Most lawyers would be insulted if you accused them of having a trick up their sleeves. These guys are miffed if you accuse them of not having more than one trick up their sleeves. They not only admit to sleight of hand, they will show it to you and happily tell you how they did it.

This is not to say their professional honesty should be questioned. By day, Simon Aronson '73 is a respected attorney at Lord Bissell & Brook. John Bannon '91 is equally well thought of as a litigator for Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom. Michael Brandwein '78 is known internationally as a speaker and consultant in education, management, and communication. But at a moment’s notice, these Law School graduates put aside all thoughts of litigation, and enter the realm of prestidigitation.

Aronson, Bannon, and Brandwein are magicians.

**Exhibit A & B**

"First of all, let’s be precise about John Bannon and myself," Aronson is quick to clarify, "John and I are inventors of tricks. We are the creators of magic tricks for other magicians. John and I deal in what is known as ‘close-up magic.’ Magic is divided into a lot of different areas, the word ‘illusion’ is generally reserved for the big stuff—elephants or people disappearing. ‘Close-up’ is used for the tricks for which you can carry your props in a brief case: like cards, coins, cups and balls. John and I deal mainly with cards, but not exclusively."

Both men started in magic at an early age. Aronson grew up in New York City near the Play Land Amusement Park, where he spent three summers running the magic store. "I worked my way through high school doing birthday parties and county fairs on the weekends. During Law School, my wife Virginia ('75) and I even performed a mind-reading act. I never stopped."

He has published many books on tricks, including Card Ideas, Shuffle-bored, and The Aronson Approach. His sixth book, Bound to Please, a compilation of earlier works, was released this fall.

It was through the literature of magic that Aronson and Bannon became acquainted. Bannon, who started in magic in high school, had already published his second book on magic by the time he graduated from the Law School. He went on to publish other works, including Impossibilia, and Smoke and Mirrors. Both men were already well-respected in the field by the time they actually met—appropriately enough—in a magic shop. The two soon became friends as well as members of the same 'session' group.

"A session is a group of magicians that gather to brainstorm," Bannon explains. "One member will present an idea, and the others will kick it around a bit, adding to it, and making suggestions to improve upon it. Our session meets every Saturday afternoon. It's a closed group of certain magicians that we all respect. This particular session has been going on for twenty-five years. It used to be under the tutelage of one of the great card magicians, a fellow named Marlo, a true Chicago legend. A lot of tricks emerge that evolve within sessions."
The inspiration for magic tricks is hard to pin down. Usually, it begins with visualizing the final effect the magician is after. That is then followed by hours of brain-wracking needed to determine how to achieve that effect. Aronson says that the mixture of "effect" with a strong current of underlying logic is what magic is all about—as well as other things.

"You see, magic on the appearance is not intellectual. It's fantasy. It's wonder. It's wishes. It's freeing yourself from the bounds of logic. But underneath, it's intensely rational because you have to know everything there is about what you can and cannot do, the limits of your methods, and tons about the psychology of spectators: how they attend, how they look, how they perceive, and what they remember.

"I find that is how magic relates to law. Basically, what a lawyer is trying to do is present facts to an audience, using reason and emotion, in order that those facts are perceived in a certain way. Some become important, some become irrelevant. That's what a magician is doing. In that way there is a strong similarity."

**"What a lawyer is trying to do is present facts to an audience, using reason and emotion, in order that those facts are perceived in a certain way. That's what a magician is doing. In that way there is a strong similarity."**

Michael Brandwein has long been comfortable in the world of magic. At one point in time, his parents thought he might be too comfortable. When asked what he wanted for his eighteenth birthday, Brandwein told his parents he wanted a hospital-regulation strait jacket. His father said, "You'd have to be crazy!"

"Well, Dad," Brandwein replied, "that's the whole point."

Nonetheless, his parents encouraged his interest. Brandwein continued his magic and today works full time as a speaker and teacher, using his magic as an educational and visual aid.

"I often use magic in teaching because it not only increases attention but also helps explain the concept. If I am conducting a program for, say, staff training and I want to talk to them about understanding 'process,' magic is a great model of how easy it is to forget that there is a trick to something. Showing people magic and demonstrating it to them helps me explain some otherwise abstract things."

Brandwein began magic at the age of ten and by twelve he was performing at parties. While in Law School, he performed in all the undergraduate shows all three years. "There were three of us—Dick Craswell ('77) played piano and Chuck Price ('79) juggled. I was best known for the strait jacket routine. I used a real strait jacket, like Houdini, who was famous for this."

Though he also performed for numerous corporate and public events during his Law School years, it was never the revenue it generated that interested Brandwein.

"The least important aspect was that magic provided some income, but I was never performing for that reason. Law school made my brain race at speeds I never imagined. Magic enhanced my thinking. It really helped me to focus my
thoughts.

"But I also believe that it helped more than my brain, it helped my heart. I think that's very important. Helping people to have fun, especially laugh, brings me enormous joy and I found that I needed that during Law School. It helped me keep up with the emotional part of me as well as the analytical part. It helped me put a lot of the stress and tension into context. For example, during the first exam period one of our professors assigned some additional reading during exam week and everyone freaked out. At that point, I wasn't able to take much more of it. I put my books down, put on my coat, and crossed the Midway to the Wyler Children's Hospital and did magic for some of the children. That helped me a lot. When I got back to the dorm, I was able to put what I had thought to be earth-shattering into context because some of the children with whom I had been playing were unlikely to be playing anything six months from then.

"It's interesting then that one of my favorite types of magic is escapes. For you might say, indeed, magic was my escape."

After leaving the Law School, Brandwein was a litigator for nine years, making partner before he was faced with a decision.

"All this time I had been doing part-time teaching, speaking, and consulting. By word of mouth, requests grew to a point that I had to choose between two full-time professions. I decided to stop practicing law and go into speaking and teaching, because I felt I could have the widest possible impact on people by doing that. I always make clear that fact that I didn't leave law because of any dissatisfaction with it, I was just in the unusual position of having the opportunity to use everything I learned in several different fields and combine them into this one job that I believe has a greater impact."

Now Brandwein lectures and conducts training seminars for persons in a wide variety of areas: education, business, social services, health care, and management. While working with people who deal with everyone from pre-schoolers to the elderly, his subjects range from communications and interpersonal skills, to persuasion and problem-solving.

All the while, he was using his magic; for throughout the years, Brandwein never lost sight of the fact that magic can be a tool—for learning and inspiration.

"I was always afraid in Law School, and ashamed of my fear, until I read that Houdini himself was always afraid, and then I realized it was okay to be scared and intimidated, I just needed to make good choices. I wrote down a personal message to myself back then that I still have. It reads 'A coward is not a person who fears but one who fails to act wisely when afraid.' Magic helped me with my studies, my three years in Law School, and with my fears throughout my life."

He makes sure it continues to help others as well.