

Competition Perspectives

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In my last article, I addressed the issue of perspectives, specifically pertaining to ISCA events. For my purpose here, I'd like to write about my perspectives of competitions at ISCA events as well as other Regional clown events. While the two articles are certainly related, I think this separate article might allow me to be thorough without being boring. OK. Let's get into it.

First of all, for those of you who have never competed as a clown, I suggest that you consider doing so. It is a way to challenge yourself and try to bring your skills to another level and also be compared with your peers. You will be able to see others give their best while you do the same, all in front of an audience consisting of many friends and family. And, for your efforts, you might even bring home an award for your mantle.

Competition is an excellent way to improve your clowning skills and to learn about our craft. And, as is with so many other activities in life, the proper preparation and mental attitude is essential for ensuring the success of this endeavor. How does a clown prepare for competition? What is the best attitude? Let's consider the following.

Long before any competition, a smart clown will take the time to make some very important decisions. While many of you will think of these as obvious decisions, they are none-the-less, important and oftentimes neglected.

Do I have a copy of the rules for competition and am I aware of all of these rules?

What category will I compete in? Whiteface? Auguste? Tramp or Hobo? Character?

Do I have clean, fresh make-up and application implements?

Paper towels? Brushes and sponges? Powder? Toothpicks?

Is my wig in shape? Picked? Brushed? Styled? Fitted properly to best frame my face?

Is its color coordinated as to not blend with my costume and to enhance the total look?

Is my costume clean and neat? Pressed? With name tag? ISCA or Regional patch displayed?

Are the shoes clean and polished? Laces looking new and crisp? Socks clean and bright?

Do I have the accessories to provide the complete look?

Clean gloves? Glove extenders if necessary? Clown hat? Clown tie? Character prop?

If you are considering the Tramp or Hobo categories, some of the previous suggestions might have to be a little different. New and crisp would not be appropriate. Bright might not be the best option. While clean is always appropriate, clean looking might not be the best option. For example, white gloves on a tramp would not be as "in character like" as gray or "off white" gloves and ripped or torn gloves might look better than crisp, new gloves. Of course, this is only my personal opinion and not necessarily the opinion of any judges.

Let's assume that the category options are decided upon and you are well equipped to handle the makeup and costume portions of the competition. What's next?

Have you registered? Have you made reservations for transportation? Hotel? Are you planning to attend the awards banquet? Have you made the necessary reservations for you and your family or guests? Have you considered the appropriate dress for the awards banquet? If you or your friends win, are you prepared to take pictures? Are you planning to bring the details of the competition back to your Unit or Shrine Temple? Do you have the paper with pen, and camera with film to handle these? It sure is better to think about these items beforehand and come prepared.

During the competition, it is entirely possible that some other competitors might actually be better than you. It is a wonderful idea to be able to take notes on your fellow competitors. They might have a makeup application technique you might like to learn or a costume accessory that might give you an idea. Competitions are a wonderful place to get some ideas and improve yourself. I'm not suggesting at all that you "steal" ideas or props. I'm suggesting that you might be able to get ideas to create, improvise and eventually come up with your own, original "take" on an otherwise, already known idea. Ultimately, you may begin to think differently about this honorable craft, become a better clown and possibly bring home a Top Ten Award or better.

How many of you can remember going to a competition and coming home with a new spin on a parade gimmick or a new skit for your circus. Have you learned a new make-up technique? Learned how to make your "best pose" with more energy and enthusiasm? Learned a new balloon or magic trick? How about watching and listening to another talented clown as he deals with a difficult audience. Have you ever learned a new technique regarding the handling of a different type audience? Let's remember that there are some wonderful experiences at these get-togethers and not everything is dependant on carrying home a trophy.

As far as the actual competition is concerned, there are some things that you should consider as being very important. Since the competitors are being judged, it follows that the competitors should be seen and heard without distraction. If you know the audience, please convey to them that their support is certainly appreciated but their respect is required. They should keep their talking to a minimum and obviously at a low level. Your assistance in communicating this would be appreciated by everyone.

The audience is there to support their families and friends. They laugh and cheer along with the rest of us. When the competition begins and many people come into the room, conversations can be distracting. The more people in the room – the more noise level. It's important to remember that even though you are keeping your voice down, when others are also "keeping their voices down," the total or actual noise level is understandably disturbing to many. Therefore, if you need to talk, try to bring it outside the competition arena and remember how you would like to be respected when you are on the stage.

Laughter and applause are always welcome, and showing support and appreciation for the preparation and effort of our clowns makes us all a family. This feeling of belonging to an association, which prides itself on being happy, friendly and welcoming, is what initially drew me and many of my clown friends to this business. I'm very proud to be a part of it.

Now, let's think about attitude.

Over the years, I've heard many comments encompassing the positive and negative aspects of competition. On the positive side, comments are common about the location of the competition, the facilities and the audience. I've heard about the quality of the competitors and the performances in the skits. When there are children present for the competitions, the competitors are usually very happy. The more audience that is present raises the happiness level for everyone. Also, the more vendors who travel to our competitions with more stuff will usually create more joy.

On the negative side, I hear about the low scores from the judges and how long the competition lasts. I often hear after the competition is over that the judges were not writing comments or not explaining the comments in enough detail. And there are comments revolving around "ignorance of the rules." "I didn't know why those yellow lines were taped around the competition area." "Nobody told me that rule." "Do I need to wear an ISCA patch?" And there are many other comments as well. Taking the time to

familiarize yourself with the rules will take care of a lot of problems in advance. Each region and ISCA have their own rules. See an officer from the respective region or organization for the necessary rules. ISCA competition rules are available in the website or from the ISCA officers.

As for judges comments, I believe they really do try. But in the interest of the competitors, I'll offer my assistance in this area and will speak to the judges in future competitions. I believe the competitors need feedback if they are to improve. But remember, there is another side to this. When the judges take the time to write comments, the competition will slow down. It is difficult to have it both ways. Therefore, if you have a suggestion regarding this, please share it with us. Perhaps we can come up with a remedy to allow for some comments and still keep the competition moving at a good pace.

As for judging and winning, it is important to remember that for each category, there is one winner. Therefore, there are usually several non-winners. For a Shrine competition, that should mean the following: One person was better than the rest on that particular day, in the opinions of those particular judges. The rest of the competitors should have been entertained by their friends and brothers and hopefully have learned some new tricks to add to their personal knowledge of clowning.

Finally, let's remember that the ISCA team does a great job. Let's take a minute to explore their efforts. ISCA coordinates the event, gets the rooms for meetings, competitions, banquets, meals, trophies and many other things. They get the vendors who bring the great stuff to buy. These vendors supply us with noses, socks, ties, wigs, hats and all sorts of tricks. These vendors usually bail us out when we arrive and discover that we forgot something important. They get the judges and make all the necessary plans for the competition and banquet. They handle the announcing, stage management, pictures, promotions and they collectively put on an entertaining and educational show.

A competition director is needed to enforce rules, referee decisions and see the event through from conception to conclusion. Snacks are usually requested, along with water or soft drinks. Chairs are needed. Competitors usually need a pen or marker, a patch and a pin to attach it. Some skit performers always seem to think that props should be provided for them. A chair or two, a table, an easel, some feathers, some water, a cup, a broom, a vacuum, a towel and other various paraphernalia are often requested at the last minute. Don't be naïve and think that "SOMEHOW, everything works out." The ISCA Officers try to accommodate the competitors, even though the responsibilities for these items belong to the competitors. It's because of the dedication and hard work of a talented team of experienced and enthusiastic officers and volunteers that these competitions take place with really, very few problems and usually, everything gets done.

Well, those are some of my perspectives on competitions. There's a lot to it. If I've missed anything, please let me know. As a member of the ISCA Team, I'm happy to hear from you and work to improve our great organization. Thank you for your attention and "Keep Smiling."

"Do-No"

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