



Is Anyone Paying Attention to You?

How to overcome distraction and short attention spans

If you're following the Presidential race, you've probably heard the number 47 bandied about recently. Well, I have another 47 for you and it directly affects your ability to be successful. According to one research study (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010) as much as 47% of our waking hours are spent in a "distracted" state. Plus, in a January article in "Forbes", the author was bemoaning the fact that social media may be responsible for shortening our attention span. The bottom line: all day long, every day, every one of us is really **not** paying attention nearly half the time.

So what does that mean to you at trial, before a judge, in settlement discussions, at mediation, with colleagues, and even when you're meeting with a new or potential client? Let's look at a couple of examples. If your opening statement is 30 minutes long, then the reality is that each member of the jury will only pay attention to a little over 14 minutes. In a mediation conference or client meeting that lasts 2 hours, the rest of the people at the table will spend almost a full hour distracted.

The worst part...?

You don't know **which** 14 minutes or **which** hour they paid attention to. Did they miss the lynchpin of your case or offer or discussion and only pay attention to ancillary points?

The solution

In light of this somewhat disheartening statistic, if you want to be more effective, more persuasive, waste less time, and accomplish more, here are 3 ways:

1. Be more focused. Decide ahead of time what you want to accomplish. What are the 2-3 key points you want to make? Not 5 or 10. It's all a matter of proportion. Spend the most time presenting the most important idea. Less time on the less important. And remember, the more bits and pieces of information you give them, the more they have to forget.
2. Be more relevant. We all operate through the lens of "what's in it for me?" If you want your listener (jury, colleague, client, staff) to be engaged, be very clear about what is in it for them to listen to you. If you're not sure, then why are you even talking?
3. Be more attentive. If you're paying attention, not totally self-absorbed, you will notice if your audience is beginning to drift away. By simply changing your tone of voice or speed you can recapture some listeners. Another strategy is to ask a question. Or try taking a long pause. You might be surprised that silence will actually grab more attention than talking.

In case you were distracted at the top of the article, about half of the time people aren't paying attention to you (or me). Be smart! Use the 3 points above to engage them so you can be more successful.

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