

# Christian Conjuror Magazine

September/October – 2009 • Vol. 53-5



**CREATIVELY  
SPEAKING**

**Randall Munson**  
Rochester • Minnesota



Randall and Sharon

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN MAGICIANS



Personality Profile:

## Randall Munson

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**Article written by Norm Barnhart, MN**

The attendees at this year's FCM convention witnessed an unusual illusion to kick off the Tuesday evening show. The curtains parted and onto the stage strolled a clown carrying a large box. The box pops open like a jack-in-the box and out of the box popped another clown – **Circles the Clown!** The audience discovered this surprising effect was all an illusion and they had been tricked into thinking the first clown was real. This clever and original performer, Circles, went on to MC that evening's show, presenting all sorts of his unique tricks, inventions and funny gags.



The incredible, creative inventor behind the greasepaint is Randall Munson. Circles is just one of his personas. Randall also performs expert ventriloquism and is a polished magician. His creative approach has made him a unique and sought after presenter. His main work derives from his corporate motivational speaking that has taken him around the world speaking in more than 35 countries across 6 continents. Randall covers topics such as humor in the workplace, innovation, creativity, and sales.

Randall's presentations for corporate groups are not just inspirational, but he presents practical techniques derived from his years of work in management at IBM – the computer innovator. His warm and humorous speaking style has made him a favorite in the Fortune 500. He has been inducted into the *Speaker Excellence Hall of Fame*. He has been the double-header presenter with such international figures as the Prime Minister of Israel, and Nobel Laureate, Shimon Peres. Not surprisingly, Randall has garnered more than 80 Gold Medals in the *International Speaker Olympics*, an IBM Award for Excellence, and is listed in the *Who's Who of Professional Speaking*. He is the first person to be honored as a Distinguished Speaker and he has been named a Certified Speaking Professional; this is an elite group of less than 7% of the professional speakers in the world. He has been selected as one of 'the World's Greatest Business Mentors.'

Randall's messages stem from his business experience as an IBM Program Manager and an IBM Executive Advocate, who for 20 years led IBM research and development projects with management, architecture, education, and marketing responsibilities. He also held an executive position for 5 years in the Target Corporation. He is former Vice President of Administration at *Crossroads College* and member of the Board of Directors of *Hope International University*. He is the founder and president of Creatively Speaking®.

Randall shares his insights as an author or co-author of nine books including the best seller *Create the Business Breakthrough You Want*. He has published numerous articles and a monthly column in an international technology magazine. His acclaimed electronic magazine, *Business Magic®*, is read monthly by thousands of decision mak-

ers in all 50 states and more than 70 countries around the world who want to experience the magic of Randall's creative insights, ideas and inspirations for themselves and their businesses.

He has a very sweet wife, Sharon, his high school sweetheart and wife of 40 years.



They often work together on Randall's projects. In fact, Sharon made the first Circles costume. They are devoted parents of three. Their youngest is Scott and their oldest is Russel who is married to Allie. Their daughter, Sheryl, is married to Jeremy Vold and they have a daughter, Emily. Randall and Sharon thoroughly enjoy being grandparents.

At this year's FCM gathering Randall also presented the Keynote, "Creative Ministry," for the convention's President's Choice. He presented several lectures including my favorite, "Ventriloquism for Dummies".

Randall's talents as a magician, ventriloquist and clown, contribute to his ability to captivate audiences in many settings – including MGM Grand, in Las Vegas, Walt Disney World and The White House. He has made televised appearances internationally and has been featured on major network broadcasts. Randall has won 30 national and international entertainment awards, and his likeness has been displayed in the *Clown Hall of Fame* and the *Smithsonian Institution*.

Randall has a flair for conveying complex, abstract, and potentially dry information in a manner that's engaging and easy for an audience to grasp. Called by many a "natural teacher," he has designed and taught courses for the IBM Advanced Business Institute,

IBM Management and Technical Education, Asia/Pacific Marketing Masters Seminars, and serves as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Wisconsin. Randall holds an M.S. degree in Computer and Information Science from the University of Minnesota.

## The Gift of Creativity

Randall loves to innovate and create. For example, his eight-foot tall, flame orange ostrich is engineered with a cleverly animated neck and head. The bird even has a moving mouth for ventriloquism.

He says, "I had seen the basic concept used in the circus with a horse or bird of some kind and I liked the idea of the illusion of the clown riding an unusual animal." The problem was that they were small and looked stiff – not at all realistic. "I wanted to take the basic concept and make it really spectacular and that's why I made it bright yellow and flame orange." He also used



bright yellow plumes to make the wings and tail of the oversize bird feel real.

However, Randall was not satisfied. He states, "I also wanted it to move and appear to be a live ostrich, so I had to develop a way to make the neck and head move and be animated." Through much trial and error it dawned on him to make it work the opposite of a conventional puppet. Instead of the neck supporting the head, the head held up the neck. This was done by creating rigid reigns that could be manipulated to move the head. "By designing it like that I'm able to make it bend down, look around, and bow. I ran wire through the stiff reigns that I use to open the ventriloquist figure mouth

that I built into the sculptured head. It's very lightweight so "riding" the ostrich for several miles in a parade is not difficult.

The challenges of creating a unique prop like the ostrich are filled with lots of trial and error. "A lot of sweat goes into creativity," Randall says. There was an incredible amount of work that went into it. He studied at the library and did research on what a real ostrich looked like. To make it lightweight he built the basic structure with piano wire, as they used many years ago in the circus. Foam rubber is commonly used now for many props, but piano wire is extremely lightweight, resilient and springs back when crushed. The hundreds of hours that went into it were worth the fantastic results.

Randall elaborates on the key to success. "It is pure and simple – perseverance and tenacity." His wife, or anyone who knows Randall, will tell you that when he puts his mind to finding a solution to a problem, or create something, he sticks to it. Searching for a solution almost consumes him.

### **The Serious Business of Humor**

In Randall's hilarious program titled "the Serious Business of Humor", he spoke about God's gift of humor and the benefits of laughter in the Christian life. He points out, of all God's creations, only man was created in His image and of all God's creations, only man has a sense of humor. "It seems to me God has shared His own sense of humor with us. Consider also that people are drawn to those with a sense of humor but they tend to avoid those with no smiles or humor. People were clearly drawn to Jesus and wanted to be with Him. So I doubt Jesus was a somber, humorless, unsmiling man. I looked for scripture passages that might give us a clue that God actually has a sense of humor and found in Psalm 2:4 it mentions the "Heaven-throned God breaks out laughing," and Psalm 37:13 says "the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming." I don't take things at face value that people tell me about the Bible. I like to check things out myself.

Randall continues, "some of the stories or parables Jesus told were said with humor that we don't recognize because we don't understand the Eastern culture of His day.

For example, when Jesus told his audience not to take the speck of sawdust out of someone else's eye when they have a big ol' 4x6 beam stuck in their own eye, he probably had his listeners laughing at the absurd image.

Randall feels that, "for something to be funny it has to have an element of truth in it." Christ spoke truth, and grabbed the attention of those around him. He used word pictures people could grasp and understand."

Randall adds, "Joy and laughter are not the same things, but there is an overlap between joy and humor but of course they also stand separately."

"What happens in humor is that you get the audience thinking one way and then you hit them with a surprise that makes them see it in a different way, and at that moment they have to backtrack on what they just heard and find out it had a different meaning and now it makes sense in a different way." Randall sums it up, "Laughter is a physiological reaction to a surprise that happens when our minds make the connection."

Randall sites studies of the brain with an MRI that show what parts are lit up at any given point. "At the moment of discovery or a breakthrough thought, a part of the brain lights up and the same area lights up when we laugh. We have an inherent pleasure when we can figure something out – there is a moment of "aha!" then a smile comes to our face – "I get it!" This is the same part of brain that appreciates humor. We find ourselves thinking one way and then the punch line causes us to discover a new way. The pleasure we feel in enjoying a joke is very similar to the pleasure we find in discovery."

### **God Created us to be Creative**

When it comes to being creative in ministry Randall points out, "God created us as creative beings; we got that from Him and He made us that way on purpose. It's a wonderful gift. It also helps us to understand our Creator."

Some people say they are not creative. But yet they are. "Children are extremely creative – and you were once a child, so you were once very creative." Randall states. "Unfortunately as we grow up we stifle that

gift. We're taught to conform and are rewarded for conformance; those who follow the world's rules get ahead. A's are given to the good kids who answer questions as they are expected to. The system rewards and appreciates conformity, which society needs to some degree, and yet the downside of it is this tends to suppress our creative abilities. Because we want to please other people, be thought of highly, and be appreciated, we tend to conform."

"In the creative ministry program, I challenge people to ask "how" and "why" and to look at things differently in order to find unique ways to share the message about Christ." We are all created creative, but our own limitations come from our own thinking. "Whether you think you're creative or you think you're not – *you are right*. Let yourself be the creative being that God created you to be."

For example, Randall says, "God had Gideon do something very unconventional. He had Gideon whittle down his huge army of thousands of men to only 300. This way God got the glory for the victory and not human strength. He then gave them a very creative approach to get the victory; God told the little army to surround the enemy with torches under jugs. Then they smashed the jugs, waved the torches, and blew trumpets. The enemy was startled and fought against themselves killing each other. That is not the typical way you win the battle – God used a totally unconventional, creative way of doing it."

"Often when we are faced with a dilemma, we have a choice of solving the problem with a conventional method. We assume there is only a single right answer to every question. Often it is the unconventional answer that is the better answer."

Randall uses the sponge ball to square magic trick with a red ball that changes to a cube to demonstrate this. The audience thinks the red ball is in one hand or the other. It turns out one hand holds a cube and the other hand holds a yellow ball. Actually, the solution is that the red ball is in neither

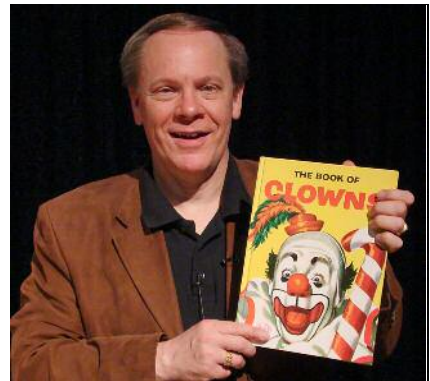
hand – there is a third alternative no one ever thought of. This surprise brings laughter, but also shows the answer to a problem

may be completely different than the choices everybody considers.

Jesus demonstrated this kind of

creativity. People confronted Jesus with two choices: stone the woman who committed adultery or break the law of God. Jesus didn't fall into their trap of picking one of the two alternatives. Instead, he said the person without sin should throw the first stone and they walked away. By choosing a third, creative response rather than picking one of the two that were presented to him, Jesus was able to defuse and disperse the aggressive crowd and minister personally to the woman. In our ministries today our creative solutions can be more effective than the conventional alternatives that are presented.

## The Spark of Creativity



Inspiration came early in life for Randall. "As a little kid my life's ambition was to grow up to be a clown. I recently discovered where that came from. I remember checking out a book in the library in the small town of Howard Lake, MN. It was, *The Book of Clowns*." Later Bruce "Charlie" Johnson sent him a copy of this book. "Now I see my inspiration to become a clown and my image of what a clown should look like came from that children's book. There was a drawing of Felix Adler the great early 1900's American clown. I have since dug

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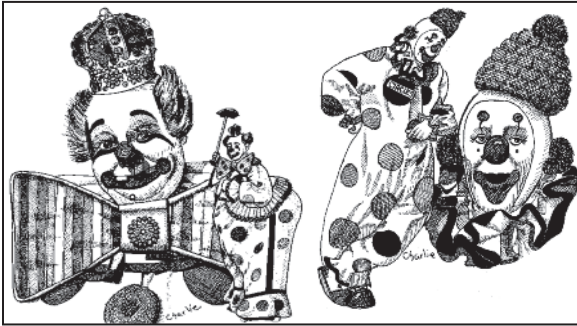


Illustration of Felix Adler and Circles from *Creativity for Entertainers Volume 2* by Bruce "Charlie" Johnson

out many more photos of Felix and see so many similarities to my Circles clown character. Spending hours with that book as a child had influenced me and I didn't realize it until recently."

Randall's mother also encouraged his creativity. "Each year the Sears catalog would arrive and my brothers and I would mark up all the stuff in the toy section that we wanted for Christmas. There were a couple of Paul Winchell's characters I always looked at with interest, but never marked it down on my wish list. My mom asked, "would you be interested in that ventriloquist puppet?" I told her I really would like it. Christmas eve the Knucklehead Smith ventriloquist puppet showed up under the tree. I spent hours and hours working on learning how to talk as a ventriloquist." This determination to learn and desire to succeed has been a huge factor in Randall's life.

"When we were kids we did not have self-working toys or electronic games and gadgets. When we played, we had to figure out what to do so the creativity came from the inventions of our minds. The toys of our generation were more primitive and you had to use your imagination to enjoy playing with them. I think kids now are missing a part of that creative process. But as parents, we can encourage it."

Randall builds most of his unique props and magic. All of his construction skills were learned out of necessity. "If I wanted to make it, I had to figure out the tools and materials necessary." He has always looked for ways to improve on magical methods and tricks. "I see something I like, but I want to improve on it and so I'd invent something

to make it better."

His funniest attempt to build something, was a large production box for a vent figure. It was unique, with hidden hinges, and involved 3 layers of masonite. When completed, he could not even lift it to carry it out of the shop – even when empty. Failure is an important part of the creative process and Randall has often failed his way to success.

Randall's main work now as a professional keynote speaker, often focusing on humor in the workplace. The companies recognize the value of humor as stress reliever, a team building tool, and an effective management skill. It is also very good for health, so employers appreciate Randall's work.

### Create a Humor File

Randall suggests that each of us should create a personal humor file. When you find something funny, put in file and when you have a stressful day and need a lift, pull out that file and relieve some of your stress. Randall says, "this is important. We have a lot of medical science now that has proven the value of humor. It decreases stress hormones, and it releases disease fighting immune cells. One set of the objective scientific studies showed that laughter would actually decrease the size of the livers. These are measurable results. The proverb, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine", has been scientifically proven to be true. God gave us this wonderful tool called humor. Often people come up to me after my presentation at a company function and tell me, "I had a splitting headache when I came in here and now it is gone!" (But sometimes they say their sides now hurt from laughing.)"

Go to the website [www.CreativelySpeaking.com](http://www.CreativelySpeaking.com) and click on "Fun Stuff" to see some magic and examples from Randall's humor file. †

**More next month from Randall on the Jack-In-the Box and A new and Improved Confetti Bucket Gag.**