



Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With John Teo –

John Teo is TVP for The IBM and President of The Great Wong Ring 115 in Singapore. He is well-respected in Asia and his advice and contributions are always sought on many major magic projects in that part of the world. He has an excellent reputation as a Competition judge and his skills have been called upon several times at many Asian conventions. He has been for many years and continues to be a stellar point of reference and source of Magical knowledge to many magicians. Many major International names in Magic hold him in high esteem.

John Teo is a good friend to all those who know him. He is a true gentleman. He is kind, generous and lots of fun to be with; he is a very experienced Magician and an Internationally distinguished and renowned Management Trainer.

In May 2010, I was invited to perform at a private event in Singapore and whilst there I was honored to be invited to lecture for IBM Ring 115 and to give a workshop. Prior to my arrival, I made contact with John Teo and during my stay, I spent several days in his excellent company. He and his wife were gracious hosts and delightful company.

Singapore is a delightful place. Anyone who has visited Singapore can testify to the vast and indeed numerous places to enjoy good food. As a rule, most Singaporeans have two passions. Hard work and good food. Knowing my passion for Asian cuisine, John and his wife made sure that I was well taken care of in that area.



ADB: Hello John . Thanks for taking the time to meet up and chat a while.

JT: Hello Tony. My pleasure. Always good spending time with you.

ADB: John, as you know in my lecture, one of the effects that I share, involves a banana as a lie-detector. You were kind enough to say some kind words about that and even did so publicly in the November 2010 issue of The Linking Ring. I bring up the subject of bananas because in a way that is what got you started in Magic . Share some of that with us please..

JT: Yes Tony, you are right . It was a long time ago but yes, it was a banana that got me interested in Magic. Or to be precise. Two bananas! When I was in Primary School, there was a lull period after a major examination. This was meant for teachers to mark papers. Students were told to bring board or other types of games to play in class or books to read. When I was in Primary 4 (10 years old), during one of these lull periods, my form teacher showed us a magic trick.

It was the cutting the banana in half without peeling the skin trick. He told an interesting story for this. He said that if an identical twin were to live far apart from one another, say, one lived in England and one in Singapore, then if one had an acute stomach ache, at exactly the same time, the other twin would experience the same sensation with his stomach in his own country of residence. He showed us a pair of banana that was stuck together, and told us this is a twin banana. He pulled them apart, took a knife and cut one banana cleanly in half. He asked one of us to peel off the skin of the other unharmed banana. To everybody's surprise, the other banana was found cleanly sliced in half, too.

I went back home and pestered my mum to purchase such a banana for me. It was not easy to locate two bananas which were grown stuck together. After a few weeks, she managed to find one and bring it home to me.

I was so excited and told her about identical twins. I pulled both bananas apart, and used a knife to cut one of them. I asked her to peel open the skin of the other banana. She did so but nothing happened! It was such an anti-climax! I was both puzzled and disappointed.

ADB: Well, I guess that took care of a short-lived Magic career , 😊 except for one lucky find ...

JT: Yes Tony , as you say, a lucky find . Not an unusual story for most Magicians but for me it was a huge revelation. Anyone who has had a similar experience will know exactly what I mean. I used to go to our national library to borrow books to read. In one of these visits, by pure chance ...a lucky find, as you said, ... I chanced across a book on magic. I browsed through it and I found the secret of the self-cutting banana. Because of the impact it had on me, I realized how powerful magic can be to an audience! Another thing I realized was that magic (at least the magic we do) has nothing to do with supernatural power. It uses ordinary scientific principles in a creative way so as to make things that seem impossible possible! So much fun! Cool!

ADB: Yes indeed John. I agree. You and I have had several conversations about the powerful impact of Magic when it is presented well. Anyone can do a trick but performing Magic is the key...

JT: Yes Tony, as you know already I totally agree with that premise. Nowadays because of DVD's, the Internet, especially YouTube, some of the mystique and indeed the entertainment value has been forgotten in many cases.

ADB: Yes John. We are not saying that the Internet and DVD's are necessarily bad things but it doesn't quite have the same impact as learning Magic from a Mentor and indeed the way you and I learnt our first Magic...from books. I think it is books that give us, at least on a

subconscious level the ability to think in a different way, to be creative because we need to create our own mental images rather than see them on a screen.

JT: I agree Tony. DVD's and the Internet have their place but anyone, like you and I, can only experience what we experienced, via books. In our day, when we were starting out we only had books. And yes, as you say, by reading something, it does bring into play different aspects of the brain. Moving pictures can teach, but the brain is also receiving visual information rather than creating its own. As you know Tony, I am a Management Trainer and one of the most fundamental aspects of any Training is "teaching" the brain to think.

You and I have spoken at some length about the great Magic thinkers, people like Eugene Burger, Tobias Beckwith, Martin Gardner, Jay Scott Berry to name just a few. I realized very early on that one of the sources for learning magic was through books, which I could borrow from the national library. Since then, I must have borrowed all the magic books in the library!

ADB: Absolutely. I know that you still treasure books and have an interesting collection of your own. But earlier on I referred to Mentors or to those who helped and nurtured our Magic development ...share some of your early days with us ...

JT: At Secondary School when I was around 14 years old, I found to my delight, there was a Conjuring Club being formed and they were looking to recruit members. Without hesitation, I volunteered. The teacher in charged invited a magician to help us build up this Club. His name was Ivan Ng, and he was one of the sons of "The Great Wong". At that time in Singapore, "The Great Wong" was the most well-known professional magician in Singapore.

Because of my knowledge in magic, I quickly became the Head of the Conjuring Club in my school. In the 4 years there, we produced 3 magic shows for the school, and I was the Producer as well as the performer for each show. This was the time my skills and knowledge in magic grew very fast.

Ivan introduced me to IBM Singapore Ring 115 where his father, "The Great Wong" was the President. I became a member and started to build up my network in magic. I learned a lot from the professionals there.

The networking with local magicians was very useful to me. Three of us decided to meet on a weekly basis with our spouses and discuss magic.

Each time we meet, we would decide what tricks to purchase. I would be the one consolidating the order and placing it with overseas suppliers.

At that time, our favorite magic supplier was Supreme Magic company (now defunct) from England. We also purchased from USA dealers now and then. We would purchase magic and share the tricks among all of us. We were not professional magicians as we all had our full-time jobs. Ordering was slow because there was no internet at that time. The typical period between ordering and the arrival of goods was 6 weeks. We were then exposed to latest magical offerings in the market.

ADB: You also subscribed to other periodicals as well ...

JT: Yes I did. I already had "The Linking Ring" magazines coming monthly from IBM. I subscribed to "Abracadabra", a weekly periodical, Supreme Magic's monthly "Magigram", Peter Warlock's "The New Pentagram", Sam Dalal's "Mantra", and Stephen Tucker's "The Spell Binder" and "Chicanery". Every month, I would have a lot of magic to read and digest.

Often, when I read about a particular magical method or presentation, I began to think of different applications and variations in presentation. I wondered if the originator would be interested in my thinking. I wrote back to Stephen Tucker and was surprised that he published it in his next issue of his periodical. This encouraged me so much that I began to contribute articles on magic as well as tricks and they were accepted for publication in "Abracadabra", "Magigram", "The Linking Ring" and "Chicanery".

ADB: Sadly, many of those excellent publications are no longer with us ... but I know that a lot of them are now becoming "Collector" Pieces'. There was a lot of good material in those excellent publications and reading those helped us, to be more creative in our Magic . Share some of your thinking on that please ...

JT: What I find most intriguing about magic is its association with creativity. It takes creativity to make something that is not possible, possible – and that is what magic is all about. I find that if I apply a magical principle differently, I can get a brand new trick. Or, if I vary the presentation of a trick, I can get a new effect. Magic is all about the "ends" rather than the "means".

Here is what I do with magic and I find that it has benefited my life:

- 1) When people come to know that you are a magician, you become the life of a party – magic is an attention grabber.
- 2) I use magic in my job to give me the USP (unique selling point). As I am a free-lance trainer and I train corporations in management, leadership, creativity, problem solving, etc. I use magic not just as an energizer to enliven the class, but I apply magic in a creative way to bring out some important learning principles of the subjects that I am teaching the class. When the class enjoys and remembers my trick, they remember the learning points as well! This has made me a one-of-a-kind trainer and I have got good feedback from my clients.
- 3) Learning magic has made me realize that I can be creative. Performing magic made me realize that I can apply creativity and become successful.

ADB: Can you elaborate a bit on that John..

JT: Sure Tony. Here are 2 examples of how magic has enabled me to use creativity to become successful:

In addition to my successful contributions to international magical periodicals, I always challenge myself to take up competitions thrown in by magic dealers.

My first encounter was in 1979 when Sterling Magic Creations of USA (now defunct) manufactured the Card Coin. They had found a way to cut the identity of a playing card onto a coin. For example a 50-cent coin can have a neat cut-out of "K" and "S" to signify the King of Spades.

However, they did not know how to use such a coin in magic and they opened up a competition in some of the international magic periodicals. The prizes were gift vouchers to purchase coin products from them – no big deal. It was more a challenge to me to come up with some applications than the lure of the prizes. I submitted 2 ideas. I was pleasantly surprised that both of them won 4th Prize (Consolation Prize). When I looked at the winners, they were all from USA while I was the only person outside of USA and in Asia. Our winning entries were subsequently published in a book entitled Card Coin Wizardry.

In 2007, I was attracted to a call for magicians to come out with a message using magic props by Magic Broadcast of USA. This was right up my alley because I used magic in my training to bring out important learning principles. I submitted 3 entries. Once again, to my pleasant surprise, all my 3 entries won the top 10 prizes! I was the Grand Prize winner, the Third Place winner as well as one of the seven Runners-Up winners – I only lost to the Second Place winner! Again, all the winning entries were published in "Message Magic" Volume 1.

ADB: Congratulations John. I have seen those effects as you were kind enough to give me a signed copy. Very interesting thinking that you have applied . I am especially fond of your , "To Each His Own". What was your thinking behind that ?

JT: Thank you. Regarding, 'To Each His Own', as a Management Trainer, I often use Magic to illustrate a point. Using magic in training is not new. It has its roots in gospel magic. Preachers use magic as object lessons to bring out gospel truths. In 2000, I got the inspirations and wrote a book on gospel magic containing some 22 effects. This was not published officially. Coming back to , 'To Each His Own', it is interesting that you like this one because not only is it one of my favorites but it is also the effect that has the greatest impact on the participants .

ADB: Why do you think it does?

JT: I think it does because it is highly visual, the magic happens very quickly and the results are very unexpected.

ADB: Without revealing too much , please outline the effect...

JT: At its very basic level it is the linking of three loops of ropes. However, what makes it interesting is the fact that via the accompanying patter, I use the magic to illustrate the benefits of teamwork. In other words, instead of each working on his or her own or as separate departments, I use the linking of the ropes to visually show the benefits of working in unison. Also given the fact that two spectators actually tie the two ropes to make links give it an added zest.

ADB: That it certainly does. I can't do this effect the justice it deserves in a few words but if anyone reads it in its entirety they will clearly see that by taking a simple premise you have given it a great deal of creative thought and thereby enhanced the application.

JT: Thank you Tony. As you and I both know, presentation is the key. The message, either verbal and/or visual must be the premise on which the magic happens.

ADB: Indeed it is and as you rightly state, the communication factor is the key ...three entries , one of them a runner –up, " To Each His Own" won you the third prize, and you also won the First Prize . Quite an achievement

JT: Thank you Tony. I was awarded first prize for my " Fruit Of The Spirit" . As I also perform a lot of Gospel Magic, I came up with effect using a Crystal Silk Cylinder. Again, this is highly visual and conveys a powerful Gospel message.

ADB: Great effect. Very powerful thinking. But it doesn't end there does it ? ..In 2009, you had some further success...

JT: Yes I did Tony. In 2009, Leaping Lizards Magic of USA organized a competition to come out with a routine based on one of Howard Adams' ideas. I submitted two entries and one of them became the prize winner. There was only one winner. The prize was the massive tome of Howard Adams called "Matchalot Mentalism" (252 mentalism effects with cards).I

ADB: Let me take you back a few years ..namely 2002....

JT: Yes, Tony.... that was a very adventurous time. In 2002, I decided to give a shot at doing magic as a business. Together with 6 other magicians, we formed a company. Again, I developed a USP (unique selling point) for this company. I decided that to be successful, I should use magic to give credits to my clients, not the performers. Currently, if a magic performance was good, people give credits to the performer. I decided to use illusions to make my client, not the magician, appear on stage. In a corporate anniversary dinner, the CEO usually addresses the company before the dinner begins. Instead of the MC introducing the CEO verbally, we designed an illusion to make the CEO appear magically on stage, often with dancing girls (depending on the budget).

What happened to the CEO was that he became the "talk-of-the-town" on the next working day! Almost every staff in the office would approach him to ask him how he had appeared

magically on stage. We, of course, had a written agreement that he would not divulge the secret! This made him happy, and he was the pay-master!

I also developed tricks that helped the Sales Director to present his new range of products for the forthcoming year. Again, he became very popular in his company on the next working day as everybody wanted to know how he worked that magic! We had a lot of success and our business shot up in the first year itself.

Unfortunately, many event organizers came to know about this and within a short while, all the other magicians in town were told to come up with a magic effect that could make a VIP appear magically. This became so common with other magicians and the fee went down tremendously as they competed for the business. Partly because of this reason and partly because we were doing this part-time that eventually, we decided to stop working together. But this showed me how using creativity to do business differently from others can bring success.

ADB: All of us, to some degree have been influenced by teachers, Mentors and others. How does that apply to you?

JT: The first person was the late “The Great Wong” from Singapore. He could not speak English and almost all his performances were silent acts done to background music. He specialized in stage magic and illusions. Because he had no real formal education, he did not order tricks from overseas. He built almost all his own props, including illusions. I learnt stage magic from this great man. Another thing that I learnt from him was his unselfishness in magic. Many magicians would not want to divulge their secrets to other magicians. “The Great Wong” was different. He willingly taught and loaned his apparatus and illusions to fellow magicians to perform. Unfortunately, some magicians took advantage of that. “The Great Wong” taught me humility.

The late “Tan Hock Chuan” convinced me that Singapore magicians can be successful internationally. He was not so much a performer but a brilliant inventor. He could come out with endless magical ideas.

He won invention competitions internationally and his many ideas were published in international periodicals such as the Sphinx (defunct), Magic Wand (defunct), Goldston’s Magic Quarterly (defunct) and Genii, and others. He was the inspiration for me to contribute to international periodicals.

Pairuch Trarasansombut from Thailand runs his own successful steel business in Bangkok. Because of his passion for magic, he started a company manufacturing magic props. All the ideas for his magic props are original with him. Another creative magician whose ideas never seem to run out! I often write, with illustrations, the instructions for his many magical inventions that he manufactures and exports to other countries. Once in every three or four years, he would organize a magic convention in Bangkok. This person has taught me to be creative as well as generous.

ADB: I have heard of him. I have never met him, but I am looking forward to doing so when I visit Thailand in the near future. Moving away, just for a moment from Magic, I know you have a few other passions. I saw that when you took me to dinner at a friend’s house. You play the guitar. And you also are an illustrator....

JT: Music is my other interest. Not only do I listen to music, I play the guitar and piano as well. In school, I joined the Brass Band and I played the baritone. I believe magic, with proper music, can bring the magic to life! I like art. When I was in school, I used to paint a lot using water colour and poster colours. This becomes an asset to me because when I write up a magical effect, I can do my own illustrations.

ADB: Share with us a bit about your kind of Magic.....

JT: I am especially fond of mathematical creations. I have all the books written by Martin Gardner on this subject. As you know, mathematical principles form the basis of many self-working magic.

I am interested in all branches of magic. I perform magic for children as well as for adults. I perform both stage as well as close-up magic. The types of magic that I do not perform are Escapism and Illusions. The latter is because I do not do shows for a living and therefore I do not invest in expensive and bulky magic illusions. I do not like Escapism. My preferred branches of magic are close-up magic, mentalism and comedy magic.

In close-up magic, I delight in the direct interactions with my spectators. Also, I find it a great challenge to perform magic right “under-the-noses” of my spectators. Because of my involvement in intellectual matters, I find mentalism a fascinating branch.

ADB: Hmmm! Yes . So do I. 😊 We can talk about that for hours and indeed we have also we have spoken previously about the importance of character in performance . What kind of character do you use?

JT: My character is one of fun as well as of seriousness, and I have a dry sense of humour. I find performing magic with humour suits my style.

ADB: That you have John. I love your sense of humor. Another topic that we have discussed and share similar thoughts on are the performance and presentation of Magic

JT: Yes Tony, we do. I am interested in the psychological aspects of magical performance. I believe that there must be a reason for every move (or sleight) in magic. If there is no reason for it, that move or sleight should not be there.

A magical performance is a conveyance of a magical effect to the spectators. Different people communicate differently. Different magicians should then present their magic differently. Very often, I see performers trying to emulate another performer exactly. And some of them can do that quite well! Well, if you do so, you are only a copy of that performer – you are not the originator. When an audience sees you perform, they are only reminded of the original performer! So, one should strive to present magic in their own style.

ADB: Not surprisingly John I agree entirely with you. Another topic that Magicians argue about is whether a sleight-of-hand performer is better than a performer who uses “simple” methodology. What are your views on that?

JT: People often argue that a magician using sleight-of-hand is far superior to one using simple methods of execution. Once again, in magic, the “end” is more important than the “means” to this end. After all, in magic, people are not supposed to know HOW you do a particular magic trick. As long as the end effect is properly communicated to the spectators, it does not matter how the effect is brought about.

Having said this, there is a slight difference between magic using sleight-of-hand and magic using, say, apparatus. It is obviously more magically if a coin vanishes from the performer’s hand right in front of your eyes, than if it were to be put into a container and then the container is opened to show that the content is gone. Therefore, I believe that one should learn the basic sleight-of-hand, as they have a place in magical performance.

ADB: Yes indeed. Certain moves, sleight-of-hand, etc are all important but to paraphrase two good friends, Jon Racherbaumer and Steve Dacri, “the skill is important but should not be visible to an audience” You are so right. The end result is the objective . The means is just that ..the means!

JT: Yes Tony, that’s right. You and I know many excellent performers who use the “simplest” of methods to achieve spectacular results.

ADB: John, you credit Magic with teaching you to be creative and to think out-of-the-box. This has helped you to advance in your business and Magic career. You have been a great influence on many of Asia's young star performers. When JC Sum and Magic Babe Ning took me to lunch they were full of praise and credited you with helping them a great deal. Do you have any general advice and/or suggestions for young up and coming Magicians?

JT: From my perspective, I happen to strongly believe that magic is about communicating (selling) the effect to the audience. Apparatus and sleight-of-hand are the means to achieve this end. I think it is important also to think in terms of your spectators. If they don't understand what you are doing, your effect is probably too complicated. Make it simpler, cut out all the unnecessary parts, and your magic will be more effective. Develop your own style and don't copy other magicians. Have your own performing persona. And last but not least, the golden rule of magic - practice, practice, practice!

ADB: Wise words that transmit some excellent advice. Thank you John. As always a great pleasure. It has been delightful

JT: Thank you Tony. My pleasure too.. And remember, just as soon as you get back to our part of the world , there is a standing dinner invitation to my favorite restaurant.

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