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Learning, remembering and properly pronouncing other peoples' names is more than just good manners; it's good business and good citizenship.

*M*y name is Craig. But I'll answer to Greg. Most Gregs I know answer to Craig. Of course we are not alone: there's Eva and Ava, Bill and Bob, Jeff and John, Kristin and Kirsten, Ari and Avi, and many more. I can't complain. I often confuse and occasionally mangle others' names. Names are not my strong suit.

My purpose is not to engage in anthroponymy, the study of personal names. It's simply to remind you that learning, remembering and properly pronouncing other peoples' names is more than just good manners; it's good business and good citizenship. What's in a name? Everything!

Every Toastmaster, indeed every person you meet in life, wants to be seen as an individual, feel special and respected. When you refer to people by their preferred name, you are honoring them and showing respect. You're also seeing them as individuals. It's a good beginning to a relationship.

Over the years I've struggled to learn and remember names. The older I get the harder it becomes, in part because I continue to meet new people, sometimes an audience at a time!

Given our global marketplace we are likely to meet customers from China, Israel, Nigeria and Germany, Argentina and Arkansas. Names and

I'll Never Forget

By Craig Harrison, DTM

What's-His-Name

pronunciations vary by country and region. Eugenia – pronounced “U-Gene-E-Ah” in the United States – sounds entirely different in the Southern hemisphere: “O-beee-Nee-Yah.” Win points by pronouncing it her way! My secret: I spell it out phonetically whether on paper or in my mind. Seeing it this way helps me pronounce it properly.





In Toastmasters it took me a while to pronounce correctly the names of Osafran Okundaye and storyteller Orunamamu (pronounced *O-Roon-a-Mab-moo*). I've heard it mangled seven different ways. Ditto the name of Speechcraft participant John Eweglaben. It would have been so easy to pull an Ed McMahon, and simply introduce him by saying "Here's Johnny!" Instead I had John spell his name out for me phonetically and then practiced saying it repeatedly. Incidentally, it is pronounced "*A-wig-LAY-Bin*."

I accidentally insulted my Pro-Toasties Club colleague from Louisiana, Mademoiselle Carolyn Millet (pronounced *Meee-Aye*), by presuming her last name was pronounced like the grain. That's not Southern hospitality!

Employ the following tips to track names and the vital details that accompany them:

- When you hear someone's name, repeat it out loud as soon as possible in conversation.
- Append it to the beginning or ending of your greeting to that person: "It's a pleasure to meet you, Amber", or "Tyrone, how nice to meet you."
- Try to associate others' names with what they tell you about themselves. Repeat it out loud if need be: "Ken the southeast quality-control manager"; "Ariana, the internal service starlet." Hearing yourself say their names makes it more real and memorable.
- European names employing W may sound like V's: Tony Bacezowski of my hometown Lakeview Toastmasters pronounces his name *Tony Ba-SHEV-ski*.
- Chinese names may take the form of last name (surname), first name (given name). For example: Longtime Oakland City Center Toastmaster Joe Parkman tells new friends: "I'm no ordinary Joe, I'm Parkman Joe!" Indeed, he is.
- Employ mnemonic devices or alliteration to help you remember cus-

tomers' names: Ling from Laos, Helen who's gellin', Sandy...like my sister-in-law (of the same name).

- Make written notes to yourself, at the time of the meeting or later. Don't tax your memory. Write on the back of their business card or in your PDA. (Beware of writing on the front of someone's business card. In some cultures it's perceived as defacing the person!)
- Ask for help with complicated names or those in a foreign tongue. Take pride in learning the trills and other accents of foreign languages. Customers will appreciate your efforts and warm to your efforts at correctly pronouncing their name.
- Learn the story behind the person's name. Orunamamu's name, in the Nigerian language of Yoruban, means "Oh you royal one, miss morning star." Sometimes she'll simply tell people "The 'O' is for respect!" That's memorable!
- If you ask someone how to pronounce their name, never respond "Oh, I could never pronounce that!" Not only is it disrespectful, it's lazy on your part, to not even attempt the correct pronunciation. Try your best to pronounce it correctly in their presence; ask for help if you aren't letter perfect the first time. Remember, it's not about you and your comfort level, it's about them and making the effort to respect their identity.
- Most importantly, remember that other people share your pain. If you know your name will be hard to remember or pronounce for others, help them out: realtor Lisa Wierenga of Michigan encourages people to think of the phrase "Wearing A"; A realtor whose last name is Wojokowski helps people by saying, "It's like 'where's your house keys!"; and Oakland poet Lavignia asks people to call her "Vinny the Poet" for short.

According to the mingling maven herself, author Susan RoAne, "if you have trouble remembering names, understand that others have forgotten yours. Never, ever ask, "Do you remember me?"

The author of the bestselling books *How to Work A Room* and *How To Create Your Own Luck: The "You Never Know" Approach*, RoAne recommends that we simply "put out our hand, smile and re-introduce ourselves. Ninety percent of the people will respond in kind and no one is playing the memory game. For the 10 percent who don't ask, tell the truth: "It's been one of those days...I can't even remember my name."

And when the shoe is on the other foot, and your name is forgotten or mispronounced, don't get angry or feel victimized. Our past international president, Dilip Abayasekara, Ph.D., DTM, has experienced the ups and downs of having a distinctive name. Dilip, a Sri Lankan whose last name means "leader without fear," knows his

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name is difficult for a first-timer to pronounce. He offers a pronunciation guide, relating his name's pronunciation to words people already know: Dilip sounds like Philip; the first three syllables of Abayasekara mimic the first three letters in Spanish or French: *Ab – Bay – Say*, to which one can add *Kub – Rub*. It works!

Of course, if the person in question offers you a nickname, you are welcome to use it. Many people have trouble pronouncing (and spelling) the name of the longtime Duke University men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski (give yourself two points if you pronounced it "*Shub-SHEV-ski*"). Many players and fans alike eschew the Polish pronunciation and simply call him by the alliterative "Coach K."

One challenge occurs in environments when more than one person has the same name. In such cases nicknames may be the answer. One person may prefer Michael, another Mike and a third might even prefer Mikey. What is needed is mutual assent. Assigning a nickname without a person's permission can be insulting. Get a person's buy-in. Remember, their identity is at play. Accede to their wishes whenever possible; what's humorous to you may be insulting to the person in question.

Recently Distinguished Toastmaster Keith Ostergard, Toastmasters Vice-Chair of Training in the People's Republic of China, told me that companies often have so many employees with the same name it becomes problematic:

"In China it is very common to meet or work with people who have the same name – both surname and given name. Wang is one of the most common Chinese names. Once we had six people in a department of 100 with the name Wang Chen. In order to keep them straight, they all agreed to let me number them: Wang Chen 1, Wang Chen 2, etc.." That worked well until one left the company. They all wanted to change their numbers!"

What's in a name? Gold. Learning, using and properly pronouncing strangers' names is a great first step to building solid relationships based on trust, respect and admiration. Win the name game! 

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