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# ENTERTAIN

# WITH

BY AARON ONEAL

**D**arkness enveloped me as I pulled into the casino. It was forty-five degrees, raining and I had not had a bite to eat in seven hours. I barely noticed the chill as it slowly seeped through my jacket. I walked at a quick pace, but not to find the warmth of the lobby. Instead, my legs carried me towards the highlight of my week: I was finally getting to sit down with Carey Heim.

Carey has been one of the most prominent magic entertainers in this soggy corner of the United States for over two decades. From his early days studying with Slydini, he has developed some of the strongest slight of hand routines in the Northwest. He has instructed over fifty students, and ten of them are still performing professionally. In the 1990's he won just about every magic competition in the Northwest.

I was excited to sit down and pick the brains of one of the greatest performers I have ever witnessed.

I was confident that whatever tips he was going to give me would elevate my magic to a new level. After all, he has done it all: He has worked at biker bars, stage shows, high-end restaurants, dive bars, private parties, casinos, and just about every type of venue you can imagine. Here was a performer that could give me real world advice after spending countless hours doing what so few magicians get to do- performing for real live audiences. Would

he teach me a new trick? Help me improve my pass? Nope. Instead, the interview which follows is the greatest magic advice I have received in all my years performing professionally.

*Me: As someone that has seen you perform many times; I am mesmerized by your audiences' response. What about you and your act makes your audience respond so positively?*

Carey: Know the names of your spectators. There is an incredible power in using someone's name during a performance. It draws people in and makes them feel like part of the show. We all understand this on a very basic level. Our names carry so much of our identity but performers often forget that in magic we are performing for people that not only have to buy into our magic, but they also have to buy into us as individuals. Many performers make the mistake of performing "at" people instead of "with" the audience.

*Me: One of my favorite bits you do involves your own name. Would you mind sharing what you do and why you think it has such a strong impact?*

Carey: Sure. I was doing a gig one time and I said to this guy, "I'm Carey." He laughed and said, "That's a girls name." Well it pissed me off so I went home and I asked my sister about it. I said "Hey Chuck..."

# E

# EMPATHY





For years I understood this was a funny joke and we all know that laughter is one of the strongest ways to connect with an audience. This gag also does something more subtle. I have come to believe that in some way it also humanizes me with my participants. I am sharing a part of my childhood. Even if the audience were never ridiculed about their names, I think most adults can relate to being made fun of. It gives the entire audience permission to laugh with me, and in some ways, with each other.

**Me:** *What is another tactic you might use to get the audience engaged?*

Carey: One of the most powerful use of names is getting the crowd interacting with each other. This does require some humility, as those of us that have been performing for many years know...the show is not about us. It's about the people we are performing for. I constantly look for ways to integrate the people around me into my act. If I learn that Mark is from Chicago, I might point to a woman and say, "Hey Betty. You want to shuffle these? You know how people in Chicago are" (while looking suspiciously at Mark). Again, the subtle use of names just serves to reinforce that we are all in this together. But I would never open with this line. The more you perform the more you will intrinsically learn when you can slip in a subtle dig. All I know is that the more someone likes you, the more you can get away with.

**Me:** *Give me another example of how you use names to strengthen your audience connection.*

Carey: I like getting as many people involved as possible. Being called on as a participant can be intimidating for people. I want them to laugh early and try and break down some of that awkwardness. I will call on a volunteer and ask, "What's your name?" And the lady responds, "Mary." I will then look confused and say, "Hmmm. What's your first name?" The spectator will almost always hesitates in confusion and usually repeat their first name again, "Mary." Then, without missing a beat I respond with, "Mary Mary. Your parents were very creative" (or whatever trailing line I want to use that night). There is a risk of alienating the audience with this type of humor, but because I have connected with the them, they give me quite a bit of slack.

**Me:** *Performers are sometimes nervous about approaching a table. They don't know what to say or what trick to do. Do you have a specific trick or line you like to use?*

Carey: I used to approach a table and do a flash fire production. I have changed this approach over the years. Again, if my goal is to connect with my audience, then why would the first thing I do involve showing off my skill set? There will be plenty of time for that. Now, I will usually use one of the following three lines. It depends on the situation, but I like these questions because they immediately let my audience know that I am interested in them, I can usually find some great ideas or lines to come back to, and if the group does not know each other well it can create a nice ice breaker.



1. Where are you from? (This can be used in any venue)
2. How do you know each other? (A great opener for corporate events)
3. What brings you here tonight? (I use this in restaurants)

The amount of information you receive from these three basic questions will be staggering. It will open up more possibilities to interact with your audience than you can imagine. Not only have they seen some incredible magic, but they have also learned things about each other and now can discuss shared interests, experiences, or simply ask more questions. Connecting with your audience is the best advice I can give. If your audience is engaged the magic is stronger, the reactions are better, and the experience is heightened. Tricks can be learned anywhere. Entertainment can only be learned through experience. So I hope people try some of these ideas. I think they will find it will elevate their magic and repeat bookings.

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