



Seven Strategies for Remembering Names, Information and Passwords

You're walking down the street and meet someone whose name you SHOULD remember but don't. You can't even put the person in the right setting; is he a friend from several years ago or one of the new hires in your company? You try to get by with a warm greeting, but a friend joins you and asks to be introduced. An awkward silence ensues and you realize you can't fake it any more. The other person remembers your name, yet you've forgotten his.

On another day, you're sitting at your desk trying to remember the phone number you just called and it eludes you. You try a wrong number and finally google the organization's number.

Then just this morning, your boss gave you instructions rapid-fire—too quickly for you to write them down. You tried to commit what she said to memory and then jotted down what you remembered after she left. You know you forgot something but you can't remember what.

Sound familiar? If you need a memory that works well under pressure, and that quickly recalls names, phone numbers, instructions and other bits of information, try these seven strategies.

Look at the person when you hear their name

When you meet a person, you often pay more attention to his or her face or to distractions than to the name. If a third person introduces you, you normally look at the person doing the introduction. If you meet a customer or have just come into a room full of people at a party and get introduced to others, your attention focuses on how you look or on the situation. As a result, you “miss” the names. Because memory is highly associative (one thing links with another), looking at a person



Solutions: THE WORK LIFE YOU WANT TO LIVE

when you first meet enables you to link the sound of the name with the face. Then, when you later look at the face, you more easily remember the name.

Make sure you hear the name clearly

Those who make introductions and instructions often rush, thus names may be mumbled or slurred. Similarly, rapid-fire instructions may be delivered in non-logical order. If this happens, ask the person to repeat his or her name or the instructions. If you hear only a mumbled name, or the instructions move too quickly, you'll only remember a portion of the name or information. If you realize several minutes into a conversation or project that you were too distracted or rushed to fully retain the name or information, ask for the name or instructions again. You can't memorize what you haven't heard.

When you hear the name, repeat it at once inside your own head

Repeating a name increases your chances of remembering a name by 30 percent. If you remember repeating poems in grade school until you memorized them, you realize that repetition works. While something repeated once a day for eight days can generally be remembered for months, something heard only once may be forgotten by the end of the first day. If you want to remember a name, repeat the name in your head when you first hear it and then again aloud in conversation.

If the name is unusual or hard to remember, ask the person to spell it or spell it silently yourself

Because it is easier to remember visual rather than auditory information, we often take a mental snapshot of a person's name without realizing it. When you meet a person named Joe or Mary, your mind quickly "sees" "Joe" or "Mary" as an automatic and helpful "snapshot."

Unfortunately, when you meet a person with an unusual name such as "Tanzeem," and you quickly think "what an unusual name," this thought



Seven Strategies for Remembering Names, Information and Passwords

replaces the automatic spelling, and you later remember not the name but that the name was “different.” If you want to remember unusual names, spell them and while the sound of the name may vanish into the reaches of memory, the spelling remains.

Write the name, instructions, or other information

Visual memory imprints more strongly than auditory or verbal memory. As an experiment, think of your living room couch. If you quickly “saw” it in your brain and then described it to yourself, you demonstrated the primacy of visual memory. If you’ve ever made a list of items to buy at the store and left the list at home, you probably noticed you could recall all or most of the items on the list.

Given the power of visual memory, if you write a name and then look at it, you increase your chance of remembering the name. Similarly, writing multipart instructions helps you retain the information. Additionally, your writing cues the person giving the instructions to slow down and gives you a set of instructions to guide you later.

Say the person’s name out loud early in the conversation

When you meet someone, you probably say “hello,” and then give your own name. If you first repeat the person’s name, as in “Hello, Ben Swann, I’m Lynne Curry,” you increase your chances of remembering the person’s name by 50 percent. Out loud repetition proves even more effective than silent repetition because it more actively works your memory.

Use the name in conversation

Using a person’s name in the first three minutes after meeting them increases your chance of remembering the name when you next meet. The repetition reinforces the linkage between the person’s face and their name. Also, most people like hearing their own name.



Solutions: THE WORK LIFE YOU WANT TO LIVE

Use the name when exiting the conversation

If you use the person's name one last time as you end a conversation with them, for example, "It was good to meet you, Jenny," you capture their name in memory for weeks.

Turn your memory on by motivation

If you've raised teenagers, you know many of them forget to do things you ask, but can remember the names of everyone in a music group or the batting average of every player on their favorite team. We remember what we want to remember and what's important to us.

As an experiment, look around the room you're in and notice everything red, paying careful attention to the near reds such as pink, burgundy, and even orange. Now turn back to the book and remember everything you saw in the room that was green or blue. If you can't remember many items, that's because when you focused on red, you overlooked green and blue.

The more attention you "give," and the more you actively focus on what's happening around you, the more you can keep in memory.

Give memory a chance

When you meet a person weeks after you last met them or want to remember a phone number or another piece of information, give your memory a chance. You expect your memory to be instant. When you first see a person or want to remember something, you expect the name or information to immediately flash across your mind.

Because so much information is in memory, it takes several seconds for your mind to process many associations and come up with the right name or information. If you expect instant remembrance, you often get impatient, and the resulting anxiety forms a sure-fire barrier that blocks memory. As another example, remember what happens when you stand up to give a presentation and instantly freeze. You draw a blank because you're unexpectedly put on the spot and temporarily forget everything.



Seven Strategies for Remembering Names, Information and Passwords

So, give your memory a chance. Unfreeze your memory by relaxing and thinking about anything you can remember about the person, number or other information. Relaxation and the remembrance of associated events helps the mental sorting process needed for memory retrieval. You can buy yourself time by clearing your throat or taking a deep breath.

Remember

Would you like to be able to remember the names of the people you meet, the phone numbers you call frequently, and the information you receive?

If so, look at a person when you first meet them so you'll be able to later link the sound of their name to their face. Make sure you hear new names or information clearly—you can't memorize what you can't clearly hear. Take notes to help remember instructions or numbers. Say the name out loud in greeting and in conversation if you can. If not, mentally repeat the name to yourself. If the name is unusual, try to spell it. If you really want to remember something, give it your full attention. Finally—give your memory a chance—let it work and exercise it daily.

“A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Solving Work-Related Problems”

“Whether you are an employee or an employer, this book will resonate. Unless you have been living under a rock, you have already been exposed to many of these problems that cause conflicts at work, resulting in stress and lost productivity, and negatively affecting health and happiness. The advice and case histories in the book are distilled from the author's experience during a long and successful career in human resource management and consulting. Names have been changed for obvious reasons, but at one time or another we have all experienced the Managerial Darth Vader, the Scrooge employee, and the two-faced co-worker, to mention a few of the characters in the short stories that illustrate the various chapter segments. Lynne Curry's book serves as a convenient manual in which you can look up a specific problem, and obtain professional advice on how to handle it, for a fraction of the cost of hiring your own human resource consultant. There is useful advice for employers on improving communication and productivity, motivating employees, effective hiring and retention practices, and meeting legal obligations. The book also provides excellent coaching for employees and prospective employees in dealing with difficult bosses and co-workers, setting and achieving goals, managing expectations, career building, and taking effective interviews. The author is not afraid to be specific, has a very direct, easy-to-read style, and each issue is dealt with in short, one to two page well indexed segments that are internally consistent and can be consulted as needed. This book is a great reference: it's all here. Either as insurance, or as damage control, this book is an excellent investment.”

- Trevor Bremner



The Work Place Ted Bundy

You've met him. He's the workplace Ted Bundy. Initially he's charming, both to men and women, and especially in the presence of the boss. He's friendly and confiding. He extends himself on your behalf—out of all proportion to anything you'd expect.

Then, he knifes you in the back. He uses office politics to undermine coworker, supervisory or business-to-business relationships. He chooses only certain victims—normally those who have something he wants or envies. He displays no remorse for his assaults. Instead, once he discredits a valuable employee or business owner, he voices surprise and disdain that they could have the problem he manufactured.

Have you fallen victim to a workplace serial killer? Have you made a series of strategic mistakes when sparring with one?

Recognizing an office Ted Bundy is harder than it looks. Often, all you'll have to base your suspicion on is intuition. But—as with criminal serial killers—there are tangible traces.

What are the clues? Here's what you might notice. You may hear negative comments and stories about individuals you'd thought to be solid performers or managers of high integrity. If you're Ted's target, you'll lose valuable relationships—he'll manage to fabricate convincing scenarios in which you're the “bad guy” out of small pieces of truth and large quantities of shadow.

If you spend much time around an office Bundy, you may eventually suspect he's two people—the ingratiating charmer and the cold, hostile person who deftly cuts others to ribbons. You may think he's erratic—but chances are you won't be sure what to think.

According to an interview of management consultant Dr. Cheryl Lieberman and human resources manager Ellin Reisner, clues that a serial killer may be working in your organization include large numbers of



Solutions: CoWORKER DILEMMAS

people quitting or transferring; increased employee visits to the human resources department; an overactive rumor mill; and unexpected drops in productivity.

If you suspect you're a target or have a killer in your organization, what should you do? First, stop looking the other way. The best weapon a serial killer has, say Lieberman and Reiser, "is thinking his/her behavior is going unnoticed. Break through that pattern by confronting the situation head on."

Second, deal with the situation and not the symptom. Rather than trying to stop rumors, realize rumors are symptoms. Investigate and get others to talk about what they've seen firsthand—not what they've heard. If you're the target, remind others of their history with you—and ask what innuendo has led them to discredit that history.

Serial killers live in darkness and rely on the rest of us turning our backs and not trusting what we see with our own eyes. The best defense is to realize there may be a pattern to what you're seeing and to deal with the problem head on.

