

Networking and the Name Game

Networking is the process of making, using, and retaining both professional and personal relationships with the goal of exchanging information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions. When making new acquaintances, one of the biggest mistakes people make is not remembering names.

Using a person's name in conversation is an easy and instant way to make them feel important to you. It shows that you are paying attention and are interested in the individual you've just met. If you can walk into a room, meet 10 people, and leave hours later, saying good-bye to each person using his or her name, people will be astonished. Plus, they will remember you.

To avoid the embarrassment of forgetting someone's name, try these strategies:

- 1. BE A REPEATER.** Make a point to say a person's name aloud at least three times during the conversation. Asking a question is a good time to do this. For example: "Where do you work, Martha?"
- 2. FOCUS ON A DISTINCTION.** When you meet someone, focus on something distinctive about the person. Is he really tall? Does she have red hair? Associate this feature with the person's name. For example: "Tall guy = Evan" or "Red Head = Greta."
- 3. USE VISUALIZATION.** Break down the person's name into syllables and think about the sound of each syllable. What images do the syllables trigger for you? For a simple name like Bill, you might think of the image of a dollar bill. For longer names, think of multiple images. For example, the name Nicole may make you think of the image of a nickel or the image of a nick on a piece of coal. Turn the name into the image, and you'll burn the name into your memory.

4. **SPELL IT OUT.** If you don't think you heard the name correctly, or if it's an unusual name, ask the person to say it again. Better yet, ask them to spell it.
5. **LISTEN UP.** If you wait patiently, there's a good chance the person may use his/her own name or that someone else will. If you're going to lunch or dinner, allow the acquaintance to give his/her name to the host to reserve the table.
6. **WRITE IT DOWN.** If you're keeping a networking book or a journal, write the person's name down. If you got his/her business card, put it in your folio with notes about your relationship to them.
7. **USE ASSOCIATION.** When networking, you are going to meet new people in both professional and personal situations. If you met Laura at a charity auction, remember her bidding. If you met Tim at a club, remember him by the DJ headphones he was wearing.
8. **ASK SOMEONE ELSE.** If the opportunity is available, it is preferable to discreetly ask someone else for a person's name than to risk greeting them incorrectly. It happens to everybody, and no one will hold the inquiry against you.
9. **FORGET YOURSELF.** If you try too hard to make a good first impression and are worrying about your own appearance, the quality of your handshake and what you said, chances are you will not have any recall as to on whom you made the impression. When you become too self-conscious during an introduction, it interferes with your memory. Concentrate on them instead.
10. **INTRODUCE SOMEONE ELSE.** Introducing someone you just met to another person allows you to (1) say his/her name, (2) take control of the conversation, (3) show your willingness to encourage connections, and (4) expand someone else's network.

By remembering names, you've achieved the first step in networking. The sound of peoples' own names makes them feel comfortable and friendly toward the speaker. They will warm up to you and tell you a bit about themselves. This is the start of building that business or social relationship, and all because you took the time to pay attention and remember names.