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Is Your Memory More Like a "Screenshot" or a "Macro"?

Understanding how your memory works is the key to using it more effectively. Here's a simple exercise that will help you start thinking about memory in a more precise and useful way.

The "Screenshot" Concept of Memory - Warning! This is NOT How Memory Works.

Picture a computer program that allows you to take a "Screenshot" of whatever is on your computer monitor right now. If you have Microsoft Paint, you can see what I'm talking about by doing the following:

1. Load MS Paint
2. Minimize MS Paint
3. Press alt/print-screen simultaneously
4. Maximize MS Paint
5. Select Edit/Paste from the MS Paint drop-down menus
6. Save your screenshot to a file name - e.g., screenshot.bmp

This is how many of us grew up thinking about memory...but it is dangerously wrong...dangerous because it doesn't allow us to use our memory most effectively.

The "Macro" Concept of Memory - A Better Model of Memory

Now, maybe some of you have used what are called "Macro Utilities". These are computer programs that allow you to record your keystrokes, save that recording to a file, then assign that file to a keystroke combination, such as "Alt-A".

Then when you press "Alt-A", the recording of your keystrokes is played back. If you want to try one out, visit <http://www.download.com> and type the word "Macros" in the search box. You'll be presented with various ones you can read about and try. Many of them are free.

So why is this a better model of memory? Because when we remember something we are actually reconstructing the steps we took to "create the memory" of that thing to begin with. You might say that we are reforming all of the connections in our brain that "are the memory".

How does this save you time and help you to use your memory better? Because now you know that if you have something complicated to remember, the most important thing to remember is the "trigger" that kicks off the process of "recreating" the memory.

You also can make a more intelligent choice about choosing your initial "trigger". The "trigger" should be based on the situations in which you are likely to be required to "recreate" the memory. For example, when I play music, people often ask me to play a particular song. So when I have memorize songs, I create the following "Macro" - I'll call it the "Song Request Macro":

1. Memorize the song title.
2. Memorize the Lyrics to the Song (which are usually based on the Song Title and therefore a natural connection).
3. Memorize the melody with the lyrics.
4. Put the chords to the melody and lyrics

Now, when someone in the club requests a song, this "Song Request Macro" is automatically kicked off!

You can do the same sort of thing for any situation in which you will be called upon to remember something. Figure out what your likely "trigger" for the memory is going to be and base how you approach memorizing using that "trigger" as a starting point.

You do have to practice the sequence you are memorizing through SOME repetition. But the MOST IMPORTANT thing is that once you understand that this is how memory works, you can TRUST that once you hit that trigger, your "Macro"

will "recreate" your memory.

For more information about recommended memory resources, visit the "Resources" section of the "Members Only" site.

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