SPEAKING AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Given all the other aspects of how you will communicate to your audience, verbal presentation is still the major form by which you will reach them and deliver your message. Which makes us turn now to your choice of language: how you say what you say and what the right words can do for you.

Making Language Clear

Language builds instant understanding if it is used well and if it uses terms that are acceptable and comfortable for everyone. Once we know a language, we expect its words to be clear. We depend on easy, automatic processing and *expect* to understand. We *don't* expect to get stuck. We get concerned, even angry, when we do.

If you have developed expertise in a given field, you must be very careful about falling into a private shorthand form of talking, where only peers understand you. The serious consequence of this is that you don t have a portable language system any more and cannot use it for all occasions, with all kinds of audiences.

It means clients will be left behind as you go on and on about your specialty.

Lay audiences will become alienated and stare off into space.

It even means that among your co-workers you can unwittingly (or maybe even wittingly) develop a kind of oneupsmanship that says, "I m part of the club. Are you?"

Therefore, step one in making yourself understood is *listen to yourself!* Question whether your words are supportive for *this* audience and watch which ones you use. If you slip, always explain instantly, with a little laugh about "Hanging around those computers too much, I'm forgetting how to talk like a person."

Simplify

Think about the words you choose. Use familiar synonyms to explain. Become sensitive to your own speech patterns. Edit your word choices. Challenge yourself to find ways to explain what you know very well, even instinctively, so others can get it. And be careful not to patronize as you do it. We sometimes feel superior when we know something not everyone knows. When you're out there trying to get others on your