Rule 4: People Don't Pay Attention to Boring Things

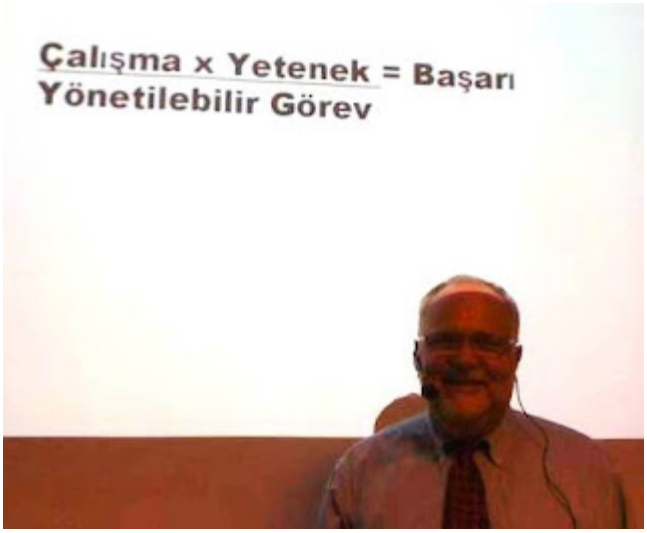
Actually, it should be Rule #1 for staff developers, coaches, facilitators, and administrators planning the back to school sessions with staff, students, and/or parents. It is listed as Rule #4 in John Medina's book, **Brain Rules**.

A teacher in one of my summer workshops recommended the text to me and I am enjoying it as my airport read. As I read the chapter on Rule #4 and the summary bullets, I reflected on my own learning and experiences as a presenter/facilitator.

In the summary (page 94), Medina shares these points:

The brain's attentional "spotlight" can only focus on one thing at a time: no multitasking.

This is evident to me at the beginning and end of my presentations when I am thrown a curve by the person in charge. They get up to introduce me and decide to use this opportunity of having all staff present to announce some upcoming 'event or requirement', giving everyone a focus other than my topic just as they are to turn the microphone over to me. The other comes at the end when half an hour before my closing. Invariably, just as I have everyone focused on the wrap up, they pass out an evaluation form to be filled in… I'm ready for my big close up, and no one is even looking at me.



We are better at seeing patterns and abstracting the meaning of an event than we are at recording details.

Lately, I've been attempting to more consciously give an opening statement or two that hints at a pattern in my

upcoming presentation. As an example, in my day long workshop around PLCs and coaching I mention up front beliefs that drive my work- “Teaching is a team sport” and “Teaching should be a public act”. Throughout the workshop material being discussed should be connecting to those pattern statements. I received reinforcement this week when a high school teacher approached me mid afternoon and said, ”I wish they’d have brought you in before they pushed us into PLCs. I get it now.” I think he got the pattern.

Emotional arousal helps the brain learn.

Medina reinforces this in Chapter Five (page 116)… *Introductions are everything…Film directors know that the audience needs to be hooked in the first three minutes after opening credits to make a film compelling. Public speaking professionals say that you win or lose the battle to hold your audience in the first 30 seconds of a presentation.*

In last week’s blog I shared a clip of a high school valedictorian’s speech questioning her energy being spent on grades and missing the opportunities to learn. I used that clip early in several presentations this summer and have gotten participant emotions aroused to set the stage for learning.

Audiences check out after 10 minutes, but you can keep grabbing them back by telling narratives or creating events rich in emotion.

I discovered this years ago and plan my material so that a 90- 120 minute presentation is made up of about seven 10-12 minute chunks all followed by a small group discussion, turn and talk, answer a question in pairs…something requiring a participant response.

Medina suggests that every ten minutes presenters provide emotionally competent stimuli (ECS) which he calls hooks.

Effective hooks need to:

….trigger emotions

… be relevant

… connect the chunks of the presentation

Most of my hooks are stories. The key as Medina states is that the hook must be relevant. Simply telling a joke or some irrelevant anecdote can create distrust with the listeners. They can feel like you are disorganized or even patronizing.

The good news …. schools and classrooms are filled with the stories that hook educators' emotions to learn, grow, and change to enhance the achievement of their students. My thanks to everyone who has shared their stories with me.