

**Business Bullet ~**  
**Why Can't I Remember Your Name?**  
**Contributed by Scott Ginsberg**

You've found out you're terrible with names. You forgot someone's name within ten seconds of their introduction, and it embarrasses you. In fact, it's possible you won't even approach someone whose name you have forgotten. As a result, you will miss out on a valuable business contact.

If you go out of your way to identify and amplify names, it is the easiest thing to show people you appreciate them. A person's name is the difference between a stranger and a friend; the difference between a prospect and a client; and the difference between "that guy", and "Marty, my newest customer."

But, in addition to mastery of these skills, it is equally important to understand why you forgot them. If you target this problem at its source, you discover ways to eliminate name forgetting before it begins. You will also become more attune of what stands in your way to make enriching connections with new people.

### **ATTITUDE**

*"I'm bad with names, I can only remember faces. I always forget people. I don't think I'll ever improve my memory for names. I feel guilty when I ask the person to repeat their name again and again."*

Change your attitude! You can't continue to make excuses and apologize to people if you forgot their names. If you tell yourself you're terrible with names, you're always going to be terrible—it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Moreover, if you apologize to people, you only remind them that you're terrible!

### **FOCUS**

*"I failed to focus on the moment of the introduction. I was too busy worrying about the correct handshake. I was overly self-conscious about my first impression with the new client. I thought about me and not about them."*

Forget about you. Focus on them. This is the foundation of customer loyalty. Smile and make eye contact as soon as they say their name. Repeat it back to them within four seconds. Don't worry...when you do remember their name, you will make a good first impression.

### **THE NAME ITSELF**

*"I forgot their name because it's complicated. I forgot their name because it's too long. I forgot their name because it's derived from a culture different than my own."*

Ask them about the spelling, origin or context of their name. The longer and more unusual a name, the easier it will be to inquire further. As such, this not only allows them to repeat their name, but you appeal to their personal interests. It shows them you care about their personal information, flatters them and makes them feel valued. Usually, they will be glad to tell you about their name.

### **MEMORY**

*"I forgot a customer's name within ten seconds of introduction. I drew a complete mental blank. I was humiliated."*

This occurs because a person's name is the single context of human memory most apt to be forgotten. So, widen other areas of your memory circuit and repeat the name out loud in the beginning, during and at the end of the conversation. When you speak the name, hear the name, and listen to yourself say the name, you will remember it.

### **ASSUMPTION**

*"I assume someone will tell me their name. I assume my coworker will introduce me. I assume names aren't a big deal."*

Be the first to ask. Got out of your way to find out people's names. Take your colleague aside and tell them to introduce you to the person clearly and properly. When they do introduce you, be certain to make eye contact with your new associate. This forces you to concentrate on his or her face and name and block out noises and distractions.

## **SUBSTITUTION**

*"I accidentally put the wrong names with the wrong people. I confused people's faces. I saw someone's name as an arbitrary fact, and did not turn it into a meaningful representation of them."*

Look at people's facial features when they tell you their name. Dramatize those features and make a memorable connection between the person and their name. The crazier the connection, the easier the name will be to remember.

## **OVERLOAD**

*"I was introduced to several customers at the same time. My brain was overloaded. Five names went in one ear and out the other. My memory for names has diffused."*

Ask the person who introduced you to quietly repeat everyone's name in your ear. Then, go around the group and say their names to yourself while you look at their faces. Say them over and over again in your head during the conversation. Do this several times. If all else fails, write the names down, look at their business cards, and/or visualize the person's face while you consult your notes.

Practice. Practice. Practice. That's the hard part. But over time you will learn how different methods and tools for name memory will work best for you. Whichever learning style best suits your personality; use any combination of visual, aural or dramatic techniques to remember names.

Attitude. Attitude. Attitude. That's the easy part. As practice enhances your name memory over time, it only takes a few seconds to decide to change your attitude. Don't tell yourself that you can't remember names! Once you have made the decision to go out of your way to remember them, it will only be easier to acquire and master the skill.

Whether you're on a sales call, in the field, work at a conference or serendipitously meet someone again at the grocery store, if you remember someone's name it will be more valuable than gold.

You know how it feels when someone goes out of their way to remember your name. That warm sense of appreciation rings in your ear and resonates like a bell down to your heart. It is a pulse of pure human energy. And every time it happens, it brings us closer together. It fulfills our capacity to instantly and effortlessly connect with each other.

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