

This week's tip is about: HOW TO EXPLAIN AN ABSTRACT IDEA

Do you have just 2 minutes? That's all the time it takes to read the following article. But if you're really short on time, just read the first paragraph. It summarizes the whole text.

Enjoy!

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Free article no. 42
HOW TO EXPLAIN AN ABSTRACT IDEA
by J.A. Gamache
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When trying to explain an abstract idea, compare it to a concrete idea the audience understands. Start with the concrete idea you plan to use, explain how it works and then finish your comparison by linking the concrete to the abstract.

Comparisons are meant to bring the audience from the concrete to the abstract. One of the best explanations I've seen of an abstract idea was when someone compared the worth of a human being to the value of a bank note. I'll use it now to illustrate the three steps to comparing the concrete with the abstract.

1-FIRST PRESENT THE CONCRETE IDEA YOU'LL BE USING IN YOUR ANALOGY

The speaker showed the audience a bank note and said, "We could compare your personal worth to this one hundred dollar bill." He introduced the abstract idea (personal worth) and the concrete idea (bank note value).

2-EXPLAIN HOW THE CONCRETE IDEA WORKS

He then asked the audience: "By a show of hands, who would like to receive this one hundred dollar bill?" Noting that almost all the participants raised their hand, he immediately crumpled the bank note, threw it on the ground, stomped on it, and then jumped on it with both feet.

He then picked it up and asked, "By a show of hands, who would like to receive THIS one hundred dollar bill?" Once again, virtually the same number of people wanted the bank

note because it still had the same value even after being crumpled, smudged and trampled.

3-LINK THE CONCRETE TO THE ABSTRACT IDEA

The speaker concluded by saying, "Like this one hundred dollar bill, even though some people may have crumpled, smudged or trampled you in the past, you're still worth the same. You are always as precious. Remember that."

I would like to draw your attention to the sequence of the steps I just mentioned. To ensure that you'll be well understood, you should start by talking about something the audience is very familiar with, and only then should you explain your abstract idea by stressing the similarities in your comparison. Practice finding objects of comparison to explain your abstract ideas. Like the piano, this becomes easy with practice...

Happy writing!

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