Your Mind on Media Newsletter:
It's Probably Not Alzheimer's: Maximize Your Memory
(c) Joanne Cantor, Ph.D., May 21, 2012

Does it seem harder and harder to remember all the things you learn each day and all the stuff you need to keep track of? Well, you're not alone. First of all, our digital devices cram more and more information into an already stuffed cranium; and secondly, there's the natural process of aging: As we get older, our memory capacity declines.

It's easy to see why too much information makes it hard to remember the things we need to know. Try finding something in an overcrowded closet (i.e., needle in a haystack) rather than the suitcase you packed yesterday with just the few things you knew you'd need.

As for your aging memory, we need to face facts. "Working memory," the amount of information we can keep in focus at one time, plateaus at the age of 25 and before long begins a steady decline. So even healthy people find it more difficult to keep things in mind as they move on in years.

Wondering whether your memory problems are normal
or whether they're a sign of developing dementia?
See my new post in Psychology Today (link is on my home page):

"Is it Alzheimer's? Normal Aging? or Simply CyberOverload?"

Knowing what we're up against and why, here are just a few tips for overcoming some of the memory challenges we all face:

1) **Separate the Wheat from the Chaff**. If you're attending a presentation or reading something you need to remember, don't multitask it -- give it your full attention. Focus on the essential elements, arguments, or facts that you need to remember -- jot them down or repeat them silently to yourself; think about them one more time as you leave the meeting or as you finish the reading to allow the memory to be consolidated.

2) **Make Sure Important Information is "Top-of-Mind" When You'll Need It**. If there are names or facts you want to remember quickly; say, you're going to a meeting and you want to appear in-the-know, or you're going to a reception and want to be able to come up with people's names, review these things shortly before you go. Read over the essential facts (names of companies, projects, or people) -- or try to anticipate who will be there; check your address book or use Google for help. Having just recalled something makes it much more accessible. In other words, bring what you're likely to need along in that virtual suitcase.

3) **Be a Choosy Information-Seeker**. Just because information is readily available, it doesn't mean you need to know it. You can't be an expert on all things. As you wander through cyberspace, decide which topics are essential to you, which interest you, and which you can do without. Your usable memory capacity is not limitless. Better to spend more time reconsidering and reevaluating the information you've already accessed than to keep endlessly getting more.

Recent Sightings:

iVillage:
10 Ways Social Media Affects Your Mental Health
The Boston Globe:
Movie Ratings Rated PG for "Poor Guide"

I was in San Diego last month addressing a group of appreciative University of Wisconsin Alums who ranged in age from their 20's to their 80's. One woman told me that the information about the impossibility of multitasking was "life-changing" for her; that she could finally be comfortable with her overwhelming preference for doing things one-at-a-time in her office, and couldn't wait to convert her co-workers. Another told me that she would immediately adopt my advice for taking low-information breaks to reduce her stress levels and become more efficient. An incoming undergraduate student told me she couldn't wait to put my ideas to use in her studies. And an older gentlemen came up to tell me that although he didn't own a computer or even a cell phone, the information and advice I gave was helpful to him.

Making These Ideas Work for You

Looking for a speaker who entertains, informs, creates buzz, and gives easily-adopted strategies for change? These days, effective speakers need to involve their audience actively. That's why my presentations are full of brain games and other interactive learning exercises that drive home my points, making them both easy to understand and memorable.

The people in your business, association, or school can also benefit from the activities and strategies in my keynotes. Email or call me (608-221-0593) to learn about how we can help them succeed and thrive in the Internet age. Or go to the Speaking section of my website to explore the various programs I can offer on increasing productivity, maximizing creativity, and reducing stress.