

I've had the repeated experience of talking to union leaders and groups of workers, pointing out to them that a pension is delayed payment for work already done. I get universal agreement. Then I ask, "Have you ever said it?" "No." "Do you believe it?" "Yes." "Would you start saying it?" That is where it gets difficult. Even for progressives, it is hard to shake the frame constructed over years by pundits on the right that pensions are pay for not working.

Yet the fact that pensions are delayed payments is an obvious truth that would undermine the idea promulgated by pundits on the right that pensions are pay for not working.

So why can people perceive an important truth on a topic crucial to them, a truth that needs to be out in public, and not say it, not make it part of their everyday discourse?

The reason is that just telling someone something usually does not make it a neural circuit that they use every day or even a neural circuit that fits easily into their pre-existing brain circuitry—the neural circuits that define their previous understandings and forms of discourse.

It is difficult to say things that you are not sure the public is ready to hear, to say things that have not been said hundreds of times before.

As noted in chapter 1, this problem has a name—hypocognition—the lack of the overall neural circuitry that makes common sense of the idea and that fits the forms of communication that one normally engages in, the things you are ready to say and that the people you speak to are ready to hear.

Slogans can't overcome hypocognition. Only sustained public discussion has a chance. And that takes knowledge of the problem and a large-scale serious commitment to work for a change.

Several important issues that confront us right now—from global warming to the wealth gap and beyond—demand this kind of sustained discussion and commitment. I am offering this section of the book in the hope that various readers will take on the various tasks of working to provide frames—that is, automatic, effortless, everyday modes of understanding that we desperately need.