

## What's your name again? Why it might not be your brain's ability but your lack of interest that causes a bad memory

June 20 2012

---

(Medical Xpress) -- Most of us have experienced it. You are introduced to someone, only to forget his or her name within seconds. You rack your brain trying to remember, but can't seem to even come up with the first letter. Then you get frustrated and think, "Why is it so hard for me to remember names?"

You may think it's just how you were born, but that's not the case, according to Kansas State University's Richard Harris, professor of [psychology](#). He says it's not necessarily your brain's ability that determines how well you can remember names, but rather your level of interest.

"Some people, perhaps those who are more socially aware, are just more interested in people, more interested in relationships," Harris said. "They would be more motivated to remember somebody's name."

This goes for people in professions like politics or teaching where knowing names is beneficial. But just because someone can't remember names doesn't mean they have a bad memory.

"Almost everybody has a very good memory for something," Harris said.

The key to a good memory is your level of interest, he said. The more interest you show in a topic, the more likely it will imprint itself on your

[brain](#). If it is a topic you enjoy, then it will not seem like you are using your memory.

For example, Harris said a few years ago some students were playing a geography game in his office. He started to join in naming countries and their capitals. Soon, the students were amazed by his knowledge, although Harris didn't understand why. Then it dawned on him that his vast knowledge of capitals didn't come from memorizing them from a [map](#), but rather from his love of [stamps](#) and learning their whereabouts.

"I learned a lot of geographical knowledge without really studying," he said.

Harris said this also explains why some things seem so hard to remember -- they may be hard to understand or not of interest to some people, such as remembering names.

Harris said there are strategies for training your [memory](#), including using a mnemonic device.

"If somebody's last name is Hefty and you notice they're left-handed, you could remember lefty Hefty," he said.

Another strategy is to use the person's name while you talk to them -- although the best strategy is simply to show more interest in the people you meet, he said.

Provided by Kansas State University

Citation: What's your name again? Why it might not be your brain's ability but your lack of interest that causes a bad memory (2012, June 20) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-06-brain-ability-lack-bad-memory.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.