Art and science of remembering

Glenys Bridges discusses techniques to hold on to your memory

I always have trouble remembering three things: faces, names, and - I can’t remember what the third thing is...

We often hear people say they have a memory like a sieve. Most of us would like to have a better memory. The good news is that there are a number of easy techniques we can use to improve our powers of recollection.

The ability of dental professionals to remember names, faces, facts and figures will have a massive impact on how they are valued by their colleagues, their profession and their patients. In many ways we judge the worth and intelligence of others based upon their ability to retain information. Some people have amazing recall of numeric information; in fact some of us can remember the phone numbers of all our friends and family, but can never remember where we put our keys! Memory theorists summarise memory as being the processes of registering, storing and retrieving information. They recognise that we use our visual, aural and kinaesthetic senses in this process. To improve the power of memory we need to determine which of these senses is your dominate sense so that you can make good use of your strengths, whilst working to develop areas of weakness. In his book, Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything, Joshua Foer offers these tips for memory improvement:

Visualise Techniques

If your dominant sense for learning and remembering is visual; link names to visual cues, such as a person’s name is Mary, picture her dressed as Mary Poppins, or picture someone called Tom as Tom Jones. Wherever possible blend the key words you want to remember to pictures or places. Memory Guru Tony Buzan offers this technique in his mind mapping process when you can see the links between events or ideas, as they are set out in linked boxes.

Aural techniques

If your dominant sense for learning and remembering is aural. You could use mnemonics to create a memorable sentence as a memory aid. For example, children learning music often use Every Good Boy Deserves Fun to remind them of the notes of the treble clef. This can be applied to anything from shopping to tasks, to ‘to do’ lists. Then by voicing the mnemonic aloud, you redouble the ability to recall the information when needed.

Emotional links

When your dominant sense for learning and remembering is kinaesthetic it is important to recognise that we remember what has the greatest meaning to us. In many cases, the reason someone has really good recall is linked to their interest in the subject. The reason is simple; if you are interested in something you are far more likely to remember lots of details. Our brains divide memory into two sections, working-memory and long-term memory. This is such an effective system that it is mimicked by computers.

Some people say that our memory deteriorates with age. This may well be true, but as in all things, the use it or lose it principles apply. You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realise that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all, just as intelligence without the possibility of expression is not really intelligence. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.

About the author

Glenys Bridges is managing director of the Dental Resource Company and has provided training for dental teams since 1992. For more information, visit www.dental-resource.com or call Glenys Bridges on 0121 241 6693.