

12@12
The Most Important Word to Remember
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James
Taurance
Tom
Vivian

I bet I just got some people's attention. I am almost certain that I got the attention of those whose names I called out. And I probably got everyone's attention, because you wondered why I called out the names of some of those who are present here today.

I did so to demonstrate to you the power of using someone's name. Even if I didn't call out your name just now, you have experienced that power yourself. You have been in a crowded space. There is noise and conversation going on all around you, but somehow you manage to hear someone calling your name from afar. They may not even be referring to you. They may be calling out to someone who has the same name as you do, but you find yourself turning to see who is calling your name almost as reactively as ducking when something comes flying at your face. There is just something about the use of our name that draws our attention and evokes response.

In fact, when people use your name, it probably affects you more than you think. Research suggests if you receive a text reminder for let's say a doctor's appointment, and that text includes your first name, you are 57% less likely to be a no-how for your appointment than if you received text without your name. Or what if you must pay a fine, and you receive a letter asking you to pay up? What will be your response? Research suggests that you will be nearly 50% more likely to pay if the letter begins by using your first name.¹

Or consider this: each year there are a number of significant storms that hit our shores. As you know, those storms have names attached to them. Let's suppose that the storm's name is Alissa, and your name happens to be Amber. Just because the name of the storm starts with the same first letter as your name, you are more than two times likely to donate to relief efforts for that storm than those who do not share

the same first letter.² Isn't that crazy? That is how attached we are to our name.

Whether we recognize it or not, our name is tied intimately to our personhood. A parent understands this when they reprimand a child for a behavior they find particularly troublesome. They use not just the first name, but the middle name as well. And they do so not only to get their child's attention but because they want the child to change.

A teacher understands the power of a name as well when he makes mention of a student in a positive light. Let suppose a teacher wants to recognize a particular student and says, "Today, I want to recognize a student that has done an outstanding job this semester, a student who has not only done her own work well, but has also been there to help other students. She has stayed late to help me in the classroom and she has come early to help other students." At this point, all the other students in the class may know exactly whom the teacher is speaking about. They might even be staring at the student. But if the teacher stopped with those words, or if the teacher said, "You, in the third row come forward, I would like to give you an award," the kind words would fall well short of their potential effect. It's not until the teacher calls out the name of the student that the words really inspire the student. And when her name is spoken, she will have to use all of her self-control to not break out in a smile. The use of her name will make the words go deep inside her.

Or how about a graduation ceremony? You attend one for a friend or for a relative, perhaps your own child. What is the most important part of the ceremony? It is when you hear the name of the one you care about. In fact, if you were to be there for the whole ceremony, but were not paying attention when the person's name was called, you would feel like you missed out. One or two seconds is spent to call out the name, and that one or two seconds are the very most important part of the graduation.

A few weeks back, I shared with you a story of Andrew Carnegie, the steel baron of one hundred years ago. I told you he had quite a way of interacting with his employees in the steel mills. When he saw a group of men smoking under a sign that read "No smoking," he did not tell them to quit smoking instead he handed out cigars and asked the men if they would please smoke them outside. The men understood what

Carnegie was getting at. Carnegie's tact in not calling them out was probably enough to make them view Carnegie in a positive light, but there is a good chance that when Carnegie talked to the men, he used their names. I say that because he made a point of knowing as many people's names as possible. And it appears not to have been without effect. In an era when big labor was growing up, Carnegie never had significant issues with his labor force. His mills never experienced a strike. One can't help but think it was largely because those who worked his mills knew that to Mr. Carnegie they were people with names and not just a part of the industrial machine.³

And this was not the only time Carnegie used names to his advantage. When trying to become the supplier for the Pennsylvania railroad, Carnegie decided to name his new mill in Pittsburgh the "Edgar Thomson Steel Works." Who was Edgar Thomson? The president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. And you can guess where the railroad was soon buying their steel.⁴

Now, in this last case, you might say that Carnegie was just appealing to Thomson's vanity. And perhaps he was, but notice that he did so just by using the person's name. Like it or not, people just feel more important, more listened to, and more cared for when we use their name.

All this suggests we ought to work awfully hard at being good at knowing people's names. In saying that my guess is your first reaction is "But I am not very good at names." To which I say, "Join the club." I have found that those who are good with names are few and far between. Tom Douthit, the senior pastor at BridgePoint, happens to be one of those. He is likely to remember your name after one interaction and even to remember it for years. But the rest of us just aren't gifted like that.

A search of the internet will provide you with all kinds of articles telling you how to remember people's names. One article titled "How to Remember a Person's Name" provides eleven steps. Now, I don't know about you, but if I am struggling remembering people's names, I am certainly not going to remember eleven different steps to remember their names!

Most who write on the subject suggest repeating a person's name in your mind the moment you hear it, and using it in the conversation as many times as you can. Others suggest you link something about the

person to the name as quickly as you can. This has been helpful for me. I find that if someone comes up to me and wants to discuss an idea or a project, I have a hard time remembering their name. But if I find out something about them personally, like where they live or where they grew up, or the kind of work they do, I remember their name much better.

I also find that I do much better remembering people's names if I clearly hear both their first and last name. That would seem to double the names I have to remember, but for whatever reason I find knowing both names gives me a bigger handle to grab on to. I also find making lists of names helpful, because I know I will forget names. I make lists of names of students at Rice. I make list of names of folks who attend 12@12. I even have a stack of index cards in my desk with people's names who are regular attenders at BridgePoint. And I often pull them out on Sunday morning and go through them. Now, you might think that I am really good at names since I am sharing with you my routine. I can tell you I am not, and it may even be that you have come several times and I have yet to get your name down. But I can only think how miserably worse I would be at names if I didn't make the effort I do.

As you might expect as a pastor I spend a good deal of time reading the Bible, and one of the things I have long recognized is that the Bible is a book about God. He is the main character from beginning to end. But along the way hundreds and hundreds of people that are a part of God's story are named along the way. There are even long lists of genealogies. It is as if God is saying that while he is the main character, it is a story that he has given countless people the privilege to be a part of, and he wants to remember them by name. God even says that if we are to be saved that we are to call on the name of his son Jesus. That's how important names are to him. And it seems that if they are important to him, they ought to be important to us.

So use any method works for you, but if you want to influence and care for others from members of your own family to those you work with and live around do something to become better at using people's names. I think you will find the effort more than pays off.

¹ Steven J. Martin, Noah J. Goldstein, and Robert B. Cialdini, *The Small Big* (Hachette Book Group, 2014), Chapter 5.

² Ibid.

³ Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Pocket Books, 1998), 75.

⁴ Ibid., 74.

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