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Lesson No. 25, Training the Memory

North American Institute

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EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

LESSON No. 25

TRAINING THE MEMORY



NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

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By

**NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
CHICAGO**

TRAINING THE MEMORY

Few other things are of more value to the public speaker than the possession of a thoroughly trustworthy memory. Practically every step of the process makes demands upon the memory to a greater or less extent.

It is a pretty well established fact that in these days far less attention is given to the cultivation of this faculty than should be given. Neither the lower nor the higher institutions of learning provide and demand the mastery of exercises in memory training which were thought essential two or three decades ago. In the home little attention is given to the matter. Few men and women are doing the sort of reading that demands the use of this faculty, and even those who are doing the better sort of reading do not discipline themselves in this power. The nation has become fascinated by the newspaper. It seems as if

every one reads it. And nearly every one reads it on the run. Hurriedly it is skimmed without much real attention put upon what is being read. This kind of reading destroys the power to remember.

It is no wonder, then, that so many men and women, when they come to the platform to speak, are in great fear of forgetting what they wish to say. Having put the memory under little, if any, training, they still think it strange that it refuses to serve them as the well trained faculty does. The public speaker must remember his facts, his outline, the special conditions surrounding the speech, the occasion, the audience. There are many principles of matter, composition and utterance which are to be borne in mind. For the inefficient memory to carry all these matters is too much to expect.

It, therefore, behooves the student of public speaking to set himself to the task of training his memory so thoroughly that it becomes a most efficient servant.

But, it is frequently said, "I have no

memory for this, that, or something else." In the great majority of cases such a statement is an admission that the faculty of memory has not been put under the necessary discipline. Put it under the correct discipline for a sufficient length of time and the most backward will be pleased with the results.

Professor James, in his *Psychology*, says memory "is the knowledge of an event, or fact, of which meantime we have not been thinking, with the additional consciousness that we have thought or experienced it before." For use in the practical affairs of life an excellent memory must include one other power, that of recalling at will the "knowledge of the event or the fact." Professor James says, further, that the act of memory is not complete until the present fact or image "be expressly referred to the past."

Of what does remembering consist? We are told by the psychologists that it has a physiological basis. These students tell us that there is not a thought, an action, or a feeling that does not register itself upon

the gray matter of the brain. This registration consists of a pathway dug in the gray matter of the brain by what is called a chemical discharge that occurs in the act of thinking, acting or feeling. It is well known that, once this pathway has been dug, it is easier for the discharge to go the same way a second time. When the chemical discharge has traveled this way twice, it makes the journey the third time far more easily. Each time that the chemical discharge occurs the way is made easier for the next discharge. Let there be supplied the proper exciting cause and the journey has been made.

This explains that which is called habit. Here is a man who always puts on his right shoe first when he dresses in the morning. He is entirely unconscious of the fact. Some way he started this habit and now, without thought on his part, when he comes to that part of his dressing the discharge is brought about by the merest desire to put on a shoe, and since the discharge has gone that path so frequently which chooses the right shoe first, it will continue to do this

until prevented by the forming of a new habit—that is, the making of another pathway which will see to it that the left shoe is put on first.

This is about what happens in the act of memory. A fact coming into the mind tends to persist for a time. An actual pathway has been made in the brain. Now, the question whether the fact will remain long and can be recalled readily becomes important. How long a fact or an experience will be remembered and can be recalled easily depends upon the vividness of the first impression, the interest in the fact or event, the relation or association with other facts or events or affairs, and the frequency with which the fact or event is recalled. It is possible that the first and second points in the process should be taken as one—that the association of the fact with other facts or events will depend upon our interest in the event. Here is a person who has lost all his immediate relatives in some great flood. The event with all its details will be long remembered because the impression was very vivid, the

flood related itself to many persons and things he was interested in, and after the flood was over he told the story of it over and over again. As long as he repeats the story the pathway in the brain created by the experience will be kept alive and the whole matter will be easily brought to mind. But even then, by degrees some detail here, and another there, will be forgotten, until, years afterward, only the most important details will be readily recalled.

So with all matters of memory. That novel which was so interesting you remember well as long as you keep telling the story of it to another. That play which deeply moved you will be remembered for no great length of time unless you think of it again and again either for the purpose of keeping it alive for yourself or for the purpose of sharing your experience with others. That speech which held you spell-bound will be soon forgotten unless you call it to mind rather frequently. It will be noted that but one sentence or one idea can be recalled of a speech listened to years ago. This one sentence or idea would not

now be recalled but for the fact that for some reason you keep it alive by more or less frequent recall—due to the fact that some way that one idea so deeply influenced your thinking that it changed the very life itself. So much of the book, the play, the speech as continued to appeal to the interest and was remembered with more or less frequency will be recalled with but little effort. In the cases mentioned it will be noticed that the vividness of the impression was occasioned by the fact that the interest was strongly appealed to.

This last named idea brings us to an important factor in the training of the memory. The more a fact or an event appeals to the interest the deeper will be the pathway made in the gray matter of the brain and the more easily will the fact be recalled. This condition of interest also includes another point, namely, that the fact or the event is related, that is, is associated, with some other fact, event or interest now a part of us.

So in the practical problem before us it will be discovered that those matters of

the processes of public speaking, those facts to be used in a speech, those ideas needed to develop our thought, will be most readily remembered which grip our interest. The degree of readiness with which they will be remembered will depend upon the intensity of the interest in them.

But how about those matters that do not interest us? If possible, a way must be found to make them interesting. They must be so studied until it can be seen that they are essential to the well-being, the success, or the happiness we desire. The facts do not interest because they do not seem to be in any way related, that is, associated, vitally, with any other fact, event or feeling in life that seems important to us. The examination must be continued until it can be seen that these facts to be remembered have a vital relation to other desirable affairs in life.

It is impossible to do this with all things and ideas, however. When this is true, other methods must be used. An idea is forgotten because it does not bear any logical relation to other knowledge now in the

possession of the mind. To find this logical relation will greatly assist in the process of remembering. Forgetting a part of a speech is frequently due to the fact that that part was not put in its logical relation to other parts. Or possibly there was not supplied a normal, natural link to join the parts with. To train the mind to logical thinking will mean a great gain in the ability to remember.

But there are many things and facts which seem to exist without any logical relation. Every effort must be made to ascertain a logical relation. Failing in this, there are two other aids which we may call on.

Many things related and unrelated are forgotten because no real attention is given to them. The vividness of the impression was not great because the attention was not intent. The closer the attention put upon a fact, idea, sound, name, sight, odor, or what not, the more vivid the impression, and the more vivid the impression, the more easily recalled. There can be no gain-saying the fact that the modern man and

woman need to train themselves much in the power of giving attention—that is, the power of mental concentration. To give undivided attention to those things we need to remember will greatly improve this faculty.

Another aid is still ours to call upon when attempting so to fix a fact that we shall not forget it. This is the process of associating the idea or fact with some other idea or fact. It has been shown that when we are deeply interested in the fact or idea, or when we have been compelled to become deeply interested, the fact or idea associates itself with a greater or smaller number of other facts now a part of us. If, then, there is not this natural interest in the fact, then we may make it an easier process to remember the fact by associating it with some other fact that is well known. The association is made with something alike in shape, size, color, sound, location, odor, nature, etc. A gentleman said that he had occasion frequently to refer to Mr. Norman Hapgood, editor of Harper's Weekly. He found it very difficult to re-

member his name. At last he made the following association, which of itself seems nonsensical, but which forever prevented him from further forgetting. He told himself that the first half of the name, "Hap," was the first syllable of the word "happen," and that the second part of the name, "good," was the English translation of the Latin word "bonus." A prominent scholar told the author at one time that in order to remember the English translation of a Hebrew word he made a series of nine associations. The student may think that this making of associations is likely to take up much time. Not so, after one has followed it some time. It is remarkable how rapidly one will make the association. But even suppose the making of the association did take time, the time saved in recalling in the future will be much greater.

Practically all the memory systems invented for the use of the forgetful are based upon some system of association.

These are the principles:

Learn to interest yourself in what is to be remembered.

Learn to place it in its logical relation.

Learn to associate it with your interests.

Learn to associate it with other facts, shapes, sounds, etc.

Compel yourself to recall it frequently.

EXERCISES.

These exercises are provided as a means of testing the students' knowledge of the subject and for training through actual practice. Exercises are not to be sent to the School.

1—Select a name which you have had difficulty in remembering and form some kind of an association with some other name, fact, shape, sound, relation or interest which you have readily in mind. Recall this association three times during the first day, and once a day for five days.

2—Select some important fact which you do not easily recall and carry out the same method as indicated in Exercise One.

3—Select a number representing some fact in your interests and fix this number in your mind, using the same method indicated above.

4—When introduced to a stranger form some one or more associations which will enable you to fix well in mind both the appearance and the name of the individual.

5—Select one sentence a day from your reading and make such associations as you

can after the rules given on pages eleven and twelve of this Lesson until the thought of the sentence is so well fixed that it would be impossible for you to forget it.

6—Having fixed in mind the thought of the sentence indicated in Exercise Five, look very carefully at the printed form of the sentence to fix its appearance, fix the order of words as to their length. Then, look away from the printed form and repeat the sentence. Then use the thought of the sentence, and the recalled appearance to further fix the exact order of the words.

"Though old the thought, and oft
expressed,
'Tis his at last who says it best."