

How to Remember Names

This article originally appeared in the June / July 2003
Canadian Consulting Engineer Magazine.

Do you have trouble remembering names? Lots of people do and pay the price for it - embarrassment and potential loss of business. How would you like to be able to remember the name of every person you meet, regardless of whether you are meeting him or her in a personal or professional context?

The answer to improving long-term name memory is a simple and effective system called "The L.I.S.T.E.N. Name Memory Formula." Here is the abbreviated L.I.S.'N. version.

"L" is for LISTEN

Listen carefully to the person's name when introduced. Pronounce both names correctly immediately. When most people are being introduced to someone new, they are listening to make sure their own name is said correctly. Because we don't focus on the other person's name, we don't hear it. More importantly, if we don't say their name back to them to ensure accuracy, it does not go into our short-term memory. Saying the name out loud, a practice also known as "auditory reassurance," is key to getting it right. Focus on their name, not yours. **Memory is the art of repetition - but you have to pay attention.**

"I" is for INITIATE

Initiate, ask fun questions about their name. Even if it's not obvious, ask the origin (is that Irish?), what it means (you will be surprised by what people tell you), whether they are related to someone with a similar name. Most people like to be asked questions about their name, especially if it is unusual or difficult to pronounce. In my case, questions come almost automatically. "Bruce Lee? Thought you were dead." "Are you related to the actor Bruce Lee?" "Do you know Kung Fu?" These kinds of exchanges make for a fun and memorable introduction. Because you ask questions, you hear stories, which creates more connections in the brain and gives better retention. **Memory is association.**

If the person has a really difficult name, ask how they spell it. That way you mentally see it and hear it. In effect, you are practicing it. Anyone who has a difficult name does not mind you asking how to say it, as getting it right is a sign of respect at the start of a new relationship.

"S" is for SAY IT OFTEN

Use their name three times in your first meeting, taking advantage of this opportunity to talk to them about them. The first time is when you are first introduced and you say back their name for clarification. "Murray Streight, nice to meet you." The second time is somewhere in the conversation where you can use both names, without seeming obvious: "So, when Toni McMillan is not at these events, what do you do in the real world?" Or, "So, Sandra Gorson, what is it that interests you about this event today?"

"N" is for NOTE 4 FACTS

This is the best tip! Write four identifiers about your meeting and conversation on the person's business card. To obtain their card, offer your own first. The next time you meet the person you will remember them. This makes a great impression and says, "You are important to me." Here are the F.A.C.T.S. of what to jot down.

F - Facial Feature. Who do they look, walk or sound / talk like? I used to be told I looked like Dick Clark or Jack Nicholson, so I changed my hairstyle.

A - Activity and facility. For example, "Our training day, Westin Hotel"

C - Contact date and city. "Calgary, July 8/06."

T - Topic of greatest interest. What was the most important item they talked about? A new consulting project? Their favorite vacation spot?

That's it! A simple formula for name memory that will stay with you. If you become interested in a new person and apply the above strategy, you will raise your attitude towards them, your own self-confidence and your reputation with others.

Attention, Association and Repetition. That's all it takes.

Bruce Lee is President of Encore Seven, Inc. an international training company he founded with his wife Toni, that specializes in inspired leadership, customer service training, personal productivity and employee retention.

E-mail: BruceLeeSpeaker@shaw.ca

1- 403 – 242 - 6212