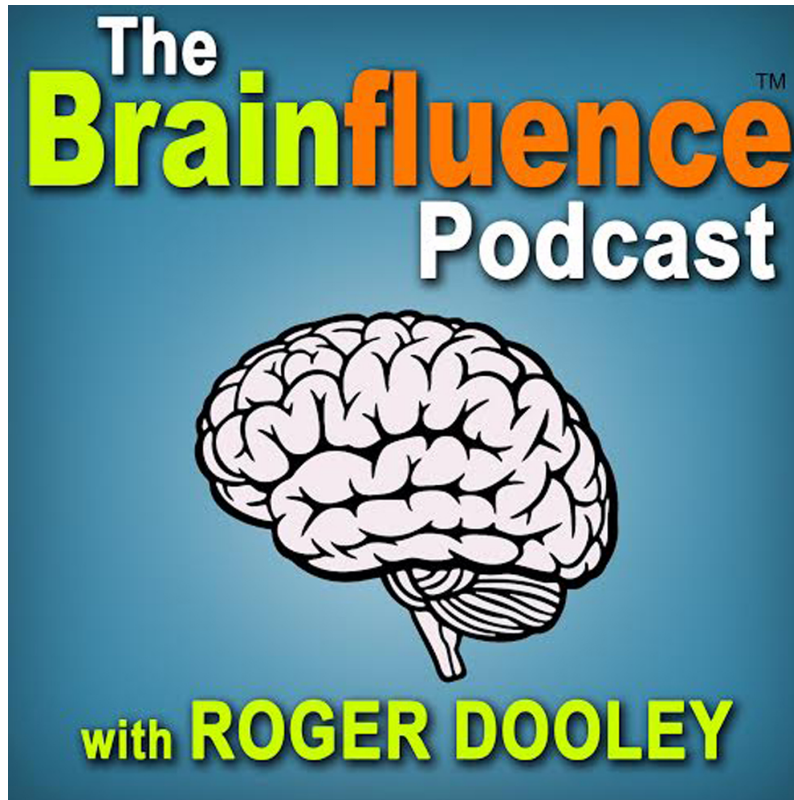


Improve Your Memory, Step by Step



Full Episode Transcript

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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast, I'm Roger Dooley. Have you ever met someone in a networking event and five minutes later you have no idea what their name is? Have you had someone come up to you that you know you've met but can't recall who they are or worse, remember them at all? Have you ever tried to learn a language but been frustrated by your inability to recall many of the words that you learned? Today's guest can help you with all of those things. Dr. Anthony Metivier is the founder of the Magnetic Memory Method, a systematic 21st-century to memorizing just about anything. This methods Anthony says, are easy, elegant, effective and fun. Don't ask him for the first 500 digits of pi, he doesn't focus on long strings of digits or training for memory championships. Rather, he focuses on tasks that are part of your daily life. Foreign language vocabulary, names and faces, materials for test and exams and so on.

His new book is The Memory Connection, a step by step guide to memory improvement that lasts. Welcome to the show Anthony.

Dr. Anthony M.: Thanks for having me, Roger. It's great to speak with you.

Roger Dooley: So hey, let me start by asking of is remembering things under assault? Now we've got Google will remember facts, we've got GPS to remember directions, we've got things like Evernote to save stuff that are unique to us. We've even got translation software that it's okay now but in a few years, it may not be. Unlike what we saw in the

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old Star Trek shows where it's just about real time and you don't actually have to learn other languages. It seems like as humans, now in this technology age, we're outsourcing a memory to digital tools.

Dr. Anthony M.: Yeah, we're under assault to answer that directly but not necessarily by those things that you cited. Those tools really free our memory to pay attention to information that matters. Where we're being assaulted is more in the area of what is called digital dementia, the negative metaphor. Sometimes also called the Google effect and what I prefer to call digital amnesia because amnesia can at least be cured or pass away over time. That's all about the shrinking coupled by algorithms that are feeding us group think material. Compressed in articles that are scanned rather than read and have what's called dual path readership and really, are just empty of information. So we're training our brains to no longer read but to scan. Then when we go to reading books, they become much more difficult.

It's not even just about reading but it's about processing information. We have evidence that it's just not even being entering cognition, it's not being understood. Often that's because there's nothing there to understand, there really are very little. So yes, we're being assaulted but we don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater and there are some tools that actually free our memory to focus on improving it and then using it for the information that matters.

Roger Dooley: Right. I think I understand what you're saying, that today's digital information often comes in little bite-size chunks that really don't have too much content and we're becoming accustomed to that. As a result, we are

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presented with somewhat complex information that actually has a fair amount of detail. Our brains get kind of fatigued by that, right?

Dr. Anthony M.: Right and not only fatigued but it's the sense of overwhelm and then we get into scarcity of time to consume it. Really, there are tools for reading faster but it's hard to imagine how it's possible. Especially when it's on something the size of a Kindle, really. Now on these smaller and smaller devices.

Roger Dooley: So it seems like names are one of the hardest things for business people. Eventually maybe I'll have smart glasses or some other kind of tool that uses facial recognition that can whisper a name if somebody comes up to me. It's going to tell me who they are and what they do or what our relationship is. But until that technology exist, why does it seem that names are so problematic? Names, faces, and I guess in different context? Like I said in the intro, there's a phenomenon where you met somebody and they told you their name but literally minutes later, you have no idea what it was. Then there's I guess this other phenomenon that you meet somebody that you know you know but you can't connect the name or perhaps you can't connect what it is that they do. Why is that a problem?

Dr. Anthony M.: Well, one of the things that happens is that we're just to go back to your word, assaulted. We're assaulted by so much information when we meet a new person. Our brains are taking into account the color of someone's eyes, the color of their hair, how tall they are and unconscious communication, we're processing so much. If we don't consciously seize upon the moment to recognize a name and then do what is called elaborative

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encoding to get it into memory at some level. Then it is gone in an ocean of all kinds of things. I haven't even mentioned background noise in the room, temperature, and quality of light and all these things that the brain has to process. The name is just this tiny little tit-bit of four to maybe 12 letters. If we don't seize upon that moment, we don't train ourselves to recognize it, then we're very likely to just forget that detail.

It's related to that effect of, I need some scissors and you go out into the hallway and then you arrive in the kitchen and you're like, "What did I come here for?" It's the same thing because when you leave that room, temperature changes, light quality changes, the feeling of the floor under your feet changes and you're just assaulted by so much new information so it pops it out of your brain. It's the same technique to remember. You close your fist and you say scissors and move out of your office and into the hallway to go to the kitchen. That will help you remember it.

So when you hear a name, you say it in your mind and then you can use some of the memory techniques that I teach to make sure that you memorize it.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, it seems like that kind of thing is partly context related because I've certainly had that happen to me. Where I go into the other room to get something and then a piece of mail on the counter distracts me. I start thinking about that and then, what did I come in here for? But if I return to my original place, something will pop into my head because I got the same context at that point and it comes back. But to avoid that short-term loss, it's important to sort of emphasize it.

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I think probably most of us don't even think to do that because well hey, who would be damn enough to forget they are looking for scissors when they're going 20 feet from one room to the next? But obviously, it happens.

Dr. Anthony M.: It's not about intelligence, it's just about the human brain and how it works. Fortunately, we can intervene on so much of our heritage from the cave people. We can actually use conscious intention to change and to perform at higher levels. That's what education is and memory is just another thing you can become educated about in order to turn it into a tool that operates better.

Roger Dooley: So, Anthony early in the book you talk about four kinds of learning and six kinds of sensory preferences. We can't go into those into a lot of detail, otherwise, we wouldn't be able to talk about anything else. But I want you quickly run through those and we see if our listeners can identify where they might fit in that scheme of things.

Dr. Anthony M.: Thanks for mentioning those, Roger because they're super important. The reason why I focus on them in the book is when people come to the world of memory techniques, one of the first objections that they feel or many people do anyway, is I'm not visual, or I'm not creative. Often legitimately feel a resistance to it because of how so much of memory training is created. But the reality is that we have so many assets in our minds. So the modes that we have is some of us are more visual than others or we're more auditory or kinesthetic or we even have a better a sense of smell or preference for smell or taste or even just thinking itself, concepts.

So that's really important and I show people how that if they can figure that sort of hierarchy in their sensory preferences, they'll hit the ground running with memory

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techniques much easier and go the distance as a result. Likewise, with the four learning types. A lot of people, they need to know what something is immediately then about a quarter of the people need to know why it's important immediately. Then other people need to know how it works and for your entrepreneurial listeners this is gold because then they're other people, they just want the action steps and go.

When you understand and you understand it about yourself and you understand it about others, you can do more to try and get all four of those types of information as quickly as possible into your messages. So that you hit all of those preferences of what it is, why it's important, how it works and just give me the action steps. Because everybody will have those preference and they won't have them equally for every single thing that they try to learn. So we want to be sensitive to that as learners and also as people who make, that create things for other people entrepreneurially.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I suppose since this is a podcast, our listeners are probably somewhat audio-oriented since that's how almost all will be consuming it. But I think that flipping it over to the other side of say conveying information to people, doing a presentation or a speech, there's a fair amount of research that shows that getting that information out there in multiple ways will help people remember. It's sort of the flip side of what you're talking about, Anthony. That if you're trying to remember stuff, then you can perhaps consume it in the best forms for you. But also if you're conveying information to people, it's important to realizing. There seems to be some debate over whether there are people who are very specifically visual learners or something else. But I think there's

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widespread agreement that having multiple types of information so that having a memorable image, at the same time you're showing a picture and maybe a single word as a visual makes the whole thing a lot more memorable.

Dr. Anthony M.: Yeah and I talk in the book about how as learners we need to take that initiative. So we might know that we prefer this or that kind of visual or auditory mode. But we need to go one step further and also explore the ones that are not necessarily our preference or our strength and add something. So if that means reading an article or even a couple of extra articles, that's going to give us so much benefit because we're going outside of our preference. So I very much agree that there's a lot of debate in the science but there's also just the practical wisdom of challenging ourselves.

The other thing that I talk about in the book is challenge is great, we aren't learning unless we're challenged. But we need to also understand our frustration points. When we get frustrated, instead of giving up, know that we're frustrated and just scale back to where we're just being adequately challenged again enough to learn. You can actually increase challenge gradually overtime and always avoid that frustration point.

Roger Dooley: We just a week ago had John Medina on the show, the author of Brain Rules. He was also the originator of the brood effect where he was able to improve the memory of his students at exam time by spraying brood cologne in the classrooms as he was teaching and then in the room where the exam was being given. He did less somewhat controlled experiment, probably not the most scientific one but found that adding that olfactory cue actually

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seemed to help the students remember the material, which involved a lot of memorization.

Dr. Anthony M.: There's a number of things like that when I was a university student and I think I even did it in high school, I had read it somewhere. If you eat a banana while you're studying and then when you eat a banana before you go sit the exam, theoretically, you're going to have a similar brain chemistry and that will help aid your recall of the information. In an anecdote level, I have to say it did provide some benefit and it might just be psychological priming through a ritual. But banana chemistry is banana chemistry so things like that do make sense.

Roger Dooley: Right. Even if it's a plausible effect, if it works, it works. So you can't fight it.

Dr. Anthony M.: Yeah.

Roger Dooley: So one thing slightly counter-intuitive, Anthony is one of your first recommendations is people start a memory journal to write stuff. So explain what that is and why it's important?

Dr. Anthony M.: Well, memory journal is a way of tracking what it is that you're doing, having a place to refer to it. Because I request very kindly, request but actually if you want the best results, you're going to do this. Which is to draw memory palaces to exercise your spacial memory, get spacial memory outside your head and then be able to use it better for memory palace creation. But I appreciate why it sounds counter-intuitive but in the world of artistry, having a sketchbook is very, very important for many reasons in terms of developing the art of sketching. In many ways we're sketching our lives, we're sketching what we learn. If we're not externalizing in books, we can't

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see progress, we don't have a place to refer to it but relying only on our memory. I can go on and on and on but the artist's sketchbook is just a must if you want to develop any kind of ability to use your hands to represent anything and you see progress over time and you date things. It is just a must in that world but it also applies to everything else.

It is just a way of committing to hey, I'm going to do this, I'm going to have a physical reminder of my commitment to do this and I'm going to visit it day after day. I'm going to have it visible in my home and I'm going to check in with it and fill it in. So it has many, many benefits. If you read, I don't have all the citations collected together but if you read 59 Seconds by Richard Wiseman he collects a lot of the data and they are in his work-sited. About how you remember more about your life through journaling and your memory changes. Also, your perception of time changes and you tend to value time more when you track it.

So all of these things are combined in that recommendation and I couldn't possibly imagine life without it myself and I see so many results for the students that I work with when they also take that up.

Roger Dooley: So in passing, Anthony, you mentioned memory palaces and that's a technique that's been around for probably at least a couple of thousand years. Why don't you explain what they are and then maybe the different variations on them too? Because the classic is maybe the rooms of your house and so on but you've got some other options. So why don't you explain about that, Anthony?

Dr. Anthony M.: Well, it's grounded in an association and the mind's ability to remember the links between things. One of the things

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that we remember freely without any effort is space. So when you moved into the home that you live in now, did you have to work hard to remember the layout of the home?

Roger Dooley: Not this one.

Dr. Anthony M.: So I think if you think about many, many buildings, you might have put some effort into the layout of some more complex ones but-

Roger Dooley: Right, my last house I got lost in for a while but it was unusual.

Dr. Anthony M.: Okay, right. Most people when they think about their childhood home, they can really bring back an unusual amount of detail about how it was laid out, high schools, churches and so forth. We seem to have this as a natural memory resource and then we can use other tools of memory to layer images on top of locations. So like the corner of a bedroom. Then I was seeing Roger Moore, he was in a dual with The Brain and that helped me remember Roger Dooley's Brainfluence podcast that I was going to be on that show today. I located that very, very specifically in a room so that if I forgot that, then what was it? Yeah, right, it was Roger Moore and he is in a dual with The Brain.

If I didn't put that in space, it will just be lost in my mind and I will have to fish for it and thinking it would be as strong because I can go to my bedroom and say, there is that corner. There are specific things happening there, which ties or taps into what's called episodic memory, which is the ability to remember stories very easily. Then it comes back and there's other levels of memory involved there.

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It's an ancient technique as you mentioned and the brief story that we have from history is that Simonides was at a banquet hall. He gave a speech and he was called outside. The banquet hall was destroyed from an earthquake and he was able to recall the names of every single person there and where they were at the table of the banquet. Because he used his memory techniques to associate an image with the name of each person where they were sitting. The city officials were helped greatly in helping the families of the dead give proper burials to their lost ones. That's basically why we have that story because it's such a memorable story but it is a story that tells the story of how the techniques work. There are many variations but that's the core of it and it's so powerful.

Roger Dooley: Anthony, how did you know to look in the bedroom? In other words, you stored that memory associated with perhaps some object or corner or something in the bedroom. But how did you know that I would be there and not the living room or some other place or a different house?

Dr. Anthony M.: There's a bit of a mystery to that but part of it is because I actively created that imagery there. So I know it because I did it. I took the initiative to create the memory. Because I know that I do these techniques then I'm thinking okay, well, where is that information? So you're creating chains of association based on actual remembered experience.

So a lot of people struggle with that. This is where the why learner and the how learner come in, they want to know why and how. In memory training, there's a little bit of a blank there. Well, why and how does that work? It works because you do it, you develop a skill. Then you're

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going to think, I memorized that, where did I memorize it and what did I put there? Then you start to use the chains of association to bring it back. Why I chose that corner is because I created that memory palace as an all-purpose day to day sort of to-do list. It's created in a particular way in order to serve a linear order of the order of the day. That is the second thing, so it's actually in the second corner of the room and that's basically how that works.

But the why and how that are really just learned experience and that I have done it. Heaven forbid a stone hits me on the head and or I develop Alzheimer's or dementia then I no longer remember having done these techniques. But I don't worry about that too much and I don't worry about that for the students. We tend to remember the things that we do when we put tension around them.

Roger Dooley: So in that same bedroom corner if you will, do you have lots of other stuff stored?

Dr. Anthony M.: Well, I have lots of multiple memory palaces.

Roger Dooley: Right. I guess that's one question but I mean I presume that you can sort of overwrite the old stuff and like tomorrow, you won't need to remember me specifically. So you can put something else there. But if you are memorizing vocabulary words or a list of something that you might want to recall in the future, can you use the same locations and somehow sort of know when you're in one mode and when you're in the other mode?

Dr. Anthony M.: Yes, absolutely. Reusing memory palaces is one of the classic questions. There's a bit of finesse here and there, a lot of it depends on your skill with the technique. But yes, I reuse many memory palaces over and over again.

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By contrast, there are memory palaces that I don't reuse over and over again. It just depends on the context. But yeah, overwriting memory palaces is very, very easy. There's deep fascination and discussion about how you can get the maximum advantage out of doing that and avoid some of the classic problems that come. Such as ghosting is called and in the science, it's called the ugly sister effect. So it's been named, which is when you're looking for one piece of information that you've encoded into your memory palace. You're Prince Charming and you're looking for Cinderella but your memory is giving you something else. So that's called the ugly sister effect.

But these are just minor problems and very few people take them seriously once they sort of know what the game is and how to play it. Just give people a sense of how this can go or what it can develop to. Alex Mullen, he just won the World Memory Championships for the third time. His memorizing 52 cards in a randomized shuffled deck in under 17 seconds and he reuses the memory palace that he uses for that over and over and over again in training. He doesn't get ugly sister effect from what he did the day before. He's just focused on what he is doing right then and just sizzling through this for show or competitive purposes. But all of that stuff applies to anything you want to learn.

Roger Dooley: So other than your current house or your last apartment or something, you don't have to use a physical structure, right? You can use other things that have some sort of association. What one or two examples be?

Dr. Anthony M.: Well, other things people like to use. They can use video game spaces so to speak. So the territory that a character might navigate through a video game, that can be used.

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You can use locations in movies. No matter what other alternative that you use, even if you invent something. Like I have invented trains for example, in my mind. Whatever you're using, you're still tapping into the sense of memory and the brain's capacity to juggle spacial location in the mind. It's always the spacial technique at some level.

Roger Dooley: So one really practical problem that just everybody has today is remembering usernames and passwords. We can outsource lots of Google and of course, you can outsource some of that to your browser or your password tool. But sometimes we just want to know by memory what they are in a strange computer in a hotel or airport lounge or something and we need to get something done quickly. Is there a technique that you use for that? A lot of people do is just reuse the same information over and over again, which is not the recommendation of security experts.

Dr. Anthony M.: No.

Roger Dooley: Is there a particular approach that you use that our listeners might be able to employ? Because everybody I know deals with that.

Dr. Anthony M.: Sure, well let's take the hypothetical. You are at a hotel and you want to create a unique login for that hotel. Let's say you travel a lot, you're in five or six hotels per month, for example. So what you can do to memorize your passwords and not have them crackable and so forth is I don't know. Maybe that reference is a bit too obscure but some traveler, someone who is just notorious for traveling. Maybe Tom Hanks when he was in that movie where he lived in an airport.

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You could have Tom Hanks let's say and he is a businessman and he is traveling. So every password is going to be Hanks and because A is the first letter of the alphabet, A will always be one. So now it's H-1-N-K-S and then you can have the name of whatever hotel you're in spelled backward with every E being a three or something like that. Now, what you're actually doing is you're using rules as your new password and you're just using those rules. You can obviously finesse those and some of the passwords will say, well it has to be so many characters and it has to have special characters and so on. So you got to factor that into the technique but if you just follow general rules then it's the rules that you need to remember not necessarily the passwords itself. Because the rules will tell you what the password is. So it's kind of like doing code cracking on yourself.

But that's one technique that I use often and it works really well.

Roger Dooley: Right and actually that sort of used case that I was thinking about, Anthony was more you've been logged in your computer or you've been logged in on Skype for the last two years. So you have not used that username and password. Then suddenly your computer resets itself or you're on a strange computer. But I think you could use that same sort of technique by combining something to do with the name of the site and applying a rule that would not be obvious to folks but would be sufficiently difficult to survive brute force attacks and so on.

Dr. Anthony M.: Yeah, the recommendation there doesn't change much depending on the context. I was sort of following your story with the hotel.

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Roger Dooley: Well, usually that happens to me when I'm in a hotel and I'm using their computer in the business center or something of that nature.

Dr. Anthony M.: Right. Well, to be fair-

Roger Dooley: Or even worse, the site says, we don't recognize you because you're coming in from an IP address in Lebanon or something so log in again, please.

Dr. Anthony M.: Right.

Roger Dooley: That's when you have to remember I do use non-memory based aids for that. Sometimes you just wish you had it right at your fingertips.

Dr. Anthony M.: Yeah and that is a totally good wish to have but I feel to be fair, I don't actually recommend memorizing passwords myself. Other memory expert, named Jonathan Levi agrees with me on that. We recommend things like last pass as much as possible to have maximum security. Because entrepreneurs they often have to give passwords to VAs and so forth. So they need to be in a secure place where they can be shared. So just by virtue of that as a memory expert and also as an entrepreneur, I tend to not recommend memorizing password if you can avoid it.

However, if you want to explore this topic more, Brad Zupp is the go-to guy for that. I have an interview with him, he has written an excellent book on memorizing passwords for security concerns. So I'm not really that focused myself in terms of memorizing passwords but he is excellent. So his name is Brad Zupp, Z-U-P-P.

Roger Dooley: Very good.

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Dr. Anthony M.: It's a great book, so I recommend that. But again, the entrepreneurial thing, Jonathan Levi is the other person I mentioned, L-E-V-I. A great friend of mine and we do a lot of work together for our demographics and psychographics for memory training and a lot of them are entrepreneurs. We just thought because we have to share our passwords with so many VAs it's actually not great advice to really focus on giving so much debt of attention and time to memorizing passwords when they need to share them anyway. So the last pass is the one that he and I both recommend. Certainly, there are other options but that is something I should mention to be totally fair.

Roger Dooley: Okay. Well, great advice, Anthony. Is there a difference in the way that you memorize things that you want to retain for a long time as opposed to just for the short-term?

Dr. Anthony M.: Yes, there's a huge difference and that difference is what is ultimately the use of the memory palace? The use of the memory palace is an alternative to rote repetition. So rote repetition is repeating something as long as it takes to get into memory. You can use recipe cards, you can use software. We've talked about the problems of software already and so I don't like to use software. But there are things like bots and programs all over the internet that will feed you information over and over and over again. Repetition, repetition, repetition.

The memory palace, on the other hand, is I learn Chinese right now and it is incredible. When my wife feeds me a new phrase in Chinese, I just start to see some pictures in the kitchen. Then I revisit those pictures at least five times on the first day, at least five times or once a day four, five days and then at least once a week for the next five weeks and I will remember it forever. I don't have to look

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at it hundreds of times. The way that the software feeds it to you again and again and again until the point of boredom and death. I just start to use the phrases again and again and again also. Then it ultimately becomes unnecessary to do it once a week for five weeks because it's entered long-term memory so fast. It's just give me the phrase, start to make some images, paint them on the kitchen wall mentally and then revisit them.

So the rule of thumb is five times the first day, once a day for the next five days and then use it. By using it I mean not just speaking into conversation but reading, writing, speaking, and listening to it. I will actually ask her to say it again and I will write it down and I will look it up on the internet so I'm actually reading it. Getting it into as many of my processing modalities as possible. Then I've just got it and that's how I learned German, it's how I've studied any language. It's just really, really powerful.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I think the process of sort of actively using the information is important. Just I know when I'm say drive to a strange location through a fairly complex road. If I look at GPS guide me and I'm just blindly going left, right and so on. If somebody asked me once I got there, How did you get here? Man, I don't have no clue, I just went where she told me to. But if I'm forced to navigate that myself actively either from maybe a map or from memory, then wow, the next time through I will remember it completely.

Dr. Anthony M.: Yeah. You're laying the foundations and your physical brain is mapping it out and storing it chemically in different locations of your brain and then it consolidates during sleep. It's really actually miraculous how it all works when you think about it.

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Roger Dooley: Yeah. Just to wrap up, what do you think, Anthony, are the biggest mistakes or the biggest mistake when people are trying to memorize or remember things? What should they avoid?

Dr. Anthony M.: Well, I think one thing is people have a sort of worry about making mistakes that should be avoided at all cost. What I teach to help avoid that is relaxation. I think people they're physically tensed and they're thinking too much about the outcome and not focusing enough on the craft and the science of memory techniques. So they're putting very unnecessary barriers in front of their success. So if you can focus on your breath, get relaxed then this is going to work much better. The creativity that you need to come up with these images in the first place, that's going to come much easier. The number one mistake is just taking it a little bit too seriously and worrying too much about the outcome and not just focusing on the game itself. There's kind of a game aspect to it.

Then nature takes care of the rest as long as you as we talked about put the stuff into use and then revisit it. You will develop a kind of style of how many times you have to revisit it. So five is a rule of thumb, it's a good one but it's not necessarily going to be the number for you. Yeah and just enjoy it, it's just fun and you don't have to put yourself into high stakes situations like I do sometimes where I go into a room and memorize 30 names. You don't have to do that, you can practice memorizing 30 names and just test yourself privately and give a nice chuckle for how well it worked and keep your own score and so forth. Until you get to a point to where you want to externalize and verbalize more of what you've memorized.

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Just don't ever associate stress with memory because it's counter-productive and it's not necessary. There's so many fruits to be gained by just enjoying the process.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, that's great advice. Let me remind our listeners that we're speaking with Anthony Metivier. Founder of Magnetic Memory Method and author of the new book, *The Memory Connection*, a step by step guide to memory improvement that lasts. Anthony, how can people find you and your content online?

Dr. Anthony M.: Well, my core website is magneticmemorymethod.com and we have a free course for your listeners at magneticmemorymethod.com/brainfluence.

Roger Dooley: Awesome. Well, we will link there, we'll link to the couple of books that you mentioned, Anthony and any other resources we talked about on the show notes page @rodgerdooley.com/podcast. We'll have a text version of our conversation there too, in case people are more into visual learning as opposed to auditory. They can save that to Evernote even or the memory tool of their choice. Anthony, thanks for being on the show. I don't think we'll forget this one.

Dr. Anthony M.: Thank you so much for having me, Rodger. It was great.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.