

Dear All

I was reading a recent article on CEO attention span and it made me learn about this topic. The article said that most CEOs have low attention spans and want telegraphic communication in order to make an impact on them. Here's my learnings from the topic on attention spans:

1. Attention span is defined as the amount of time spent on an activity before getting distracted. The distraction comes from another activity or sensation or because of stress.
2. There is a theory which has floated for some time saying that humans' attention span is 8 seconds while that of goldfish is 9 seconds. Scientists and researchers are still trying to figure out the source of this study, no one seems to know but this statistic keeps getting quoted all the time. The actual truth is that the attention span of a goldfish has moved from 5 seconds to 9 seconds in the last 20 years.
3. What are the challenges of a short attention span? One can make careless mistakes, one can't read long enough, one could stop listening, one could leave tasks partially done, one could be disorganized, and one can be forgetful.
4. People say that the technology age or the information age has lowered attention span. The validated data says Yes and NO. The data shows that attention spans have been dropping for 100 years now. It is true that as volume of content increases, then you really need to do a lot to hold attention.
5. Here is some data worth considering- news cycles and headlines have dropped in time. Topics tend to trend quickly and equally they trend to taper quickly. What makes interesting content is something everyone is trying to crack. The average twitter headline trended for 17.5 hours in 2013 and by 2016 it was down to 11.9 hours. In the US, 22 % of consumers listened to a podcast in 2006, now 75 % of Americans listen to a podcast. The average length of a video on You Tube was 2.4 minutes in 2006 and by 2018, it had moved to 15.1 minutes. However, we also have tik tok and the 3 second films from Facebook.
6. Analysis shows that things that are important for a news cycle are: hotness of topic, progression over time and the desire for a new topic. The death of princess Diana lasted for a long time as a news cycle because it involved emotions and divided opinion on who was right and who was in the wrong.
7. Netflix reports that their binge watching has gone up in the pandemic. 61 % of Netflix users regularly watch 2 to 6 episodes.
8. It is difficult to present or have a conversation when the boss has low attention span. It is so because the employee has come fully prepared and is excited about the presentation and the boss says, 'just hit the headlines' If a boss is well prepared for a meeting, then he can actually engage better and improve the quality of the discussion.
9. There are three types of attention – sustained attention (attention that's needed in business meetings, in a movie, in a business review meeting), selective attention (the ability to do one thing, especially the ability to listen to someone who is talking to you in. party without your eyes going all over the room), divided attention (this is multitasking , doing two or more things at the same time)
10. How does one improve attention span? Here are a few ways:
  - Chew gum. Viv Richards the famous west Indies Cricketer is a good example of using chewing gum to get focus while playing. In 2002, I remember seeing an advertisement for a chewing gum ad in Japan – it said "It helps improve concentration"
  - Drink lots of water, to stay hydrated
  - Exercise to improve mental fitness and
  - Meditation/yoga

It helps all of us as colleagues if we improve our attention span.

Feedback welcome

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