

Inattention

Television has taught us to listen with half an ear. In the past, to listen or learn you went to a totally focused environment where that was the only activity: school, college, lecture hall, theater, auditorium, forum, library.

Now consider the environment in which television gives information and its effect on concentration. Kitchen, den, living or bedroom. Phones ring; kids play; moms and dads cook, talk, or read. The business of life—eating, arguing, laughing, disciplining, attending to daily details—all vies for equal time with the tube. Television often becomes an obbligator, a hum or drone in the background. Only occasionally does it rise up to demand total attention from the disparate group pursuing their activities in the vicinity. This from the most powerful communications medium ever created, shared by more people than ever before!

What effect does this have?

We start with the problems we as a species have in *ever* paying attention, under any circumstances. Due to the fact that it takes only 15 percent of the brain to process and understand language, we have 85 percent of free "attention span" left over whenever someone speaks to us. *Any* speaker has to fight for that other 85 percent in order to keep his or her audience—fight the wool-gathering, daydreaming, problem-solving, random thinking we all do with that free brainpower.

Now television comes along, challenging even *more* of that tenuous attention base. It teaches us that it's okay—actually the norm—to listen just a little, from time to time, instead of helping us focus and concentrate. Not good for you, the business communicator who needs rapt attention from beginning to end . . .

hack of Continuity

We get comfortable about coming in on the middle of a subject. Others fill us in with an even more edited version than the television show itself presents, and that's enough for us to climb aboard and tune in. Otherwise we bumble along till the show or subject comes clear and hooks us, or we resort to our other great power play—switching channels without even getting up!

Vetoing the Subject

The ability to snap off communication in mid-sentence, based strictly on whether it has already grabbed us, bodes ill for anyone wanting to