

Remembering Names

Deep within your brain, a section called the hippocampus acts as a gatekeeper. It sorts memories and decides whether data is significant enough to pass into long-term memory. Important memories are filed away in the cerebral cortex, the outer layer of the brain where a vine-like maze of billions of nerve cells communicate via electrical and chemical impulses to retain information. Less important thoughts (such as tasks you have to do today, but will likely never think of again) are filed into short-term memory, used, and then discarded. Researchers believe that sometimes memories fail because the information isn't filed properly. Sometimes the breakdown comes when you try to retrieve the memory. Like many other things in life, improving your memory skills takes practice.

In the *Memory Book*, Harry Lorayne and his team offer some informative tips to help remember people's names. A couple of their points are expanded below for your pondering:

1. Face and Name Association

Examine a person's face discretely when you are introduced. Try to find a unique or unusual feature – ears, hairline, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, chin, complexion, etc. Create an association between that characteristic, the face, and the name in your mind. The association may be to link the person with someone else you know with the same name. Perhaps you will link that person to an image of the motorcycle they ride. You may even associate a rhyme or image with a name. For instance, one way to remember Guy Drake may be to think of a “male duck.”

2. Repetition

When you are introduced, ask the person to repeat their name or repeat what you heard to ensure accuracy. (“Nice to meet you, _____” is always a great way to start.) Use that person's name throughout the conversation without overdoing it. If the name is unusual, ask how it is spelled or where it comes from. Exchange business or calling cards if appropriate. The more often you hear and see the name, the more likely it is to sink in. The more links and associations you discover, the easier that “file” of information will be to retrieve from your memory when needed. You can even make notes on their card so you can look up those important details later!

Some of the Dale Carnegie programs teach a “conversation stack” to help you visualize and link information as you get to know someone. For example, you could visualize that person or couple on their motorcycle. The motorcycle is pulling a trailer. Inside that trailer are objects that help you remember something about the person's city of residence, chapter, career, family, hobbies, etc. As you learn more about the person, you can keep stacking objects in their trailer so you can visualize the various aspects of your conversation. The more you learn, the more associations you can make with your own interests, common people connections, etc. to help catalog that information in your brain even more effectively.

These methods for remembering names are fairly simple and obvious, but are extremely important considering the volume of the information being processed through your brain (knowingly and unknowingly) every day. Be patient and practice often!