same, (zero), but the perceived value, the effect on my long term business and the effect on my confidence is significant. Of course without great marketing this approach may leave me without a home to sit in, but that's a different subject.

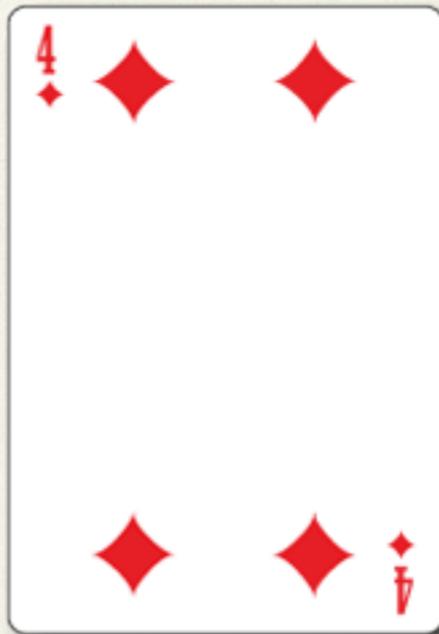
Many years ago [Andy Nyman](#) gave me some great advice on fees. He told me to write down my fee structure on a piece of paper and stick it above the phone. That way when anyone rang I could quote them a price without hesitation. It's great advice. I think that with things the way they are you should also have a minimum fee written down as well, a price below which you will not take a job, alongside your preferred fee so that you can haggle if need be. It forces you to put a value on what you do and then stick to it and I believe this is really important. Take time to understand the value that you provide and be prepared to charge accordingly. This concept of value as opposed to "service

offered" means you can always improve and increase, there are no limits.

Magicians are ten a penny and so that's what they charge. You however are you, and are worth a great deal more.

FOUR OF DIAMONDS

RECORD



Even as I write this I can feel the hypocrisy flowing through me - this post is more a case of do what I say NOT do what I do!

I was a free spirit and wasn't going to be ruled by money....

When I was a street performer a friend of mine's girlfriend showed me something! A little black book. This, she told me was the reason she never worried about money and was always on top of her accounts. Everything, and I mean everything she spent was written down in this little black book and all the receipts were kept. At the end of each day she would spend a few minutes, (that's all it took), filing her receipts and entering the numbers into her accounts. I laughed at the idea, accusing her of being too uptight. Life was too short to spend counting beans and penny pinching, I was a free spirit and wasn't going to be ruled by money....

Two days ago I spent 8 hours of my life reconciling bank accounts and sorting through 3 months worth of receipts so that I could file a VAT return. Luckily my accounting software allows me to upload bank statements or I would have been typing those in as well. I cursed, complained and was stressed

out but that's no surprise because it happens every 3 months, without fail.

So here's the advice that you will have heard before I'm sure - **KEEP GREAT RECORDS.**

My friend's girlfriend used a little black book, she didn't wait for the latest App that would do the work for her - smartphones didn't exist - she simply wrote things down. I socialised with her on a regular basis and I can assure you she didn't sit in the corner with a calculator, she simply kept on top of what she was spending. It became a habit and that is the key to all of this, make it a part of your everyday life. It's such a simple sentence but it beats most of us into submission. I have tried and failed on numerous occasions to maintain a regular update of my accounts and if it wasn't for the fact I had to do a VAT return every 3 months I would be in a much bigger muddle than I am.

I am going to suggest that you spend 30 minutes, once a week, making sure your books are up to date. That's it. Reconcile the bank accounts, record cash flow, have a cup of tea. The tea is a really important point. Now you can relax. You can read a book, write a blog post, work on a new routine. You have created the space to be creative, (mentally and physically), by eliminating that pile of paperwork that will continue to grow and continue to haunt you until it's done.

There are **NO EXCUSES** for not keeping great records. It's not difficult, it's not time consuming, in fact I have absolutely no idea why it's such a big deal for most of us, maybe we

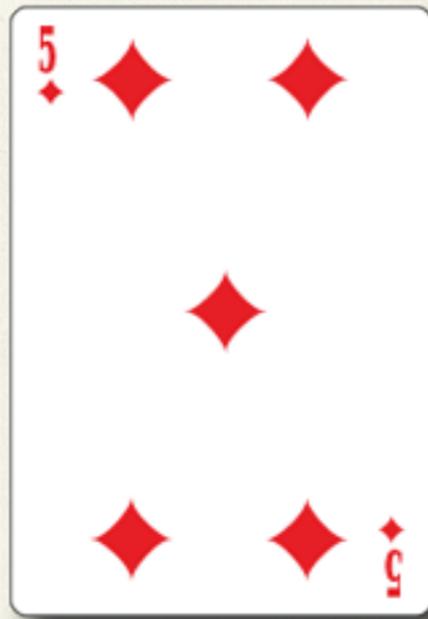
don't think it's important. Well here's a cautionary tale: some years ago a good friend of mine who failed to keep his books in order and failed to submit up to date accounts was fingered by the taxman. It cost him in the region of £40k, he had to remortgage his house and it still isn't over for him. Why? Because he couldn't prove them wrong.

Reconcile, Record, Relax.

(Mark McGuinness at Lateral Action has a great resource for those of us who need more help with all of this - [5 Essential Money Skills for Creative People](#))

FIVE OF DIAMONDS

VALUE



I've always been a big believer in keeping fees at a good level and not dropping them to secure the work. It's not just on principle, there is also the belief that raising your fees when times are good is harder to do than dropping them when things get tough. It does however pose a problem. People are more price sensitive now, even near the top end of the market and you have to do something to ensure your fees are seen as "worth it." One way to do this which is in the realms of everybody is to add value to the service you offer, real or perceived.

If you have read any business or marketing book written in the last ten years you will be familiar with this concept. The idea that the service you offer is only a small part of the service you deliver. As magicians we do tricks, fool people and hopefully entertain them. I do, you do, every working professional magician does this and in this respect we are identical and possibly therefore interchangeable. We strive to be individual in the way we perform and the material we deliver, (at least we should do), but for the most part a magician, to the outside world, is a magician.

Added value or perceived value provide you with another route to distinction. Every moment of contact that you have with a potential client offers you a chance to add value . Every phone call, every email, every single interaction is an opportunity and yet businesses across the board, not just magicians, fail to capitalise on these moments, focusing entirely on the point at which they do their job.

If you eat at a fancy restaurant where the food is great but the staff are rude or you are left waiting for an age, would you go back? Probably not. Contrast that to a restaurant where from the moment you phoned to make the reservation you were treated as though you were the most important guest they had ever served and an embossed confirmation card was sent to you're home address. A restaurant where as you arrived nothing was left to chance, you were swept away by the atmosphere, and oh the food was fine. Unless your a food purist, there is no competition between the two.

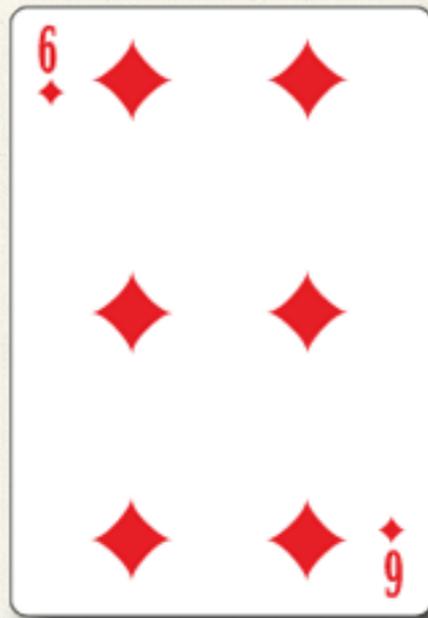
It can be an interesting exercise to examine your processes and look at how you conduct yourself during each stage of a booking. How many times do you have contact with your client outside of your performance? That's how many opportunities you have to add value. For example do you have the necessary systems in place? Systems that enable you to generate and send personalised contracts, confirmations and thank-you letters so that you don't forget. (A great example for magicians is [Giggio](#)). Thank you's are really interesting. They are non-essential in terms of the job but they are invaluable in terms of how you are perceived. If

you have ever received a personal, hand-written thank you from a client you'll understand the impact they can have.

From the moment your phone rings or the email arrives in your in box you are "[Un-Marketing](#)", helping to grow your business by providing experiences outside of the expected. If you do it well then your higher fees will not only be accepted but expected as well.

SIX OF DIAMONDS

MARGINS



Back in my previous life as a personal trainer there was an acronym for the 4 ways you could improve exercising and the benefits. It was F.I.T.T, and it stands for Frequency, Intensity, Time and Type. I thought I'd examine the same acronym and apply it to the way we work as professional magicians and look at how it can make us more profitable.

Frequency

The first word, frequency is the obvious one. The more work you do the more money you make. It's all about getting more gigs. As with personal fitness however, where over-training is a real and serious risk to your long term health, taking every possible gig is exhausting and not necessarily the smart thing to do long term.

Intensity

Intensity isn't so clear. High intensity means huge effort but potentially huge gains. This would equate to a premium performance which had a high fee attached. High pressure, high return. To simplify it a bit lets view this as purely a case of raising your fee or up selling to a more lucrative

performance, for example cabaret from close up. To make gains in exercise you need to push past certain physical barriers. Very often these barriers also have a significant mental element to them which can be equally difficult to overcome. To make advances your business and as a performer you also have barriers to overcome. Raising fees and stepping outside of your comfort zone is a big problem for many people and it requires great mental strength to push past any initial pain.

Time

Time is the same for all of us. No-one has more than 24 hours in every day and yet some people seem to achieve a great deal more than others. The length of time that you exercise can be easily stretched out to give the impression of a lot of work done however it is the quality of the time that makes the difference. If you are spending your time simply moving from one gig to the next and not creating something in between I would suggest you are wasting your time. You are your business and working to better yourself can only be good for that business.

Type

Type is another way to improve the quality of exercise. Switching the type of exercises you perform keeps things fresh, keeps your body guessing and helps you to improve in different areas. The type of performance you do can and should vary. There are numerous ways to use magic in performance and you should consider other outlets besides

your usual suspects. You will learn from the different environments and each one will benefit the others.

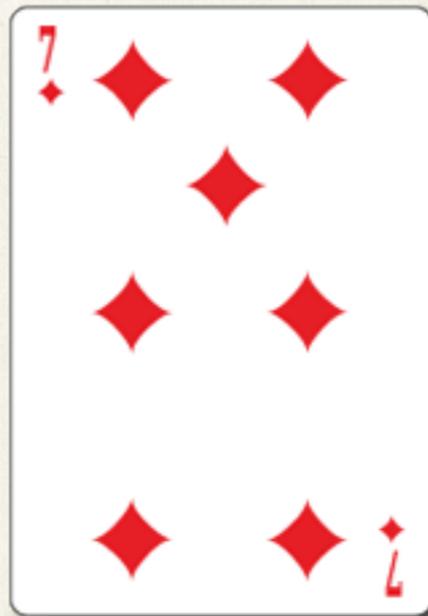
10% is a margin not a mountain

These four simple improvements can have a substantial effect on your profitability. Imagine raising each one by just 10%. Simply raising your fees by 10% and the number of bookings by 10% will increase your income by 21%!

I'm not trying to say that it's easy, it isn't, but it certainly isn't impossible. 10% is a margin not a mountain. I just want to demonstrate that small steps can lead to big shifts in your success and it's within the scope of all of us make these incremental changes

SEVEN OF DIAMONDS

BRAND



A brand is not your logo or tagline.

It may seem to be a little excessive to think about branding when after all you're just one person. Surely it's only the big businesses that need a brand? Well, actually no.

Let's start at looking at what a brand really is, actually let's start at looking at what a brand isn't: A brand is not your logo or tagline, although these are elements of your brand. They are representations of your brand but not the brand itself. Your brand is really the promise that you make to your clients. It is the thoughts and emotions generated in the minds and hearts of people who you meet and the feeling they take away.

For most magicians we are the business and so the brand we are building is our personal brand and according to Dan Schawbel of the [Personal Branding Blog](#) before we can start building our brand it is our challenge to make the following equation true:

Your self-impression = How people perceive you.

This means that whatever we promise people in terms of the person/experience they will get when they book us will be the same as the person/experience they actually encounter. So

before you can even start creating your brand you have to understand who you are and how you are perceived. Simply branding yourself a "Psychological Illusionist" doesn't make you one and if the experience that your spectators have is a guy doing card tricks then the brand you are building is one of someone who can't be trusted. You are still creating a brand just not the one you wanted. It does take time and careful consideration.

So why is your brand so important? Well if done properly it can be your singular distinction in a busy market place and that can be crucial. A strong brand can also create a strong performance. Weak spots can be carried by the brand, if an audience is expecting miracles because of how you are perceived then they will, by their own making, see miracles.

It can also shoot you straight through the foot as some of TV's finest have discovered when they fail to live up to the promise they make on TV when performing live.

Think of the most commercially successful performers in the world and you will find that they have a brand that sets them apart before they even step on stage.

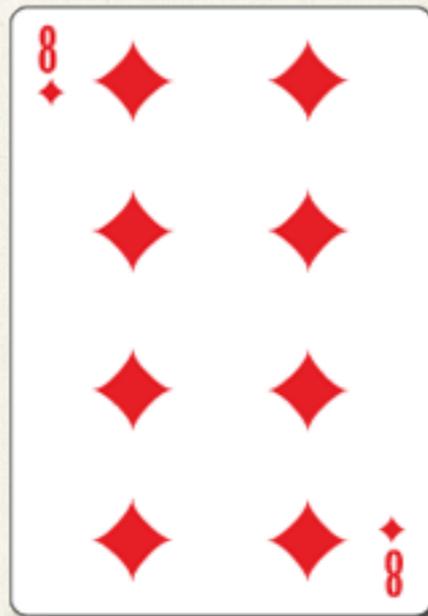
The first clear step to building a personal brand is, as mentioned above, to look at what you're doing and then at how it is perceived. If there is a gaping hole between the two then you need to reassess. Which is easier and which would make you happier, changing their perception or changing what you do? Once you know your promise is a good one and one that you can keep then it's time to tell the world.

Stick to that promise, be consistent and create a visual style that will represent your values on and offline.

Building a personal brand is an ongoing challenge. It's as much personal development as business development but it's a challenge we should all take in our efforts to make our magic more profitable.

EIGHT OF DIAMONDS

8 THINGS



1. Stay in touch. Do you have a list of clients sitting on a database and if you do what are you doing with it. Your list is the key to increased profits. These are people who know who you are and know what you do. Existing clients are easier and cheaper to sell to than new ones so what are you doing to keep yourself at the front of their minds? Do you have a monthly e-newsletter? If not why not? It's virtually free to do and as long as the people on your list are happy to hear from you every month then there's no reason not to do it. Try not to talk about yourself too much in the newsletter. Offer advice, provide useful commentary and of course let them know how they can get in touch with you.

2. Make it easy for them to do business with you. This means that you need to think about the process that a client will go through to book you. Then make it all "push button" simple wherever possible. Online booking forms, automated contracts, and the ability to pay you online are all things that you could consider.

3. Eliminate the risk. Offer an iron-clad money back guarantee and honor it. Many years ago I provided a less than satisfactory service to a client and I knew that I should probably have waived my fee but instead I invoiced them and held my breath. They said they didn't want to pay and they were right. I should have offered before it was demanded. Learn from my mistake!

4. Ask for Referrals. This is a win-win. Your clients want to think that you value their opinion and if you've done a good job they'll be happy to spread the word. Referrals are like a chain reaction and will boost your sales with minimum effort. Have you got a referral system in place? There's plenty of literature out there that will help you build your magic business through referrals.

5. Have VIP's. The Pareto Principle states that approximately 80% of your work will come from 20% of your clients, these are your VIP's. Build relationships with them and be prepared to go out on a limb for them.

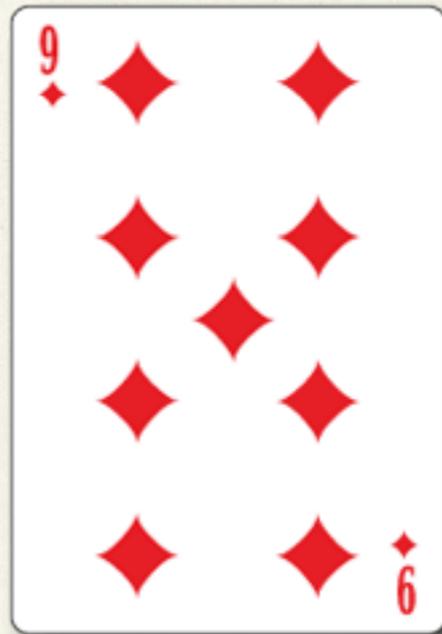
6. Refer them. If you know your clients business well, (and you should try to learn as much as you can), introduce them to someone who maybe a potential client and you'll be making them very happy. Don't ask for anything in return just do it because you can.

7. Educate them. You know what you do but do your clients? Educate them to the possibilities that all your services provide. Don't try to sell them all the services straight away just keep them up to date and wait until an opportunity arises that you could help them with.

8. Understand their needs. Before you try to pitch your services understand exactly what the client needs. If you try to force your service into an unsuitable situation you may come unstuck - they might book you!

9 OF DIAMONDS

PLAN



Feast & Famine

One of the problems that most self-employed performers encounter is I imagine, the "feast & famine" cycle. This is the result of being one person trying to do the multitude of tasks that are necessary to make a living in the industry. Everything from product development all the way through to product delivery. We can find ourselves focused on one element, performing for example, only to discover that when that work is complete there is no more to do. So we knuckle down to generate more business, which we do, and the cycle begins again. There are always unwanted gaps. The problem is even more pronounced if you work on larger projects, such as Trade Shows, Theatre Shows or Cruises. Projects like these are extremely time consuming and can leave you out of the loop long enough for it to impact on your income. So what's the answer?

There are a number of ways to avoid the feast & famine cycle and one of these is to have a marketing calendar. Put simply a Marketing Calendar is a twelve month plan of all the marketing

you intend to do and it outlines the campaigns you will embark on at particular times of the year. Retailers are the kings of this and the school summer holidays offer us some great examples. At the beginning of the holidays we are treated to "Back to School" ads, and at the end of the holidays we see a plethora of toy ads all reminding us that Christmas is "just" around the corner.

By planning ahead like this you always know what you are focused on at any time of year. You can build your calendar around the work cycles you are familiar with and more importantly identify gaps in your year that need to be filled. The beauty of forward planning is that you can create your campaigns months in advance and using all the wonders of the world wide web execute them at the push of a button. Emails, auto-responders, schedule blog posts etc. all make it possible to be highly visible to your clients while you are actually earning money with your magic.

To build a Marketing Calendar you simply need to draw a grid of twelve squares, each one representing a month. Mark out the key busy times of the year, for example:

July & August - Weddings

September & October - Trade Shows

December - Corporate Parties, etc.

Decide what you want to achieve for each of these periods, (e.g. book 4 Trade Shows during September/October) and then give yourself 5 to 6 months to achieve it. Why this long? Well unless you are well established you will need to

start building your brand and creating awareness which is a process that involves building trust, which in turn takes time. (As for weddings, well the lead in time can be 24 months plus!) I'm talking about campaigns because that is what you should be planning for during this period. A methodical set of targeted marketing components that build to a sales point. Not just a mass email to everyone on your list telling them you're available for Christmas Parties, (I'm guilty of this and can tell you it's pretty pointless - unless of course your list is made up entirely of Christmas Party bookers.)

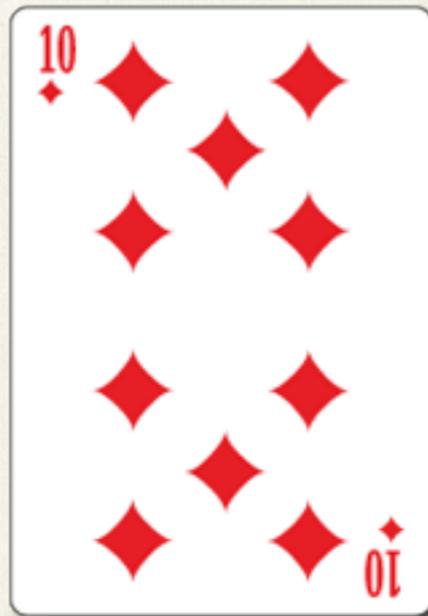
When you have planned the stages of your campaign put them on your calendar and make sure you put it somewhere you can see it.

Now you have no excuses when you find yourself sitting in your office twiddling your thumbs.

You should only have nothing to do when you plan to do nothing.

10 OF DIAMONDS

YOU II



I'm going to go off script a little bit here and the result is a bit of a ramble - I had planned to write about the benefit of saving 10% of everything you earn, (or something along those line), but was so bored with the idea that money was THAT important that I physically couldn't force the words out. Instead I'm going to give you a nudge, sorry a poke with a stick and tell you that you are capable of anything and ask why aren't you doing it? Lacking in subtlety I know.

The subtitle of themagicstateofmind.com is "The key to your success is you" and I seem to have forgotten the importance of that in my quest to be very clever and knowledgable about all things business. There is only one thing stopping you from achieving great things and the good news is that the one thing is you. The bad news is also that the one thing is you.

Imagine for a moment that you really were a magician, that the powers you possessed enabled far more than the rising of a playing card to the top of the deck - what would your life look like? What if you could have anything for yourself and your family, what if there was no skill you couldn't possess, no dream

you couldn't achieve, what if.... As long as your answers remained grounded in the physical world then there is nothing stopping you moving towards that end other than yourself. In "[The Naked Leader Experience](#)", David Taylor gives a guaranteed formula for success which is:

1. Know where you want to go.
2. Know where you are now.
3. Know what you have to do, to get to where you want to go.
4. Do it!

It's really that simple but let's break it down:

1. Know where you want to go - this is where you need to think big. If all you want to do is have a quiet life then guess what that's all you'll ever have. You will turn down opportunities and avoid difficult situations - bingo, you've succeeded. If you want to be a world class act, booked every night for the rest of your life then that might take a bit more doing but the end is always a good place to start.
2. Know where you are now. By giving yourself an honest appraisal of where you are in every aspect, physically, mentally, emotionally you can start to see what's missing and see if it's physically possible for you to achieve your goal. (I'm never going to be play James Bond for example - I simply don't have the time.) For the world class act ambition I mentioned above, maybe you'll realise that you need a world class act!

3. Know what you have to do, to get to where you want to go - if you can, reverse engineer the process, "begin with the end in mind." When you have a set of steps that will get you to your goal you may notice that the first step isn't so intimidating, your big dreams may not be so implausible after all. A world class act is developed bit by bit, not all in one go.

4. Do it! No explanation needed.

I am not a success, a world class act, a millionaire or even close, but I do have BIG dreams. I wake up every day and see that there is opportunity everywhere. Some days that is inspiring, some days it is overwhelming, and on some days I just have to put the rubbish out and tidy my desk. I'm not relying on getting the "big break", or winning the lottery, I'm relying on myself because in the end they're my dreams. Good luck.

CREATE



I have to be honest, even though I have been writing about profitability I personally have had a pretty lean time of it over the last few months. August in particular has been quieter than usual and it's usually pretty quiet!

But I have been busy. In fact I have been busier than I have for a while. Full days and long nights in the office have been the general pattern of things, scattered with the usual "school holiday" commitments. The focus of my work time has been creating notes and visuals for a lecture that I'm giving in Sydney at the end of the week and again in Singapore on the way home. It has been an education as I have never really, seriously put my work into any form other than performance apart from the creation of 2 DVD's some time ago but that project was driven by someone else and was, in truth, a performance.

For those professionals who lecture and produce notes, books etc may I take this opportunity to tip my hat to you, it's hard work - really hard.

The satisfaction I have gained from doing this will, I hope, outweigh the stress and anxiety it has caused and hopefully the

results will be well received. Am I happy with the end result? Of course not, but that is more a personality fault than anything else as initial feedback seems to have been positive.

So let me get to the point: Make something!

The work we generally do is pretty transient and short lived. It exists at a moment in time and very often is only experienced by a relatively small number of people. These snapshots are what we are building our reputations on and are fragile at best. So make something. Something concrete and durable. Something that you can look back on dewy eyed in years to come on and criticise, praise or even regret.

We live in an age when producing something is easier than ever, a click of a button and you can have your "miracle" on line for the world to see. This is a sword with two incredibly sharp edges. The amount of shit that clogs up the bandwidth of our virtual lives is unbelievable. (I apologise for the use of profanity however mild, but there really is no other word for 90% of the "magic" posted on YouTube and the like.) Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. Actually I'll rephrase that: just because you can do it quickly and badly doesn't mean you should. You have at your fingertips the ability to create at the least "very good" and at the best "incredible" material to share with the world. If the work you want to share is only worth a few minutes of your time to "package" then it probably isn't worth two minutes of my time to watch, read etc. There are of course exceptions but these I believe are rare.

There is no excuse for "not knowing how" to make things look better, Google is your friend!

Conversely if your content is garbage then you can package it all you like and it will still be garbage however you will have learnt how to package and so all is not lost. (As a side note I think that the majority of the material in this category is the result of a cynical attempt to make money from those people who are yet to grasp the concept of style over content. It doesn't help magic and probably breaks a number of laws concerning misrepresentation.)

The product doesn't have to be video, it can be notes, essays, blog posts, photographs, drawings, concepts, talks, advice, a show, anything that you have deliberately put together to share with others and yes you can charge for it if you want. Once you have created something worthwhile you have a tangible asset that can be exchanged for money, information or credibility. Something that can be developed and improved or simply used as a stepping stone to create more. You will be criticised, it will be slated and the internet trolls will trash it, but as long as you have taken time and effort producing it you will benefit. You will learn from the process and acquire a set of skills that in the future could make you a great deal of money directly or indirectly. It is an investment in yourself

HELP



First things first, this post is being written at 5am in the morning in Sydney airport. I've had NO sleep and so if I make no sense you'll know why!

As I mention in my last post my trip to Sydney and Singapore has forced me to put together a number of items; notes, DVD's etc. and as a result I have had to enlist the help of a number of friends. It's not that I couldn't do it on my, it's that I couldn't have done it as well.

A number of people in Sydney have commented on the quality of the notes I produced - they look great. Now I know how to use all the necessary software to create these things but the decision to use a designer was the best decision I made. [Martyn Rowland](#) did the job for me in a tenth of the time it would have taken me and the result is fifty times better. A number of people have proof read the notes, DVD's were shipped for me and I sought feedback from people who's opinions I trust.

All in all my trip to Sydney has been a success because of other peoples willingness to get involved in the project.

It's very easy for us to see ourselves as "solo" performers and I personally suffer from being a bit of a skinflint when it comes to hiring professional help, but the best results are always achieved when you enlist the help of people better suited the task than you are. Our reluctance is a mixture of ego and the desire to stay in control of everything, (which I suppose is ego..very tired).

So what do you need to do to make sure you have the help of really good people?

1. The first thing is make yourself available to others. Be prepared to share your knowledge with them and they will be prepared to share theirs with you.
2. Be open to criticism. If you ask for help then make sure you understand that other people have different opinions to you, that is after all why you are asking them. A group of friends and "yes" men will not improve what you're doing it will just re-enforce what you're doing wrong.
3. Understand what your group has to offer. Find out what skills exist within your particular circle of friends by asking them. Just because you know someone as a magician doesn't mean that's all they do - you'll be suprised by the talent that is on your doorstep.
4. Look outside of your close friends. Being selfish with your project as an individual or as a group will result in a second rate job if the necessary skill sets aren't available.
5. Pay for it. Don't abuse your access to people's talent. Even if they're one of your best mates, reward them for their hard work whenever possible. If you benefit then so should they.

So that's my sleep deprived ramble - thank you to everyone who has helped me with anything ever, I'm a better person because of it.

Coffee.....

MONEY



Well diamonds are nearly done and it hasn't all gone to plan. My pre-written titles, that have been pinned up on my wall since the beginning of the year have on the whole, been ignored, as I found myself wishing I was writing about something other than money. However it is an important part of being a professional magician, fundamental actually, and so I 'm going to run through some of the points I should have made.

The Richest Man in Babylon

This is a well known book and carries one important message - save 10% of everything you earn. It may seem like a big ask but 10% is not that big a deal and putting it to one side, either for yourself or for others should be simple. It isn't, but in comparison to my next point it's a piece of cake!

Save Your Taxes.

Hands up those of you who separate the taxes you will need at source. Not many I should guess. If you're anything like me you rely on a busy December to cover the January tax bill. **BIG** mistake. You need to have that money set aside and out of reach. January is a slow month for most of us and the cash

injection that December brings can be used to compensate for that dip in income. But not if you have to give it to the taxman. Worse still for those of us who are VAT registered and have to fork out every 3 months. In both cases you need to adopt the frame of mind that it isn't and never was your money. It hurts but it's not going to go away just because you ignore it. If you can set up an automated monthly sweep of the bank account that you pay your fees into. Skim off around 30% of everything you earn before you transfer "your share" into a current account, that way you'll never feel the pain of separation.

Invest in Yourself

One of the most important things you can and must invest in is yourself. Learn skills that lie outside of being a magician but will help you become a better one. Take courses on acting, marketing, speaking, filmmaking, lighting, sales, design, photography etc. It doesn't have to link directly to your performance but if it feeds your creativity and develops you as an individual then it will be the best investment you have ever made.

Cash is King

You've all heard this before but do you appreciate the importance of this simple statement. I have, (on several occasions), walked the fine line between having a business and losing my business. I am not good with money. When I have it, it seems to evaporate and the feeling of constantly chasing my tail financially is a feeling I know well. In my

defence I have always managed to pull something out of the bag but that is not a recommended way of doing things.

Stay on top of your finances, spend less than you earn and save for things you want. I love the idea that you should wait for a set period of time before you make a significant "discretionary" purchase. After a big payout it's all too easy to treat yourself in the short term without considering the long term implications. Boring I know, but better than being skint.

I'm going to recommend you read "[I Will Teach You to be Rich](#)" by Ramit Sethi, follow [his blog](#) and take his advice. He knows far more than I do and is unsurprisingly much, much richer than I am. I am trying to turn around my financial affairs but it is something you need to "decide to do", it won't just happen on its own. I may never be rich but I refuse to be poor.

CHAPTER 4

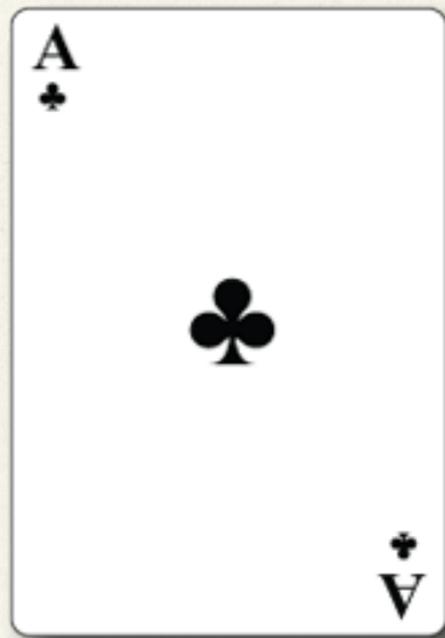
CLUBS

KING OF CLUBS BY OLGA ROZANOVA



ACE OF CLUBS

SUSTAINABILITY



Well we've come so far and this is the final straight of my "enforced creativity" experiment. It's fitting then that the last suit, Clubs, represents sustainability.

Being a professional magician for many of us was a long term dream or ambition that we have made a great many sacrifices to achieve. But what now? Can you maintain the level of enthusiasm and passion for the job that you felt when you set out on this rather unconventional journey? How does the prospect of performing the "one where the card rises to the top of the pack" 30 odd times a week for the rest of your life, sound?

What the caterpillar calls the end of the world the master calls a butterfly. Richard Bach

In a [recent interview](#) I did with UK magician Rob James, (a name to watch I assure you dear reader), Rob made the observation that, "any close-up magician with a degree of intelligence is at some point going to want to do something else." (They may not be his exact words, but close enough). The questions are what and how? Well that's what I want to explore

over the next 12 weeks. How can we stay doing what we love and loving what we do?

Well we have covered a lot of the answers in the three previous sections. Having a strong personal motivation, being perceived as an asset and making it pay, are all very important factors in the pursuit of longevity in any career, especially in one like ours that can be so fickle. But sustainability also comes from digging deep and setting your foundations well. The wonderful thing about solid foundations is that you can build anything on them and they can be reused should your first attempts fail. In fact failing is almost a pre-requisite of success depending on how you perceive it and use it. It's also important to see the foundations that we have set so well, not as anchors but as stepping stones, allowing us to move forward, (or sideways), and begin digging a new set of foundations, equally as deep and strong. This desire to keep on digging is I believe one of the keys to sustainability. Of course it is possible to build a successful career on just one set of foundations but that kind of sustainability is liable to stagnate. It may look okay to the casual observer but just below the surface the lack of oxygen is lethal, agitate it and it stinks.

I love magic and I love being a performer but if I look at what I do now and ask myself is this what I want be doing in 5 or 10 years, the answer is no. At least not in the way I'm doing it now. I can see elements of what I want in the future in what I do now and this is the secret to keeping the whole thing alive. Realising that I'm on a continuous journey that

has no defined end and enjoying the ride no matter how bumpy.

As I am in the last stretch of 52Ideas it would be good to hear what you have to say about sustainability and indeed anything that has gone before. Please leave your comments or criticisms, offer ideas and inspiration. Tell me if there's something I should say or simply say it yourself. Thanks.

TWO OF CLUBS

PIGEONS



"We don't get a chance to do that many things, and every one should be really excellent. Because this is our life. Life is brief, and then you die, you know? And we've all chosen to do this with our lives. So it better be damn good. It better be worth it." Steve Jobs

When I was a street performer in Covent Garden, every day I would see young kids chasing the pigeons. They would run around in circles, charging up to the mangy looking birds, only to have the pigeon fly off at the last minute or simply flutter forward ten feet, out of harms way. The kid would then chase another pigeon and then another and the whole thing would carry on until boredom or exhaustion kicked in. It always made me really anxious because in the back of my head I kept thinking "what if the kid catches one?" Seriously, think about it. If a three year old actually managed to get his hands around one of these "rats with wings" what the hell would he do? I'm sure the pigeon would react adversely to being held captive by a snot-nosed poacher and lash out in what ever way birds lash out, (lots of ferocious flapping I imagine), but the kid, what would

the kid do? Either scream or look up and say "I caught a pigeon." In both cases the reality of succeeding isn't as much fun as the chase. (Wouldn't that make a great cartoon series.....) If you actually watch kids chase pigeons it becomes pretty clear that they don't really want to catch one, they just want to run around. They're not stupid.

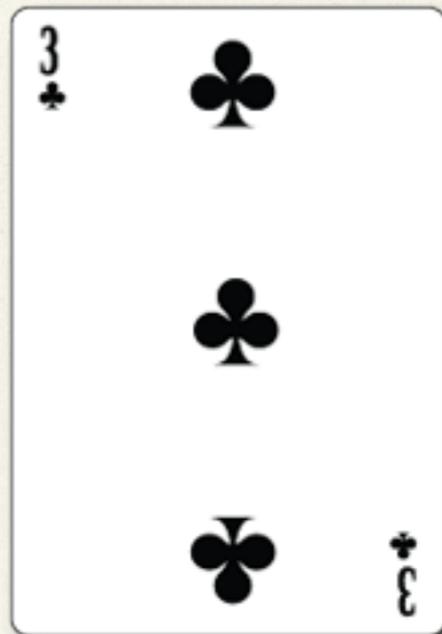
I know a lot of busy people. People with deadlines and projects but no time. People who are gigging all the time because they want to make a lot of money and then they can focus on the stuff that really excites them. The trouble is there's too many gigs or too much other stuff that needs doing. Stuff that is preventing them from doing what they really want to do. One day though they will write the show or the book, they will stop doing the shows they're doing now and focus on whatever it is that excites them. One day. It always makes me anxious because in the back of my head I keep thinking "what if they find the time?" Seriously think about it, what if you actually find the time to do the "big stuff" you've been talking about for all these years, what the hell would you do? Would you get on with it or would you scream. The realisation that what you have been after all these years is achievable is fantastic, if that is really what you want. If however you have no real inner desire to pursue it then you will fail and all of the running around will have simply tired you out.

As Mr Jobs said "Life is brief, and then you die." To make the most of the time you have always be aware of who you are and what it is you are doing. Stop and ask yourself, "Am

I making a positive difference to my life or am I chasing pigeons?" If you want to catch a pigeon, catch one. Your not a child, it's not that hard. (Watch this if you need proof) If you don't really want to catch a pigeon, stop chasing them and have an ice cream instead.

3 OF CLUBS

HATE



I've spent the majority of my time while writing these posts being positive, but being positive all the time is not only hard to sustain it's also a little bit boring. So here is a question for you:

"What do you hate about what you do?"

If I said that I loved magic it would be a lie. It would be impossible to enjoy every aspect and performance of magic that I have ever encountered. The truth is I see more magic that I dislike than I like and just to be clear a large percentage of the performances I have given over the years fall into the "dislike" category. There are also a number of styles of magic that make me want to despair and a smaller sub-set of these that could, under the right circumstances, make me wish I had never chosen magic as a career.

All of this however is a good thing because now I know what I don't want.

In the great book [ReWork: Change the Way You Work Forever](#), the authors and founders of 37Signals tell us to "Pick a Fight" and I'm going to suggest you do the same. Find an enemy that you can pitch yourself against and make it your crusade to

vanquish the foe. A good fight, with a defined opponent, is a great source of energy and inspiration. If you can define what it is you hate about your job, your life or any aspect of your current situation then you will have real drive and purpose. Apathy however is a curse and it is comfort that breeds apathy. This is true of so many performers who reach a certain level and then cruise for the remainder of their career, personally I can think of nothing worse, it would be like being one of the living dead. Great performers reinvent themselves throughout their career as if they were being chased by the ghosts of their former selves, terrified that they will settle into something so comfortable they would never be able to set themselves free.

There is something today, something right now, that really bothers you about where you are, who you are or what you do. Don't leave it standing there like the elephant in the room, do something about it! It could be your show, your finances, your lack of confidence, your lifestyle, your relationship or even the fact your office is a shambles - I don't know what but whatever it is face up to it. Don't submit to the sickening feeling that it gives you day after day, use it as fuel to drive you forward and commit yourself to eradicating it from your life. You may not win every battle and defeat every enemy but the process will keep you alive and fighting on.

These challenges are not there to grind you down but to give you something to push against. Yes you need direction and a focus going forward but if you are also driven by the need to

leave something behind then your progress will be so much better.

4 OF CLUBS



HEALTH



If you work on the assumption that you are the heart of your business then it would be right to say that the healthier you are the healthier your business is. The problem with being the business however, is that we as physical entities are very often the last thing we think about. If you want to have a sustainable career and be in a position to enjoy the fruits of all of this hard work then you need to look after yourself. The entertainment industry is littered with brilliance that has been tarnished with illness either physical or mental and very often both.

Several years ago I ran a fairly successful fitness business but the truth is that I wasn't doing work that I loved. I was a part time performer and those were the moments that I was most alive. So when the opportunity came to become a full time pro I took it. The contract was performing in the bars and clubs of Cyprus and the temptation to party accompanied by the eventual mind-numbing boredom of only working 1 hour a night meant that I was either drunk or hungover most of the time. After three months of excess myself and the guy I was working with realised that were living in a version of hell and so we ran

away! I'm not proud of that but looking back I think it was the right thing to do at least as far as my health was concerned.

Back in the UK I became a full-time street performer and continued to party hard. Financially I was struggling and even though I looked okay on the outside I was starting to slowly collapse on the inside. I'm a fairly intelligent guy and I knew I was living a life that was not:

- a) what I had hoped for.
- b) good for me.
- c) anywhere near my potential.

When I eventually took myself to the doctors and she asked me, "So what seems to be the problem?", I broke down. Right there in the Doctors office my veneer of resilience crumbled and I sobbed like a baby.

The doctor, being a highly trained professional responded by saying, "I think you might be suffering from depression!" Not the toughest diagnosis she'd ever had to make but accurate all the same. Now depression covers an enormous spectrum and my condition was relatively mild and heavily self inflicted, even so being told that you are suffering from a mental illness is a big deal.

So why the sob story? Well at the time I was a pretty tough, outgoing, fit individual but I forgot about one thing - myself. As a result I was brought to my knees by something invisible

and unexpected and I still to this day find myself unhappier than I possibly should be every now and then.

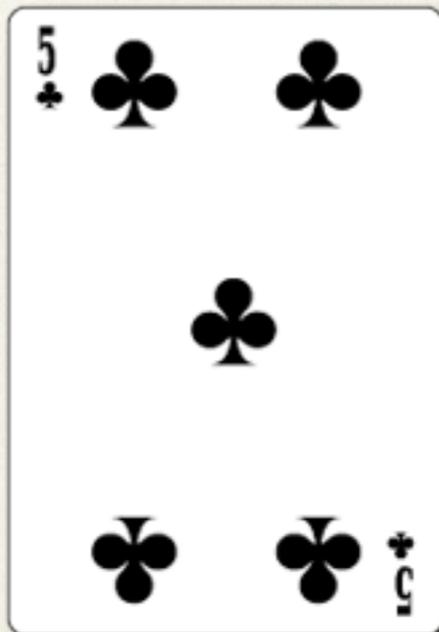
If you have read this far maybe you're expecting a little sermon on the evils of drink blah, blah, blah. Not from me. I haven't had a drink for about 7 years but all that does is makes me the most boring possible guest at a party, (unless of course I'm working in which case I'm a real hoot!) I never had a problem with drink, just with hangovers. The biggest evil was actually dehydration and it was a major contributing factor to my depression (in my opinion). Combine that with being a fitness instructor who trained 5 days a week and taught up to 30 classes a week to being someone who did nothing was a disaster. Everyone is different. The key is to be aware of what is and isn't right for you and act accordingly.

After being told I had depression I went back to being a fitness instructor as well as performing. The endorphins from exercise were a crucial part of controlling the lows and they still are. I didn't give up drinking immediately, not until my daughter was born I and realised that late nights with a bottle of wine and early mornings with a baby don't mix. One of the biggest revelations for me however was linking my water intake with how I felt - water is fundamental to good health and it's free as well. Result.

I know that all kinds of unexpected shit happens to people, stuff we can't control but we can still influence how we feel on a day to day basis. So my point is really very simple - treat yourself as the single most important asset your business has. Please.

5 OF CLUBS

OPPORTUNITY



It had been raining for days and days, and a great flood had come over the land. The waters rose so high that one man was forced to climb onto the roof of his house.

As the waters rose higher and higher, a man in a rowboat appeared, and told him to get in. "No," replied the man on the roof. "The Lord will save me." So the man in the rowboat went away and the man on the roof prayed for God to save him.

The waters rose higher and higher, and suddenly a speedboat appeared. "Climb in!" shouted a man in the boat. "No," replied the man on the roof. "The Lord will save me." So the man in the speedboat went away and the man on the roof prayed for God to save him.

The waters continued to rise. A helicopter appeared and over the loudspeaker, the pilot announced he would lower a rope to the man on the roof. "No," replied the man on the roof. "I have faith in the Lord; the Lord will save me." So the helicopter went away and the man on the roof prayed for God to save him.

The waters rose higher and higher, and eventually they rose so high that the man on the roof was washed away and drowned.

Upon arriving in heaven, the man marched straight over to God. "Heavenly Father," he said, "I had faith in you... I prayed to you to save me, and yet you did nothing. Why?" God gave him a puzzled look, and replied "I sent you two boats and a helicopter, what more did you expect?"

Are you so busy looking for the next big thing that you may be missing some great opportunities to grow your business and yourself?

If you're like me and the majority of working magicians you're about to get pretty busy as the run up to Christmas begins. By mid-December you'll be tweeting about how if you have to do one more f**king card trick, blah, blah, blah. You'll be desperate for it to end so you can get to work on the stuff that really excites you. Then January will happen and you will find yourself with so much free time you'll be showing yourself card tricks and praying for the phone to ring! What every job brings with it is an opportunity to get more work or to improve the work you do and it is essential that you grasp that opportunity. If predictions are to be believed the next few years are going to get tougher and we need to be doing everything we can to make sure business keeps coming in.

It may be a good idea to look at the way you would like to see 2012 panning out for you and making the most of every opportunity that comes your way. Don't wait until January before you work on the new copy for your website, get it up there now while there are people to show it to. The same goes for new material - planning to work on the new act in

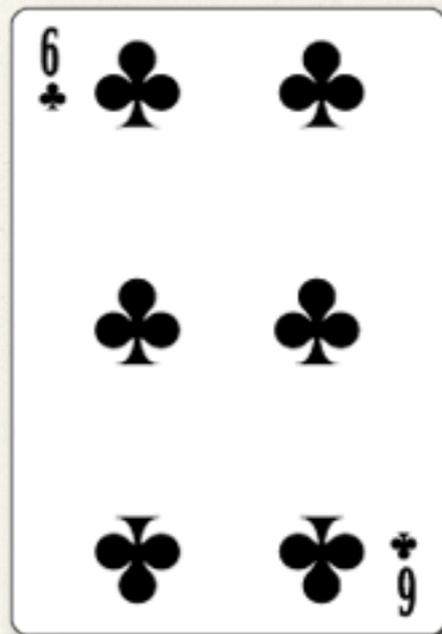
the new year won't work, start working it in now so you can get time in front of a real audience immediately. The people you meet in the December onslaught will be the people who have the freshest memory of you in the new year and they may be essential in creating a successful 2012.

We will all experience the drunks and the idiots and it is easy to put our heads down and plough through the conveyor belt of magic performances but try to look up once in a while. Among the crowds there will be someone who can make a significant difference to your career and you don't want to miss them. As hard as it may seem, try to remain present in every one of your performances because you just never know who might be watching.

The longer I have been doing this job the more I dread December and I am one of the worst offenders in the "I wish I were somewhere else" camp. This year I want it to be different. This year December is going to be a season of hard work and opportunity.

6 OF CLUBS

DISCOMFORT



If you read about success and successful people you will notice a common theme that occurs in their stories and that is one of some kind of struggle. We most admire the people who have clawed their way up from rock bottom or have conquered seemingly insurmountable odds. [Listen to the speech](#) that J.K. Rowling gives to the alumni of Harvard University to be inspired by such a story. You may not like the books she writes but her path to success was incredible and when she says that "rock bottom makes a good foundation" you know she is speaking from experience.

In my own life, my problems are not so extreme. When I'm playing with my 4 year old son I often find myself choosing the games that allow me to lie down on the floor so that I can get a little rest at the same time. The result is that I usually end up falling asleep and have to be woken up by my son dragging my eyes open or even worse I get caught snoozing by his mother, (apparently snoozing during the day is some kind of crime against humanity). The solution to this problem is quite simple, I don't lie down. I position myself so that I am a little uncomfortable and to counter the discomfort I make sure I'm

fully engaged in the game that we're playing. In truth this is not only a much better result for my son but its also a hell of a lot more rewarding for me.

Being uncomfortable is very often necessary to achieve results, whether it is the every day like playing games with your children or on a life changing scale like the one experienced by one of the richest women on the planet. For most of us uncomfortable can be as simple as hauling ourselves out of bed on a cold, wet morning in order to pound the streets, while for others the situation may not be their personal choice and the effort required is almost forced on them. Many people have achieved great things because quite frankly that was the only option they had left outside of giving up.

What I'm suggesting is that you deliberately put yourself in uncomfortable situations. Stepping outside of your "comfort zone" is the only way you will develop and continuous development is at the heart of a sustainable career. It's no different from a muscle that needs to be pushed past it's current limits so that it can become stronger and more flexible. The heart is a muscle and you are the heart of your business so you need to be getting stronger every day to keep your business alive. You need to be regularly pushed past the limits that you are comfortable with in order to pump new life into the work you do. I'm not talking about taking risks, although risk taking can be part of the process, I'm thinking more about the hard slog, pushing past the line where most would stop and doing the things that most people would

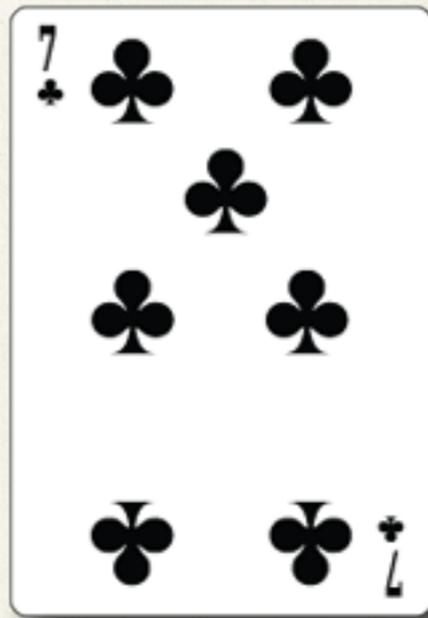
prefer not to do. That is after all one definition of successful people: "those who do the things other people don't want to do." Work harder, train harder, practice harder even when it's uncomfortable. Learn to find comfort in the discomfort.

We all have something that we are going to do "when the time is right." It is not necessarily the fear of doing it, or the lack of skill that is preventing us taking action but it could very well be the gravitational pull of the comfort zone you're in. Finding the momentum to achieve escape velocity is actually harder sometimes than doing the thing itself.

7 OF CLUBS



NOTHING



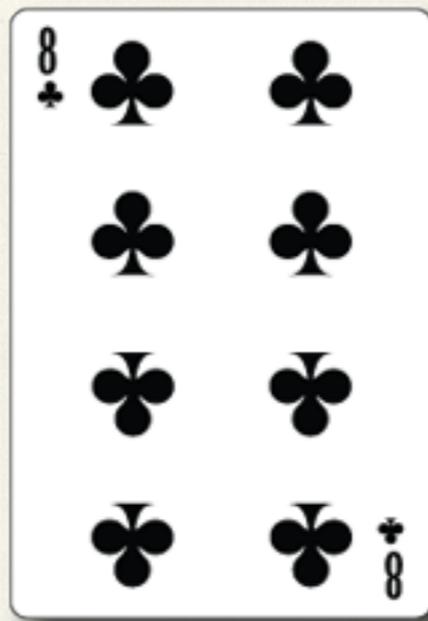
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone. Lao-tzu

Don't be afraid of empty space and silence.

Give yourself permission to do nothing.

8 OF CLUBS

EVERYTHING



It's easy to let things slip. To forgive yourself for a job half done or shrug off the fact that you weren't up to scratch. And that's okay as long as you understand that it still counts - everything counts.

There are so many facets to our careers as magicians and performers that it can be overwhelming to think that we must always consider everything. Surely that's impossible? Maybe so, but it all counts. The way we talk, walk, dress, smell, shake hands, write emails, post tweets etc. etc. It all counts. It's like a mosaic created of tiny photographs that when looked at from a distance creates an image of you. The overall image may be perfectly acceptable but as you move in closer its integrity begins to fragment and the true nature of how it is made up becomes apparent. It is possible to see the larger image as the crucial one, the only one that is really important but as people stare at it for longer they become intrigued and their focus shifts to the smaller images, because in truth those are the really interesting aspect of the picture.

As performers you put yourself into the public eye and as your reputation grows people will have longer to look at who you are. They will want to step a little closer and analyse what it is you are made up of and they will also have more opportunities. What they see will affect how they view the larger image, which may, in your mind be perfectly acceptable.

Imagine talking to someone who has a large piece of food caught in their teeth, much as you want to concentrate on the conversation you will be unable to draw your attention away from their dental issue. You may feel comfortable telling them but more than likely you will not as that may appear confrontational or rude. So it is with our picture in picture imperfection - no matter how perfect the overall image is if someone is aware of a rogue element they will find it hard to not to focus on that. With this larger picture however the fault may never be resolved and it may always be an issue. We need to work harder to shift focus away from this glitch or to make it pale into insignificance.

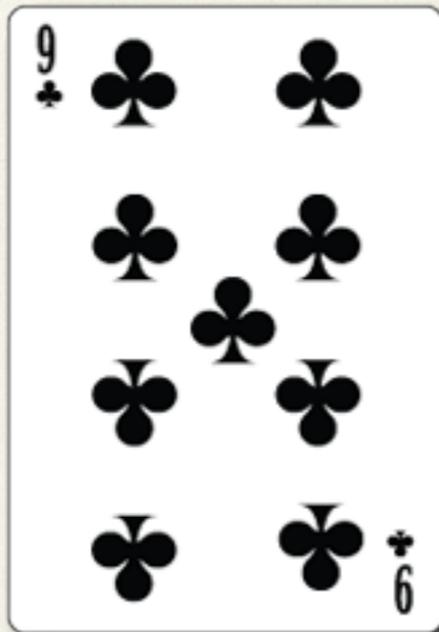
It is impossible to please all the people all of the time and we all make mistakes, that's the nature of being human. Just bear in mind that it all counts and your aim is not just to create a great overall picture but to build it with care and consideration. Realise that when you put yourself in a position to be judged, people will judge.

I'll come clean here, I have taken the idea of Everything Counts from Gary Ryan Blair, a speaker and author who I have followed for some time and whose ["100 day Challenge"](#)

is worth your attention. He has written a new book called "Everything Counts", which I have yet to read but offers 52 ideas for achieving a better business and personal life - a great idea!

9 OF CLUBS

FAILURE



Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm. -Winston Churchill

How you view failure will pretty much determine your success and your ability to sustain that success. We all fail, the secret is to do it often and recover quickly. As Henry Ford put it:

"Failure is only the opportunity to begin again, only this time more wisely."

What that quote is really saying is that failure is impossible unless you see it as final, the end of the road. If that is the case then the experience of failing isn't the problem but your lack of faith in eventual success is. If you do give up have you failed or simply made the decision not to succeed? Failure to succeed is not the same as absolute FAILURE!!

There is another school of thought that suggests failure is not an important part of learning, that it is simply failure. In *Rework*, a great book, the authors suggest that all failure teaches you is how not to do something, it doesn't show you what you should

actually have done. So what's the point of failure? It's a tricky one: to fail or not to fail that is the question.

In the rework essay they tie in making mistakes with failing as if they were one and the same. They're not in my opinion. You can only make a mistake if there is a predetermined "right way" to do things, if you are stepping into the unknown then mistakes aren't possible are they? How can you make a mistake if you didn't know what to do in the first place? Mistakes are caused by poor judgement or the disregard of rules or principles and they can, and often do result in "failure" in one form or another. The mistake was not finding out what to do in the first place, but you know that now - lesson learned, failure averted. But you can fail to succeed even if you did everything you planned correctly and made no mistakes. Failure to succeed is not purely the result of making mistakes but it is the result of taking action. So the easy way to avoid failure is to avoid taking action!

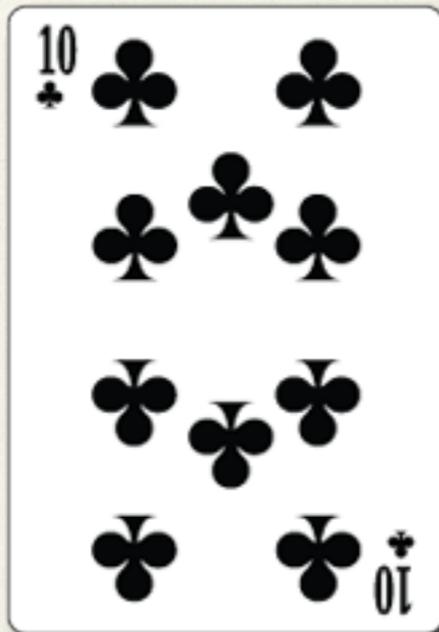
Problem solved, (ignore this advice!)

Of course we all want to avoid failure at any level and we do that through preparation and planning, but even then success is not guaranteed. If it was then the world would be a pretty dull place and excelling at anything would be virtually impossible and easily replicated. That's really the point of the Rework essay - don't make mistakes if other people have been successful in whatever it is you intend to do, learn from them. If you are a pioneer then be prepared to not succeed at first but please don't see that as a failure.

Real failure only happens when you learn nothing, when time and energy is wasted and nothing is gained. It is only true failure when it occurs and you aren't changed by the experience. That's what failure really is - an experience, and we are defined by our experiences, successful or not.

10 OF CLUBS

EXPECTATIONS



A magician has a card selected by a spectator. The card is returned and the pack is shuffled. The magician then spreads the cards face down in a wide arc across the table and moves his hand back and forth across the spread, his index finger extended as though it were a divining rod. Eventually he lowers his finger onto the back of a single card and looks up at the spectator. "Would you be amazed to find that this was the card you selected?" he asks the spectator mysteriously. "Not really." comes the curt reply, "that's your job."

There are two kinds of expectation - yours and theirs. Both have to be managed, in magic, in business and in life.

If you expect nothing from anybody, you're never disappointed.

Sylvia Plath, "The Bell Jar"

Lets start with yours. You must be clear about what your expectations are first of all, where they come from and what they are based on. Expectations are not the same as goals although they are an important piece of the puzzle. They are not the top of the ladder but the rungs, important stages in your progress towards achieving your goals. They serve as a "required minimum" and should always be met. This is the

main reason that you should set your expectations, because if you fail to reach them it can be quite painful, however careful planning of your expectations can mean you create a positive feedback loop that enables you to push through to your end goal pain free. You set your goals high and your expectations low. As you progress your expectations will grow almost imperceptibly. I want to be a successful speaker but I don't expect to be great the next time I stand on stage - it's too soon, I need more experience. I do expect to be better than I was the last time, to learn more about the business and I expect that eventually this will turn into something great.

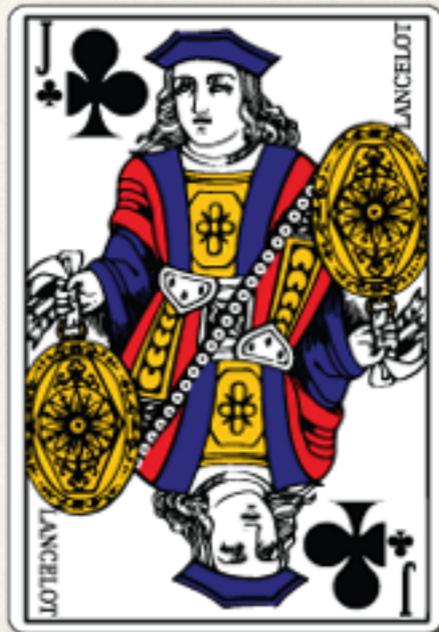
Also you must not confuse expectations with assumptions. Assumptions are lazy and without any real thought. If you assume something will happen and it doesn't you will find it difficult to understand what went wrong. If you expect something to happen and it doesn't you are much more able to learn because your expectation is based on your experience.

Now theirs. If you meet people's expectations you are competent. Competence is essential but generally invisible and easily replaced. Other people's expectations should be exceeded whenever possible. Amazing things happen when you exceed expectations. People remember you. What is interesting is that most people have low expectations, (see the above quote), which means exceeding them is often very easy. Every time you exceed expectations however, expectations grow, and more will be expected of you. You

could view this as a reason not to try at all or alternatively see it as the most wonderful opportunity to improve.

JACK OF CLUBS

REVIEW



“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” Søren Kierkegaard

I have lost my way...

One of the great things about writing a blog or keeping any kind of record of your thoughts and ideas is that you can refer back. I recently read a post I'd written about clarity on my personal, and sadly neglected blog, in which I espoused the importance of de-cluttering and self restriction, it was all very positive stuff. The fact that I still feel slightly overwhelmed by everything that I need to achieve and that there is still a sense of claustrophobia in my workspace means that at some point I have lost my way. The post gave me a gentle reminder of what I was hoping to focus on and alerted me to the fact I had been sidetracked.

Even my kids learn to "plan, do and review."

Looking back at what you have achieved or set out to achieve means that you can reassess your position and purpose, you can change course if necessary or give yourself a sharp kick up the

arse if needed. Even my kids learn to "plan, do and review" at school. It is so easy to be distracted from our plans and to eventually forget about them altogether. They simply fade into the background as your life insists on taking control.

If you're anything like me you have several "brilliant" new ideas every day, (I have used quotation marks to emphasise my tongue pressed firmly in my cheek), and you will rarely if ever move from one point to another by the shortest possible route. I need to constantly remind myself what it is I am supposed to be doing in order that it gets done. I'm not talking here about the tasks and to-do lists, I'm pretty good at the mechanics of "getting things done". I'm referring more to the big plans, the things that 6 or 12 months ago mattered so much. We can all get trapped in the mundane, lost in the trivial and without periods of reflection we would probably think we were doing okay. Actually you probably are doing okay but does that excite you?

So how often should you remind yourself of your real plans? Many people suggest you do it everyday and that would seem about right to me. Once you stop moving towards your desired destination you will find starting again a real struggle. By checking in everyday you will be able to make minor adjustments when needed rather than having to exert a huge amount of energy when you eventually realise you're off course by a mile. (Any one who does their own bookkeeping will know exactly what I mean - sort your receipts everyday and you won't have to plough through the shoebox at the end of every quarter).

I suppose the key in all of this is momentum. In order to sustain your forward motion you need to keep the momentum going and any kind of motion requires fuel. That's what reminding yourself of your purpose does. It fuels your imagination and your spirit by letting you know that your efforts are taking you somewhere you really want to go.

As we approach the new year we are all predisposed to reflection and we sort through our mental shoebox of resolutions and goals. We pick through the pieces of our year but it is impossible to cover everything and something valuable always gets thrown away in the mix. How much easier, how much more effective and how much more sustainable would it be if we took 5 minutes every day to assess the situation?

QUEEN OF CLUBS

LEARN



Live as if your were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever. - Gandhi

There are two approaches to not learning. Either you don't want to learn or you don't believe you have anything to learn. The first is a result of ignorance the second is the result of arrogance. Both of them are wrong. If there was one skill that I would gift my children with at the expense of all others it would be the love of learning. (NB. I actually do mean my children, Madeleine and Oliver, I'm not so deranged that I have started referring to anyone who reads this blog as "my children!")

I love, love, love being a student. I become more than slightly obsessive about topics and then immerse myself in them, sometimes to no avail as I come to realise that I am not cut out to do everything, (yeah, I'm as shocked as you are), but I love the process anyway. Actually that's not always true, sometimes the process is unbelievably difficult and painful, but that makes the rewards, should they come, more valuable. Anyone who has struggled to learn anything and has eventually prevailed knows

the feeling of "OH YES!!" that comes from a hard earned success, it's hard to beat. Continual learning is at the heart of every victory, personal or business and once you are free from the confines of a structured educational system you have an infinite number of subjects to choose from. How f**king incredible is that!!

At the start of the 52Ideas project I suggested that at some point we all need to stop acquiring more information and start focusing our attention on what we already know. For many people the need to know everything is the very reason they fail to learn and understand anything. They add on thin layer after thin layer of information and create a veneer that at first glance may pass as authentic but scratch below the surface and you may find them thrashing away trying to catch their breath. Acquiring information isn't learning. The need to know everything is driven by a fear that you may be missing out on something, that you may be left behind, but if you were to take Gandhi's advice and "learn as if you were to live forever" that fear would not exist because you would have all the time in the world. The gathering of information is however an important part of the learning process but only leads to what is termed "conscious incompetence", all it does is makes you know that you don't know. The real learning comes next.

We all have the skill to learn, if we didn't we would never have made it this far. Learn how to do stuff and how not to do it. Learn from art, from books, from your mistakes and

other peoples. Learn from experience and from life and learn to love learning, just don't stop learning.

Love

Dad x.

KING OF CLUBS

BELIEVE



When you believe in a thing, believe in it all the way, implicitly and unquestionable. - Walt Disney

I know that in a number of these posts I have used my own shortcomings to highlight what I think is the right path to take and here I go again.

If you know me personally then you may find this hard to believe, but I actually have a few confidence issues. If you know me well then I'm not telling you anything new. The apparent confidence I have as a performer has been hard earned and has a relatively narrow range. I could be accused of thinking too much and doing too little and it's an accusation I would accept. So this post is as much a lesson for me as it is a possibility for you, as indeed all of the short essays in this series have been.

I have repeatedly cited arrogance as one of the human traits I despise, (although some would say that it is a trait I can sometimes display), and that still holds true, but along with that loathing is a secret envy. I see people who are so confident in

their abilities that I accuse them of arrogance so that I can shrug off their achievements, (arrogant of me I know), while all the time I wish I possessed that level of self belief. None of us can know for sure that we will be successful in whatever we attempt, the future is an unknown for everyone, but that doesn't stop us from believing that success will come our way. Belief is the most important asset you have in any pursuit, without it you are almost certain to fail.

If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right. - Henry Ford

It's not just about saying "I can, I can" over and over again, it runs much deeper than that. Before you believe you can achieve something you must believe you have the right to do it, that you deserve the success. You have to convince yourself before you even start, without that everything else is just paying lip service.

You are at the centre of your own Universe, that's a fact. Everything you do or experience is as a result of you. If you didn't exist those things wouldn't be done and those experiences wouldn't be had, at least not in your way and not from your perspective. You create your own experience of the world, it starts and ends with you. You also determine how everything and everyone outside of yourself experiences you. If you don't believe in yourself then the damage is already done, before you even come in contact with the outside world. You loose and the outside world, well the outside world doesn't know any different. You deserve better.

It's lack of faith that makes people afraid of meeting challenges, and I believe in myself. - Muhammad Ali

Here's the thing, you have already achieved so much more than you give yourself credit for. You learnt to walk and talk and that's a big deal. Your life to date is a series of successes that you haven't stopped to consider. If you are struggling to believe you are worthy or capable of something, look back a day, a week, a month, a year or more if necessary and you'll be amazed to see how far you have already come.

Thanks for your time and your attention.

Pete

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