

# LARRY HASS

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## On Teaching Magic

*[This is a lightly revised version of my video blog, Cutting Through the Noise, delivered on September 6, 2016. A print version of it appeared in my book with Eugene Burger, Teaching Magic: A Book for Students and Teachers of the Art (2017), pages 52-53.]*

Good evening! My name is Larry Hass and I am back to cut through the noise! Our topic this month is Teaching Magic, a topic that's near and dear to my heart. This is one of the primary things I do... in life!

But what exactly is teaching? We all have had teachers, but we have also had lots of people talk to us who didn't really teach at all. I have always been deeply concerned about this issue—about clarifying what real teaching is so that each of us can get more and better education, and also so we can avoid those people who have other agendas.

So, let's start with an easy example. When I am performing magic, I am not teaching. Performing is not equivalent to teaching, an audience is not a classroom; these are fundamentally different activities with different goals. I think this is fairly easy to see.

And selling something isn't teaching either. When I am trying to sell something to someone, I am using all my powers of persuasion to get them to buy something or buy into something. And that's not teaching either. Indeed, the best teachers in my experience are doing something like the opposite of that.

Okay, then, performing isn't equivalent to teaching, and selling isn't equivalent to teaching. Standing in front of a room and talking or speaking isn't necessarily teaching either. Why? Because in my life I have listened to endless speeches and talks that failed to educate me. They may have imparted information, facts, or data, and that can be a good thing, but passing along information isn't really teaching. No, no, the real teachers in my life, the people who have genuinely educated me about something, are fewer and farther between than talking heads or information providers.

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By now you might be wondering: What is teaching? Who are the teachers? Well, after a long career as an educator of both philosophy and magic, I would offer this for your consideration. I would suggest a teacher is someone who sees you to some extent as the distinct person you are and tries to help you achieve your goals or your potential. This is so important, so I'll say it again: a teacher is someone who takes the time to see us as we are and says things to help us fulfill our own goals.

With this working definition in place you can now test it for yourself. Think carefully and clearly about the real, wise teachers in your life. Didn't they do this very thing? Didn't they take the time to recognize you and acknowledge you? Didn't they try to help you improve and succeed in your own measure? And now think about all the talking heads, false teachers, indoctrinators, or information providers telling you what they think you should do, what they think you should know, or what they think you should buy. The difference between teaching and all of those behaviors is all the difference in the world.

Real teachers are crucially important in our lives, and real education is one of the great human goods. So I hope to have said enough tonight to encourage you to seek out and spend time with real teachers of magic wherever they may be—people who will take the time to see you as you are and who will try to help you meet your goals. They certainly exist out there: you already have had real teachers in your life, and they exist in magic as well.

There is an old nasty saying you've probably heard that goes: "Those who can't do, teach." This may get a chuckle, but it doesn't take much thought to realize it's false and idiotic. No, no, the proper saying is this:

**Those who are concerned to *help others do*, teach!**