

Imagine that you have a calendar composed of all twelve months of the year. I'd like you to tear out either the first six months or the last six months and hand it to me. Again, it's your choice. Have you torn out the first six or the last six?

The first six months.

Great! I'm going to mix them up and I'd like you to randomly pull three of them out. Which ones did you take back in your mind?

January, March, and May.

You will tear one of them up. It really is your decision. I won't tell you which one, but since I can't see them, you'll have to tell me which one you'd like to tear. Which one?

May

Now, Scott, you know there is no way I could have influenced your choices. From the beginning you have decided everything. In fact, you have more decisions to make, but first you have to tear up the month of May. Tear it into two pieces right across the center, and hand them to me. I'll hold the first couple of weeks in one hand and the last couple of weeks in the other. Now, carefully consider which piece you want to take back. I won't stop you or influence you. First or Last?

I'll take the last half, please.

Remember, each time you have chosen what to eliminate and you have left me with the first two weeks. Put your imaginary half away with the rest of the calendar. I'm going to call out the dates that I have starting either from the 1st or the 14th and stopping wherever you like. Which direction should I go? Forward or back? And on which date shall I stop?

I think you should start on the 14th and go backward to the 7th.

I can't possibly have any control. In fact, I don't want any. So let's just continue with what you have decided. Since you have taken away the 14th back to the 7th, it leaves me with only 6 dates. I'm going to hold the odd dates in one hand and the even dates in the other. Don't immediately decide but I want you to picture either the odd or the even beginning to float up into the air. Can you see them? Which ones are floating up in your mind? Odd or even? Again, it is up to you.

I am picturing the numbers 1, 3, and 5 floating out of your hand.

He has chosen 1, 3, and 5. All I want you to do is concentrate on those numbers. See them floating and swirling about. Reach up and grab one. Do you have it? You'll have to let us know which one since we can't see it.

I can see them - I've grabbed number 3.

Terrific. You have a wonderful imagination. Let's do it again. With your empty hand, grab another one. Which one?

Got one - it's a 5

I'm guessing that you only have two hands. You may correct me if I'm wrong. We won't need the 1 which you decided to leave floating. Here, I'll take it so you won't be distracted. So far, I've done exactly what you wanted me to. Hand me one of your numbers. Which one?

Ok, you can have the 5

Thank you for the gift. Now let me see if I can go over what has transpired in the past 13 hours. We started with an imaginary calendar, removed pages, someone selected a month, someone else selected odd numbers, you decided to give me the 5. This has been an international affair. And all the time, I haven't influenced a single choice. I have followed everyone's lead. Had we used the last six months of the year there is no way we could have ended up anywhere close to where we are now. In looking back, I see that the month chosen was May, and I have the 5. So out of 365 possibilities the committee has decided randomly on the date of May 5th. Steve wanted me to be honest and admit that I had no finish. Well, he's right. How could I have any finish for such a random process? The choices were beyond my control. And who could have predicted May 5th?

Happy Cinco de Mayo everyone!

--Dan Harlan

When performing Equivoque live, it is easier to get it flowing, but you have to be able to transition smoothly as the choices are made. Here are some suggestions to strengthen your technique:

1. The spectators must get a sense of being in control. You'll notice my verbal re-inforcement throughout. "We'll do it your way." "It really is your decision."
2. The spectators must get a sense of the randomness of the choices. "...randomly pull three of them out." "After all, you are just making random choices."
3. The spectators must sense that the selections are unimportant to you, but potentially important to them. "I won't stop you or influence you." "But it really doesn't matter, does it?"
4. The process must sound specific, yet allow you to interpret it meaningfully regardless of the choice. This is the most fun part for me.
"I'd like you to tear out..."
"You will tear one of them up."
"carefully consider which piece you want to take back."
"...starting either from the 1st or the 14th and stopping wherever you like."
"...picture either the odd or the even beginning to float up into the air."
"Reach up and grab one."
"Hand me one of your numbers."
5. Before the revelation, the entire procedure is re-visited with emphasis on the randomness and spectator control. This is your opportunity to psychologically influence the memory of the events. Remember that the audience won't be fortunate enough to be able to look back over the process and analyze it. You can tell them what happened, and (if you've performed well) they will believe it. Later, they'll swear you simply agreed to every choice they made. Look over the last paragraph before I went to bed to see how it is worded. I hope this demonstration was valuable to you.

--Dan Harlan