

Methods of Memory Magic

You're at a function. There is a person smiling at you from the other side of the canapé tray. You're certain you've met before. Where did you meet her again? And what is her name? Sometimes you have a code with your friends and colleagues at such events: "If I don't introduce you to someone tonight, that's your cue to jump in and introduce yourself, because it means I don't remember their name". It's an embarrassing gaff and one that most of us would like to avoid. We certainly work hard to cover it up as much as possible when we can't remember a person, a past conversation or a name. Wouldn't it be more useful to put all that energy we use for covert memory operations into actually improving our memory skills in the first place?

The importance of a good memory cannot be underplayed. Yet, when you think about people you know with really sharp memory skills, it is likely that not many spring to mind. You will even hear people admit that they have a "terrible memory for names" or "they're not good with numbers". Most of us could do with some improvement in the memory department. Well, you don't have to accept your level of ability. It is within your control to raise the bar.

Research has shown that in order to have a chance of remembering anything, the object, person or event must be drawn into our consciousness, encoded and stored in our brain, and be able to be retrieved at a later date. Additionally, we have three types of memory: sensory, short term and long term.

Sensory memory is extremely short term, only a matter of seconds. Your sensory memory detects things that occur in your environment. It could be a loud sound or a car speeding past. With no need to store the information, those memories simply disappear. However, if you are motivated to notice something about the sound or the car, the dynamics are altered. For instance, if what you thought you heard was a gunshot, or you knew the car speeding past was driving away from a bank robbery, you would consciously register more information. The events would move into short term memory.

Interestingly, short term memory has a limit to both the capacity of information that can be stored, and the length of

time for which it can be stored. When you are learning something new and you say your brain is full, you probably aren't exaggerating. Short term memory is the reason you may forget the last two or three digits of a telephone number you've just been told. In order to remember it, you need to repeat it a number of times. If you have speed dial on your phone, you may never remember it off hand. If you do repeatedly dial that number manually, at some point, it enters your long term memory.

Long term memory is full of information from your short term memory that you have chosen not to discard. You have actively elected to remember those things. Going back to the gun shot and the speeding car, if you know someone's just robbed a bank, you may prioritise in your memory the colour of the car, the make and model, the registration number and a description of the occupants. However, if you find out later that the car that sped past you was the getaway vehicle from a bank robbery, you may have difficulty accurately describing even the colour of the car to authorities. You may not even remember a car speeding past you at all, simply because you didn't prioritise the information.

We prioritise information which is meaningful to us. It may already be associated with something that is relevant to us, and hence, builds on an existing story in our memory. Or it could be new information that we feel is important to remember. Either way, it explains the human consequences of

a poor memory. We have all had that experience of not being remembered by someone. Last time it happened to you, how did you feel? It is likely that you felt insignificant to the other person. Mostly, when we are not remembered, it makes us feel that we are not a priority to the other person. In a business sense, it can make it harder to build rapport and create productive professional relationships, if you are consistently forgetting details about your colleagues and customers.

So, what are some of the basic skills you can develop in order to maintain and improve your memory?

1. Remembering numbers

It is important to de-clutter your mind. If your memory is full of information that you no longer need to use, it may be blocking your ability to store new information. If you can recite the entire script from *Guys and Dolls*, but you can't remember your customer's standing order, you may need to reprioritise your brain space. As discussed, you will also need repetition. Numbers are best remembered when used over and over again.

2. Remembering names

We all know how important it is to remember the name of someone we have met before. Forgetting someone's name in any environment can knock a few points off your scorecard, even if they've only registered it in their subconscious mind. Building rapport is not usually done on a conscious level. A combination of subtle interactions help build rapport over time and

remembering a name is one of the more important in this subliminal process.

Remembering a name is a two fold process. It's all about the introduction and the priority. When you are introduced to someone, ensure you accurately catch their name. This requires that you are interested to know their name and that you prioritise its place in your memory. In order to ensure accuracy, make eye contact and repeat their name back to them immediately after the introduction. Doing this begins the process of recall in your brain and also ensures you don't spend the next three months calling them a different name. So it can go something like this: "Hi, I'm Brent Michaels." "Brett was it?" "No, Brent." "Hi Brent, I'm Laura Evans."

People don't mind correcting you if you get their name wrong immediately after hearing it. However, if you continue to call him Brett for the next year, he will possibly be too embarrassed to correct you and it will affect the rapport you are able to build with him.

Immediately following the introduction, make eye contact and use their name in the next three sentences you say. It could be: "So, Brent, which company do you work for?" Or "Brent, can I get you a drink?" Or "Are you here with a group Brent?"

Finally, always say your name when someone gives you theirs. "Hi, I'm Laura Evans" should be met with "Hi Laura, I'm Brent Michaels". It should never be met with "Hi".

3. Remembering a person

More people are better with faces than with names. This is because most of us

are better at recognising rather than recalling. Others have to meet someone three times in order to register that they've met them at all. Again, it comes down to priorities. You need to decide that remembering people is a priority. The skills you use to remember a person are the same as remembering a name. If you remember their name, you are unlikely to forget their face.

4. Remembering a conversation

Relationships are based on history. The more history you can remember about someone, the more interest they feel you have in them. We feel special when someone remembers the details of past conversations. This is why, when initially getting to know a customer, people in customer service roles often keep notes of past conversations to prompt their memories and help build a better relationship. Remembering details of people's lives requires interest. As the listener, you need to be present in the conversation and register what is being said to you. At the same time, as the speaker, or the person wanting the details to be remembered, you need to be aware of your timing. Sometimes you have caught your listener off guard, or in the middle of something else, and the chances of igniting interest at that time are far less. Both parties have to be in tune to the needs of the other in order for high quality communication to occur.

Some other advice

- At work functions, collect business cards. If there is anything you want to remind yourself of about that person, you can write it on the back of the card while it's fresh in your mind.

- Always offer your business card. It will help the person remember you. If you are not doing something you'd rather forget later, you can always benefit by being remembered yourself.
- Always make a note of what you have promised and ensure you follow through with your commitment. Forgetting to deliver on a promise will make you memorable for all the wrong reasons.

The art of recall is a skill that you continually need to practice in order to maintain sharp proficiency. Your priorities, interests and behaviour will influence your ability to remember details, as well as your likelihood of being remembered. A good memory for the details of others, and assisting them to remember you, can be of enormous benefit to both your personal and professional relationships, creating rapport and ultimately, strong and lasting connections. 💡

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