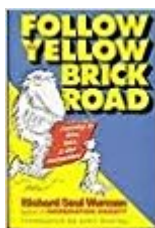


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# Follow The Yellow Brick Road: Learning To Give, Take, And Use Instructions



## Synopsis

Architect, graphic designer, consultant to industry, and purveyor of information packaging, Wurman now attempts to teach us how to teach and how to take teaching. Let it be a lesson to us all. After committing *Information Anxiety* (1988), a cluttered compendium of flashy formatting that produced just what the title promised, Wurman offers a bit more substance in this outing, but the product is still belabored. The text is an ultimately numbing amalgam of stray statistics, mild anecdotes, studies, rules, formulas, and conditions that might somehow prove of interest to some M.B.A.s. Buried within ``3 types of instruction,``4 factors for instruction givers,``5 basic components,``and ``6 basic building blocks``--no lords a-leaping--are, to be sure, some pedagogical truths demonstrating that instructors don't listen, listeners don't hear, and all have private agendas with which to reckon. Wurman attributes the Union Carbide disaster at Bhopal, as well as lots of other messes, to faulty instruction, and maybe he's right. But here there's a wealth of distracting page-layout, what with boxes, mixed typography, and more bullets (of a printer's kind) than were expended in Operation Desert Storm. Somewhat more interesting is a surfeit of marginalia, with an eclectic collection of quotes from Werner Heisenberg to Kahlil Gibran, Albert Einstein to Robert Pirsig. Wurman's style (in English, not to mention book decoration) is less felicitous, which makes the margins better reading than the text. Some substance submerged in a flood of format

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## Customer Reviews

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This is an important book, and at a penny, it's a pretty good deal. However, it is a bit of a mess. It's long winded, meandering... and occasionally brilliant. Instructions are everywhere in our lives. Our boss gives them, our spouses give them, we give them.... our appliances and electronics give them! Some are explicit, like "put tab a and slot b" or "buy some milk on the way home" and some are implicit like "Oh, I love irises" or "this documentation is a mess, and needs cleaning up." But they all effect our ability to navigate the world we live in. The book is worth it if you just read chapters 1&2 and 8... but there is ton more, on education, on management, on communication itself. Take a chance on this wacky book. It might just save your job and your marriage... or at least, give you some ideas about how to train users of your software. ;)

This subtitle suggests that this will be a blow-by-blow walkthrough on just about everything to do with instructions. The previous reviewer can be forgiven for thinking it was supposed to teach him how to right them, or rather, his instructor could be forgiven (if an instructor SHOULD be forgiven for not reading a book before assigning it). In fact, it deals in a rather desultory but very diverting and thoughtful way with how people learn things from other people, deliberately and by the use of mediating information, i.e. not just by on-the-spot imitation, and with special attention to the job

environment. It's really a philosophical rather than a practical approach, though most of his examples are close enough to practice to strike this rather philosophically-minded reader as practical. And if it's aimed at anyone in particular, I would say it's America's self-important and trend-crazy managerial class, rather than technical writers or their readers among those workers who still really work rather than just schmooze with the other drones. Unfortunately, I'm not sure very many people read this book. I'm looking at this library's copy and it hasn't been borrowed in years. So maybe it doesn't matter what it's about. Where's the chick lit?

I am a big fan of Wurman's *Information Anxiety*, where he does a great job of using his text and format to illustrate the points he makes about information. This work is the opposite. It is ironic that a supposed how-to on instructions does not get to any hows by page 54, where I quit reading. This is an almost 400 page tome, and considering the author's reputation as an information presentation expert, it was frustrating to not find quickly, at-a-glance, the locale of the meat of this book. I was plodding through it sure that I would refute other reviewers low ratings, but after falling asleep the second time while reading it, I threw in the towel.

This book was assigned reading in a technical writing course I took in college. It is quite simply the worst thing I have ever seen in print. The book is supposed to be about giving and receiving information efficiently, yet it is filled with dozens of misspelled words and grammatical errors. It looked like it was written by an 8 year-old. It's filled with silly cartoons and information that alternates between obvious and useless. My dim-witted professor and the author of this book are living proof that just about anyone can get a college degree. I'm still mad that I had to shell out cash for this garbage.

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