

Lynda Goldman's Business Image Tips
Do You Remember My Name?

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Dear Networker,

'I'm really bad at remembering names.' This is one of the comments I hear most frequently when I give seminars on networking and business receptions. Is it something you say as well? Welcome to the group!

How often have you heard someone's name, and a minute later the name has disappeared from your mind, as if you never heard it at all? Then you stand there feeling foolish, not knowing if you should admit your 'bad memory' or try to fake it.

Well, if you've ever seen the Seinfeld episode where Jerry couldn't remember a girlfriend's name (he could only remember that it rhymed with a part of a woman's body, but couldn't remember which part), you'll know that faking it can lead to lots of trouble.

So, what do you do when a person's name has totally vanished from your mind? There aren't any magic solutions, but here are a few hints and tricks to help.

First, it's important to understand why we often forget names.
Here are the most common reasons:

1. In the first moments where you meet someone new, you are forming a first impression of that person, and he or she is forming one of you. Since first impressions are mainly visual, during the introductions you were doing a visual reading of the other person, and not really listening as carefully as you would be later.
2. When you meet someone new, you are thinking about your own first impression, and what you will say to the other person, so you're not really focused on what they are saying to you.
3. You never really heard the name properly. Many people say their names quickly, because, after all, they know their names! But when you say your first and last names together without a pause, it may be difficult for other people to understand you.

4. In our multicultural society, we encounter many different names. Some are unusual or difficult for us to pronounce.

5. We're all on information overload. With all the details and data we process every day, it's no wonder we forget names. We're lucky if we remember our own names!

Here are some tips to help you remember names better.

1. Really listen for the name. Make sure you hear it. Ask the person to repeat it if you aren't sure, or if the name is unusual. Ask the person to spell it if it will help you. You can say this in a complimentary way, such as, 'That's an unusual (or beautiful) name. How do you spell it? I want to make sure to get it right.' Or, 'Nice to meet you (name of person). Did I pronounce your name correctly?'

2. Take advantage of visual aids, such as a name badge (don't you wish everyone wore one?). If you receive their business card, don't just tuck it away in your pocket. Take a moment to read the name and title. You'll get a wealth of information about the person, and remember their name much better when you've seen it written down.

Tip: When you receive a name badge at a conference or networking event, don't hide it away. The best place to put it is on your right side, closer to your shoulder. This is the easiest place for others to see it when you shake hands. Try to avoid putting your name badge on a chain around your neck, because it often twists around, or gets hidden in your clothes - not great for helping people remember your name.

3. Offer your name, so they will offer theirs. If you say, 'Hello, I'm (your name),' it would be very unusual for the other person not to say something like, 'Nice to meet you. I'm (his or her name.)'

4. Use the rule of three. Try to use the new name three times in your conversation. You can say, 'Nice to meet you, Helen.' 'Have you been to this conference before, Helen?' And, when parting company, 'It's been great speaking with you, Helen.' By now, you probably remember Helen's name!

5. Don't berate yourself for forgetting a name. We live in a fast-paced society and suffer from information overload. It's not just you - most people have trouble with names. If you forget someone's name, simply say something like, 'I'm sorry, my mind has gone blank and I can't remember your name,' or 'I know we met before. Please remind me of your name.'

And if someone forgets your name, don't take it personally. Just offer your name quickly to avoid making the other person feel awkward.

6. Make the effort to learn and remember people's names. Shakespeare said, 'There's no sound so sweet as the sound of one's own name.' When you remember someone's name it makes them feel special and valued. It's really worth making the effort.

