

Secret Newsletter 2 (MAR 2019)

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Grüezi mitenand! ("Hello all!" in Swiss German)

Thank you to all of you for the nice feedback to my previous *Secret Newsletter*. The reception was actually such that I decided to start with the "Secrets" and finish with the "Commercials".

Ask Roberto...

In answer to my suggestion to ask me questions, Mal Simpson wrote in and asked:

"As far as suggestions for future topics, I'd be interested in knowing what you consider to be common mistakes which you see amateur magicians make. Thanks for all your products."

I shall make the answer to this most interesting question the topic of today's *Secret Newsletter*. However, before we get "into the middle of things", let's agree on something: I'm fully aware that most of you who are reading this *are* amateurs (in the best sense of its Latin origin "amare" – "to love").

By no means do I want you to think that I, as a professional of many years, am talking down to or patronizing you. I've been a hobbyist (since 1973), an amateur, a part-time professional and finally a professional (since 1988), and I remember, know and understand exactly all the struggles I went through. Therefore, please take the

following simply as my personal opinion and experience I'm passing on to you. If you agree, you are welcome to use my advice, if you disagree find your own answer to the question I've touched on. In either case you should be able to profit. Here we go:

Common Mistakes Amateurs Make

Due to my books, which are now in eight languages, I have many people come up to me at magic conventions and say "thank you", moments that are sometimes very touching. Or I join a group at a convention. And as the Vice President of my magic club in Basel, Switzerland, I'm quite active, too. In all of these cases I get to see a lot of magic, in 95% of the cases by amateurs.

Thinking about what I've seen in the past years, here is an attempt to classify the "mistakes" I witnessed in nine points:

1. **Nervousness.** The first thing I notice is that most people get very nervous before and during the performance. Fear not, as this is something professionals suffer from, too. The difference, however, is that professionals know how to control the "beast", but most amateurs don't. I will mention three things. First, "stage fright" is a natural stress mechanism that helps us to be at our best in the extraordinary situation of a performance. Understanding this will turn the enemy into a friend. Second, we take ourselves too seriously. The higher we put ourselves, the longer the fall. Compared to the tragedies of life, failing in a card trick is, well, a minor incident. Therefore, relax. Third, find a ritual that involves mental and/or physical exercise before performing. Here is a simple one: Breathe in through your nose, and then breath out through your mouth twice as long. Do this for as long as it feels comfortable. The subject is obviously much more complex. This why I wrote an essay on the topic, "Who is Afraid of the Stage?", and you can download it as a free PDF from my web shop by clicking [HERE](#). If there is sufficient interest I shall make this the topic of my next *Secret Newsletter* – let me know.
2. **Understand & Practice.** Most amateurs don't understand the trick they are performing, and then they do not practice enough. Listen to an anonymous Zen Master, who said: "Before you practice understand, but once you've understood, practice."
3. **Presentational construction - Prologue & Epilogue.** Most people I ask to do a trick for me demonstrate rather than perform. I have a full-day Masterclass on the subject of how to find a presentation for a trick, so this is a complex subject. A relatively easy way to get the process started is to think of a prologue and an epilogue. Paul Arden, the advertising guru, used to say, «No first sentence without the last sentence.» How can you implement this? Start right now: take a card trick you do, and which you usually introduce by saying,

«Take a card...», or, «I have here the four aces.» Well, that's not such a good start, is it? But that's how many indeed do start a trick. Now try to come up with something more interesting, amusing, informative or simply more captivating to say. For instance, «In my next experiment I'm going to make all of us younger.» Or, «Who believes that women are more intuitive than men?» Or, «What you are about to see, is the result of serendipity.» Of course you have to express judgment in all cases, or as Vernon kept reminding us, «Use your head.» Once you have that first sentence, it is very probable that it will lead you to the presentational plot of the trick, and this in turn will make it easy to find a «last word», which we call an epilogue. For more on the subject see the entries for DEC 30 and DEC 31 in [Secret Agenda \(now available as an E-book\)](#). Make a resolution right NOW: do not ever again perform a trick that has not a well thought out presentation with a prologue and an epilogue.

4. **The Method is Not the Effect.** Dai Vernon used to say that the difference between an amateur and a professional is that the latter knows what an effect is. This can go so far, that the method is mistaken for the effect. Amateurs have a tendency to judge the quality of a trick by its novelty and intriguing method. They derive their joy of practicing magic from the methods, not from the effect it has on a spectator. This is a huge topic. It requires an understanding of what the effect is and how to pull it off. It has to do with the order of actions (do I show the card has vanished from the deck and then reproduce it, or do I reproduce it, and then show it's gone?), the timing (where are the pauses?), the text (what do I say, when do I shut up?), how to structure the climax and several other things. Most amateurs I see perform are not aware that these questions even exist, let alone find a good solution to them.
5. **My Reality is Not Your Reality.** A child puts his hands over his eyes and says, «You can't see me!» He thinks that his reality is the same as the other person's reality. Unfortunately this is not only the source of great aggravation in the world, but also in magic. It goes hand in hand with what I call the «Effect-Method-Split» (inspired by Karl Jaspers's «Subject-Object-Split»). Some performers happily talk and perform, without ever wondering what the others are thinking and feeling at the same time. But since magic culminates in astonishment, and astonishment is the result of a mental process that eliminates all causes in order to access Wonderland, it is important to understand what happens in the spectator's mind and how he (mis-)constructs his reality. This is the Constructivist's approach to magic, and it is the approach of all good magic since its inception, but only in the 20th century was it formalized by the Spanish School of Magic. (Read Ascanio & Tamariz, but also the theory chapters in [Card College 2](#) - it's all there...).
6. **Bad Choice of Tricks.** This is closely related to the previous two points. Amateurs get so fascinated by the novelty of a trick and its clever method, which at second look most of the time is not at all so clever or by a novel

When an effect takes most of the time to set up, or is a novel gimmick, that they neglect to ask the all-important question, «What is the effect?» This, however, is one of the most difficult questions, not only for amateurs, I should add. Take «Chicago Opener» from Garcia's *Million Dollar Card Secrets*, in spite of its controversy an excellent source for professional material. Most of us have done this trick, or are still doing it, rightly so, as it is a very good trick. But what is the effect? Is it a color change? Is it a prediction? Is it a manipulation of the spectator's will? By understanding the phenomenon at the basis of the trick, the latter can be given the proper presentation, otherwise you risk to confuse the issue, if the given plot (presentation) runs against the inherent plot (contained within the trick). It is similar to when verbal and body language contradict each other, when someone says, «I do magic because I want to give people something», but at the same time they are making a «taking» gesture with both hands. A good trick can be told in one sentence, is memorable, its method impenetrable, and it has a clear subtext (symbolism).

7. **Always New Tricks.** You've heard it before: «Amateurs perform always new tricks for the same audience, professionals perform always the same tricks for new audiences.» That's the amateur's dilemma (one of them...). I answer the question in [Ask Roberto in detail](#) (Question 23 - «Practice», and Question 28 «Program Construction of an Act»), but here is a summary: try to keep three very good tricks in your «long-term-repertoire», and keep practicing them on a regular basis. Use 25% of your «magic time» for that. Use the remaining 75% for anything that «amuses» you, because, after all, as an amateur magic is a hobby for you, and you should simply enjoy it without any thought to utility. In those 25% of the time, you will do what you do better, and built criteria, which you will apply to the rest of your «novel» magic, and because of this, with the years, your magic will improve, and you will grow humanly and artistically with it.
8. **Communication, Timing & Pacing.** To look, *when* to look, *where* to look and *how* to look is one of the fundamental tools of communication *and* deception. Many do this intuitively, some do it well, most do not do it so well. There is a grammar of how to look, it is a language of its own (oh my, another lecture!). Very often, when I watch someone in an informal situation do several tricks in a row, they neglect what Ascanio called «the pause of assimilation». When an effect has occurred, you should wait for the effect to register; this means that the spectator has to go through a mental process, albeit a quick one, where he realizes that this is his card, that it is impossible that you could find it, that this is incredible, even impossible, that you are a genius (what else?), and that he should tell and thank you. The amateur more often than not is more interested in showing off what he can do and knows, than to create the experience of wonder, to let the audience enjoy ..

it, and to celebrate this moment of communion. Instead, he runs to perform the next trick, being afraid that otherwise he will miss the opportunity to do it. This also has to do with the lack of self-confidence that characterizes the inexperienced amateur, because he thinks that what he just did was not so good after all. BUT if one thinks this, why perform it in the first place? The solution is simple: only perform tricks that you feel comfortable with, because you think they are good tricks, and because you know you have mastered. If you don't, *practice more*, and think.

9. **Don't Know When to Stop.** This refers to the length of an individual trick as well as to the duration of a performance. Due to his fascination with methods, the amateur often neglects to keep a trick short. Take the «Ambitious Card», a wonderful trick, and in my opinion one of the ten best card tricks (download for free my short essay on the subject [HERE](#)). In reference to how long one should perform at all, the legendary Nate Leipzig used to say, «Leave them wanting more.» As simple as this reads, as difficult it is to live by. However, the effort it takes us to develop the necessary experience, the judgment and the sure instinct, well, all of this will make us a better and more interesting person, and this is the person (not persona!) that makes our magic unique and fascinating. A subject for life... But here is a piece of advice I read many years ago in an old magic book: arrange three tricks to form a little act, ideally around ten minutes. That's a good length for an impromptu performance for friends, after dinner, or when having a drink. Usually that's enough, ten minutes. If you feel that the majority of those present want more, and they explicitly ask you, then, and only then, follow up with another set of ten minutes, or just one more «closer». In order to do this, however, you need the necessary repertoire, a question we will have to leave for another time, if somebody explicitly asks...

Three Recommendations

1. Read chapters 1 and 2 of my [Stand-up Card Magic](#), as many of the problems mentioned are addressed in detail, with solutions of how to solve them.
2. Read Chapter 27 «Theory» of [Card College 2](#), for the same reason.
3. Take one trick from your repertoire and implement only ONE new insight from the reading. Then take another trick, and implement ANOTHER insight. Do this with one trick per week, three in one month. Rest on the fourth week of the month. Do this for one year. At the end of the year notice your growth as a magician and human being, without effort and lots of pleasure - send me your thanks and a bottle of wine. If you are wealthy, send money to gjobbi@bluewin.ch at Paypal.

Be Humble

Since we spent so much time with the “mistakes” of others, let's end with an exercise

in humility and remember what Confucius once said: "If you see a worthy man, imitate him. If you see an unworthy man, examine yourself." Amen.

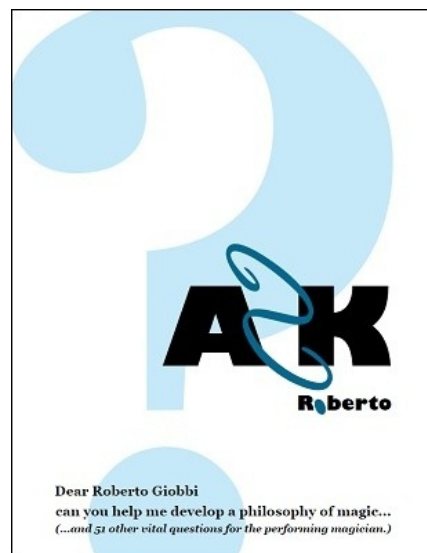
Personal Coaching Live or via Skype

If you are interested to receive personal advice on anything related to your magic, you can take personal coaching lessons at my studio in MuttENZ, Switzerland, or via Skype. Live Lessons are 2 hours and cost \$ 250, Skype Lessons are 75 minutes and cost \$ 150. For details simply answer this email.

Ask Roberto

"Ask Roberto and Secret Twitter are absolutely brilliant concepts!" (Chris Brown)

"Without a doubt, Ask Roberto has been the greatest purchase of my magical career!" (John Holt)



If you liked the answer to the above question, you will love *Ask Roberto*, available as a printed book, but also as an E-book. You'll find 52 interesting questions and my detailed answers. Similar to *Secret Agenda*, *Ask Roberto* is ideal to be read as an E-book on your Tablet or Smartphone.

For the next 72 hours you can get *Ask Roberto* (the E-book) at 20% off [HERE](#).

Card Magic Masterclass

„Your Masterclass DVDs are getting feedback better than anything we've EVER produced. People LOVE it.“ (Andi Gladwin & Joshua Jay, Vanishing Inc.)

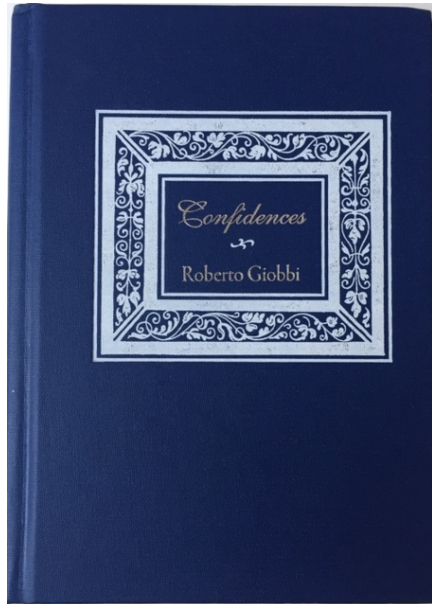
If you're still hesitating to get *Card Magic Masterclass* read Shiv Duggal's rave review from *Genii* magazine [HERE](#). You can get *Card Magic Masterclass* as a download from Vanishing Inc. [HERE](#), or a physical set from me [HERE](#) (ask me to autograph it to you)

photograph to you.

A piece of advice, if I may: when studying the videos, use a notebook (paper or app) to write down the items that interest you and the insights you've gained. If you do not do that, most will go in and out, and you've simply wasted your time. How to study, make notes, and practice is another subject for discussion, if you are interested.

Confidences

"You are a truly outstanding author: with each sentence you share with us a thought or trail to improve our Art. Thank you for this wonderful work!" Carlos Vaquera



Confidences, one of my favorite books, is going to be out of print soon, and likely not reprinted. Get a signed copy as long as it lasts [HERE](#).

Card College 1&2 - Personal Instruction as Download

"This is a masterpiece of reference work!" (Andrew Peel)



The 4-DVD-Set [Card College 1&2 - Personal Instruction](#) is now definitely gone and will never again be reproduced physically. BUT you can now download the complete course as MP4 files at a third of its original price (€ 49.95), and you can even have each one of the 23 Lessons individually at € 4.95. So if you are for instance struggling with the Palm or the Top Change, two of the more difficult sleights, get the

two lessons for the price of a Starbucks Coffee. I kept the price as low as my dignity allows it and hope it discourages pirated versions.

The Missing Link

Under this heading I propose *one* unusual web-link, which you'll hopefully find inspiring, and if nothing else simply amusing. This one is about "trick shots", however not from the pool table, but from real life. If you show this on your Smartphone or Tablet, you can use it to prologue a performance piece with it. Also see the entry "Film Clip Prologue" for February 20 in my *Hidden Agenda*— to a professional who uses this idea, this alone is worth many times the price of the book (I had to say that, since nobody else does :-). Here is the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRJmcxCrAOA>

More on the next occasion - so long!

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