

HYPNOTISM, FROM START TO FINISH

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Richard Barker is “the Incredible Hypnotist.” His name shimmers on marquee of old movie theaters, fairgrounds and cruise lines.

“I love my own name being in lights,” Barker said.

Based in Orlando, Fla., Barker performs all over the world and has been teaching stage hypnosis for 14 years.



BARKER

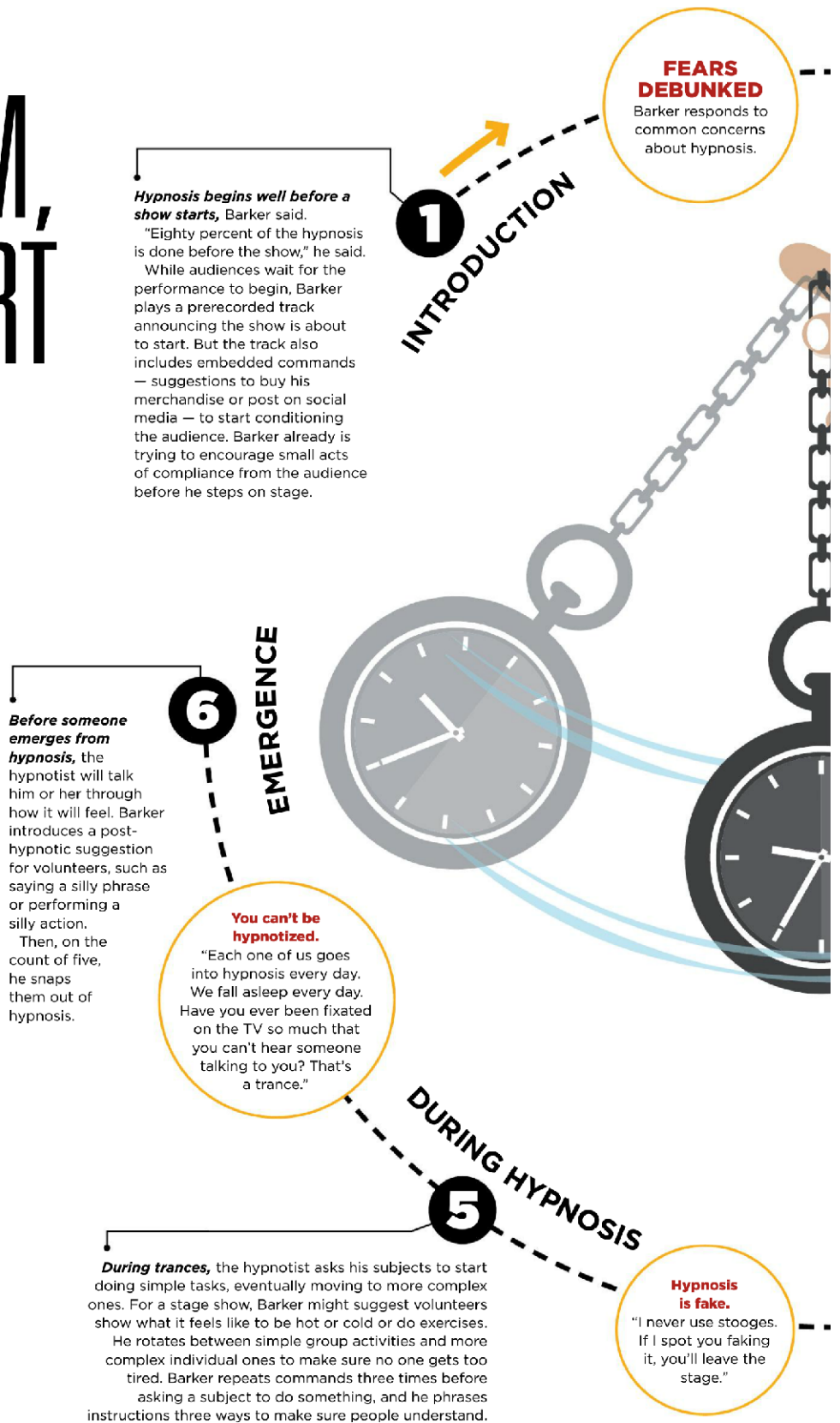
He started his career in the British Army, serving for seven years with the Royal Green Jackets, then

became a bobby patrolling the streets of Kent, where he was raised. He was promoted to detective but grew frustrated with suspects who refused to answer his questions. So he studied neurolinguistic programming, a communication approach concerned with patterns and thoughts, to get suspects to talk.

“I honed my (hypnosis) skills through my police work,” Barker said. “If you can get into the mind of a criminal, you can get that ‘right to remain silent’ into them singing like a bird.”

Barker eventually started doing hypnosis on the side, then turned it into a full-time gig.

He recently met at the Orleans with 12 students who traveled from across the United States, Canada and New Zealand to share with them the art of stage hypnosis. Here’s some of what they learned.



During the pre-talk, the hypnotist outline what will happen during the show. He addresses misconceptions and tries to ease any fears people might have about hypnosis. The goal is to get "complete and ultimate compliance," Barker said. There are important safety considerations the hypnotist should address during the pre-talk, such as ensuring people aren't chewing gum and don't have dangerous objects in their pockets. The hypnotist also should inform the audience members their hypnotic experience will leave when they leave the auditorium. The hypnotist then will ask for volunteers. Barker typically instructs audience members to run to the stage as quickly as they can. That way he ensures he gets only volunteers who truly want to be hypnotized.

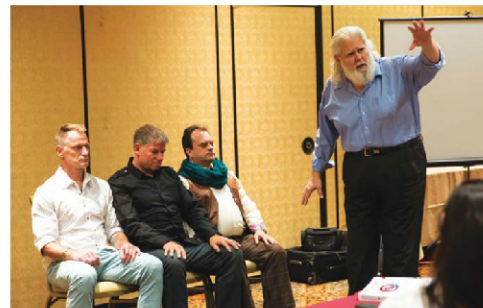
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PRE-TALK

Hypnosis is magic.

"Harry Potter is not going to come on stage and zap you into hypnosis."

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► **Doc Stevens, of Detroit**, conducts a hypnosis session during a stage-hypnosis training seminar at the Orleans. (CHRISTOPHER DeVARGAS/STAFF)

INDUCTION

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At this point, the hypnotist plays peaceful, mellow music. His goal is to make sure people are relaxed and following his commands.

The first step of induction is fixating on an object. Though the classic image is a hypnotist swinging a pendulum, most hypnotists wear a ring, carry a pocket watch or choose an object nearby to have people stare at. Indoors, it could be a lamp or an exit sign. Outdoors, it might be the top of a pole or a tree.

The hypnotist instructs the person to breathe in and out, saying every sound and action will help him or her relax. Noises add to the sensation. Once the subject has begun to relax, the hypnotist performs a pattern interrupt, getting the person to obey a command before returning to a state of

relaxation. Barker said he typically prefaces the command by saying, "In a moment, but not yet, I will ask you to open your eyes." He often says it multiple times before actually performing the pattern interrupt.

"One, two and three," Barker says, snapping on three. "Open your eyes."

The goal is to make sure the hypnotist has closed off the person's critical mind and is going straight into the subconscious.

Next the hypnotist says, "The more you try to open your eyes, the more you fail. And the more you fail, the more you try again" — this is known as the eye lock.

Barker said this step helps the hypnotist determine whether the subject is obeying.

Another way Barker tests his subjects is with an introduction. If the person reaches out to shake Barker's hand before Barker reaches out to shake the subject's, he knows the person is not under.

Hypnosis will make you do things you don't want to do and reveal your secrets.

"I'm not going to make you do anything you wouldn't ordinarily do."

DEEPENERS & FRACTIONATION

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The hypnotist might use deepeners to put the person even further in a trance. Deepeners are routines that convince people to fall into a deeper hypnotic sleep. Common deepeners are imaginary sleep dust, sleep guns with sleep bullets, sleep arrows and sleep boomerangs.

Deepeners can be good for subjects in a stage show because it gives them a chance to rest. "You've got to be really nice to your volunteers," Barker said. "You need to show you care, because they're sharing their personalities with you."

Fractionation, on the other hand, occurs when a hypnotist repeats a routine in a pattern to get the person to sink deeper and deeper into hypnosis. One way to do it is to have the person open then close his or her eyes repeatedly to sink deeper back into sleep.



► **Master hypnotist Richard Barker** demonstrates the proper way to interact with volunteers during a stage-hypnosis training seminar at the Orleans. (CHRISTOPHER DeVARGAS/STAFF)

IS IT SAFE?

Barker compared hypnosis to playing roulette.

He said he never would suggest anything dangerous but acknowledged there could be some unpredictability with hypnosis.

Some people can experience an "ab reaction," or abnormal reaction, to a common suggestion. One time, Barker said, he suggested a volunteer imagine relaxing on a beach, and she became terrified. He later found out she had seen a friend get attacked by a shark and was frightened of beaches.

"It does happen," Barker said. "It's just a numbers game. You hit that raw nerve, and there it is."

There are other rules, too. Hypnotists shouldn't do shows in the rain because someone could slip and fall. And shows shouldn't be performed outdoors in lightning or thunder.