



## **Unforgettable: Making Your Message Stick**

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### **Instructions**

Please download and read the text and complete the prepared test questions at the end. Reading the text and taking the test must take 1 hour in order to receive 1 clock hour credit. Please print out the finished test and payment method (the last two pages) and mail to Lakeshore Educational & Counseling Services. Once received, Lakeshore will grade the test and if passed, Lakeshore will e-mail you a certificate. The cost for one CEU is \$15.00. Tests will not be graded until payment is received.

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Thank you for your participation.

## **Introduction**

When you speak, do others listen? Patient care increases when we communicate clearly and effectively the first time. Valuable time is wasted when messages have to be repeated, or clients misunderstand our meaning. Current brain research reveals that getting others to pay attention and remember what you have to say requires that you be succinct, compelling, and make an emotional connection. Learn how to grab attention from the start and make your message stick!

## **Educational Objectives**

After taking this course, participants will learn how to:

1. Review how long and short-term memory works.
2. Understand what messages human brains retain and reject.
3. Create messages with high brain appeal that increase effectiveness.

## **Let's Get Started!**

### **Memory Test**

Quick – what's the last conversation you had? Who was it with and what did he say? Recognizing what you recall about other people and what they say will help you understand what messages stick. Sometimes it's not what was said that counts, but *how*. Was the delivery pleasant, rude, funny, or sarcastic? Did you feel comfortable or intimidated?

Think back to a conversation that you can quote verbatim. Why do you remember it? How did you feel during and after the exchange? People tend to recall very positive or negative events. That's no mistake – strong emotions anchor messages in long-term memory. Too much emotion can overload the sensory system though, as in hearing really bad news. The brain almost shuts down and goes numb. So, a successful message is a combination of using the right words delivered with just the right emotional tone.

Starting today, take note of two types of impressions: what you remember about other people and what other people remember (or forget) about you. Pay attention to conversations, presentations, interviews, and even advertising that sticks in your mind. See if you can recognize a pattern of what catches your attention. At the same time, document when people noticed you and times you felt overlooked. Are you more successful with certain people, situations, or topics? Again, see if you can recognize a pattern. Use the following situations to build your awareness.

### **Are You Memorable?**

Assess your current impact by answering true or false:

- People often interrupt or talk over me.

- Other people receive credit for my ideas.
- People forget their previous conversations with me.
- I have difficulty getting return phone calls, texts, and emails.
- Others don't notice my absence from meetings or social gatherings.
- Patients/clients often don't understand what I'm trying to say the first time.
- I constantly have to repeat myself.
- Others rush to end their conversations with me.

If your answers include more “true” than “false,” don't worry! With a few adjustments, you can learn to craft a more memorable message. If you feel comfortable doing so, seek feedback from at least three people you trust. Ask what it is about your message or delivery that makes it hard to grasp or remember. Listen for the commonalities in their answers. Their observations may be hard to hear, but without feedback, it's difficult to improve.

### **Not Quite Total Recall**

If your goal is to be memorable, it's helpful to know how memory works. Many people imagine that the mind operates similar to the memory storage on a computer. With a computer, a file can be saved in its entirety and stored until you want to access it again. When you reopen the file, it's exactly how you left it. Details can be added or deleted and saved again. Unfortunately, your memory is not that reliable.

Researchers are still trying to understand exactly how memories are created and stored. What seems clear is that there are different types of memory that are stored in different parts of the brain. One type of memory is called declarative and involves facts that you can recite such as your telephone number. The other type of memory is known as non-declarative which are memories you can't experience in your conscious awareness, but clearly recall like the motor skills necessary to ride a bike. You remember how to do it, but you don't have to recite every detail in order to ride.

### **A Thousand Little Pieces**

So, if memories are stored in different parts of the brain, how'd they get there? Research suggests that each time you have an experience the details of it splinter into a thousand little pieces and disperse into your brain. This fragmentation happens because signals from different sensory sources are registered in different parts of the brain. Something as simple as paying attention to a conversation means your brain is slicing and dicing the experience and sending it to multiple locations.

When it comes time to recall the memory, your brain must retrieve all the bits and pieces and reassemble the story as close as possible to the original experience. Here's where human memory is not as reliable as a computer. In fact, it would be more accurate to compare it to Swiss cheese – there are lots of holes. Memories have different life spans. Some details stay with you while others vanish instantly. The holes get filled with details from the *present*, not necessarily as

they originally occurred. In essence, by filling in the gaps, you're retelling a different story every time.

As you can see, it's a very complex system! Your goal, of course, is to make sure your message doesn't end up in the holes. Luckily, studies have provided clues as to what aids memory. Any experience that starts with a bang, appeals to the senses, is repeated, and has personal meaning is more apt to remain. Knowing this will help you increase the likelihood that your message will stick.

## **Brain Appeal**

While it may seem that you should deliver a message that's people-friendly, it actually needs to be brain-friendly. And, the brains of today are different than years past. It was once thought that adulthood meant the end of brain development, marking the start of a slow deterioration. Luckily, that's not true! It's now understood that your brain is more like plastic and is ever changing, adapting to new challenges and stimuli. Amazingly, your brain is able to spontaneously rewire and reprogram to learn new tasks as needed.

One of the biggest adaptations in human brains today is due to the Internet. Studies reveal changes in the ability to scan a lot of material very quickly. For instance, consider how you're reading this text right now. You may find yourself scanning the page, looking for highlights that interest you, versus thoroughly focusing on each paragraph. While this is certainly a skill, it affects what is converted from working memory to long-term memory. Many users of the Internet report having difficulty concentrating on one idea for too long without feeling fidgety. Net appeal relies on hyperlinks, pictures, video, audio, and switching between multiple screens. The brain has adapted to constant stimulation by skimming the surface of information, but not going too deep.

## **Multiple Exposures**

To put it mildly, people are distracted! Don't be offended if what you have to say doesn't immediately lodge into the other person's long-term memory. It will take multiple exposures to your message to make an impact. With shorter attention spans, people will naturally zone out after about ten minutes, unless there's a change. The brain likes short, clear messages. Rather than communicating paragraphs of information at one time, you'll be more successful delivering smaller chunks, and repeating. Avoid getting frustrated if a patient doesn't remember by responding with an exasperated, "I already told you this!"

The brain also craves novelty. Imagine driving down a straight highway for hours without a radio, conversation, or scenery to entertain you. It gets boring and the car ride seems to take forever. That's how the brain works – it gets bored easily. It adapts quickly to the familiar, and then is seeking a new challenge. A brain-appealing message needs to be interesting with attention-grabbing hooks embedded to keep the listener involved. Hooks include changes in voice tone, volume, examples, stories, asking questions, physical movement, and visual aids.

## **Drifting Attention**

Wake up! Pay attention! Focus! If you've been reading for about 10 minutes, there's a chance your mind is already drifting. Or worse yet, you're multitasking. It's not that people are unable to do two things at once: walk and talk, play an instrument with both hands, watch TV and eat ice cream. But, when it comes to *paying attention* to two things at the same time, multitasking is a complete myth. Your brain learns sequentially, meaning that it focuses on one thing before moving to the next. In fact, every time your attention shifts, your brain goes through a four-step process of focusing, engaging, disengaging, and refocusing.

This fact makes the timing of your conversations all the more important. It does no good to share anything of significance with someone if he's paying attention to something else. If you want your message to be absorbed, it's best to wait until he's finished with a current task or ask him to end it. If he insists he's paying attention, even when it's clear he's not, try changing environments and ask to speak elsewhere. Granted, these requests do irritate some people who assume they can do it all, but their brain is just as human as the next person, with no special powers of dual concentration.

## **Short Segments**

The other reality is the average 10-minute attention span. Effective communicators adapt their message to fit this framework and present ideas in succinct segments rather than rambling. John Medina, author of *Brain Rules*, and professor at the University of Washington School of Medicine, designed a lecture model based on the 10-minute rule that earned him a teacher of the year award.

To ensure his students have better recall, Medina teaches in 10-minute modules using the first minute to give an overview of his main concept. The next nine minutes include stories, examples, and interaction to support his single, core concept. Therefore, a 50-minute class will cover five main ideas. According to Medina, the brain processes meaning before details, so it's critical to start with the big idea. The brain also needs time to digest material, so providing several supporting examples helps the concept stick. But, once the 10 minutes are up, he's moving on before the attention of his class does. You don't have to be a teacher to benefit from the idea of breaking down your message into digestible chunks. This is one case where more doesn't equal better.

## **Connect the Dots**

What you have to say may make perfect sense to you, but not necessarily to others. Most speakers move too fast for their listeners either because they're so familiar with their own content, or they've been thinking about it a long time before sharing. It may be the first time the patient has heard your ideas, so he's playing catch up. Remember, he already has a lot on his mind, so to make a dent in his memory you're going to have to connect the dots of your details to your main point. This will also help you stay on track. If you're adding details that have nothing to do with your main point,

the listener will struggle tying everything together. Therefore, you'll either need to regroup details or edit them. If it's not relevant, get rid of it.

## **Gender Differences**

You probably don't need a scientist to tell you men and women communicate differently! Comedians have been making jokes for years about the obvious misunderstandings in how men and women relate. However, science has backed up general observations with data that helps to explain why such discrepancies exist. It turns out that gender plays a role in attention and memory.

This is not a case of male versus female, but rather right brain versus left. Both hemispheres are used in memory, but for different purposes. The right side of the brain tends to remember the gist of an experience, while the left tends to remember the details. Studies suggest that men generally process experiences using the right hemisphere, meaning that they recall the overall big picture, but not the tiny details. Women, however, mostly process experiences using the left hemisphere, which means they focus on all the nooks and crannies of an interaction, especially those with emotional significance, like an argument.

Of course, both the big picture and the details are important in communication. But, it's possible to leave a conversation with two completely different interpretations. The message you wanted to stick may have been lost simply because the other person was focused on the opposite of what you intended.

## **What Did You Say?**

Gender doesn't just affect listening, but speaking too. The female brain engages both hemispheres when speaking and processing verbal information while the male brain primarily relies on one. This gives girls the academic edge early on as they perform better at verbal memory tasks, verbal fluency, and speed of articulation. So, not only are female brains wired to focus on details, they're wired to talk about them – a lot. This can create huge misunderstandings when a woman is sharing a lot of details and a man is listening for the overall message. She can become offended that he's, "not listening," when he's actually trying very hard to grasp her point.

Creating messages that are gender friendly means appreciating the biological differences instead of getting mad or acting superior. A woman speaking to a man would do well to pare down her message to the essentials rather than including unnecessary sidebars. A man speaking to a woman would do well to expand his conversation by including a few more details to increase emotional connection. To be memorable, you'll need to adapt your message to your audience, both male and female.

## **Short-term Equation**

Before you read further, try this quick exercise. Write down as many brand names as you can in the following categories: toothpaste, shampoo, and laundry detergent. How many brands in each

category can you name? Odds are, it's about seven. Even though you've been exposed to these products all your life and stores have entire aisles dedicated to them, the reality is, you can only remember a few.

It's not through lack of trying on the part of advertisers! They've invested millions of dollars in campaigns designed to grab and keep your attention whether it be through print, radio, TV, or Internet. Now, imagine *you* are the product. Pick three categories related to your profession that matter such as unique skills, qualities, or education. If you asked ten different people to list the top names in that category, would your name come up? Marketers call this "top-of-mind-awareness" and in order to achieve it, you'll need to understand the limitations of short-term memory.

### **The Magic Number**

In 1952, Princeton psychologist George Miller published a paper, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two," in which he noted that working memory only has the capacity to hold limited amounts of information at any one time. Miller wrote that the typical person retains seven units of information, plus or minus two. Current research suggests a more realistic number is about four. Therefore, for someone to remember you, the listener must forget something else. Capturing someone's attention literally means overtaking one of seven rungs on the ladder of his short-term memory. And, once you get there, you have to fight to keep your place.

Since short-term memory is the gatekeeper to long-term memory, it's worth the effort to figure out how to make your message stand out. First, if the average recall of information is only seven items, your main point (the message you want to stick) should never be more than seven words. If you can't say it in seven words or less, neither can the other person. That's not to say you have to limit yourself to one, short sentence, but once your conversation is over, what do you want the other person to repeat about it? Consistently repeating your bottom line will be necessary in order to refresh the memory of the other person.

### **First Impressions**

The short-term memory clock is ticking. You have approximately 30 seconds to go from impressionable to forgettable. Some people would argue decisions are made even quicker. Consider how long it takes you to decide whether you'll watch a certain TV show before flipping channels – seconds? The mind moves fast for good reason, as now you know that working memory is limited. Brief assessments help you progress without having to concentrate too much.

### **Three Words**

Most people agree first impressions matter, but surprisingly, few put much effort into creating a good one. Creating a positive impression starts long before you meet other people. It starts with how you think about yourself and the image you want to project. Answer this question in 30 seconds or less: what three words do you want people to use when describing you? If you can't

answer in under a minute, you don't know and therefore, you can't expect other people to know. Their mind is moving on to something else. You can *hope* they think highly of you, but that's a huge gamble. There's a limited window of opportunity so you need to proactively determine how you want to be known.

Give careful consideration to three words that authentically describe you, no matter your environment. (Choosing different words for different groups of people will leave you feeling frazzled rather than authentic.) Then, think about how a person described this way behaves? What would you need to do or say in order for others to think of you this way? For instance, if you want others to think of you as considerate, you can't just tell them, "Hey, I'm really considerate!" If you did this, they'd think otherwise! You need to demonstrate the impression you seek to make.

Someone is always watching, therefore impressions are formed when you least expect it. The short-term memory clock starts ticking the second they encounter you, not when you decide you're prepared to make a good impression. You must mindfully know what you want to project and do so consistently. Otherwise, you'll lose people's attention faster than you can change the TV channel.

### **Make it Meaningful**

Imagine tasting something very plain and bland and then being asked to describe it later. You probably wouldn't have too much to say. But, if the bite you had were rich, complex, and full of flavor, you'd have plenty to discuss. Then imagine you experienced this flavorful bite of food at a restaurant with attentive waiters and great music while sitting with friends who made you laugh all night. The second experience would have more meaning and positive associations, making it easier to remember.

Memory tests show that the more meaningful and rich an experience is initially, the easier it is to recall it later. And, memory is boosted whenever the same conditions of the first experience are recreated. The familiar circumstances help trigger past experiences, like how hearing an old song can make you remember specific moments in your life. What's key for memory though is the *initial* input. The brain latches on to those first impressions, which is why you want to make sure they're positive and engaging.

### **Questions to Engage**

Whenever you help create associations and meaning for people, it increases the chances they'll remember your message. One way to accomplish this is to engage them from the start of a conversation. Your goal is to involve others and encourage them to connect personal meaning to what you're saying. Here are examples of questions to use:

- How are you connected to \_\_\_\_\_?
- What got you involved in that?

- What's your opinion?
- Have you ever had this happen to you?
- How did you handle this type of situation?
- What are your thoughts?
- Would you tell me more about that?
- Have you ever known anyone who \_\_\_\_\_?
- What's your experience with \_\_\_\_\_?
- What was that like for you?

Every time you engage patients in telling their own stories, you're helping to create meaning. This is a great example of a hook to maintain interest. Your message becomes associated with their personal experience, which is already lodged in their memory. So, by engaging others from the start, you're in essence linking on to something that's already present. Now, when they recall that experience, your message is part of the story.

### **Provide Context**

Picture a Velcro bull's-eye game where the goal is to throw the ball and make it stick. Even if your aim is perfect, the ball won't stick to the felt target unless its patches of Velcro make contact. The same is true when trying to get your message to stick in someone's memory. In this case, the "Velcro" you need is the listener's prior knowledge and experience.

Any time a concept is introduced, the brain does a wild scramble trying to place it with something that's already known. Learning is accomplished through comparing and contrasting. Without any context or frame of reference, the idea is too hard to grasp, much less retain. For example, imagine if you were trying to explain frozen yogurt to someone who had never tasted it. You might say it's similar to ice cream, but with yogurt. Now the listener has some context to comprehend the rest of your explanation. But, you would have missed the target completely by diving into a conversation if the person wasn't even familiar with ice cream.

Explaining frozen yogurt is pretty easy compared to other ideas. Imagine you wanted to discuss a medical procedure, a new policy, or your feelings. How would you put each idea in context for the other person? What examples could you use to compare and contrast so others could grasp and remember your meaning based on what they know?

### **Velcro Knowledge**

Putting things in context requires starting where your listener is starting, not based on your prior knowledge and experience. You must consider their age, culture, gender, education, and background. If you're not sure, ask! Here are some easy ways to find out more:

- Have you ever heard of \_\_\_?
- Are you familiar with \_\_\_?
- Have you had this happen?

- What's your experience with \_\_\_\_?
- What do you know about \_\_\_\_?

If you're speaking one-on-one or to a small group, you can adapt your message to match their experiences. The larger the audience, the more universally appealing your message needs to be in order to be successful. The last response you want is for someone to think or say, "I have no idea what you're talking about!" Once you understand an appropriate frame of reference, weave your idea into your listener's experiences by continually offering comparisons to what he already knows. Every time you do, it's like sticking the Velcro covered ball onto the felt target.

### **In Conclusion**

Superior patient care requires clear communication from healthcare providers. The reality is that short and long-term memory is limited and fragile, especially if patients are emotionally overwhelmed with their circumstances. Effective communication increases when messages are succinct, meaningful, and matched to the listener's prior knowledge and experience. Most likely, the same message will have to be repeated several times before it sticks. Therefore, successful communication is not judged on how well a message was delivered, but rather what the patient is able to recall.

**TEST**

**Unforgettable: Making Your Message Stick**

Complete the test below and follow the instructions provided on page 1 to receive your certificate. Remember to include the Payment Method form when you mail the test in. Please complete the information below to serve as the sign in form. Please PRINT clearly.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (            ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Circle the correct answer:**

1. Long-term memory recall can be described as:
  - a) Total and unfailing.
  - b) Only focused on positive events.
  - c) Like Swiss Cheese with lots of holes.
  
2. A memorable message includes these elements:
  - a) Context, emotional connection, personal meaning.
  - b) Humor, big words, positive.
  - c) Lecture, examples, 20-minute chunks.
  
3. Short-term memory is limited to:
  - a) Shopping lists.
  - b) No more than 9 items.
  - c) Only things you like to think about.
  
4. Putting messages in context aids memory because:
  - a) The listener has longer to think about what you're saying.
  - b) It calms patients down who are upset.
  - c) It builds onto the listener's prior knowledge and experience.
  
5. The best way to make your message stick is to yell.
  - a) T
  - b) F

I read and completed the test questions for 1 hour of credit.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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