

# Tricks to remembering people's names

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Shakespeare's Juliet declared to Romeo that names really aren't that important with her famous words: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

But Juliet never owned a service station. She never ran for office or practiced law. She never taught school. And she had the luxury of hiding behind a feathered mask when she walked into a room full of faces, unlike the rest of us who see the same situation as a minefield of names we might not remember.

"You've got to be scanning the horizon when you arrive at a party so you don't get caught off guard," said lawyer Harvey Ford when asked about his tactics for remembering names.

"I know it's important to people that you remember them, and that's why I try to honor them with that memory," said Gov. [Charlie Crist](#), who effortlessly greets hundreds of people by their first names. "I'm far from perfect. One thing I try to do is say their name back to them when I meet them." Personal development instructor Alan Mong offered the same tip to a Chamber of Commerce group recently during a short program with tips for remembering names. To become really proficient he invited members to attend a seven-hour memory training workshop for \$649 hosted by his employer, Freedom Personal Development of Madison, Wis. Mong has led similar programs for SunTrust and [Bank of America](#), among other companies. "The biggest misconception about memory is that it's age-related," he said.



Mong called on the audience to create one list of 15 random things such as pizza, pumpkin, [Afghanistan](#) and sunshine. He then dazzled the crowd by reciting the list forward and backward by memory. Chamber members called out numbers from one to 15 out of order, and he named which item on the list corresponded. Jaws dropped. Mouths gaped. It was as if he had sawed a woman in half.

"My memory is no better than anyone's in this room," Mong said. "It's just better trained. Having a trained memory can make you more money and reduce stress." Author and speaker Peggy Post, the great-granddaughter-in-law of [Emily Post](#), once the American barometer of etiquette, grants us all blanket forgiveness for forgetting names.

"Everybody draws a blank, even with somebody they know very well. Don't be ashamed to admit it because it's better than ignoring the person," she said. "You can say: 'I'm sorry. I can't believe I've forgotten your name' or 'I remember meeting you last summer but I can't remember your name.' If you can tell the person other details you do remember about them, it helps the situation."

Louis Murphy, pastor at Mount Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church in St. Petersburg, Fla., estimated he knows half the names in a congregation of 4,500.

"I wish I could tell you I know every last name, but I don't," he said. "I hate when I can't remember a name, and my memory is terrible. I have to be very, very intentional about remembering names. When he meets someone he repeats their name several times in conversation.

"Even out of their presence I might say (to myself) 'Okay, I just met Ian.' As many times as you can repeat their name after you first meet, the greater chance you have of remembering that name," Murphy added.

A few years ago he listened to the Mega Memory tapes by marketing guru [Kevin Trudeau](#). They offered different things to trigger memory. If you meet a Curtis, think of some way he can be tied to the word "curfew" or "current." For Doug, think of "duq a hole," but for Douglas,

think of “dug a glass.” Ford, who actually professes to be bad with names, offered one of his tactics for remembering names.

“I see a person and I picture them as a character in a movie or TV show, and that sort of locks them in my memory because I can associate them with who they remind me of,” Ford said.

“Maybe they have a sense of humor like [Jon Stewart](#) and it helps me remember them. Not that their name is Jon, but it still helps me remember them.” Someone who is inquisitive and speaks very fast is a [Chris Matthews](#). Someone who talks slowly, uses few words and is way cool is a [Clint Eastwood](#).

“The Seinfeld show is a great source of analogies,” Ford added. “Say I go to dinner with someone and they are very persnickety about the way they order from a menu, I think of them as a Seinfeld character.” So how many Kramers does he have in his name file?

“Other than myself,” Ford laughed, “not many.”

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