

CHAPTER ONE

Hello Jack... err... Jim, I Mean, John

What's so important about remembering names?

My daughter, Gali, was four years old when she surprised me one evening, as we walked down the street together.

“Daddy, can I have a coin?” she asked.

“What for?” I asked.

“To give to Boris,” she replied.

I didn't know any Boris, especially one who conducted business with my young daughter. Therefore, it was only natural that I should ask her, “Who exactly is Boris?”

“Come on, you know...” she said in a small voice. “The man who plays music.”

I immediately realized that she was referring to the street musician, who plays the mandolin, relying on the charity and kindness of passersby for his living.

Nevertheless, I was surprised by the fact that she knew his name.

Gali took the coin and approached the musician, who was occupied with his belongings at the time. She stood in front of him and, unable to attract his attention, spoke to him in a quiet voice.

“Boris, this is for you.”

The musician looked up and gazed at her in astonishment. “How do you know that my name is Boris?” he asked with a heavy Russian accent.

My daughter looked at him for a moment and said, “You told me last time!”

“But how did you remember?” asked the musician, his eyes twinkling.

My daughter couldn’t answer this. In fact, it seemed that the question was incomprehensible to her. It was as if she was thinking to herself, “What’s the problem? You told me your name and I remembered it. Why the big surprise?”

I observed the two of them from the side in amazement. For me he was just an ordinary person on an urban street, the type that one passes by fleetingly, with hardly a blink of the eye. But for Gali, he was Boris! A man with a name like me and like her, an interesting man who gives her pleasure through his music.

My astonishment was insignificant compared with the next thing that happened. Boris straightened up, picked up the mandolin and began strumming a tune. Gali placed a coin inside the rusty tin can and, at that moment, Boris stopped playing. He knelt towards the tin, took out the coin and returned it to Gali.

“You are my friend,” he said with a warmhearted smile. “I’ll play for you for nothing.”

I have been developing and applying memory techniques for years, aware of the potency and importance of a sound memory. But what transpired that day was an absolute illumination; a four year-old girl, walking in the street, approaches a street musician and addresses him by name. The musician, who lives frugally from every cent dropped into his tin can, refuses the money and is overjoyed. Why? Because one of the thousands of people, who pass him by everyday, remembered his name!

That's all that Gali did. Boris, touched to the core, thanked her in the most natural but amazing manner – he dedicated a song to her for free. He thanked her for remembering his most dear possession – his name.

Skinner's Positive Feedback Theory¹ determined that giving a person a compliment and acknowledgment generates positive change. Remembering a person's name causes beneficial recognition that is translated into deeds of trust, comradeship and a desire to prove that we are worthy of respect. In Steven Covey's famous book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, he singles out a critical point in relationships and business transactions: "Without involvement, there is no commitment." Remembering a person's name creates a significant change from a lack of involvement to highly emotional involvement, and to an increase in motivation for commitment. People are the most important component in any public or private business enterprise. All are vital – janitors, students, sanitation workers, clerks, messengers, managers and CEOs. All are driven by appreciation, respect and ego. Each person has a name by which they want to be remembered, liked and respected.

Try and imagine an insurance agent meeting a customer and failing to remember his or her name.

"I have insured my house, my car and my life with him and he can't even remember my name?!" Would such a client recommend him to friends or even wish to continue being insured by him? Most likely not.

Research has shown that people "repay back" those who remember them. A lecturer who remembers a student's name from a class of two hundred, will inspire that student to invest in his studies and want to prove his worth. A woman, who purchased something at a small store a month ago, will most likely 'adopt' the store and become a loyal customer if the storeowner remembers her name.

1. J.F. Skinner. The Theory of Positive Reinforcement

A messenger, business proprietor or sales representative would give you better service (discounts, upgrades and convenient payment terms), if you remembered them and addressed them by their given names.

Furthermore, people in the upper echelons achieve their status as a result of their ability to initiate and lead. Inter alia, people with leadership capability know how to create personal relationships and infuse respect, trust and motivation by placing an emphasis on remembering people and their names.

Sam Walton, the founder of the giant retail chain Wal-Mart, used to study and memorize each branch's employees' names prior to visiting that branch. He was also the first to initiate name tags for sales personnel and service providers, with the business philosophy that customers would feel more comfortable buying from a salesperson whom they know by name.

Walton said, "If you want to succeed in business, remembering names has to be in your highest priority. It is a critical tool for succeeding in business."

Napoleon remembered the names of all his thousands of officers. He even had a method for remembering, which we will elaborate on in one of the following chapters.

It isn't widely known, but US President George Bush has an excellent memory for names. Bush is wont to give nicknames to the members of Congress. He calls Congressman Fred Upton, 'Freddie Boy.' He calls Congressman George Miller, 'Big George.' Reference here is not only to an efficient technique for remembering names. His informal approach generates a sense of closeness and appreciation, and forges better working relationships between the president and Congress.

"Remembering names creates a warmth that converts new acquaintances

into old friends,” stresses Benjamin Levy, an expert in the field and instructor of senior managers in American corporations².

Remembering names is a strategic asset and, in contrast to the widespread belief, **is not an innate capability**. The ability to remember names is acquired and can be easily obtained. Every one of us can remember the names of thousands of people, thus working miracles on the personal and business levels.

Remembering names, therefore, contributes in a number of ways:

- ✓ It leads to personal connections and immediate trust.
- ✓ It creates loyal customers and raises the sales and earnings curve.
- ✓ It raises motivation and commitment amongst employees, contributing directly to reducing expenses and increasing personal output to higher efficiency levels.
- ✓ It arouses appreciation for the person’s good memory and indicates professionalism. A lecturer, who remembers the names of forty participants within a short time period, elicits appreciation and creates a professional impression. People are amazed by what they perceive to be difficult to perform.

Beyond the fact that those with good memories are perceived as highly intelligent and professional, the ability to remember names also contributes on the personal level: **Self-confidence grows, embarrassing situations are avoided, and the ability to concentrate is honed.**

Make a personal effort to remember names, compliment those who remember names and encourage others to do so. The results will be evident.

2. Benjamin Levy, Remember Every Name, Every Time, Fireside, 2002, pg. 42



In one of my favorite cafes, I noticed a waiter giving special attention to one of the customers.

“Are you satisfied, Lizzie?”

“Is the food to your liking, Lizzie?”

“Lizzie, would you like more salad dressing?”

After Lizzie had paid and left, I had a short conversation with the waiter.

“Well done,” I complimented him. “A client such as this, whose name you remembered, with such personal and devoted service will, no doubt, be a loyal customer and spread the word about your excellent service.”

“Thanks very much, that’s very kind of you,” the waiter smiled with satisfaction. “But that was my wife.”