



## I'll Never Forget Whatshisname!

This month's column has been prompted by some conversations at recent courses and a chance encounter with a young actuary\* who suggested I take up this topic. It's one of my favourites and fundamental to communication: using names.

Now I know that not everyone thinks this is important but, before you stop reading, think about how you felt the last time someone forgot your name (or got it wrong). The aim of this column is to help you avoid having that effect on other people....

I am not going to spend a lot of time with methods for remembering names as there seems to be a wide range of "systems" - and different things work for different people. However, some of the following generic tips may help support your own "system":

- When you hear a name, use it. It might help embed it in your memory and it also allows you to check you have got it right.
- If you are not sure that you heard it correctly the first time I suggest that you check it straight away. It may have been hard to detect Nick v Mick, or it may be an unusual name or an accent may have made it difficult to identify. In any case it won't hurt to ask something like: "I'm sorry, would you mind repeating your name?" Alternatively, if relevant, feel free to refer to their business card.
- You may also like to confirm your pronunciation, if their name is difficult for you to say. (I think it's polite and it may help embed it.) You may also like to check their preference (eg Dave v David) before you take inappropriate liberties. (Please don't call me "Marty".)
- If you are at a function where name tags are provided then use them. If you are organising a gathering then remember to at least consider providing name tags.
- You can help other people with names by providing clear introductions. You can also help in more subtle ways. If you are at a function and there are two people that you know and you suspect that they know each other you could say something like: "Hi Barry. You remember Melinda of course?" That allows Barry to say, "Of course, hi Melinda" and everyone is happy\*\*.
- If you are attending a meeting where there are a few unfamiliar faces you can make note of their names on a hand-drawn diagram of the room or meeting table. Alternatively, if most people have given you their business card, you can arrange them in a way that corresponds to their seating position to help you recall who is who.
- If you are meeting with a group of people that you have met before but your recollection is vague you might undertake some preparation. Check your memory with a colleague or see if their photo is on Linked In. (Another benefit to continue with last month's topic). Be careful relying on their Facebook photo....



Sounds pretty straightforward? Let's consider three tricky situations....

1. Following on from the 5<sup>th</sup> bullet point above, \*\*what happens if Barry and Melinda haven't met? That's OK, a simple response like "I'm sorry, I thought you both were famous" may overcome the problem and you can switch to a normal introduction, perhaps reminding them where they may have met.
2. What happens when you forget someone's name? No, avoiding them is not the right answer. You can look for clues in the conversation or simply be upfront, saying something like, "I'm really sorry. I know we have met before but I can't recall your name." Most people are not perfect with names and will appreciate both your honesty and your willingness to check.
3. What happens when you get their name wrong? (Sorry, Alex\*). Again, I think it is best to be upfront and apologise. If you are brave enough you can also promise to get it right next time! This may not be sufficient, of course, if it is your children's names or your partner's name – that probably requires flowers!

In summary, I think that the most important factor is caring. If you believe that it is valuable enough for your relationship to focus on his/her name then I am confident that you will improve. It does, however, require some conscious effort to use the right name when you are communicating.