

The Thirteen Paths

R. Paul Wilson

“Magic should be fascinating *and* impossible.”

Juan Tamariz

Introduction

These are not my rules. In fact, they are not rules at all.

They are truths.

Over thirty-six years, I have learned from some of the greatest minds in magic. Some are my friends and for that I am fortunate but a great deal of what I have learned can be found in books both old and new.

I recorded these lessons for my own benefit and I refer to them constantly. If something doesn't work, I often find the solution somewhere on this list.

After discussing The Thirteen Paths at lectures and seminars, I am always asked to share them in written form so, here they are. You will read this in minutes but, if you are serious about the art, you'll think about these ideas for years to come.

Write your own rules. Discover your own truth. Follow your own path.

R. Paul Wilson, July 2013

www.rpaulwilson.com

Twitter: @rpaulwilson

Practice.

Rehearse.

Perform.

Recognize the value of all three disciplines.

A boxer spends hours training, exercising and building muscle. Sparring is essential to develop reflexes and timing. Once in the ring, the fighter learns what works and adds to their experience.

We must learn and practice all that is necessary to achieve an effect, then rehearse how to apply these skills before performing for an audience. Lessons learned from each stage of development are invaluable.

A performer who employs an excellent presentation but cannot execute the necessary technique is just as disappointing as one who excels in physical skill but cannot hold an audience's attention.

Learn the rules.

Then break them.

If you are ignorant of the rules, you cannot break them.

An artist must master a craft before using it as a means of expression. Every lesson learned is a building block for creativity.

To stand upon the shoulders of giants, first you must climb.

Value your own ideas but earn the knowledge to properly assess and understand them.

Remain the student.

Seek out new and worthy masters. Some might come to regard you as a master. When this happens, see the next rule.

It would be impossible to learn everything. This is a good thing.

There are always more secrets to be learned.

Find your own buried treasure.

Choose your mentors carefully.

In the land of the blind, *one eye* is king. Many so-called teachers are only a few lessons ahead of those they instruct.

Maintain Perspective.

Beware the beguiled. Audiences are supposed to think you are greater than you actually are. It's part of the show. Do not believe them or madness and mediocrity will follow.

Magic is a powerful art form. If your audience doesn't think you *might* be the best magician in the world, you've failed.

Be honest with yourself. How much have you truly contributed to your own repertoire?

Understand the moments.

Ask yourself five questions:

1. What's the effect?

Describe the effect in the simplest terms.

Everything we perform should be summed up in one sentence that reveals the nature of the desired effect.

It is essential to maintain clarity. Confusion is not magic, nor is it story, music or art.

The audience will empathize naturally with clear ideas and concepts. Take care not to obscure these in performance or presentation.

An effect must be fascinating *and* impossible. Many rely on magic to be fascinating because it *was* impossible. This is poor construction and weak presentation.

2. What happens?

Describe every detail. Repeat until the routine sounds impossible, amazing and unforgettable (and the effect remains crystal clear).

Sell the effect to yourself. Try to build it into something miraculous.

Notice whether any aspect betrays or interferes with the desired effect.

Do not complicate or confuse the effect.

Write it down and find ways to improve your description by adding or removing details.

Visualize the perfect effect from the audiences' perspective.

3. Where are the moments of magic?

Decide where to focus attention.

Too often, magicians perform miracles without stopping to let the audience appreciate what just happened. Rings are not supposed to link and balls are not meant to vanish.

When we perform the impossible, it's important to allow a moment of astonishment.

Concentrate attention on these moments. Never let one slip through your fingers.

Remember that attention is lowered as people react. Take advantage of this.

Listen to your audience. Often they will react to moments you did not intend or predict.

4. Where are the moments of method?

Understand where the method might be detected or interrupt the effect. Take care to avoid both.

Misdirection is anything that leads the audience towards the effect and away from the method.

Beware of false methods that might occur to your audience.

Direct your audience to what seems most interesting and relevant.

If the method attracts attention, change it or change the moment.

5. Where are the moments of fairness?

Use any opportunity to prove there is seemingly no method and make the effect more bewildering.

Analyze the effect to find where you can demonstrate the absence of deception.

Use these moments to mislead or distract the audience from the real method.

Understand the power of truth.

Make these moments clear and memorable.

Find your own path.

Inspiration is the beginning of the journey. Imitation is natural at the beginning but you must use this to gain experience and develop your own ideas, material and style.

Copying others is not the goal of an artist. It is essential to find your own voice and repertoire.

Take inspiration from many sources but do the work required to build your own success.

Avoid becoming a version.

If you deliberately steal someone's material or style then you are a thief.

Critique.

Be your own critic. Seek out advice from trustworthy and knowledgeable peers. Be careful who you ask but be prepared to listen, learn and discuss their opinions with respect. Value honest, constructive advice.

Self assessment is important. Be as honest as possible but accept that you can never see the whole picture.

When asking for advice or criticism, understand that the purpose is to identify flaws, weaknesses and problems.

When given notes, suppress your emotions and take time to consider each point. Try to remain detached.

Don't shoot the messenger.

Take great care in who you ask for help then trust your instincts and listen.

Study.

Examine other methods and effects. Seek out new and better ideas. Use what is useful, remember what is interesting and learn to decide what is valuable.

Inspiration comes from many sources.

Whatever your chosen discipline, recognize the potential in studying other art forms.

The objective is not to find new material.

Leave a trail of breadcrumbs. Take notes. Record your thoughts and ideas.

Throw a wide net. Do not limit yourself to a narrow field of interest. Learn to apply and relate ideas from anywhere.

Cut your own path.

Know what it's about.

Every effect is a story or part of one. Understanding this can give an effect meaning but it is not always necessary to tell the audience. It's impossible for an effect to have meaning to an audience if it has none for you.

Inner scripts help the artist to express outwardly. Decide these carefully.

Identify special thoughts, feelings or memories you might have for a particular effect.

Connect material to what interests you. The audience will recognize this, even though it is unspoken.

Simplify.

The simplest, most direct method is usually the best but not necessarily the easiest. This applies to the method and the effect.

Be as direct as you can be in both method and effect.

Do not let the presentation complicate or clutter the effect.

Master the skills needed to employ the best methods.

Ensure that the effect does not betray an obvious method (even one you are not using).

If the method cannot be changed, change the moment and new options will present themselves.

If the method is more interesting than the effect (to you or the audience), change the effect.

Always be ahead.

Employ methods, principles and strategies that keep you ahead of the audience and their expectations. Be wary of methods that happen at the same time as the effect.

Some argue that being ahead of the audience is the primary principle in magic.

Never reveal the purpose of a secret move or action.

Where possible, add time between method and effect.

Sometimes the method can happen *after* the effect.

You first.

Be more interesting than your props.

Tricks can be bought but magic must be performed.

Your audience should remember you.

The only thing you have that is truly unique is yourself.

Never hide behind your props.

Promote your own image and personality.

Decide who and what you are, in performance.

Learn how to connect with an audience.

Want WONDER

Endeavor to create the seemingly impossible, to capture the imagination and inspire true emotions.

There is real joy in creating moments of astonishment.

The audience's experience is more important than the performer's.

Even when demonstrating skill or power, the ultimate effect on the audience should be of amazement. Being impressed is not enough.

Decide that wonder is important and strive to create it at every opportunity.

Applause is not the only reaction.

The Last Word

This took many years to compile. It is the result of listening, failing to understand, making mistakes and trying again until I found what works.

What works for me.

These are the thirteen paths that I have chosen to explore. I hope they help you to find your own direction.

There isn't room on this page to include all of my friends and direct influences but I would like to thank the following people:

Roy Walton, Ron Wilson, Sonny Day, Pat Page, Alex Elmsley, Andrew Galloway, Larry Jennings, Shigeo Futagawa, Michael Weber, Eric Mead, John Carney, Max Maven, Dean Dill, Tim Conover, Johnny Thompson and Juan Tamariz.

Please share this PDF document via email with anyone who is genuinely interested but please do not sell or reprint/republish in different formats.

Copyright 2013 by R. Paul Wilson

No part of this text is to be printed, published or distributed without the express permission of the author.

May be shared in its original form, printed solely for personal use or distributed directly via email or public forums in its original form.

Please do not reprint or copy the text onto websites, forums, blogs or any other media.

Distribute only in the form of this PDF document.