

- Is unable to find a familiar hook or frequency on which to tune in;
- Can't connect the parts of what it's hearing.

Our minds prompt us to ask for help when we don't understand: "What did you say again?" "What do you mean?" "Wait, I don't understand." In casual conversation that works, as we make the teller slow down and re-explain or try another tack to help us understand. But there are two problems:

- In a formal presentation, we CAN'T ask till it's too late—and by that time it doesn't matter because we've already long since tuned out.

- Most of the time we WON'T ask. It's our nature to prefer staying confused to losing face by admitting that we don't understand what was just said. We often see the work arena as too dangerous a place to admit we don't understand and to ask for help.

So in the workplace, as elsewhere, we are left to depend on others; on the skills of "tellers" and explainers to be clear and give us what we need so we can understand because we won't, or can't, ask. Unfortunately, those "skills of others" are often fumbling or sorely lacking, so we sit through endless experiences wondering, "What is this about?" "Who cares?" "How boring"—wasting what could have been a time of real information gathering and exchange.

Most people, when called upon to "tell," are still only amateur talkers, *not* skilled orators, naturally gifted rational and coherent explainers, or trained and inspired storytellers. Our instincts don't automatically bring us to present information systematically, with logic and order.

This state of affairs conditions us to *expect* to be bored or confused whenever we hear the word "speech," or "report," or "presentation."

It's time to demystify the communication process and set about purposefully learning what works, what doesn't, and why. The final responsibility for your listeners getting your message is yours, the "teller's,"

To help you develop foolproof techniques for organizing and presenting material so that your audience of one or many will stay tuned in and get your message, here are some principles about how people absorb information best. They'll also help you be aware of pitfalls, of what kinds of presentation techniques *don't* work, and why.