

Remembering Names

We've all experienced the awkward moment of forgetting a name we should have remembered. Many of the most successful people in the world have developed a habit for remembering people's names and you can too. It's not as hard as you think. You just need to learn some simple tips and tricks that can be developed into habits. Once you develop a good habit for remembering names, you'll automatically commit new names to memory. Learning this skill will enhance your personal and professional relationships.



Tip #1: Pay Attention

This sounds obvious, but many people forget to pay attention when hearing someone's name. You'll easily forget a name if you don't start with this simple principle. In fact, none of the following tips in this chapter will even matter if you don't start by paying attention.

We've all been there. Someone says their name and we've almost immediately forgotten it. We're left wondering what their name was and frustrated that we didn't remember it. The problem in this situation is a lack of attention.

Paying attention to someone's name is easier said than done. In many situations, it may be hard to pay attention because of the surrounding distractions. Distractions are a large part of the reason why we are not focused on the person's name. In social situations it's very easy to get distracted. Instead of focusing on the person's name, you might be wondering what you need to say after they're done talking. Or you might be admiring the patterns on their tie. In a business situation, you might be thinking about whether or not this person is an important contact that you should know. All of these distractions and more lead to you missing their name. There is a big difference between hearing and listening. Listening requires you to focus.

Other factors that make it harder to pay attention include: lack of sleep, alcohol consumption, stress, anxiety, background noise.

If you get into the habit of paying attention to the moment that person introduces themselves, you'll find it much easier to remember someone's name.

Tip #2: Repeat the Name

Repetition helps you remember. Let me repeat that. Repetition helps you remember. When you meet someone, repeat their name. It's as simple as that. "Nice to meet you Bob." This gives you a chance to rehearse someone's name by repeating it within the conversation.

But it doesn't stop there. As you continue the conversation, make sure you sprinkle in a few mentions of their name here and there. "So Bob, tell me a little more about what you do. It sounds very interesting." This will also enhance your personal and professional relationship because one of the sweetest sounds someone can hear is their own name. So not only are you repeating their name to improve your memory of it, you are also making the person feel happier and more involved in the conversation. You'll also notice that people are more likely to pay attention to what you have to say when you include their name in the conversation.

Sometimes, you are introduced to multiple people at once and don't have time to repeat their name out loud immediately. For example, someone might say: "Paul, meet Joe, Tom, Eric, Lindsay and Jane." I might respond: "Nice to meet you all." But I would then immediately start repeating the names in my head while looking at them: "Joe, Tom, Eric, Lindsay, Jane... Joe, Eric, Lindsay, Jane."

Tip #3: Make a Connection to the Name

You want to hook that name to something that you know. The way we learn new things is by associating new memories to those that already exist. You can make a connection to that person's name by hooking that person's name to someone you already know or to someone famous that has the same name.

Try to develop the following habit. Whenever you hear someone's name, think to yourself: "Sara... same name as (your friend, a celebrity?). Get into this habit will help you associate the new name to someone you already know. Even if there is no existing connection, you just made one, and because of that you're more likely to remember that name.

Tip #4: Ask Them to Spell Their Name

Many names have a few alternative spellings. You can simply ask someone how their name is spelled and that will help reinforce the name in your memory because of the repetition involved. This strategy works well most of the time, except for situations where there is no alternative spelling and the name is just as simple as "Pete" or "Tim".

As the name is being spelled, try picturing it visually in your head. Use the "dancing letters" technique remember it better. As you visualize each letter in your head, see the letters move a little. Imagine them dancing, shaking, wobbling or bouncing around.

Tip #5: Find a Word That Rhymes with Their Name

Advertisers know the power of a good rhyme. If you lived in the '60s or '70s you might know the popular marketing slogan for the best-selling brand of cigarettes at the time: "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should." Similarly, you probably know that "an apple a day... (complete the sentence)... keeps the doctor away." Rhymes are part of the reason we remember songs (in addition to hearing them repetitively). If it rhymes, it sticks. Some names are easy to rhyme: Bob-job, Matt-bat, Tom-bomb, Anna-banana.

Tip #6: Face Association

Examine the person's face. What is the first thing you notice? Was it their eyes, nose, mouth or hair. See if you can find an unusual or unique feature. Maybe they have unique blue eyes for their skin tone? Or maybe they have ears, lips or a nose that is the defining characteristic on their face.

Create an association with that characteristic and the name in your mind. For example, to remember my name, "Paul," you can picture a physical characteristic of me (I have a pretty big head) and think to yourself: "Paul has a head the size of a basketball." It helps even more if the sentence rhymes (advertisers know this well). ‘

Tip #7: Make Up a Story for the Person's Name

The human brain has an innate ability to remember stories and visuals very well. Try making up a story for the person's name to remember it better. It doesn't have to be a long or

complicated story. In fact, it's probably better if it's a quick one-liner.

If you already know something about that person, you should try to include that bit of information into the story. For example, if you were meeting me for the first time and know that I have a strong interest in playing basketball, you can picture me playing basketball.

In fact, try doing this right now. I want you to picture me ferociously dunking over basketball-star LeBron James. Did you picture that? Good. You'll remember my name better through the association of "Paul" and "basketball." I also get a temporary ego boost knowing that you, as my captive reader, can picture me dunking over one of basketball's best players.

Tip #8: Create Exaggerated Visualizations.

Again, advertisers know this very well and will create commercials with exaggeration. If the exaggeration helps create an emotion such as laughter, the memory will stick even better. Don't be afraid to associate a person's name with absurd or ridiculous thoughts. It's for the greater good. You want to remember their name.

Tip #9: Create a song.

Have you ever heard a little song or jingle at the end of a commercial that you can't get out of your head? Sometimes it doesn't even rhyme, but you can still remember it! If you live in Chicago, or some other cities where this company is mid-

sized company is located, you probably know that "588-2300... EMPIRE" is the little jingle at the end of Empire Carpet's commercials. The repetition of that ad jingle plays a part in helping you to remember it, but the song strongly secures it in your brain. Can you turn this person's name into a one-line song? You don't have to sing it publicly, but you can sing it to yourself (then later in the shower for repetition).

Tip #10: Picture a Crowd Chanting the Name

Imagine the person you just met is extremely important in the stadium that is your brain. Picture a bunch of people dressed up as neurons all chanting that person's name: "Eddie, Eddie, Eddie." Try to imagine why that person might be popular. Did LeBron James just get dunked on again? Make it ridiculous.

The chanting in your head reinforces the name through repetition. Any visualizations that you create are also useful.

Tip #11: Picture Their Name Spelled Out

Try picturing that person's name spelled out. You can actually build on the previous tip (a crowd chanting their). As you picture the crowd chanting that person's name, picture people holding signs with his name as they chant.

Tip #12: Quiz Yourself

After you step away from conversation with the person or group, try to quiz yourself and see if you can remember each person's name. Rehearsing the names you are trying to remember is a form of repetition and it will help you remember

the names better. You'll also find out which names you missed. And at this point, we need our backup plan. How do you find out the person's name if we just forgot it?

Tip #13: Have a Backup Plan

How are you going to figure out their name if you already missed it. Simple. Ask them. Or if you can't ask them, ask someone else. Ask them for their business. The pronunciation of their last name.

If you are going to connect with them on LinkedIn or Facebook ask for spelling of their name. If their first name is easy to spell, they'll assume you are asking about their last name and will usually just tell you their entire name once again. At this point you may even want to write it down (our next tip!).

If you meet someone later and have forgotten their name, one trick is to say, "I'm really sorry but I've forgotten your name." After she then tells you her name is Mary, you respond, "Yes, I know it's Mary, but I can't remember your last name."

Tip #14: Write it Down

When you have a moment, write down the names of the people you just met. It helps to have a small pen & pad available. Writing down the name is another form of repetition since you are actively recalling that person's name, writing it down and seeing the word on the page.

Writing down the person's name also provides you with a reference for the name in case you forget it later. You may also want to write any important information about that person that you need to remember. I usually keep it brief, and write down keywords, rather than full sentences.

Tip #15: Use Alliteration

Alliteration can also help you remember a name. Make up silly nicknames for the people you meet. For a fat guy called Ben: Big Ben. Creepy Chris. Plain Jane. Hairy Harold.

Tip #16: Apply Adjectives to Names

You probably already do this to some extent. Let's say you know two people named Paul. One is short and one is tall. You are talking about Paul to your friend, but he asks "Which Paul?" You might respond, "The tall one" or "tall Paul." Doing this helps you both know which Paul is being talked about.

Try adding an adjective to the person's name. The adjective should describe the person in some way. Here are some examples (with names picked at random): Tall Tom, Obnoxious Harold, Crazy Anna, Cute Monica, Red Mary (or Bloody Mary).

Tip #17: Have a Side-Kick and Work as a Team

Imagine you're at a Christmas party, class reunion, business event or some other social event. You know you'll be introduced to many people and you're likely to forget some (or many) of the names. There are also many names of people

that you should know but have forgotten, and you don't want to get stuck in an awkward "Hey you..." moment.

In this situation you need a side-kick so you can work as a team to remember names that you've both forgotten. Before the event, you need to work out a specific signal with your co-worker, significant other, buddy or whomever else might be at this event with you. Your signal should be a subtle reminder to the other that I've forgotten this person's name. It could be as simple as a quick eye or nose rub.

At the event, you're approached by what's-his-name-again and you quickly, but subtly, signal your teammate. This lets your side-kick know that you've forgotten the name of the person you are about to talk to. Instead of waiting for an introduction, your friend takes the lead in the conversation and says "Hi, I'm Jim" to this person. Most people at this point will respond with "Hi Stephen, I'm William." Now you know his name - try not to forget it this time!

Tip #18: Unconventional Names

Most people you meet will have common names, but occasionally you'll meet someone with an unconventional name. It might be common in another culture, but you are simply not familiar with it. Although this could make it a little more difficult to remember, you should greet that as a challenge. Obviously, it would be harder for Americans to remember a name like Chakravarty, but that should not be an excuse for trying.

You should always make an extra effort to remember an unconventional name. These people are used to others forgetting and mispronouncing their names, but you can make a great impression on the person if you can accurately recall their name.

You should apologetically ask the person to repeat and clarify how to exactly pronounce their name: "Sorry, I can't hear you so well with this background noise. Do you mind repeating your name?" Or you can say, "I'm sorry. Do you mind repeating your name? I just want to make sure I'm pronouncing it correctly." Most people won't mind repeating their name. For the moment, you shouldn't worry about how to spell their name. Instead, you should focus on how their name sounds and how to mimic that sound. When the person repeats their name, you may hear it as "CHALK-AHH-VAR-TY". Notice how you can break the sound down into chunks. Chunking the name into parts will help you pronounce and recall the name.

After hearing the name "CHALK-AHH-VAR-TY" don't be afraid to repeat their name, even if you don't pronounce it perfectly. You should try repeating their name back to them, as best you can, as you heard it. For example, you might say, "CHALK-AHH-VAR-TY, did I get that right?" If not, they might repeat their name again, which is even better for you because you can try again.

You can then say "CHALK-AHH-VAR-TY, that's a really interesting name. Do you mind spelling it for me? Or maybe

you can just give me your business card. I appreciate you showing me how to pronounce your name. I actually like learning new names that I'm not already familiar with, so thank you!" At this point, you may learn that the name is actually spelled "Chakravarty." You can write it down, or have a business card as reference. And now you've added a new name to vocabulary.

Never make a dismissive or insensitive remark about another person's name. Everyone with an unconventional name can probably remember being teased as a kid for having an uncommon name. This insensitive behavior in adulthood (even if it is not with malicious intent) could make you look ignorant, bigoted or xenophobic. Even something like "Whoa, that's an odd name. Where does it come from?" - makes you sound ignorant, even though you don't intend to be. Try to keep some perspective. In most countries, your name also sounds strange.

To progress the conversation and strengthen the relationship, you can even ask if they know what their name means or if it's a common name in their culture. Do all this shows that you care about pronouncing that person's name correctly and are also interested in their culture. You've left them with a strong impression and you're both more likely to remember the experience.

Tip #19: Keep Records

If you want to commit names to your long-term memory I highly recommend that you can a record of the names of peo-

ple you meet on a daily basis. This is especially useful if your job requires you to know many people's names.

Think of this as a name journal. Keep a file on your computer, or better yet, use Google Docs or Evernote, to record all the names of people you meet each day. You can use this document to review the names of people you come in contact regularly, but often forget their names. This could be people at a party, your neighbors, friends of friends, etc. Here are some sample entries:

- "Joe - friend of Tom. Met at Christmas party. They were college roommates, big eyes, programmer, sarcastic."
- "Unit 508 - Aditya, Indian guy, very cool, works at NASA."

Review the document daily or occasionally to reinforce the names that you recorded.

Tip #20: Get Confident

I used to tell myself and others that I was really bad at remembering names. One day, I wanted to see if my belief that I was bad at names was influencing my ability to remember names. As an experiment, I stopped telling myself that I was bad at names and started telling myself (and other people): "I'm really good at remembering names." I noticed an almost instant increase in my ability just by doing this.

Before I tried this experiment, I would probably estimate that I used to remember 20% of new names that were given to

me. After telling myself that I was good at names, I was now remembering about 70% of them. Just telling myself I was good made me get better. Confidence is key.

It's time to boost your confidence. Your memory is better than you think. Tell yourself now: "I am good at remembering names."

Other Tips Based on Situations

- You're at a business lunch and are presented with the person's card. Set the card down on the table in front of you so you can glance at it just in case. This works well because you can discreetly glance at the card if you forget the name.
- If you're in a group conversation with some people who's names you have yet to remember, make sure you pay attention to others as they say their names in conversation. After hearing the name, reinforce it with repetition and some of the previous techniques mentioned here.

Final Tip: Remember To Implement These Tips

The time you have spent reading these tips will only be useful if you practice what you just read. You must turn these tips into habits. To create any habit (good or bad) you need repetition. You need to practice.

The next time you need to remember a name, you'll be more mindful of remembering it and will start implementing

these tips. Initially, you'll very consciously be thinking about each tip as you implement it. But with practice, you will automatically implement many or all of these principles without thinking of them. At this point, your ability to remember names has turned into a habit strongly embedded into your daily life. You'll find that your ability to remember names will transform your relationships for the better.

Some of the most successful people in the world are great at remembering names. If you can master these principles it will, without a doubt, help you in any career that you pursue. Relationships are the fabric of life. And one of the easiest ways to strengthen those relationships is by remembering and using a person's name in conversation.