

FOREWORD

Working as a police captain on the Lower East Side of Manhattan not long ago, I spotted a woman walking in the park with a large black poodle wearing a red sweater. I didn't know the woman's name, but I knew the dog's.

"Wendell Willkie," I called out.

Wendell Willkie didn't seem to notice he was being paged, but the woman turned around, surprised, then smiled.

"You have a scary-good memory," she said. "I can't believe you remembered his name."

But I don't really have a particularly good memory. It's just that I had chatted with her briefly earlier that week when she was walking her dog in the same area. I had patted him and asked his name; she told me, adding that his namesake "was a politician who ran against FDR in 1940. He was a Republican and I'm a lifelong Democrat, but I liked the name, and..."

And, as it happened, I always associate Wendell Willkie with an old book of poetry I like that makes reference to Willkie—and the red of the dog's sweater reminded me of that book's cover. So, with all these associations, all these mental pegs upon which to hang the memory, how could I possibly *not* remember the name of this poodle upon seeing him again?

It might not have seemed so easy, though, had I not been fortunate enough, a few months before, to attend one of Barry Reitman's one-day Memory Shock training sessions. Although I won't try to explain Barry's system—the rest of this book will do that quite simply and enjoyably—I will say that mental associations are one of his keystones. Barry will teach you that when hearing someone's name for the first time (he's usually talking about humans, not poodles), a few quick steps to form those associations will engrave that name on your brain forever. And, with a little practice, those steps will quickly become habit.

I attended Barry's class through my department's training bureau, all the students being supervisory law-enforcement professionals. We cops are a notoriously tough audience for trainers who aren't cops themselves—we listen politely (usually), but we often believe that we know more, have seen more, and are generally sharper and more clever than any civilian instructor (and we're often right).

But within a short while, Barry had won everyone over with his humorous, self-deprecating and engaging teaching style. Not to mention his ability to recite every word in that day's *New York Times* crossword puzzle, from memory, without looking at anything but the audience.

Yes, Barry had memorized the entire puzzle, and was able to reconstruct it out of thin air, first giving the number—"seven down," etc.—and then the word. For those of us who, like me, find it challenging to *do* the *New York Times* crossword puzzle, the fact that he had completed it and then committed it to memory, all before our 9:00 A.M. class, was rather, pun intended, memorable.

Barry went on to show us the elements of memorizing names and, just as important, connecting each name to the face it belongs to. Projecting a grid of anonymous faces on the screen at the front of the room, he soon had every student able to rattle off each character's moniker. This led him to demonstrate the ability to memorize long, long strings of numbers, turning them into words and sentences in order to make them easier to recall. And then...but I won't go on—you'll be doing the same things yourself before you're too far into this book.

Beneath Barry's down-to-earth Bronx attitude is a richness of knowledge, experience and interests. Get him talking and he might tell you about his years supervising the installation of nuclear components on submarines; express a strong and well-informed opinion on history, politics or culture; describe being in Atlanta for Martin Luther King's funeral; recount making it to and playing in the World Series of Poker Main Event in Las Vegas; or give you a funny story about his beloved dog, Nathan. I've gotten to know Barry a bit since that class, and have yet to find the topic about which he has nothing interesting to say.

Fortunately, he's put a lot of that unique personality into this book—along with his simple, fun and useful system for remembering all the things we all have to remember, living busy, complex lives in a fast-moving world. I've found Barry's Memory Shock system helpful on numerous occasions, personal and professional, and I think you'll like it—and this book—as much as I do.

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