
How We Choose and Send Signals

A man sat at a metro station in Washington D.C. on a cold January morning and started to play the violin. He played Bach for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by and a middle aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried to meet his schedule. A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip: a woman threw the money in the till and without stopping continued to walk. A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again.

A three year old boy wanted to stop and pay attention. His mother hurriedly tugged him along but the child stopped to look at the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All of the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 people gave him money but continued on. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over no one seemed to notice. No one applauded.

The fiddler standing against a bare wall outside the Metro in an indoor