



Oz Pearlman

# Mentalism

## An Interview with Oz Pearlman

scholarships or a couple of businesses I ran. I did magic on the side from age 16 to 20 when I was at the University of Michigan. I was always out there driving business, meeting event planners, working at restaurants. Doing magic at restaurants was really helpful to learning how to interact with people in a setting where they don't necessarily want you. It's kind of like a good sales tactic. Imagine you're interrupting somebody at dinner with their family or their friends, you learn human dynamics very quickly and you learn how to iterate. You learn the psychology of it.

Now I can be in a room with a movie star or with a CEO of a Fortune 100 company and I know how to relate to that person in the span of 10 or 15 seconds because that's how quickly people make a decision about you.

### How is being a mentalist different from being a magician?

They intersect in a certain way. Most mentalists started as magicians because they have the same foundation. A great analogy I like to say, especially being Jewish and telling my Jewish mother I'm quitting Wall Street to become a mentalist, is that it's kind of like being a doctor in the sense of everyone does premed, but then somebody who goes and becomes a general physician is a magician. Somebody who becomes a plastic surgeon, who specializes specifically in the hands or otolaryngology, anything of that sort, is a specialist, so this is like being a mentalist. There are very few mentalists in the world, and there's even fewer ones that are good at it and not boring because it's an inherently boring thing to just keep guessing what people are thinking.

You have to find a way to make it relatable, entertaining, unique, visual. That's really the most difficult challenge. It's not doing the performance. It's knowing how to make it appeal to an audience on an emotional level. I can do magic, but that doesn't distinguish me from everyone else. What separates me is the mentalism.

### Are there times when things go wrong?

For sure. I think that if stuff never went wrong, it wouldn't be as impressive because it's kind of like a danger act. If you go watch Evel Knievel, you're paying to see the jump clear, but you're also waiting to see if maybe something will happen and knowing that he crashed in the past and broke every bone in his body is what kind of has a little bit of an allure.

In my show, if I just get everything right, people get bored. I like it when somebody is gasping and can't figure out how what they just say happened or could be possible.

### Does mentalism work better in a more intimate setting?

I've done live shows ranging from three or four people at a dinner party for just their table to 17,000 people at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas where headline rock bands perform. The difference is simply production value.

If you do it in a room with thousands of people, what is involved there is just more production. I want big screens. I want ways to choose people out of the audience that are impossible. I have all different things that create a situation where you know it's not rigged or faked. That's key to my show, because if you think it's fake and a person is in on it, then suddenly nothing matters. You have to create a situation where it's impossible that somebody could be on it because it's random.

My sweet spot for most of the events that I do is from 200 to 800 people.

### Your passion is performing for people, but there is the business side as well. Is it hard to find the balance?

I had one of the big paradigm shifts for me after I was on *America's Got Talent*. It was just a tsunami. There's nothing that compared before or after. I couldn't handle running the business myself anymore.

At that point, I got a manager and an agent, people that give a separation where I'm not dealing with the day-to-day.

### With all of the success, do you miss the early days when it was all about the work and you were building your career?

You always miss the build. I've read numerous biographies of famous figures within the entertainment industry and they said the happiest they ever were was when their band was playing in total dives, making no money and just enjoying the "getting there," which is very cliché but it's true.

I do miss the early days when I was scrapping. I had an off-Broadway show that I had put together with me and one other guy. I got teenagers to be my ushers. We put this whole thing together and boot-strapped it. One night, Ethan Hawke came to my show and *The New York Times* came a week later in order to review it, and we didn't have publicists. We didn't have anything. We were doing this show in the back of a yoga studio. The excitement and the novelty of everything when you do that is so different than when you become more known and successful. ●

**EDITORS' NOTE** Oz Pearlman ([ozpearlman.com](http://ozpearlman.com)) is a world-class entertainer and one of the most sought after mentalists in the country. He developed an interest in magic at a young age and what started as a hobby quickly became a lifelong passion. After a couple of years spent working on Wall Street, Pearlman decided to pursue his dream and become a full-time entertainer. His client list reads like a who's who of politicians, professional athletes, A-list celebrities, and Fortune 500 companies. In the summer of 2015, Pearlman was featured on America's Got Talent. He has also appeared on a variety of national and international networks, a few of which include NBC's Late Night with Jimmy Fallon, The TODAY Show and ABC World News and has been profiled in Forbes and The New York Times. Pearlman is an avid marathon and ultra-marathon runner, having completed such grueling races as the Badwater 135 Miler, Hawaii Ironman World Championships, Western States 100 and Spartathlon.

### Did you always know you had a passion for being a mentalist?

I have done this since I was a teenager. The word "passion" is the best way to describe it. When I was 13, I saw a magician for the very first time and was blown away. It became an all-consuming obsession.

I come from a very entrepreneurial background. My folks got divorced when I was 13. I really needed to do this on the side to subsist; after graduating high school at the age of 16 my parents moved back to Israel and I had nobody to support me whatsoever.

I went to college and from that point forward paid every bill I had myself. I either had