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## The Accidentally Rude Thing You Need To Stop Doing

by Paige Brettingen

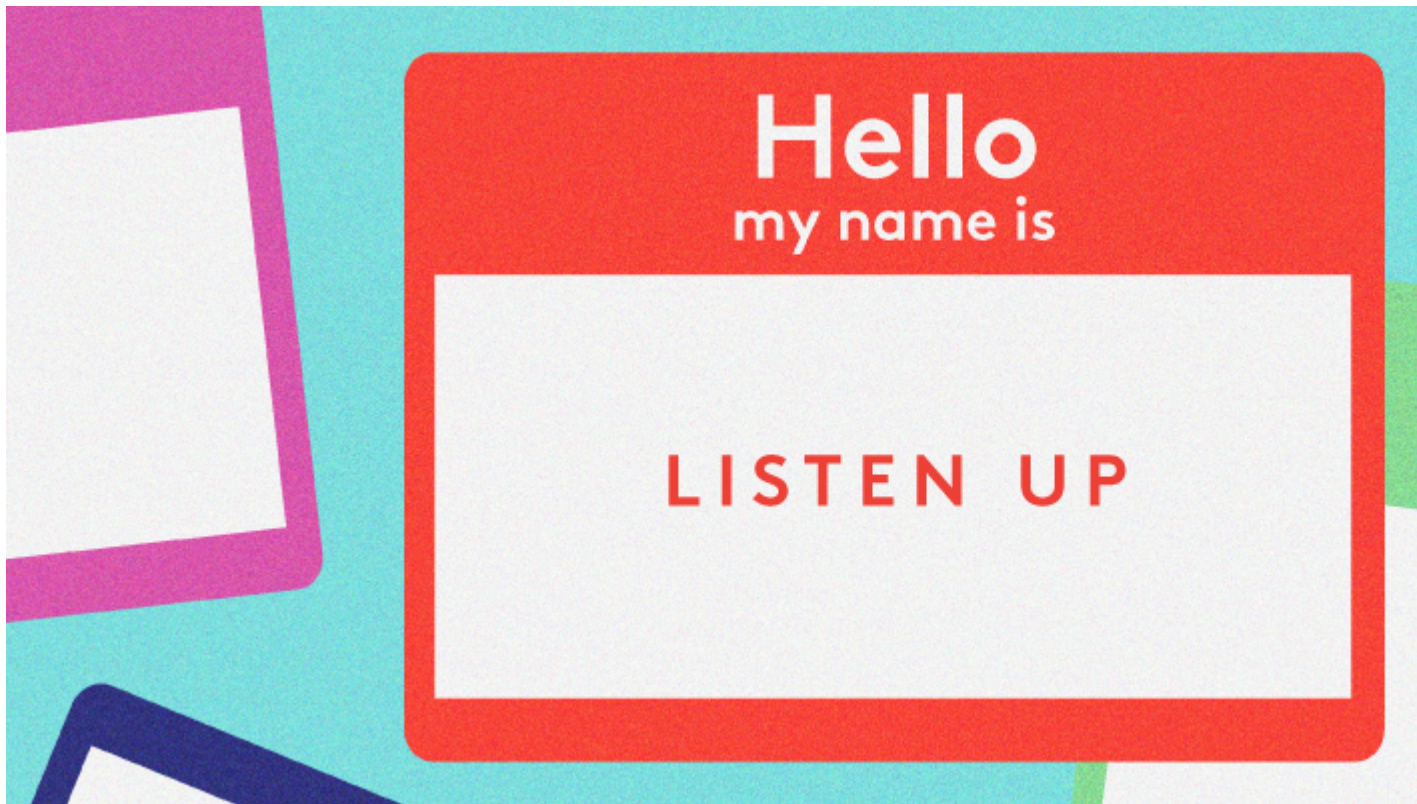
It's barely been 30 seconds since meeting that potential client, and the panic has already started to creep in. It's a familiar feeling — one that tends to pop up at cocktail parties, networking events, and alumni mixers. *What was her name again? Jennifer? Or, actually, maybe it was Jessica. It definitely started with a J, didn't it? Oh wait, never mind. It's Nicole. Oops.*

Sure, it's tempting to brush off these name-game snafus with the nonchalant I'm-just-bad-with-names excuse. But, the truth is, it can easily read as rude, and your forgetfulness can leave you looking like a dismissive jerk. Why take that risk when you don't *have* to be bad with names?

Turns out, when you're reaching for a name, it's not that your brain is refusing to remember it. It just means that your working memory — or, the way the brain consciously processes information — isn't being used to its fullest potential. According to Dr. Tracy Alloway, author of [The Working Memory Advantage](#), working memory is our brain's conductor. It's responsible for taking new information and

finding connections to old information that's already stored in our long-term memories — something that's essential for success. After all, it's impressive when someone can remember your name after having only met you a few hours before, and even more impressive if it was weeks or months before.

The good news is that working memory can be improved. Specific and targeted exercises can help make connections between the visual centers of the brain and the language centers, cementing a person's name into your memory for longer than you thought possible. And, of course, we've got the 10 essential tricks to help you do just that, straight from experts who have seen the benefits of a strong working memory firsthand. Pretty soon, you won't just remember Nicole — you'll also remember the name of her company, her assistant and her dog, earning you a special place in her memory as well.

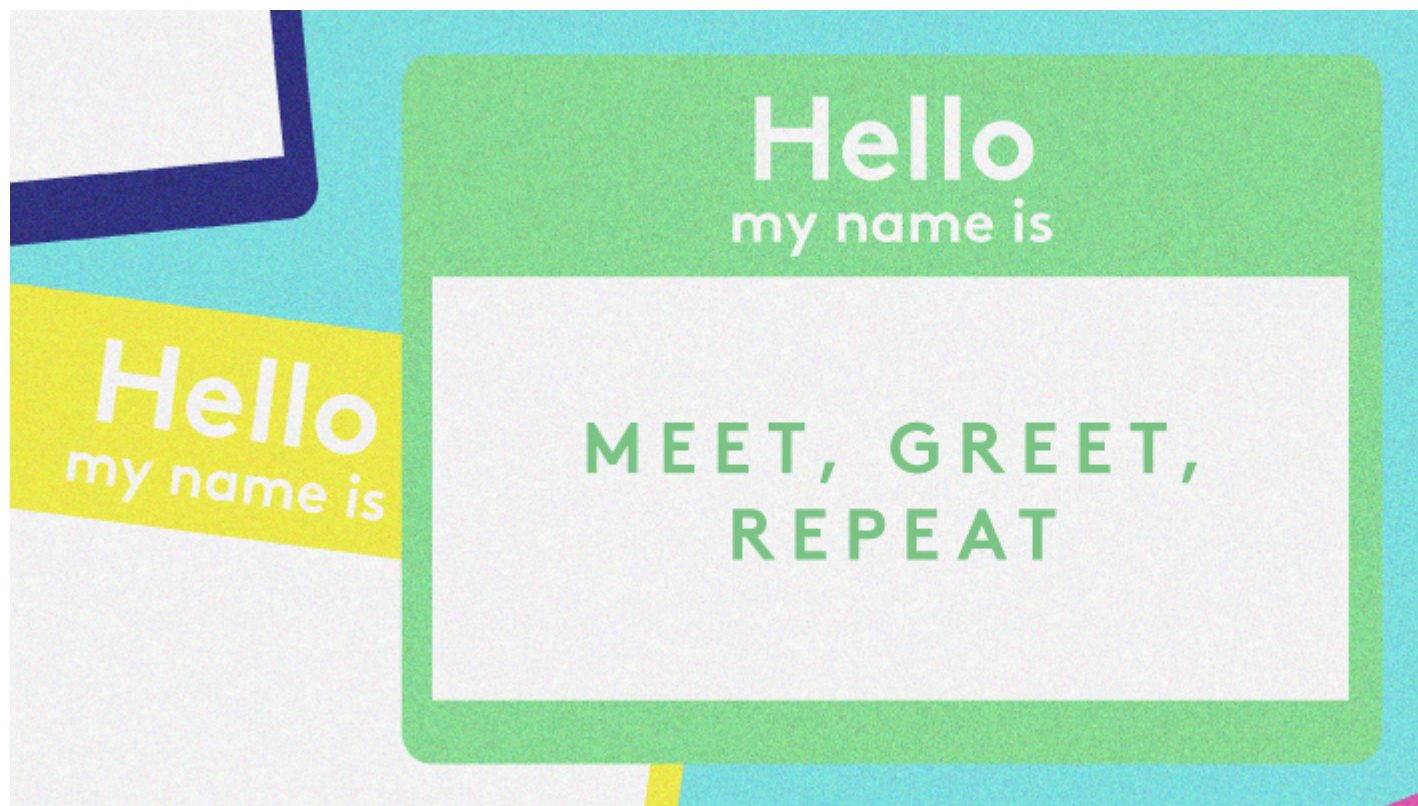


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### **1. Listen Up**

For starters, pay attention to your attention span. Are you simply not listening carefully when you're introduced to someone? For Brad Zupp, a memory-enhancement expert competing in the upcoming 2014 World Memory Championships and author of [Unlock Your Amazing Memory](#), remembering names didn't come easily until he noticed how distracted he usually was. "A lot of times, people think

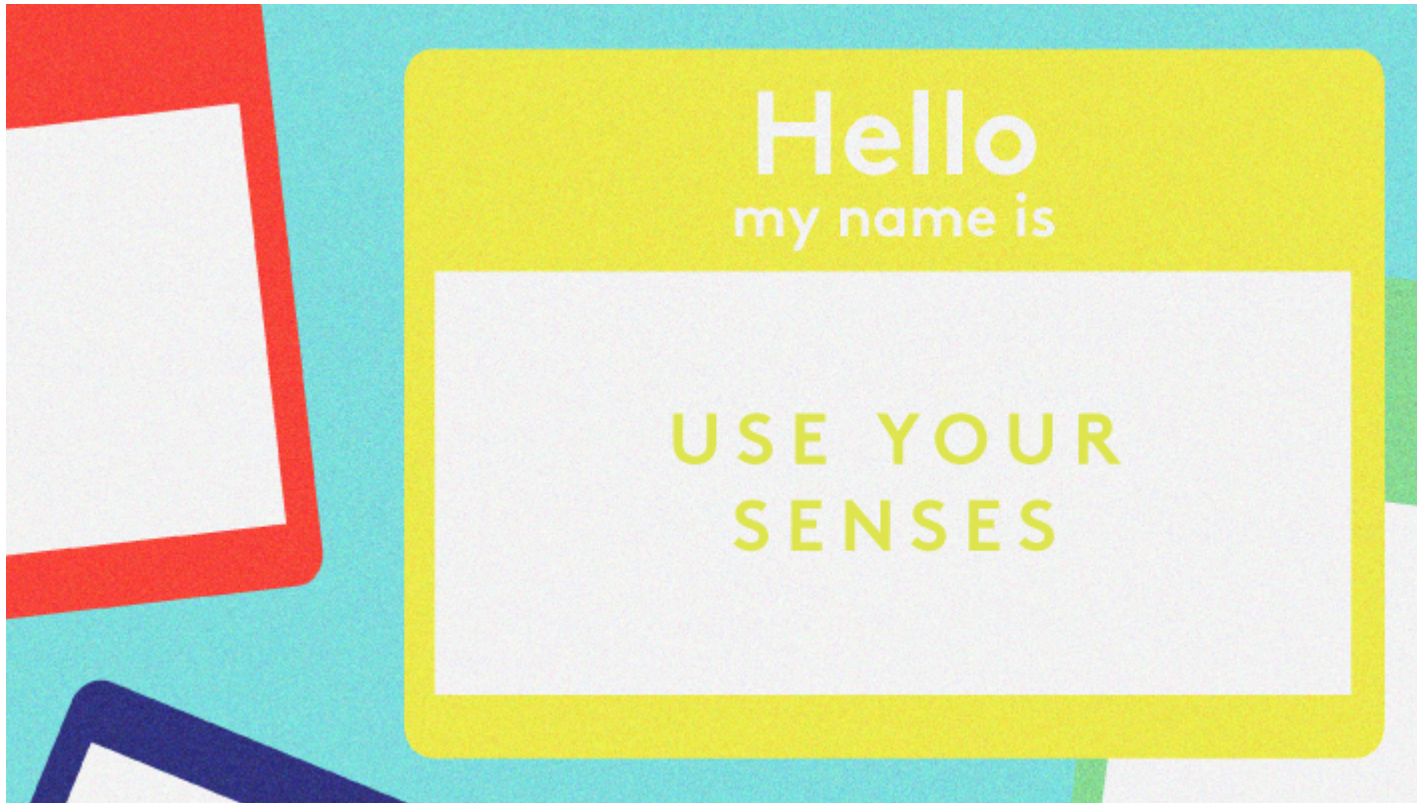
they don't remember names well, but that's not true. They just don't get them in the first place," says Zupp. "We're not focused, we don't hear well, or we're worried we have spinach in our teeth." If you realize you didn't get a name, he recommends admitting it right away. ("I'm sorry, I missed your name. Could you say it again?") If it's a unique name, you can also ask how it's spelled to ensure you've heard it correctly.



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## 2. Meet, Greet, Repeat

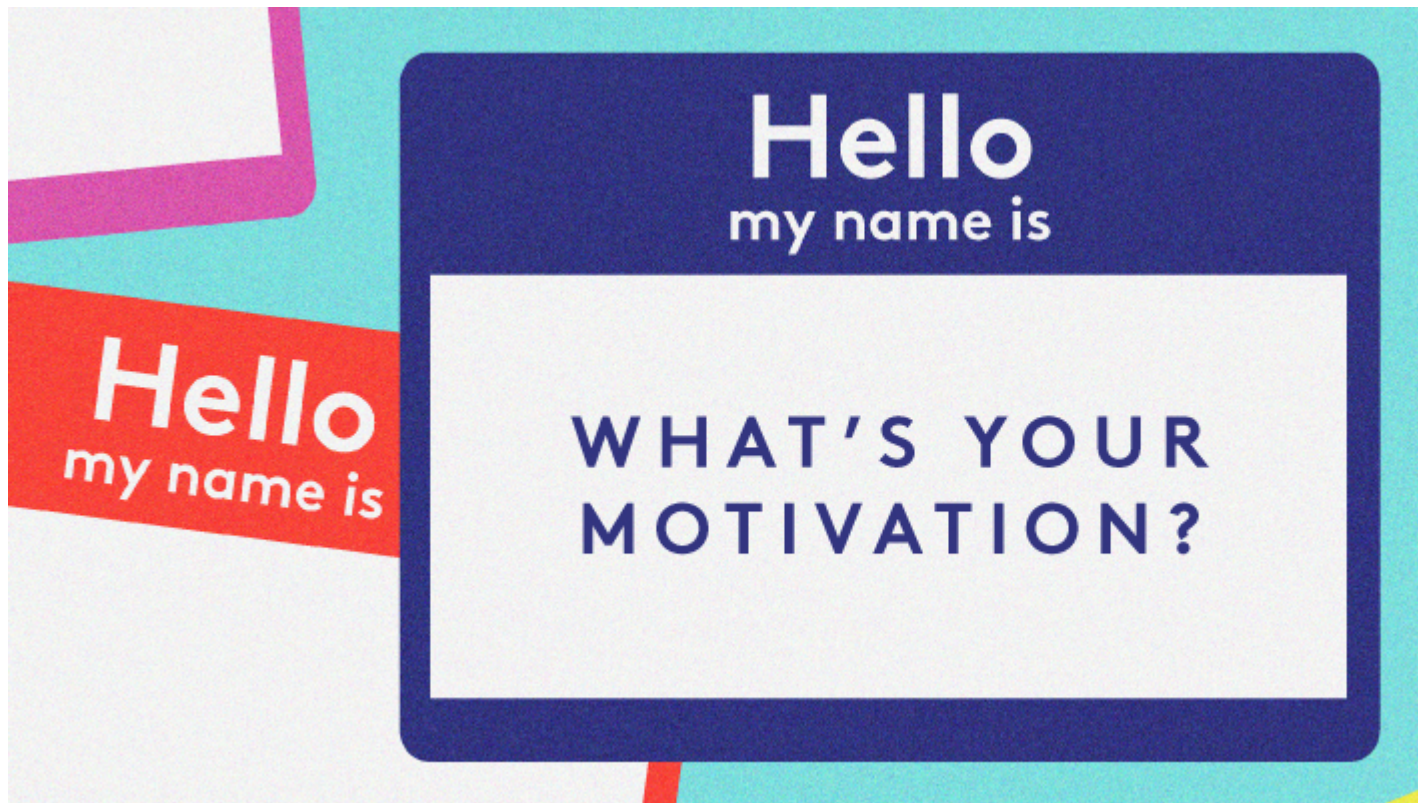
Make "Meet, Greet, Repeat" your mantra, says Brent Sverdloff, author of [How Could I Forget You! A Creative Way to Remember Names and Faces](#). When you first meet someone, say the person's name immediately: "It's nice to meet you, Sam." Later on, find a way to work the name into the conversation: "So, Sam, where are you from?" Repetition builds familiarity, but be aware that it's best when used in moderation. "Try to weave names into the conversation as best as you can," says Sverdloff. "But, don't force it. You want it to be a natural outgrowth and not seem phony or manipulative." Another option: Have a conversation about the person's name itself. For instance, you can ask if he was named Frank after a relative, or if he was the only Oscar at his elementary school.



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### 3. Use Your Senses

Become familiar with the “Baker/baker Paradox.” When you hear the word baker, a few images may come to mind: The smell of bread, the heat of an oven, the sound of a knife on a cutting board. If you think of those same images when meeting someone named Baker, you’re more likely to remember him. The reason? Synesthesia — or a blending of the senses — is occurring. “The more multilayered the experience is, the more memorable it will be, and the more the message becomes reinforced,” says Sverdloff. Therefore, the more senses you can engage, the more memorable the person (and his name) will be. So, when you meet someone named Brianne, think of how Brie cheese tastes; for a woman named Lily, picture a lily pond or the smell of a bouquet of lilies.



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#### **4. What's Your Motivation?**

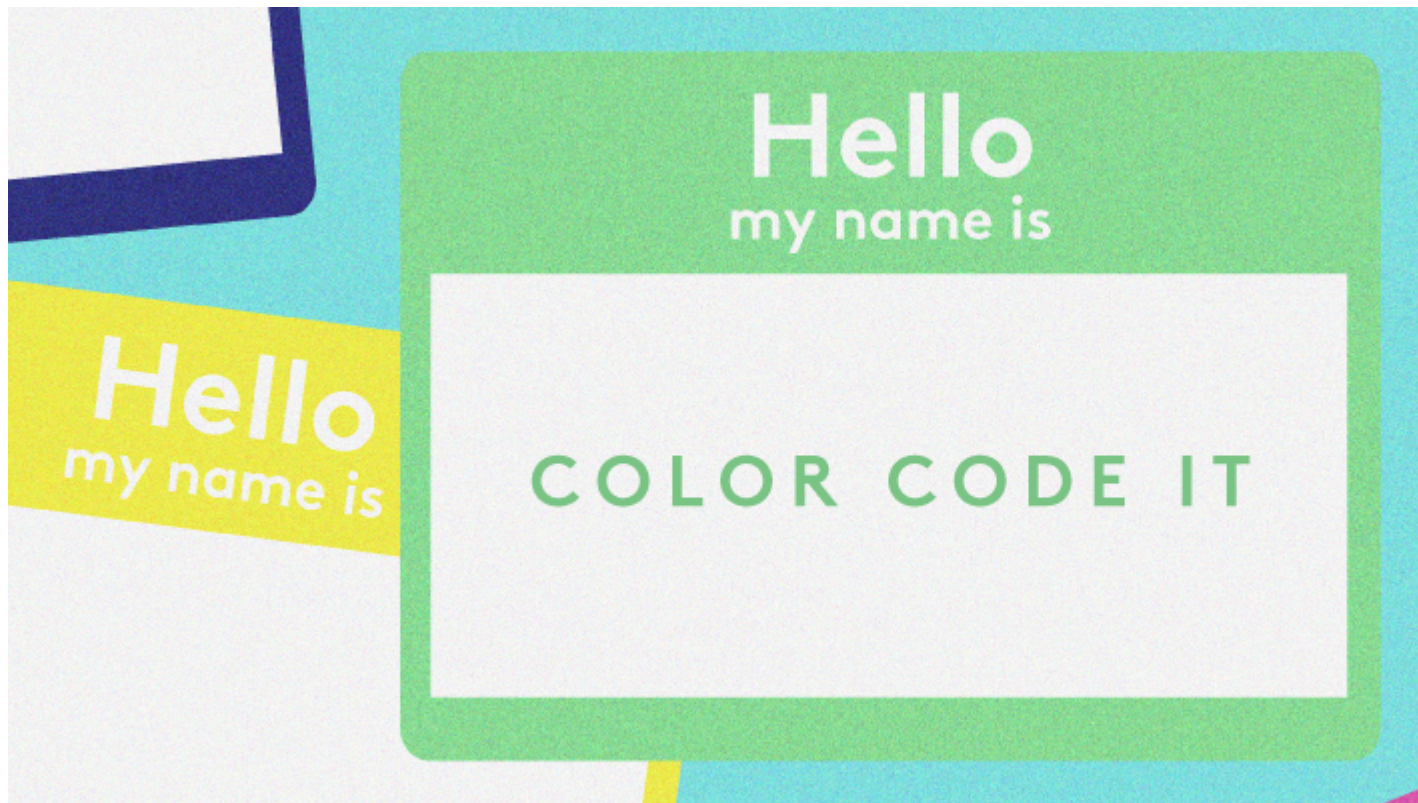
If you connect an ordinary task like learning a name with a specific goal, this convinces the brain that the name is worth remembering. “Work backward. Think of why it’s important to remember the name first,” suggests Dr. Alloway. “If you can associate the name with a long-term goal, the name becomes more meaningful.” For example, perhaps this new contact works for a company you’re interested in, so she could become a valuable networking contact. Immediately attach that piece of information to her name: “Danielle works for the investment banking firm I’d really like to work for in the future. I’m going to invite Danielle to lunch next week to hear more about her experience there.” Attaching both a goal and a task to this new person immediately solidifies her importance in your long-term memory.



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### 5. Pick One Trait

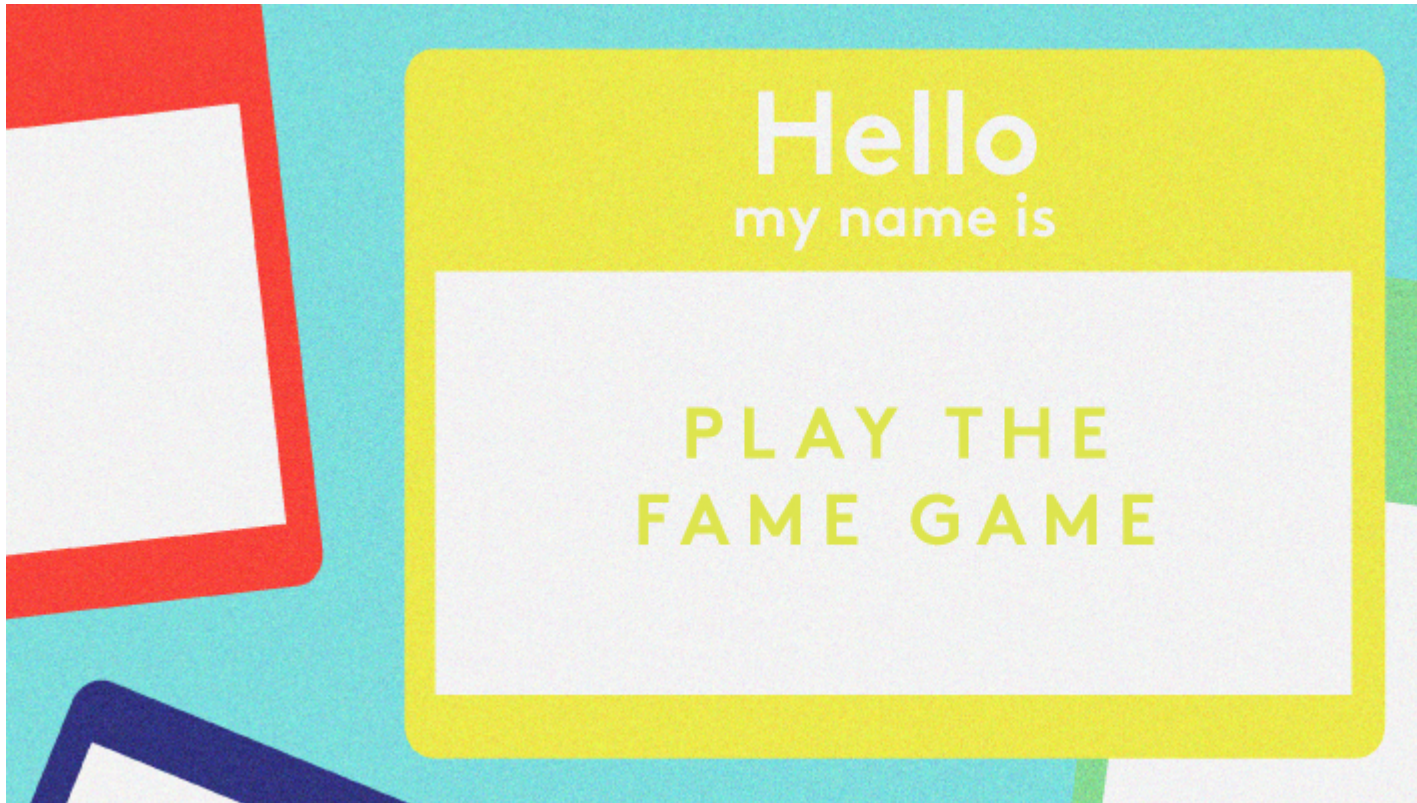
Pick the first facial trait that sticks out to you — say it's freckles, and the woman's name is Ruby. If you imagine those freckles as miniature rubies dotting her face, you've just associated her name with a visual image. The more creative the image, the better your chances of acing her name at a later point, says Sverdloff. "Even though you're focusing on one part of the face, you're subliminally taking everything in, and you'll discover that you remember the person's whole face," he says. Practice this trick when you're getting coffee, Sverdloff suggests. Discreetly note what the barista's most memorable feature is, and then connect it to what his name tag says. Then, greet him by name when you stop in later that week. The more you practice, the quicker you'll be able to hone in and connect a face to its name.



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### **6. Color Code It**

Another visual trick? Use colors. Gina with the large gold necklace becomes Gold Gina. Diane with the red dress becomes Red Diane. Attaching colors to names also gives the language centers of the brain some extra assistance. “If you’re using visual centers as well as language centers, you’re creating more sticky points and are connecting them like Velcro,” says Dr. Alloway. “A lot of times, we tend to rely on verbal memory, but it can get overloaded. Using visual memory is an extra resource that’s not getting tapped into as often.”

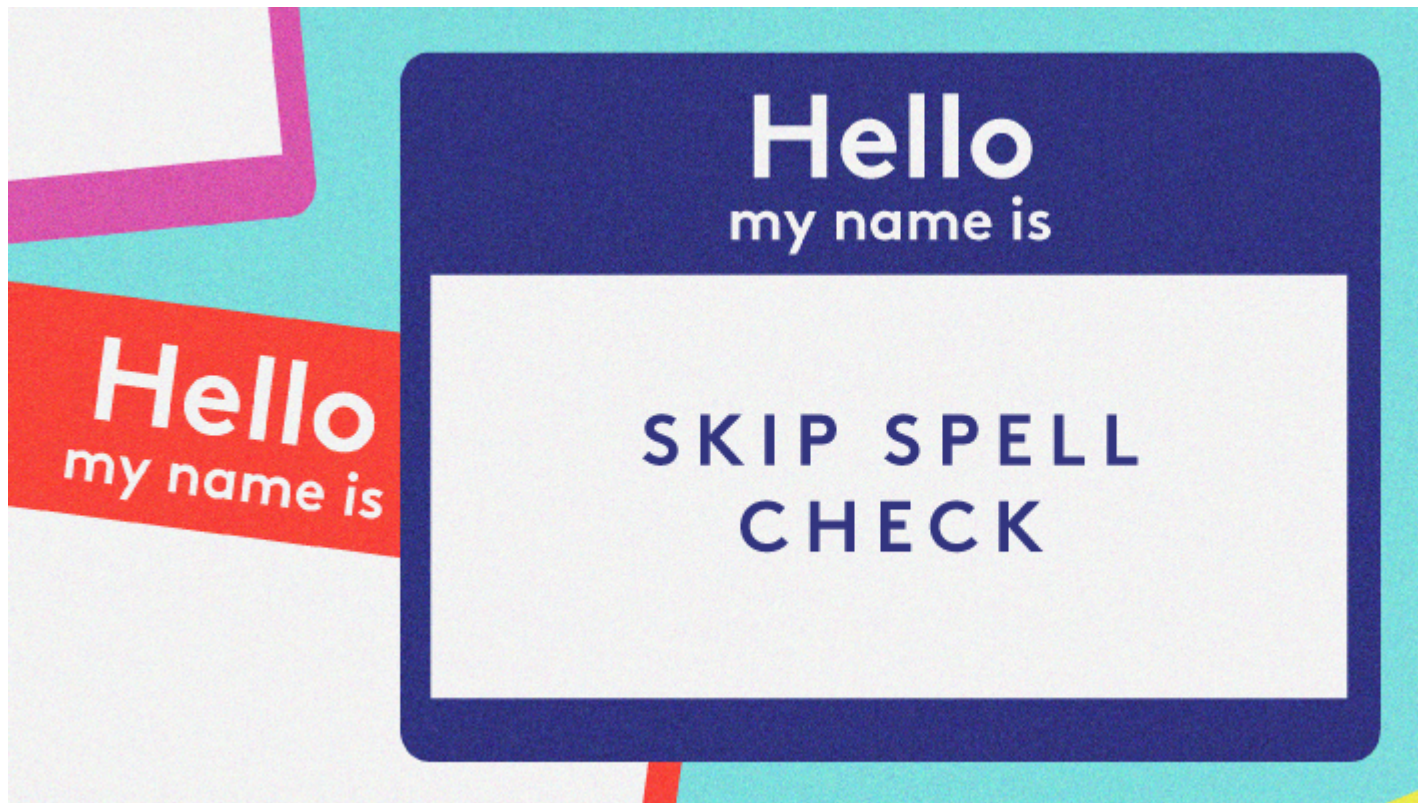


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### **7. Play The Fame Game**

Think of a celebrity who shares the name of the person you just met. “When you do this, you’re giving the brain the information it wants in a way it can easily accept — of something it reminds you of,” says Brad Zupp. “Maybe you picture Brad Pitt and me strangling each other, with him yelling, ‘You stole my name!’ The more over-the-top that picture is, the better.” Another trick is to compare the celebrity to the new acquaintance, noting which characteristics make them alike or different. For instance, “This Julia looks nothing like Julia Roberts. New Julia has short red hair, while Julia Roberts has long brown hair.” Even if the two people look nothing like each other, you’re still making a visual association with their names.





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### **8. Skip Spell Check**

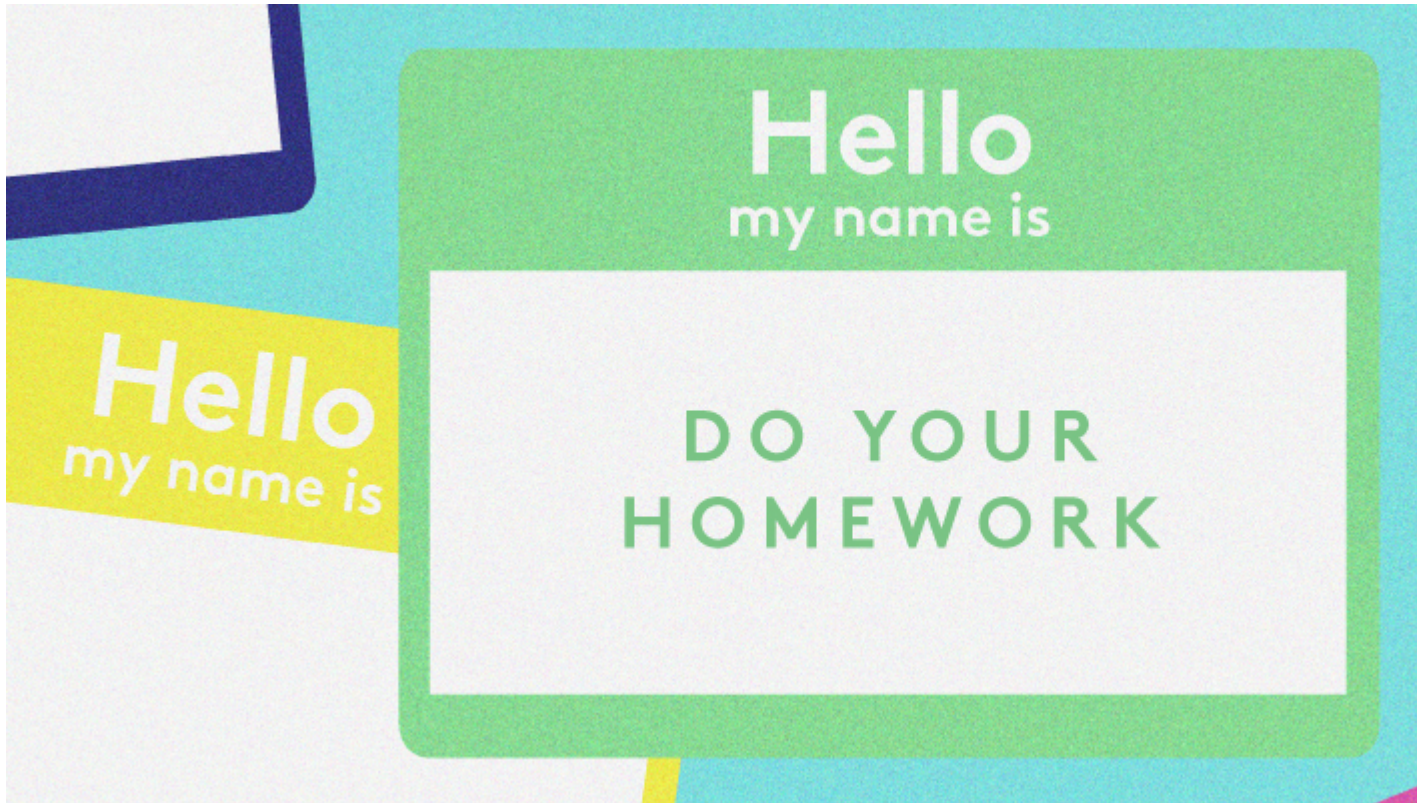
She said her name was Taylor? Think of it as “tailor.” Then, imagine her stitching the blouse she’s currently wearing. A few other examples: Turn Phil into “fill,” Jeanie into “genie,” and Brooke into “brook.” Or, preserve the consonants and change the vowels, suggests Sverdloff. For example, turn Dolores into “dollars,” Steve into “stove,” Dermott into “doormat,” and Brian into “brain.” Playing with the spelling of a name can help conjure a quick visual to connect it to. And, again, put that imagination to work. Imagine Dolores jumping into in a pile of dollar bills, or Dermott dancing on a doormat.



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### 9. Think Like A Kid

Ever notice how children tend to turn familiar phrases into seemingly silly ones? “I pledge allegiance to the flag” may morph into “I led the pigeons to the flag.” It’s what writer Sylvia Wright coined “mondegreens” in 1954. Mondegreens — the misinterpretation of a phrase that then gives it new meaning — work particularly well when faced with uncommon, hard-to-pronounce names. For example, the Indian surname Deshpande could become “dish panda,” or the Japanese name Masaoka may become “mossy oak.” “Languages aren’t always logical, and often something nonsensical will be what sticks in your brain,” says Sverdloff. “Take something foreign to you in sound or concept, and make it into something you know and can picture.” As long as it makes sense to you, your brain will retain it better. Just take extra care not to say the made-up phrase aloud!



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### **10. Do Your Homework**

On the way home from an event, recall each person you met that day, along with whatever trick you used to remember her (Ruby had the ruby-freckled face; Julia had red hair, unlike Julia Roberts's brown hair). When you brush your teeth the next morning, repeat the names yet again. "What you're doing is building a bridge between short-term and long-term memory," says Zupp. "Reviewing the names shortens that bridge. Once you're finished brushing your teeth, that's usually enough time to move the names into long-term memory." To reinforce the image, Zupp also suggests adding extra details to the image you came up with the night before. Have Ruby construct a ruby necklace from her ruby freckles. Or have the redhead Julia braid Julia Roberts's brown hair. As always, the more details you can add, the more you'll strengthen your recollection of the person. And, the less embarrassment you'll feel at next month's mixer.