from Clown Alley (Feb/Mar 2004)
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Through the years, clowns in one form or another have always been bringing smiles to peoplesx faces world wide. From the floppy hats, wired hair, bright eyes, big smiles, oversized coats, pants two sizes to small, feet bigger than anyone could imagine, you put it together, you have the basics for a clown. Ok, some clowns have a stiff hat, little or no hair, sad eyes, a frown, jacket that might not fit with tatters here and there, pants with holes and patches, shoes that might or might not fit, more than likely with holes in the sole if not in the boot. You get the picture, someone that is down on their luck but yet able to entertain. Whether you are the happy clown or the sad tramp/hobo, you have your special way to make someone smile and be happy, even if for a few short seconds.

However, what if every clown looked the same? Same hat, same costume design, same make-up design, same techniques, same skits, same shoes? It would take away the funniness that is for sure. What ever happened to the old code that you never copy another clown? I know there is no written code about this, but I know it is a verbal code passed on year to year from clown to clown. Be original, donx t copy another clown.

Donx t get me wrong, I believe everyone out there has seen a picture of a clown; if not the clown himself and say, x Wow, I really like that; I think I will try it!x But how far do you go? Do you copy just a portion of it, say maybe just the hat; the mouth design; the entire face; the coat; the entire costume; or do you go all the way and try to be as much like that clown as you can be? Yes, that would be the ultimate flattery for that clown that you liked him so much that you want to be like him, but come on, where is the originality in that? There is no challenge at all to becoming your own personality by copying either. Just imagine, what if every clown looked like Emmett Kelly; Lou Jacobs; Frosty Little; or Bozo? You pick the one you want, because there can only be one if we all decide to do this.

As years have passed, just like anything else in life, things change and technology advances. With this in mind, there is no real need to copy anyone as a clown. There are limitless ideas out there to help you in clowning. Be bold, take a chance. Design and make your own hat instead of buying one. Instead of purchasing a pre-designed costume, design your own with the assistance of a professional if needed and then make it. BE ORIGINAL. Instead of copying a face design, sit down in front of the mirror and study your face. Find the features that stick out and enhance those with the use of make-up. BE ORIGINAL. Just like the costume, if you are going to buy new shoes, work with the crafter of those fine shoes so they are original for you. Instead of taking a picture of shoes and sending that to the crafter to make these shoes, tell them you like this shoe style (Canoe, Lolli-Pop, etc), but could you change this and add this or delete this or use these colors. BE ORIGINAL.

As new clowns come in and join your unit, sit down with them and work with them. Sure, you show them pictures of the guys in your unit and they get ideas. Enforce in them, these are the clowns that have worked hard to become who they are, donx t copy their ideas. Instead, maybe take bits and pieces from a few of them and then adjust them to fit you. If you do this, you become ORIGINAL and your own personality starts to shine. However, that does not mean copy this face, copy that costume, copy their shoes, get a wig like Joey over there and ZAP, youx re a clown. Take little ideas and features and create your own. Use some imagination. BE ORIGINAL!

Having been a clown for almost 18 years now, I have seen many changes over the years in clowning. I have also heard many stories about how clowning has changed over the years even before I came along. On numerous occasions, I have seen something that a person introduces this year show up by many clowns the next year. I have seen a complete head to toe duplication at times with the exception of the face. I realize it is fun to win and part of winning is coming up with your own ideas, not copying someone else. Just because something wins this year, donx t copy it and come back next year expecting to win. The person that started the idea will definitely make a change and make it even better than it was the previous year and the judges will instantly know who was original and who was not which means point deductions in competition. It is frustrating to a clown as well to have to keep coming up with new ideas each year because someone copies their ideas each time. What is frustrating even more is something you have been working on for four or five years to get exactly what you want and then a new comer comes in and copies. The new Joey doesnx t have to do any work, he sees a winning combination, duplicates it, and thinks instant winner. This hurts not only the new guy, but the person that has been working for years on his character. You may or may not get the same judges you had last year. The judges see two clowns that appear to be twins and may or may not know who the original was and actually deduct points from each. BE ORIGINAL. Originality means so much in so many ways. In order for clowning to continue to make advances, you need people that are willing to take a chance and develop something new. Donx t copy someone else; take that chance to be different and BE ORIGINAL.

Another area to be original is in your skits. How many times have you gone to a competition and seen the Stage Coach skit. I have personally been to one competition where it was performed 3 or 4 times. This was the same skit, the same words, and almost the same props. It is a great skit, donx t get me wrong, but with that many showings of it, it gets old fast. Where is the problem you say? Several units went to a competition, saw the skit and copied it in their association. After the first group performed, everyone else is like why should we even try, it is the same skit as ours. We wonx t win unless we can pull it off better. It should never come to, x If we can pull it off better!x BE ORIGINAL. The last group that did the skit won that day because they changed the wording of the skit. x Boy, this sure is a busy route, we better be extra careful today.x This was brought up more than once during their presentation because they changed it and improvised which was a good sign of great clowns, always thinking. However, they should have never had to improvise and change something they have been practicing for weeks or months if they didnx t have to worry about being copied. How about the judges? What do you think they are thinking when they see that same skit over and over and over? BE ORIGINAL, it really does matter.

So, as you sit in front of the mirror, open that case of make-up, really think, am I my own clown, or am I that other guy? It does matter to be original. When you see a new clown costume, instead of thinking that is exactly what I want and copying it, think x That looks great, but I can make something different that will be me and look as good if not better!x BE ORIGINAL! Take some time, be creative, take chances and become your own clown, not a copy of that other guy. BE ORIGINAL!