

It's all in the mind

By Daniel Theyagu - Oct 31, 2005
ST Recruit

YOU have often heard people say, “I have a bad memory”, or “I’m not good at remembering names”.

Even you may be guilty of telling someone: “I always forget what I want to do!” or “My memory is failing!”

These are all just excuses. The fact is, you have an excellent memory. You just do not use it well enough. So, your memory begins to atrophy with time.

Your memory works like a muscle. When you exercise your muscles, you become fitter and well-toned. Likewise, when you work on your memory, your memory will work effectively.

It is possible to develop a razor-sharp memory. However, it is not going to happen overnight, and it is not going to be a simple process. You need commitment and constant practice to keep your memory sharp.



Many of you spend a lot of time trying to keep your bodies healthy and fit. Some of that time should also be spent on keeping your brain in good working order. The best way to do this is to work out your brain’s wonderful ability to remember and recall information.

There are several ways in which you can develop a razor-sharp memory. For a start, you need to understand

how your brain works. Putting it simply, your brain consists of three types of memory — sensory memory, short-term memory and long-term memory.

Sensory memory

This helps us remember things that help us to survive, like telling us we are feeling hungry or that we are cold or warm. The body will respond to these stimuli appropriately. If you are feeling too warm, for example, you will start to perspire.

Short-term memory

Also called STM, this is like the RAM (Random Access Memory) of your computer. If you have a small RAM in your computer and run many programs, your computer system crashes or “hangs”. Likewise, when you try to store too much information in the STM, you start to “forget” this information as the storage capacity of STM is limited.

STM can remember information from a period of seven seconds to a maximum of 48 hours. In fact, within the first 24 hours you forget up to 80 per cent of the information you acquire, unless this is transferred to the long-term memory (LTM).

Long-term memory

The transfer of information from STM to LTM requires you to re-configure the information in a manner that allows the LTM to remember. The LTM is situated more to the right part of the brain, and it remembers information in a unique manner that is different from the STM, which is situated nearer the left hemisphere of the brain.

Your LTM only remembers three kinds of things. If you want to develop a razor-sharp memory, you need to change any information that you want to remember for a long time into one of these three modes:

- **Survival skills:** The first is survival skills like eating, walking or swimming. Silly as it may sound, can you ever “forget” how to walk or swim?
- **Sad experiences:** The second is events that remind you of something sad that happened in your life, like a bad experience or an accident that you had. Such information automatically gets stored in the LTM and you are often triggered into remembering it.
- **Funny memories:** The third kind is information that which you find funny, engaging, silly or stupid. Just to prove this point, see whether you can answer the following questions:
 - What fruit did Snow White eat?
 - At 12 midnight ,what did Cinderella leave behind?
 - What is Popeye’s favourite food?
 - Who was Little Red Riding Hood visiting?

If you can answer them, it just goes to show how much you have retained from your childhood memories. This is because these fairy tales or cartoons are so enchanting, funny and sometimes ludicrous that your brain seems to enjoy them.

Now think for a moment what you were doing this time last week. Unless you were engaged in something very interesting, chances are you will need to refer to your diary or crack your head to remember it. Mundane activities are processed in the STM and soon forgotten.

The key to having a razor-sharp memory is to make information creative and exaggerated so that the right brain will want to remember it. This may sound difficult, but with practice, it is easier than you think.

Next: Techniques you can use to help you develop a razor-sharp memory

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