



Facilitating With Juggling

By Alan Howard

“I am blaming everything on Randy Judkins.” So says Ted Baumhauer on how he really got into juggling, and eventually merged it into a career as a trainer and workshop leader. Not training jugglers, but using juggling and object manipulation skills to facilitate learning in other business leaders and employees.

Randy Judkins — multi-talented juggler, comedian, and motivational speaker — did not provide Ted’s first exposure to juggling. In “a previous life,” Ted had been the Housing Director at Vermont Technical College. When the Bread & Puppet Theatre troupe from Montpelier came down to his school and taught juggling to Ted’s staff and students, Baumhauer himself learned the basic three-ball cascade.

But after someone asked him, “Why would you want to do that? You know, juggling is the ultimate form of procrastination,” Ted gave up, never even trying any more than the cascade... until he saw Judkins working at a conference for administrative assistants in 1993.

“He was doing a talk called ‘Full Esteem Ahead.’ It was wonderful! He came out and he juggled and he balanced, and he told stories; he just had the audience in the palm of his hand. And I thought, *What a great teaching tool! That’s what I want to be when I grow up; I want to be able to do that with groups.*”

So, at age 36, Ted was about to embark on a new phase of his professional life.

He had previously been inspired by ropes courses, activities that enhanced team-building and personal development skills. Having seen a ropes course, he went out the next day and learned how to present such seminars himself. “And then Randy came along and I thought, *Wow, another fun teaching method.* So that’s why I started learning how to juggle.”

Ted started asking who was the best juggler in the area, looking to get somebody to teach a non-credit class at University of Vermont, where he was currently employed. He kept hearing about “this Tom Murphy guy,” so he called Murph and hired him to teach a class, mainly so Ted could take it himself. “Then I strong-armed about twelve other people into the class, so I wouldn’t have to cancel it,” he laughs.

Although Ted says he was “just stumbling through the three-ball cascade” for the first days of the three-week course, he gradually caught on and steadily improved. He recalls, “Murph taught us how to break down tricks, and that connected so well with the teaching I ended up doing later. He taught us to learn the beginning; learn how to start the trick, and to start in the trick, like to throw under-the-leg on your first throw. Once you can do that, then learn the ending — so you’re juggling and you throw the trick, then stop, no matter what. You learn the beginning, you learn the ending, and over time you make yourself put the two

together.” You work your way up from doing a move every third throw, to every other, to every one, and then learn the same thing with the other hand. “It was such a great concept, that you don’t have to try to do the whole trick at once; you break it into parts.”

It wasn’t long before Ted started using juggling in his own presentations. He was already leading classes in topics such as stress management, aside from his full-time position in Continuing Education at the University. With a Doctorate in Education, he had previously worked as a career counselor and general psychology instructor. His extracurricular training classes were earning him half-again as much as his salary at the time. When his wife’s med school studies led her to a residency in Milwaukee for a year, Ted decided to take the plunge and not look for a full-time job when the couple left Vermont in July 1994.

Leaving Vermont then seemed like terrible timing, since the IJA was going to Burlington just a month later. “I felt completely ripped off! But I convinced a hospital I’d been working with to fly me back from Milwaukee, because they had to have a training right around the IJA timeframe — and they went for it! So I flew back and saw little bits of the Festival; I remember watching the five-ball endurance competition and being completely amazed *that many* people in the world who could juggle five balls were in Burlington, Vermont,

and what it looked like. I saw Randy Judkins again in the big show, and I took the three-day Teaching With Juggling class with Dave Finnigan. That's what I really stayed around for, was to take the class and to teach at the Boys & Girls Club with Dave."

Back in Milwaukee, Ted had picked up his first local training job, teaching teachers about leadership, facilitating, and problem-solving. His career has been a series of fortuitous accidents and coincidences. A call to Continuing Education at Marquette University just before the director left brought Ted a consultant job for the department, which then made a profit for the first time since their inception, 42 years earlier. Marquette later hired him to do twice-yearly training classes, which led to other companies seeking him out, putting Baumhauer on their roster, and passing recommendations on to still more companies. "It's kind of neat," he says, "to get a call out of the blue, asking if you can fly out to teach groups in Chicago, or Davenport, or Australia..."

On his website, Baumhauer calls what he does "EnterTrainment." He says, "It's hopefully entertaining, and yet it is training, and it's hopefully different enough that people will remember it, which is the reason for using the juggling to make the points."

Most of his work nowadays involves speaking to businesses, teacher groups, police officers, hospitals... It doesn't matter what the group manufactures or what service they provide; Ted's messages can be applied equally well to all manner of people working together. His seminars, workshops, and speeches largely focus on group interaction, interpersonal dynamics, and problem-solving. And he uses juggling not only to get attention but to make his points more relatable to his participants. "They begin to either get the message or I can begin to break the ice and the resistance they probably have coming into a training."

For example, Baumhauer uses a ball-spinning routine to get people to understand that there's a difference between knowing how to do a job and knowing how to teach or lead somebody else. Starting out by saying, "I'm with the Ball Spinning Company. You've probably heard of us; we're the BS Company; we really know our... stuff," he uses the ball tricks as analogies to working your way up in a company, showing how he was taught to do the ball work. Spinning a ball is fine, but if you can do more tricks, you'll get more money; the more you can do, the more the company will pay. After showing arm-curls and behind-the-back transfers, Ted asks, "What would a company do with an employee who started doing more and better



Demonstrating how hard it is to do your own work if your team can't handle theirs.



Do a job well, and you'll be given more to do.

work?" They would give that person more work! So he gets a second ball, and once he figures out how to do two and realizes he'll be recognized and rewarded for his work, he is willing "to bend over backwards" for the company — resulting in a two-ball-spin back-rollover.

"And what would any normal company do next? They'd give you more work. So I get a third ball." Success with spinning the three balls, with the aid of a mouthstick, gets applause, but leads to the usual question: what would the company do next? "Well, they'd give you a staff. So I bring a couple people up, I teach them the same way I was taught, and tell them to get to work!" At this point, Ted has only two balls, his workload reduced since he could delegate one of the balls to his staff, but they are unable to handle it.

"I can do my work and they can't do theirs, so I start yelling at them, because they're making me look bad. 'Alright,' I say, 'I'll get it started for you. Give me a finger... not *the* finger, *a* finger.' So I put a ball on the first person's finger and I turn to go help the second one, and by the time I get that person going the first person has dropped it, and I end up running around trying to get their balls started and get *their* job covered, and I don't even get back to my own job."

After every session, at least one person comes up to Ted and says, "that is exactly what happens" at their job. Just because you know how to do it doesn't mean you can teach it. After the demonstration, Ted is able to talk about that transition from being a star performer to having other people doing the job and reporting to you. The session brings

laughs, as well as lessons.

Ted usually presents his training classes to groups of fifteen to twenty, but his keynote speeches can be delivered to audiences of hundreds. One memorable event was his presentation for the Wisconsin Asphalt Convention. "I was the only non-asphalt speaker of the day. There were 294 men and six women, dressed in everything from three-piece suits and gold chains to orange-hooded sweatshirts, 'because I go to the deer camp every year after this, juggle-boy. Don't be taking too long; you got 30 minutes, not 31.'" But the session turned out to be fun, and he taught the attendees how to juggle.

As with the other skills he imparts, Ted does not teach juggling so much by example as by having the students discover the route themselves, as Ted poses open-ended questions to them. Instructing volunteers in scarf-juggling, he gets them doing it in five minutes — telling them what they will be doing and what success will look like, saying they will do six throws and six catches, but never tossing a prop himself. At the end of such a session, groups often ask if Ted can really juggle himself or not. He explains that as a leader, it's not so important that he can do the skill; he needs to know about the skill and how to tell if someone is doing it well or not, but he does not have to do it better himself, or even do it at all, to help people see how to get to the next step themselves.

"I've gotten a lot of fights about that one," Ted says. "There are some people I don't know if I've ever convinced."

In practice, he can juggle seven balls, six rings, and "at times can manage five clubs, although that one seems to be approaching some sort of limits. I don't now if it's a physical or mental limit, but it's a limit!" One trick he has become known for is the "pole transfer" move, in which he balances a stick on his chin with a ball at the top; another stick on his forehead is leaned against the ball and, by tilting his head, the ball is transferred from one balanced perch to the other. He had seen the move done by Barnaby, and then by C.J. Smith in the IJA Juniors competition. Having gone from never seeing it before to seeing it twice in a short time, Ted was inspired to buy some PVC pipes and learn the trick himself. It took him three months before he succeeded at it, despite the back pain involved in his learning process.

Even when he is not leading training sessions, Ted's shows are still educational. His standard juggling show "is generally built around juggling being hard work. It's not quite like Rodney Dangerfield, we 'don't get any respect,' but it is hard work and people don't necessarily appreciate it."

His show starts with a routine featuring a ball, mouthstick, and ring, showing all the different components of what Ted likes to do in juggling. Balancing, spinning, juggling... "And since I can't make up my mind, I thought I'd just show you everything I can do, all at once." Comic routines follow with three-to-five balls, including a kick-up of three balls at once — "I'm going to catch one in each hand... uh, don't do the math." His ball-spinning routine elicits photos taken by an onstage volunteer, who always captures the worst possible moments and angles. Ted then gets them spinning a two-ball stack on their finger.

Yes, the volunteer does the double-deck spin. "I like that they end up being successful," Ted says. "I don't usually do a two-ball stack in my show, so they end up doing more than I can do." He uses this same trick in his business classes, again emphasizing that a good leader can get his team to do something they did not think possible, even if he might not do it himself.



Ted Baumhauer, combining juggling and balancing to make a point.

Ted balances atop a rolling piece of pipe to present his three-club routine, and generally concludes his show with the pole transfer trick. As opposed to the corporate training routines, the audiences for his straight juggling show often include kids, and the transfer trick allows Baumhauer to make a point to them about setting high goals. Even if they might have seen him drop during the show, they've seen him pick the item up and keep trying, continuing to set higher goals for himself.

Like the kids, his corporate clients appreciate his approach as much as his information. Ted says, "With the crazy stuff I do — the juggling and sometimes balloons and a handcuff escape and the ropes games — I've been told, 'Don't ever try to explain what you do on the phone, because they'll never think you'll get away with it.' But I do!" ●

Making Connections

By Ted Baumhauer

We can only learn what we don't know through what we do know. Taking a skill like juggling and using it to create a teachable moment is obviously about making connections and, just as obvious, it isn't a new idea. Finding and making good connections isn't always easy, but it is a skill and it can be learned.

I want to share with you a way I find those connections and how I organize them to create a presentation. My presentations tend to be about leadership and teams, but these methods will work equally well for any topic.

Finding the connections between your topic and a juggling skill sometimes comes in one of those blinding moments of inspiration. But most of the time, they don't, so we have to go looking for them. Even the connections that come to me in those moments of inspiration are usually half-baked and need a lot of additional work to flesh them out.

Whether you have a clue or not as to how your topic is like a juggling skill, start by writing down why you think they are similar. Look for as many obvious relationships and similarities as you can think of, then look some more. The ones that aren't so obvious are often the most surprising and best. Don't edit yourself. At this point you are interested in quantity, not quality. Quality will come later. In this step, you want as many ideas to work with as you can get.

Forcing two seemingly dissimilar ideas together and thinking of them as similar is a technique called "Brutethink." We have learned dozens, maybe hundreds, of forced pairings in our lives, such as "salt and pepper." When we think of one of the matched pair, we have learned to automatically think of the other. That's what we're trying to do in our presentations — create an automatic link. If we create a memorable link, our message will stick.

Brutethink is like a tetherball setup. At first the two ideas are far apart, like the ball from the pole. If we can make our mind hold the two together like the line between the ball and pole, our brain begins to wrap itself around them until the two become one. When I learned to juggle while balancing an object, it was the same experience. At first I was trying to do two things at the same time. Then it was explained to me that I had to make myself think about doing just one trick and to force the two skills into one. Over time, and with practice, that's

what happened for me. It became one trick, not two done simultaneously. In the book *Thinkertoys*, Michael Michalko expertly explains Brutethink, and dozens of other ways to generate new ideas. If you are looking for creativity tools, get a copy of this book.

Forcing two seemingly dissimilar ideas together and thinking of them as similar is a technique called "Brutethink."

Once you have your list of connections, you'll want to review your list, pick out the best ideas, and organize your presentation. We've all heard it before: "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em; tell 'em; tell 'em what you told 'em." It is good advice, it's just missing a little specificity. Lucky for me the book *Think on Your Feet* found me. In it, Kenneth Wydro explains the PREP Method for presenting almost anything. PREP stands for: Point of View (What's your opinion?); Reasons (Why?); Examples; Point of View.

The PREP Method organizes the talk and provides an opportunity to explain your opinion or points. Inserting a juggling skill into the examples section is a great way to bring your message to life and to show the connections you have found. That's what will make the presentation one the audience won't forget.

These two techniques together will work for any topic. Using Brutethink I have found connections between the most unlikely of pairs; for example, ball spinning and how good organizations ruin great employees, and becoming a leader and juggling on a slackline. PREP helped me organize the connections to create some unusual and hopefully memorable presentations.

Juggling is relatively novel to most people, so it is a great vehicle to make your presentation interesting. Even if your audience is familiar with juggling, it is a good bet they probably have not seen it in a presentation or talk. ●