

THE FUTURE OF MENTALISM

by Richard Webster

Mentalism has become more popular than ever. I'm grateful for that in one way, as my books for mentalists are selling better now than ever before. It's hard to believe that a decade ago I was letting them go out of print because they'd stopped selling. The increasing interest—and sales—has come from the magic fraternity, the people who used to say that mentalism was boring. I guess they discovered that audiences liked it.

Some of this increasing interest is good, as new people are coming into the field with their ideas and perspectives. Unfortunately, some magicians have a desire to save the world from psychics, and attack performers who don't use strong disclaimers or—even worse—do private readings. I know dozens of private readers. All of them are sincere, genuine people who are doing their best to help others. They couldn't be less like the image some magicians promote of evil con-men preying on the gullible. These magicians have obviously never had a private reading. If they had, they would know that there is much more to it than simply spouting the same lines to every client. Cold reading has become a buzzword amongst many magicians who think the whole thing is a confidence trick.

The *Phenomenon* television show was an interesting exercise. I don't think it had either a positive or negative influence on mentalism. I've spoken to hardly anyone, other than magicians, who watched it. Everyone I spoke to thought it was a magic show. I enjoyed watching the different presentations, but thought most of it was mental magic rather than mentalism.

So there are good and bad aspects to the increasing interest in mentalism. How do I see the future? The psychic entertainers who realize the importance of entertainment will continue to do well. Performances need to be fast moving and upbeat for modern audiences. However, the routines and methods of yesterday can still be utilized. My good friend, Stuart Cumberland, is a classic example of this.

A few years ago, he came to visit. He was on vacation, and had no props or other equipment with him. He kindly offered to perform a show for our friends. We visited a stationery store and found everything he needed to perform the Annemann act. The following night he amazed everyone with his performance. Everything he did was performed by Annemann and other mentalists seventy years ago, but Stuart made it modern and up to date. He also made it believable. After the show, all my friends thought they'd seen the real thing. Stuart performed a highly memorable show. Years later, my friends are still talking about it, and asking when he'll be back.

My good friend Docc Hilford visited a few months after Stuart, and also performed for our friends. He performed a mixture of old and new effects, and totally wowed the audience. Again, everyone believed it was real. My friends want him to come back, too.

Over the last few years, Margaret and I have put on many parties, and have been incredibly fortunate in having some of the world's best magicians and mentalists entertain our guests at each one. They have all been superb entertainers. I find it interesting that the two performers our

friends talk about the most are Stuart Cumberland and Docc Hilford. This is because they are believable. Our friends have been entertained by incredible magicians, but do not associate Stuart or Docc with magic. They believe they have the “power.”

And they do. The future is bright for any mentalist who combines entertainment and believability. Despite the best efforts of the born-again debunkers, people want to believe.

Ignore the debunkers. In my experience, they will help, rather than hinder, your career. Focus on the entertainment aspect of psychic entertainment, and let your audiences decide how real you are.

Of course, for a long-term career you also need to remember that show business is 90% business.

The future is looking good for private readers, too. Everyone has problems from time to time, and a caring, empathetic reader can help people realize that their difficulties will end, and there is a future ahead. Of course, you can't simply learn a script and repeat it endlessly. You need to learn a system. This is not nearly as difficult as you may think, and there are plenty of books that will teach you the basics. Read some books on counseling, too. My main tools are palmistry, numerology, and the tarot. Palmistry is wonderful, as you can read someone's palm anytime, anywhere. Numerology is almost as good, as all you need are pen and paper. However, the tarot is the method that most people associate with fortune telling. If you choose the tarot, you'll need to carry a deck of cards around with you, but whenever you produce them people will know what you do.

I believe every psychic entertainer should know how to do a quick reading. People automatically assume that if you can do amazing stuff on stage, you can also read palms and tarot cards. I should mention that both Blair and Docc read palms while they were visiting. The readings added believability to everything else they did.

There's an insatiable market for quick readings as entertainment. If I had my time again I'd ignore full-length readings and concentrate on the corporate market. People, no matter how skeptical they may be, love having their palms read. If you doubt this, look at the lines of people waiting for a reading at any corporate event that employs a psychic reader. Your job is to give quick, upbeat, positive readings for as many people as possible. It's rewarding and enjoyable work.

I think the market for psychic entertainment is growing by the day. Be entertaining, believable and memorable. Learn business skills, and make your mark in this exciting field.

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