



Martha McGinnis

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As one who attends meetings for a living, Martha McGinnis observes each presentation as if she was a coach scouting an upcoming opponent.

A graphic facilitator, McGinnis records the proceedings of meetings and workshops on wall charts. She uses color images and key phrases to create rich, mural-sized records of discussion points and action items—the main elements of any business gathering.

Her detailed analysis is undertaken with an eye to keep any audience engaged.

“If people applied more adult learning principles to their meetings, the meetings would be much more productive,” she says.

McGinnis is the founder and president of Visual Logic, a graphic facilitation consulting practice in Atlanta. Graphic facilitation and visual recording are important components of learning events because the resulting charts help make training material stick. Once finished, the graphics are used by clients in handouts, brochures, and on websites. They are also distributed to people who could not attend the meeting.

For example, at a three-day training event for grant recipients of the Kellogg Foundation, McGinnis charted the workshops. The resulting graphics, distributed to attendees, helped them work through the processes when they returned home.

“What I create—by digesting and visually capturing the information—is an executive summary,” McGinnis says.

The secret to her ability to sort the nuggets from the noise is what she calls high-fidelity listening. “At seminars and presentations, I’m the only one in the room without an agenda or any distractions. I’m simply paying attention to what’s going on in the moment. I’m there to serve the agenda and to be faithful to the process,” she says.

Prior to becoming a graphic facilitator, McGinnis spent part of her career at Colonial Pipeline Company, the nation’s largest petroleum transporter. At Colonial for nearly two decades, she tackled such issues as treasury management, mergers and acquisitions, performance improvement, communications, and strategic planning in a variety of roles. She was attending a systems conference when she first saw a session being graphically recorded.

Since forming her company in 2002, McGinnis has found that, indeed, there is room for her skills in business. Working for such clients as Cox Communications, Scientific-Atlanta, Accenture, and Duke Corporate Education, McGinnis attends four to five major meetings per month at different locations across the country.

“I had always had an artistic bent, but there was no room for that in business,” she says. “I scurried over to the graphic facilitator and asked about the charting. The work requires visual facility and a strong listening ability. You can’t learn those things in a class, but it seemed my brain worked that way.”

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