

I'm Networking and I Remember Your Name!

By Bonnie Budzowski

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Are you looking for a better way to remember the names of people you meet at professional events? Here are some ways to increase your chances of remembering. In addition, you'll avoid starting a conversation with boring talk about the weather.

Ask a question or make a comment about the person's name. Here are some examples:

- ❑ *Say something positive about a namesake:* "It's nice to meet you, Joe. I have great memories of an uncle (or neighbor or colleague) named Joe. My uncle was an incredibly talented engineer. Is there any chance you are an engineer, too?"

If the answer is "Yes, I work for the nuclear division at Westinghouse," you can say, "Perhaps engineering goes with the name," and follow up with questions about Joe's job. If the answer is "No, I'm in the hospitality industry," you can say, "Well, I guess the profession doesn't go with the name," and follow up with questions about the hospitality industry.

In any case, pick something positive or neutral about someone you knew who shared the name in question. If you can find something you admire in the namesake, all the better. The conversation gets off to a positive start.

- ❑ *Ask for the story behind the name:* "Shalonda is a lovely (or elegant) name. Is there a story behind it?" Depending on the story, many follow-up questions are possible.
- ❑ *Ask for the meaning behind the name:* I don't hear the name Aviva often. What's the meaning of your name? Again, many follow-up questions are possible.
- ❑ *Ask for the heritage behind the name:* "I don't hear the name Broniek very often. Can you tell me about the heritage behind your name? You can follow this question with ones about geography, history, holiday foods and traditions, and many others, depending on how long this person or family has been in the US.

Repeating a name and discussing it increases your chances of remembering it. What's more, people enjoy telling the story behind their name, even if they don't like the name itself.

Introduce the person by name. People come to networking events with the goal of expanding their contacts. At the same time, most of us find it easier to stick with one conversation—even a boring one—than manage the awkward transition of moving on. Here's a way to learn a name and increase the number of people you meet.

After you have a few minutes of conversation with a new contact, make an effort to draw someone else into your conversation. Introduce your partner, by name, with a complement. For example, you might say, "I'd like you to meet Renee. I've just learned that Renee is an expert on the multigenerational workforce." If you don't know enough about Renee to extend a compliment, you can always share a fact that can open a conversation. For example, "Renee

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travelled from Ohio to attend today's event. She just might win the 'traveled the greatest distance award.' ”

This introduction helps you to commit Renee's name to memory, draws another party into your conversation, and creates a warm connection between you and Renee. Who doesn't respond well to personal and positive information about herself?!

The approaches described here—assuming you are sincere in your comments—allow you to repeat the person's name and start a conversation at the same time. Since the focus is on the other person, that person is likely to think you are a great conversationalist. This makes you both likeable and memorable. You win in more ways than one!

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Bonnie Budzowski helps clients increase the effectiveness of business messages from three perspectives—that of a marketing specialist, an expert on influence, and an expert on visual design. Why pay for one perspective when you can get three?

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