

Barrie Richardson's Impromptu Card at Any Number

My Best Card Trick

Introduction

This is my favorite card trick. Like you, I know hundreds of card tricks, but this demonstration is special. Here are a few of the features.

- 1.) The demonstration can be performed with anyone's cards with absolutely no preparation.
- 2.) The effect can be done close-up sitting at a table or as a stand-up performance piece in front of a large audience.
- 3.) The effect can be described by a participant in one sentence – "The card I thought of was found at the position in the deck I selected."

4.) The stunt is stunning and memorable.

5.) Lastly, I should note that this presentation has baffled many of the best card men. But probably more significantly, this effect has, over and over again, delighted my wife, Janie. When a trick passes the “Janie Test”, I know it is a winner.

You are paying money to learn a performance piece that requires no preparation or gaffs. However, even though the secret is simple, the actual performance takes skill – particularly in audience management and the use of both subtle and bold misdirection.

I was a college professor for 42 years, and I know how important it is to present concepts slowly and thoroughly if you expect others to replicate what you are doing. Anyone who has ever made bread from scratch knows how important it is to do each step correctly if you want to produce a delicious, crusty French bread.

My goal in this manuscript is to help you be successful. I want you to learn and then master a card trick that you can do at anytime and know you will astonish your audience.

Background

This effect – “Any Card at Any Number” is found in Greater Magic. Jon Racherbaumer calls the trick “The Berglas Effect” because of David Berglas’s astounding presentation. I have struggled with this puzzle for nearly 30 years. In Theater of the Mind, I devoted a chapter to this enigma and suggested three different solutions.

A few years ago, I came up with a variation of this trick which could be done impromptu. The method is not new. My contribution is in the routining and misdirection.

I have learned as an amateur baker that small changes in a recipe can have large consequences. This is the case in the ‘modest miracle’ you are about to learn.

Description

Step I: The Selection and Return of a Card

“Will you please take these cards and mix them up? Thank you.

“Barbara, will you help me out with this experiment? Will you think of any card – other than a joker – that you could find in a deck of cards. Most people think of a queen of hearts or an ace of spades. You can do this or you can think of a less-popular card like the four of clubs.

“Do you have one in your mind? You can change your mind if you wish.

“This is very important. I want you to go through this deck and find the card you have in your mind. Carefully remove it, and hand the deck back to me.”

The performer turns his head while she searches for and then removes her card.

“You are absolutely sure you will remember the card? If you wish, you can let the person next to you peek at it, but you do not have to do this.”

Holding the deck face-down in his left hand, the performer riffles the upper left-hand corners of the cards with his left thumb.

“Let me know when you want to stop.”

She says, “Now.”

“Are you sure this is fine?”

“Go a little further.”

The performer does this, and she again says to stop. His head has been turned to the right during this action.

The cards above the break are lifted off, and her card is placed on top of the packet in the performer’s left hand.

The cards in the performer's right hand are returned, and the assembled deck is immediately placed casually on the table.

The performer cuts the deck in half and fairly riffle shuffles the two piles – but he does not squeeze them together. The ends are interlaced about an inch.

“Please help me by pushing these cards together.”

Step II: Selection of a Location

“Barbara, I honestly have no idea what card you have in your mind. You can tell by my eyes, the tone of my voice and my body language that I am telling the truth. Women are so good at catching men when they fib.”

Now the experiment starts. The performer picks up the shuffled deck in his left hand. He points with his extended index finger of his right hand.

“Pretend that there is a ribbon hanging in front of us and that there are numbers on it from one to 52.”

The performer moves his right hand down along the imaginary ribbon. He puts the deck of cards on the table.

“Please move your index finger along this invisible ribbon, and select a number where you think your card resides.”

Barbara does this. She selects number 18.

“Do you want to move up a little...or down a little?”

“No.”

“Your number is 18, and you believe the card that is in your mind is now at that precise location. Correct?”

She nods.

The 18th card is carefully slid off the deck and left face down on the table.

The drama builds.

“I have no idea what card you are thinking of. What is it, Barbara?”

“The eight of clubs,” she says.

“This is the 18th card,” the performer says, pointing to the one on the table.

The tension builds. He invites Barbara to turn the card over. She does.

It is the eight of clubs.

Explanation

I have described the demonstration in great detail. The whole business of thinking of a card, finding it, and shuffling it seems totally fair. By the time the person selects a number, the ‘dirty work’ is almost over.

The secret of the trick is quite simple. The selected card is maneuvered so that it is fifth from the top. Then a group of cards is half passed to the bottom, and the bottom group is brought into play for the final count.

If this sounds either complicated or daunting, it is not so.

I will go slowly through each step, and you will see how strong the misdirection is in this demonstration.

Step I: The Selection and the Return of the Card

Selection – You will note that throughout the routine, the patter will refer to “your mentally selected card” or “the card you have in your mind.”

Note that when you put the cards in a person's hands and ask them to think of a card and remove the card, it psychologically puts everyone at ease. It seems fair because it is.

Replacement – This is an extremely easy and totally deceptive move. It is a variation of a 'bluff pass.'

After you retrieve the deck, you casually push off four cards from the top and put your little finger of your left hand under the four-card packet and square the deck.

The deck is now in your left hand face down. You fairly riffle the upper left hand edges with your left thumb. You ask her to say 'stop' as you riffle down.

She says "Stop." You hold the break for a second and apparently lift the cards away above the break.

Under normal conditions, when your right hand goes to lift the top packet, you would naturally put your right thumb at the back of the deck and your fingers would be curled over the top edges. Then you would lift the cards away.

Practice this procedure, and see how it looks in a mirror.

Now do this. Put your hand on the top of the deck in the same manner as you did when you removed the packet of cards...thumb at the back, fingers on the top ends. This time, however, as you go to lift the packet, your left thumb releases its hold – a slight imperceptive lifting of the thumb does this. At the same time, your right thumb makes contact with the four cards that are slightly lifted by the small finger of the left hand. The right-hand fingers grasp the front edges as you normally would, but now only the packet of the top four cards are lifted away.

The right hand is turned slightly inward and moved toward your chest as you extend your left hand holding the deck for the person to replace her card.

The right hand returns the packet on top, just as it would if it were a larger packet.

As soon as the four-card packet is returned – and this is a subtlety which you should include – the fingers of the right hand grasp about half the cards on top edges and give them a soft, easy riffle.

The deck is placed on the table in a casual fashion.

The Shuffle – Next you break the deck near the middle and riffle the two packets together making sure that the top five cards remain on top.

Then you ask a person to push the cards together and assemble them.

This whole procedure should seem totally fair and all the procedures used seem without guile.

The actual situation is that you have controlled the selected card so that it is now the fifth card from the top of the deck. You do not know the card, but you do know the position.

Step II: The Selection of the Number and The Half Pass

The cards are retrieved and held casually in your left hand.

The objective now is to secretly move around seven or eight cards from the top of the deck to the bottom and in the process reverse these cards so that they will be face-up on the bottom.

For those of you who are comfortable with doing a half pass, you can skip over the following explanation. But do not skip over the misdirection.

The mechanics of the pass are not difficult. As you will soon see, the misdirection is so strong that there is no need for speed or extraordinary dexterity.

Holding the deck in your left hand, secure a little finger break under about seven or eight cards on the top of the deck. You may find it a help to lift a small group off with your right thumb and then put your finger in the break.

Now this top group of cards is lifted upward and swiveled over as the cards are reassembled, and the pass is completed. (The illustrations on Page 13

drawn by Kelly Lyles should make this clear.) This is a variation of the classic pass.

What makes this so easy to do is the strong misdirection.

Assume you have retrieved the shuffled deck from the table, and in the process gotten a small finger break under more than five cards and less than ten.

Stay relaxed and focused on the instructions you are giving to your helper. You lift your right hand above your head and draw it vertically down as you explain the imaginary ribbon that has 52 numbers.

Believe me, everyone's eyes will follow your right hand.

Now ask your helper to move her finger down the invisible ribbon and stop where she wants to.

Your total attention is on her action. You never look at the cards in your hands.

As she is doing this, your right hand returns to the top of the deck, and you do the half pass. There is no need for quick movement or furtive behavior. Stay totally focused on what is going on, and the procedure will be totally undetected. Do not riffle cards after the pass or in any way pay attention to the cards.

For those of you who think you cannot do a pass, you have an excellent option.

Give the instructions about selecting a number, and turn away as the person is moving her hand down the imaginary ribbon. Say "Don't let me influence your choice," and as you turn away, you can move a packet of eight cards or so to the bottom and turn them over in the process. Then you turn back and place the deck on the table.

Now, as far as the audience is concerned, nothing has happened.

The deck should be placed on the table before the final number is agreed to. This is important since this action eliminates all thoughts of sleight of hand being in play.

The number selection must be above four and under 45. This will depend on how many cards you half-passed.

The invisible tape business assures you that you will most likely fall in this range. If they happen to say a number you cannot reach, say that is not an interesting number. This has only happened once to me, and it was not a problem.

Once the number is named, make a big deal that they can change it. “Do you want to move up one? Or down one?” you ask. The deck is on the table, and the stunt – from the audience’s point of view – has hardly started.

Step III: The Counting and the Secret Turnover Move

The cards are picked up, and you patter about how important it is to be sure that the cards are counted fairly. The count is slow and deliberate and fair.

Assume once again the number selected is 18. You count the cards face down in a loose stack on the table. Since everything is completely fair, you should feel relaxed and in total control as you do the counting.

The Turnover Move – When you come to the place in the counting where the card is exactly five cards away – in this case, $18-5=13$ – you stop.

You will now do a move which my friend and card trick scholar Stephen Minch tells me is hundreds of years old. It may be a venerable move, but it can be extremely deceptive.

Basically, what will happen is that the cards in your left hand will be turned over so that what was the bottom of the deck will now be the top of the deck. Since the top packet of cards are reversed, the deck will still appear to be face down.

Now, if I stopped describing the move at this point, many, if not most, readers would have trepidations about this move. It seems so blatant and bold.

I have been using this move for 30 years. The use of this misdirection was taught to me by Fred Robinson, and this approach is so strong that I know if you follow my instructions, you will be successful – all the time.

Here is what you do.

The audience is watching the count of cards. They are getting anxious.

You stop after the 13th card and say, “I know what you are thinking. You are thinking your card may have been dealt down on the pile, and I am wasting your time.”

You look the person in the eyes when you say this. You are relaxed, and you stay in the role of a person doing an experiment – not a card shark.

“Let’s see if this is the case.” Saying this, your right hand picks up the pile of face-down cards on the table, turns them face up, and ribbon-spreads them downward.

At that instant, your left hand holding the deck is casually turned over and the deck left on the table. The move is not quick. You do not want to attract any attention. It is the normal and expected thing to do. You must free up your left hand to help spread out the cards so that the helper can look them over and see if her card is there.

Your total attention is on the cards being displayed. Both hands now spread the cards around so that they can be seen.

You lean back. “Only you know your card. Do you see it on the table?”

This procedure is so natural, and the large movement – spread of the cards – completely dominates the quiet and small action – turning of your wrist and placing down of the deck – that after your first success at doing this, you will gain confidence quickly.

The Final Count – The deck is retrieved, and the counting continues as described in the description.

My favorite approach is not to pick up the deck. Rather, I put my left thumb on the back short end and my second finger on the front end of the tabled deck. My first finger is on top. This action holds the deck fairly square preventing the reversed cards from being discovered.

Then I invite a spectator to slowly slide the cards off the deck...or I may do this myself. In any case, this procedure will underscore that you are not in any way manipulating the cards.

Of course, you want to make the final revelation as dramatic as you can.

Don't forget to congratulate your helper.

Good luck!

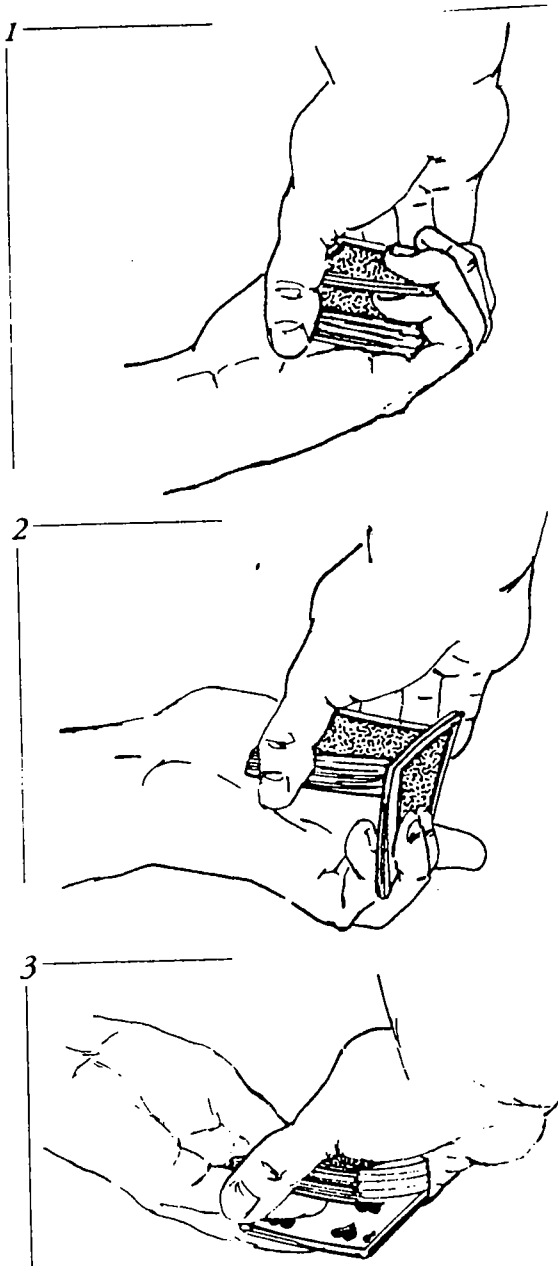
P.S. In Theater of the Mind (Hermetic Press, 1999), I published a trick called "Do You Want to Continue?" The basic theme of this stunt is that the performer keeps on giving the helpers a chance to stop the experiment at any time they wish since 'the outcome will be so perplexing that it will cause sleepless nights.' This may be a good patter to incorporate in this routine.

Barrie Richardson
620 Delaware Street
Shreveport, LA 71106

Tel: 318/865-8502
Fax: 318/868-9587

richardsonbarrie@netscape.net

The Half Pass



Source: Richardson, Barrie, Theater of the Mind, Hermetic Press, 1999, pg.109