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# MEMORY MANAGEMENT

## *Parking Information for Later Recall*

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*"If you tell the truth, you don't need a memory."*

Will Rogers

Have you ever thought, *I'm losing it?* Have you noticed that sometimes you feel like a genius and other times you can't remember what you had for lunch? The brain is a powerful tool that controls our ability to think. Unfortunately, it didn't come with an owner's manual. With a few simple tools, proper care, and feeding however, anyone (who hasn't suffered permanent brain damage) can improve their memory power.

Just for fun, take 60 seconds to memorize the following list of 10 items. Then close your eyes and see how many you can recall, in the order in which they appear here:

candy cane  
swan  
pitch fork  
mail box  
bicycle  
plow  
razor  
hour glass  
lollipop  
bow and arrow

If you remembered four or five, you're doing really well. The reason why it's difficult to recall the list is that it has no meaning. By controlling how we store information though, we can attain

greater control over what gets stored for later recall—even a meaningless list.

## **Park Information**

Here's a four-step memory technique that will enable you to store information for later recall. It's easy to remember the steps because they spell the word: P.A.R.K. This is especially useful for remembering names—a challenge for just about everyone.

### **Step 1: P — PAY ATTENTION**

The #1 reason why people forget is that they don't pay attention. This means listening with your entire body—eyes, ears, nose, mouth, skin, and any other body part that allows sensory input. All of our senses help to create and enhance memory. But how can we expect to recall something that we didn't input into our mind in the first place? During an introduction to someone new for example, many people think, *I have such a bad memory that I'm not going to bother trying to remember the name.* Instead of listening to the name, their mind is distracted with negative self-talk. By becoming a more attentive listener, you'll greatly increase your chances for recall.

### **Step 2: A — ACTIVATE AN ASSOCIATION**

Association requires mentally connecting new information with what you already know. The more visual, auditory, and kinesthetic the new information is, the more it taps into the senses that help us retain information. The more visual information is for example, the more likely we are to remember it. In order to assist memory, new information such as a name, needs to be *associated* or connected with a picture image you've already stored about the name. One of the reasons why names are so difficult to remember is because names don't generally form an immediate mental picture in our minds. We therefore have to “force” an association to assist the recall. For example, you've just been introduced to Mark. You'd like to remember his name but the sound "mark" means nothing to you, unless you associate a meaning to it. You may have met someone with the name of Mark in the past and can use that as your mental association "hook." Imagine this new Mark as your existing friend, Mark. Or imagine Mark with a big "X" marked across his face. Now you're deliberately forcing more meaning to the sound “mark” by

conjuring up an image. When the brain doesn't make the association for you, make up one of your own. Whenever you want to recall Mark's name, you'll first "see" your association (old friend or the X on his face), which will trigger the memory of the name, "Mark." The association doesn't have to be a strong one. The brain just needs a little assistance.

### **Step 3: R — REPEAT**

Recall thrives on repetition. Repeat the thought or idea over in your mind several times—even throughout the day. The more you repeat the information you want to remember, the more reinforcement you'll provide to long-term memory. When being introduced to people, say the name you've just learned out loud as a form of rehearsal. "How nice to meet you, Karen." Hearing the name helps lock in auditory recall and will assist "parking" the information into long-term memory. While you're saying the name out loud, you can be activating an association that will help lock in the name for later use. You might imagine Karen as a nurse dressed in white, *carin'* for people. The more unusual you make the image, the more likely you are to remember it. We have difficulty remembering the routine so be a bit creative with your association.

### **Step 4: K — KEEP GOOD RECORDS**

There's no substitute for a memory tool called pen and paper. Jotting the information down relieves the stress of trying to remember, provides tactile reinforcement, and helps create a perfect memory. First hear the information through all your senses, then activate an association, repeat the information, and then when you get to a place when you can write it down, do so.

Let's go back to our list of nonsense words introduced at the beginning and use the PARK technique to recall every item on the list. You will need to pay attention — really concentrate on the list, saying each word aloud to provide auditory reinforcement as well. Next, activate an association for each word before moving on to the next. I recommend the number link system. Link each item in the list with the numbers 1 — 10 and make a mental association picture for each item. For example, the first item is a candy cane.

Associate a candy cane with the number 1. Create a mental picture in your mind that connects the two pictures of 1) candy cane and 2) the number 1. You might see a giant 1 colored in red and white stripes. Next is a swan and number 2. Envision the 2 as a curve of a swan's neck, and see it floating in a lake. Next is a pitchfork and the number three. See how the end of the pitchfork looks like a three when turned on its side. Continue through the list with numbers 4-10. Then rehearse the list by repeating it several times. Then write it down. Now how many can you remember? Probably all ten!

## **What do people remember most?**

Think of a memorable time in your life. The reason why this event stands out above others is that it probably meets the following criteria for recall. Use these when creating associations for information you want to PARK.

### **1. Exaggerated Situations**

We tend to remember things that are out of the ordinary. If you want to remember something, create an exaggerated picture of it in your mind. Make it silly, unusual, larger than life, or anything else that takes it out of the mundane.

### **2. Heightened Emotions**

Events, either good or bad, stick with us if they were emotionally charged such as a wedding, loss of a loved one, birth of a child, graduation, your first solo bike ride, or even a first taste of ice cream.

### **3. Strong Visual Image**

Since we think in pictures, if we don't have a picture to recall, we're going to have a tough time remembering. A name doesn't bring up a mental picture the way a car, elephant, or a boat might. Just now for example, it was impossible for you to read the words *car*, *elephant*, or *boat* without thinking of an image of those items. In order to assist your memory with names then, create an exaggerated, emotional, and mental picture of the person's name if you want to recall it at a later date.

The mind is like any other muscle in the body. Use it, or you'll lose it. Using memory

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tools helps keep the mind sharp and alert. Using PARK to recall information and names is not only good for you, it's fun. Try it and you'll see just how smart you really are!

Contact Lorna Riley for a complete list of training programs and speeches:

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