

*Effects of Not Understanding Words*

- *We stop listening.*

The instant halt to comprehension when we hear a word we don't understand causes us to lose our concentration and the momentum built up by the speaker. We ruminate, scanning our storehouse of language, looking for possible connotations: "Sounds like . . ." "In that context, it *probably* means . . ."

But while we do that, we have to stop listening and processing your data. Then, when we tune back in again, we're out of sync and need to catch up. Meanwhile, of course, we've missed something, perhaps the essence of what the teller is telling. But that's only the beginning of the end.

- *We discover our ignorance.*

The second and deeper, consequence of using a word not in the audience's (one or many) vocabulary is the discovery of what we *don't* know and what you *do* know.

"And if *you* know and I don't, maybe I won't be able to understand your message. Maybe there's *too* much more I don't know, that you *do* know, to allow me to get the rest of your message."

Widening the gap between the teller and the receiver is a major pitfall whenever you use words to inform or persuade.

- *We learn how you feel about us.*

Even further down in the subconscious is the idea that if *you* understand and know these words and I don't, and if you persist in using them, then you don't know much about me—your audience. You don't automatically know (if we know each other) or didn't bother to find out (if you're talking to strangers) what I understand of your subject; that I don't know the shorthand and acronyms you're using. And if you're not sensitive about that, you don't much care whether I get your message or not. If you did, you'd make a greater effort to make yourself instantly clear. You'd choose words that *would* be readily grasped. You would do *nothing* to get in the way of my continued attention and comprehension. // you cared about my getting your message. *Not* only my finding out how smart *you* are . . .

- The bottom line: There are many built-in obstacles to people automatically accepting and absorbing information. This is true in general, but especially in the specific kind of information you'd like to impart in the work world. You often deal with new ideas, with changing how things are done, with trying to persuade others about your point of