



By Renuka Rayasam
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In the early 1990s Mark Channon was working at a London bar, when a friend taught him a technique to remember names. At the time, Channon, who was an aspiring actor, could remember lines for a performance, but had a terrible memory for names.

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With the name-memorisation technique, however, he was soon remembering customers' names and drink orders even during busy nights. Within a few years he designed a game show for the BBC called Monkhouse Memory Masters where he would teach contestants memory strategies and they would then compete in memory games. By

into a room and use everyone's names

1995 he had come sixth in the World Memory Championships, becoming one of the first International Grand Masters of Memory.

Today Channon teaches workers these memory strategies to give them an edge in their careers. Business coaches like Channon say that the ability to remember names is an effective tool that can help CEOs build trust with employees and executives create rapport with potential clients. Being able to recall someone's name shows that you're paying attention to what they're talking about and that you care about what they have to say, he explains.

"One of the most powerful things," says Channon, "is if you are able to walk into a room and use everyone's names."



Memory master Mark Channon says employing memory strategies can give people a leg up in their careers (Credit: Mark Channon)

In addition, remembering names and other information helps people to work more effectively, gives people confidence and helps increase focus, says Luc Swaab, a trainer with BrainStudio in the Netherlands, which helps people deal with information overload.

“We are our memories,” says Swaab. “It’s very important to invest in having a good memory. Nowadays we outsource our memory to digital gizmos, but it’s nice to work at it.”

Improving your memory

Memory experts say that anyone can learn to improve their memory using some of the same strategies that ancient Greeks and Romans like Cicero used to memorise speeches.

“It’s not that you have a bad memory,” says Kyle Buchanan, founder of Memorize Academy, based in Toowoomba, Australia. “It’s that you haven’t learned proper memory techniques.”

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It’s a major faux pas to forget someone’s name — it makes people feel like they have been slighted or marginalised or unimportant

Buchanan says he was terrible at retaining information until he saw a memory champion memorise the order of a deck of cards on a morning show in Australia about six years ago. He was working in finance at the time and decided to start learning memorisation techniques as a way to help his career. Eventually, he left his job to become a memory coach.

While humans aren’t good at remembering names, they do have innate spatial memory and facial recall abilities. Buchanan and others tap into those ingrained abilities to help people remember things like names and other information that is often hard to retain.





Most people are born more or less equally challenged by the task of recalling names. (Credit: Alamy)

A person might, for example, picture objects in their house or another familiar place as a way to memorise a random list. Or they will associate a proper name with an already familiar word.

The first step, say memory experts, is to pay attention when someone tells you their name. Often people are so wrapped up in their own thoughts that they aren't even listening when they hear a name. Following this, linking that name with a visual related to the way the name sounds and an aspect of the person's appearance is advised. Finally, a person should review that information soon after an initial meeting.



Focus on a person's name when you're introduced (Credit: Memorize Academy)

The name game

Five steps to remembering someone's name

1. Listen carefully. Often we're thinking more about what we're going to say than listening when someone introduces herself.

2. Repeat the name. Soon after hearing the name, find a way to gracefully repeat it. Maybe ask how to spell it, if it's complicated or just say "nice to meet you" with the person's name.

3. Picture an image that reminds you of that name. The name Bill, for example, might make you think of a dollar bill.

4. Link the visual to an aspect of the person's appearance. If Bill has a crooked nose, picture a crooked nose wrapped up in a dollar bill. Make sure it's something that won't change. Hair, for example, could get cut or dyed. And don't tell the person you're doing this or you might risk offending them.

5. Review the information. Find some time later to review the visuals and names in your head.

Source: Kyle Buchanan at Memorize Academy and Mark Channon

For example, if you meet someone named Matt at a party, first be sure to listen and focus when he introduces himself. Then associate the name with an image — even if it's quirky and rhymes. Maybe Matt makes you think of a doormat. Then conjure up a visual that links a part of Matt's appearance to that image. So, if Matt has big ears, picture a pair of big goofy ears sitting on a doormat. (Don't tell the person that you're doing this so you don't offend them!) Then when you get a chance later in the evening or the next morning, review the visuals and names in your mind.

While the strategy takes time and effort, Channon says it soon becomes a habit.

"Initially it's hard work," he says. But now, "when I meet people, I can't help but to remember their names," he adds.

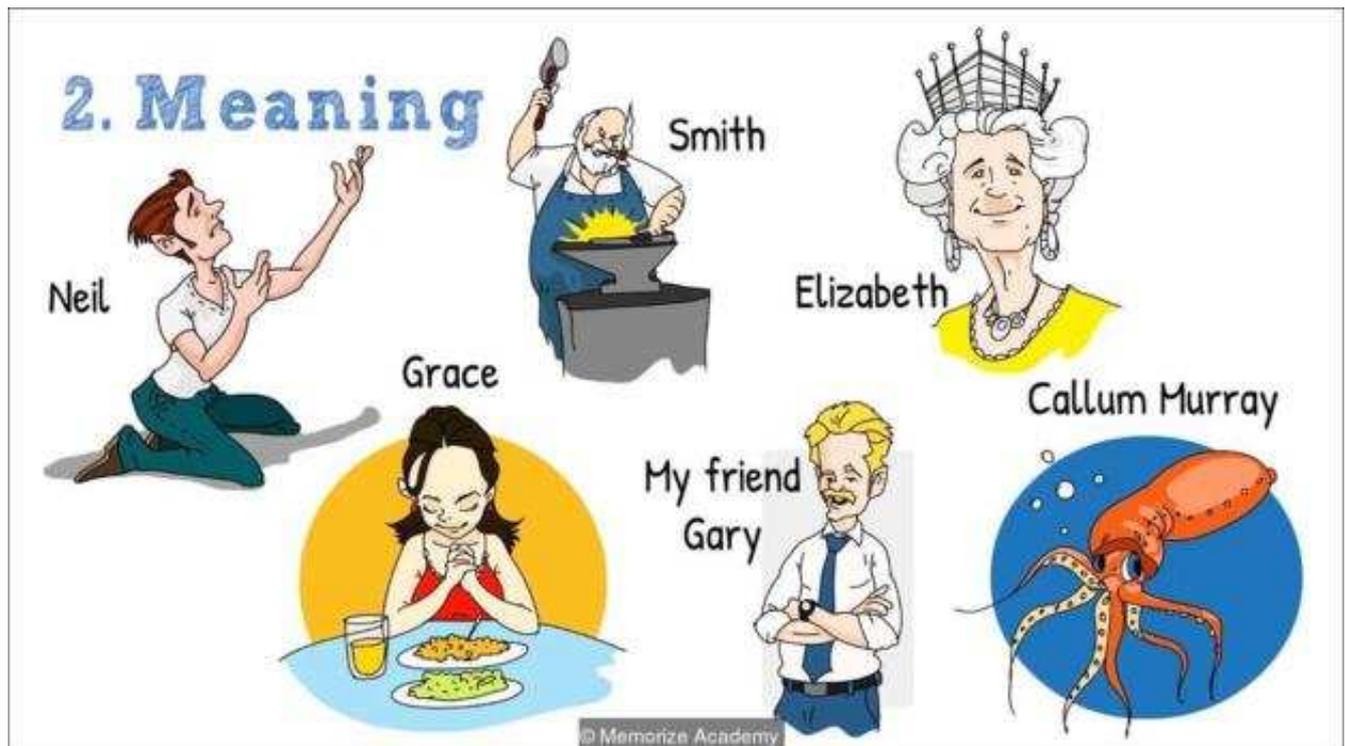
Building blocks

Forgetting a name can be problematic, especially in a business setting where making connections is important.

"It's a major faux pas to forget someone's name — it makes people feel like they have been slighted or marginalised or unimportant," says Kethera A Fogler, an assistant professor in psychology at James Madison University in Virginia in the US. "Their name is so uniquely them, which exacerbates that feeling, but it's what makes it so easy to forget."

Improving your memory can have benefits beyond smoothing social interactions, says Mary Pat McAndrews, senior scientist at the Krembil Research Institute and professor of psychology at the University of

Toronto.



Give the name meaning. What does it make you think of? (Credit: Memorize Academy)

McAndrews works with patients whose memory is damaged in some way, but also studies the link between memory and other aspects of brain function. She and her team found that the ability to remember names improves other cognitive skills. People with improved memories have more vivid imaginations which helps them come up with more creative solutions to problems.

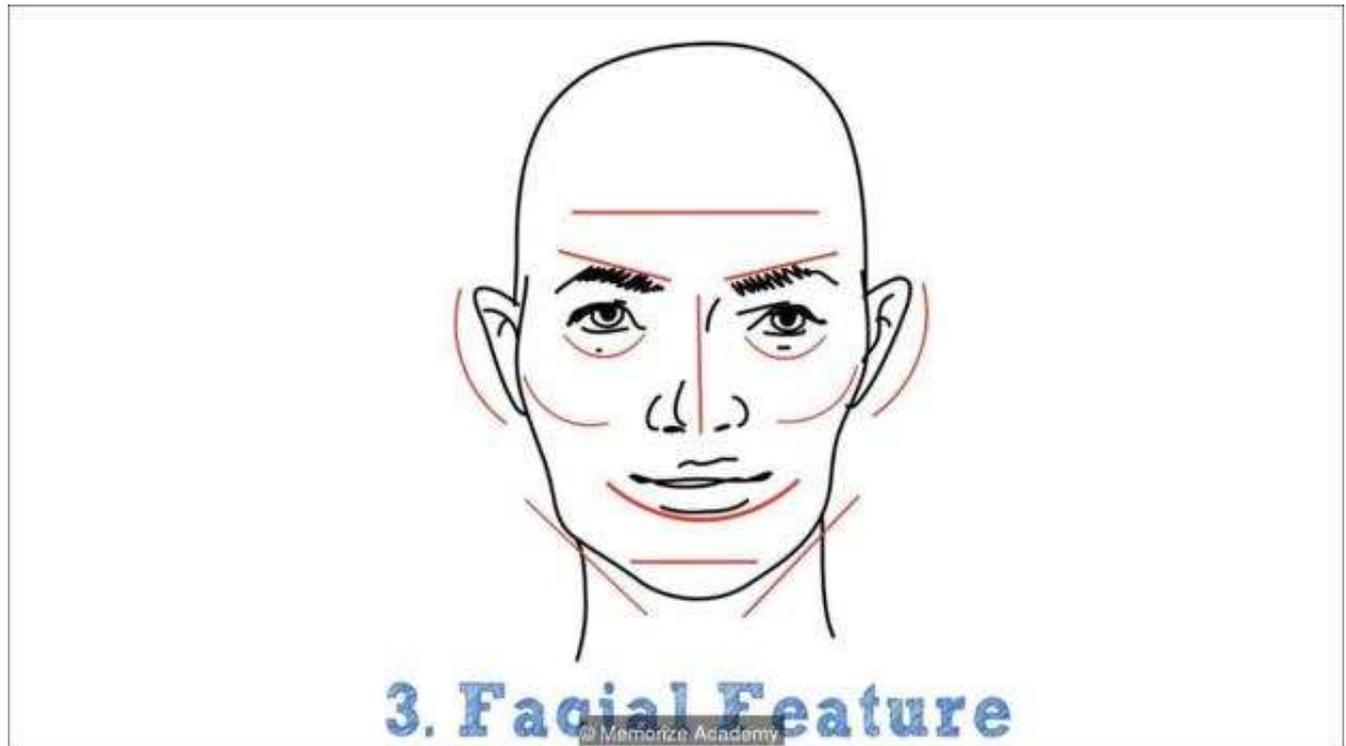
“Memory is not just about being able to recall a name and be done with it,” says McAndrews. “It’s a building block for social interactions and decision making and problem solving.”

Professions vs names

People like Channon seem born with an innate ability to remember the names of everyone they meet, but it turns out that most people are born more or less equally challenged by the task of recalling names.

“There is something very particular about proper names — they are

different from any other information,” Fogler says.



To help you remember, choose the person's most distinctive facial feature or characteristic
(Credit: Memorize Academy)

It's easier to remember what someone does for a living than their names because their profession fits into already existing semantic networks in the brain, according to Fogler. For example, if you meet a teacher named Cory, you are more likely to remember that he is a teacher, as that conjures up certain images from our education, whereas Cory is an arbitrary name given to that person that has little connection with who they are.

That's why, Fogler continues, "it's easier to remember that you've met a farmer than Mr. Farmer."