

I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET WHAT'S-HER-FACE

Strategies for Remembering Names

"Hi, Darla," Aretha said, greeting her new friend. Darla stood back, silently, her head down. She knew she should remember this lady's name. Her face looked so familiar, yet her name just wouldn't come to mind. The two women had been introduced the previous week at a support group meeting and seemed to hit it off immediately.

We first met Darla and Arlene in the introduction to this book. They're back again to illustrate a common problem after brain injury: forgetting people's names. Understandably, people often feel embarrassed about forgetting someone else's name. After all, your own name is very important to you: it is part of how you define yourself – your identity. It's important to realize, though, that *everyone* has trouble remembering names from time to time. Also, it's unrealistic to expect that you will remember *everyone's* name. Some people have a hard time just learning new names to begin with, while others have trouble recalling names of people they already know. Try some of the following tips and see if those embarrassing moments become fewer and far between.



REMEMBERING NAMES OF PEOPLE WHEN YOU MEET THEM

- Pay attention while being introduced.
 - **Stop** what you're doing.
 - **Look** at the person. What is it about the way this person looks that I will most likely remember? For example:
 - ◆ Size – Heavy, thin, tall, short
 - ◆ Hair – Curly, thin, short, long, color
 - ◆ Facial features – nose, mouth, eyes
 - **Listen** carefully to the name. If you don't catch their name when it was originally told to you, ask for it again. Saying it immediately will help you remember it when they walk away.

- ◆ Realize that people are flattered when you take an interest in them!
- **SAVE** the person's name
 - **S** Say the name at least 3 times in conversation. When first introduced, use the person's name several times as you talk to them. For example, you might say:
 - ◆ "Hi, Jim, nice to meet you."
 - ◆ "So, what do you do for a living, Jim?"
 - ◆ "Do you have any kids, Jim?"
 - **A** Ask a question about their name (e.g., "Is that Catherine with a "C" or with a "K") or about the person (e.g., "Mary, do you come here often?").
 - **V** Visualize or try to picture in your mind something about the person you are most likely to remember (e.g., shape of their nose, color of their hair, height, weight).
 - **E** End the conversation with their name. For example,
 - ◆ "Jim, it was great to meet you!"
 - ◆ "Thanks for the information, Terry."
 - ◆ "I enjoyed meeting you, Felicia."
- To cue your memory for the person's name, try to associate the person's name with:
 - Something or someone familiar to you:
 - ◆ Someone you know (For example, your aunt, your brother's girlfriend, your pet goldfish).
 - ◆ Celebrity, famous person, or TV/cartoon character (For example, Bush, Wayne, Simpson, Bunker)
 - ◆ An occupation (For example, Driver, Gardener, Cooke, Farmer, Baker)
 - ◆ A thing or animal (For example, Booth, Hill, Snow, Moon, Wells, Falcon, Beard)
 - ◆ Product brand name (For example, Singer, Ford, Webber, Dell, Decker, McCormick, Comet, Whitman)
 - A rhyme

For example, Clark/lark; Puckett/bucket; Crump/slump; Blake/bake; Terry/merry; Teague/league; Blake/lake

○ Familiar-sounding words

For example, Hightower = high + tower; Askew = ask + you; Starkey = star + key; Jackson = Jack + son; Mancuso = man + cue + sew; Andre = on tray

○ A noteworthy physical feature or personality characteristic

For example, you might think of someone with a big head of blonde hair as “Ryan the Lion”; a very tall girl might be “Tall Tiffany”; a lady with the gift of gab may be “Chatty Cathy.”

○ A “mind” picture

The more outlandish and colorful the picture, the easier it will be to remember. Longer names may need to be broken down into syllables to create memorable pictures. The full name should create ONE picture. The person whose name you have made a picture of should be in the picture. For example, to remember the name “Pitchford” you could think of the person pitching something at a Ford Bronco.

A word of caution: You will find that the more “odd ball” your memory cues are, the easier they are to remember. It’s a good idea to keep the cues to yourself so as not to offend anyone.

● **Repetition. Repetition. Repetition.** (Get the hint?)

- Say the name silently to yourself a few times.
- Try to use the person’s name in conversation repeatedly.
- Introducing the person to others can be an easy way to repeat the name without drawing attention.

● **When possible, make notes.** (e.g., in your memory book/organizer; on a calendar; note pad; program, business card; etc.). Include:

- The person’s name and prominent features
- What you talked about
- The person's interests, job, family, etc.
 - ◆ Review the name often until it is familiar. Try to use the person’s

name in everyday conversation; even if just say it to yourself.

REMEMBERING NAMES OF PEOPLE YOU MEET IN GROUPS (e.g., meetings, social gatherings)

- **Make an acronym**, using the letter of each name to spell a word. (e.g.: Randy, Amy, Nat, Kendra = RANK)
- **Make an acrostic**, using the first letter in each name to make a sentence (e.g., Albert, Lois, Chapman, Lester, Alice = All lobsters can live alone)
- **Keep a file** of each of your activities with a list of names and your notes on each person. Review the list before you go to each activity.

WHEN YOU CAN'T REMEMBER THE NAME OF SOMEONE YOU KNOW

- **Don't fret – you'll forget.** Getting upset will only make it harder for you to recall the person's name. Remember, those chemicals that make your stomach all queasy when you get worried also affect your brain! Instead of asking yourself "what's his/her name" over and over again:
- **Ask yourself *other* questions** about the person *besides* their name. For example:
 - ◇ **Who** is this person's _____ (e.g., husband, wife, child, sister, uncle, etc.)
 - ◇ **What** does this person do _____? (e.g., for a living, for fun, etc.)
 - ◇ **When** did I _____ (e.g., last see, first meet, etc.) this person?
 - ◇ **Where** does this person _____ (e.g., live, work, go to church, etc.)?

Once you can recall other details, their name tends to come to mind.

- **Say the alphabet from A to Z** under your breath. Sometimes saying the first letter of their name will trigger your memory.
- **Ask again.** If you run into someone whose name you forgot, ask them again. Remember: Most people would rather that you ask their name again than for you to feel badly that you forgot.
- **Have a "I-forgot-your-name" speech**, handy just in case. Here are a few sample sayings. You can try one of these, or come up with your

own. Practice your “speech” by saying it to yourself several times. Review your speech before you go to a social gathering.

- ◆ “Of course I remember you, but your name seems to have escaped me.”
- ◆ “I’m so sorry. I’m drawing a blank on your name.”
- ◆ “Would you please refresh my memory? Your name is...”
- ◆ “Hi! I don’t know if you remember meeting me before. My name’s [say your name]. And yours?”



Darla decided to take steps to remember the names of the people she meets in her support group. Each time she meets someone new, she stops, looks, and listens to the person. She says the name at least 3 times while they are talking. Then she writes their name in her organizer, putting a short description next to each person’s name. Darla also writes something to associate the person’s name with something easy to remember and studies her list before each meeting. Darla’s list looks like this:

- *Aretha – curly brown hair, tall. (Aretha Franklin).*
- *Sam – short, blond hair, glasses. (Uncle Sam)*
- *Brice – long brown hair, pretty (rhymes with rice)*
- *Henry – heavy, beard, red hair (1st boyfriend’s name; hen red)*

*To remember the names, she also made an acrostic (see page 24) sentence: A Small Box Hops. It’s easy to remember because it **is** so silly.*

MY ACTION PLAN FOR REMEMBERING NAMES

I seem to have the
most trouble
remembering
names...

This is what I am
going to do the
next time I meet
someone new:

This is what I'm
going to do to help
me remember a
person's name
after I meet them:

This is what I'm
going to do to
when I can't
remember
someone's
name:

I will check my
plan on this date
to see if it's work-
ing. If not, I'll need
to try another
plan.
