

"...memory provides our life with continuity. It gives us a coherent picture of the past that puts current experience in perspective. The picture may not be rational or accurate, but it persists. Without the binding force of memory, experience would be splintered into as many fragments as there are moments in life.... We are who we are because of what we learn and remember."
(Eric R. Kandel, 2006)

I am seventy-eight (where did the time go?) and am revisiting my views and reminiscences on life and memory. It's been more than ten years since I last read my book, *Managing Your Memory* (second edition). It gave me an eerie feeling. There they were — my thoughts and misunderstandings concretely staring me in the face.

First, I noticed "dissociation" (which often happens when I review my previous publications). It didn't feel like my work but rather the work of someone else. Next, I was shocked by weaknesses in the narrative. Despite positive feedback from many who read the book, some of the text lacked clarity. However, the *essence* of the work held up well. I originally planned to write a book that was approachable and readable and that stated general principles rather than to create a text that would soon be out of date. I feel that I mostly achieved that goal with the earlier book. And then, I was in lock-down due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic of 2020 – 2021. That allowed me to contemplate, rethink, and reprocess my understanding of memory, assessment, teaching, neurological disease, aging, and life. This was my chance to rewrite and revise the text to increase clarity as well as to update and to expand discussions.

My interest in memory and emotion originated from the aftermath of the drowning death of my brother, Dick, when I was nearly four years old. I had nightmares most nights throughout my childhood. These dreams often had images of the funeral that I couldn't recall in normal consciousness. I was also puzzled about my parents' reactions and idealization of Dick. Added to this, I was dyslexic and was slow in learning to read (I scored at the twelfth percentile on a national reading test administered as part of admission to Ashland College). Nor could I spell well, despite hours of detention to write out words (spell checkers became a blessing). Indeed, much of my understanding of learning and memory stem from my efforts to master university-level courses and overcome my limitations.

The final event that caught my attention was an exercise required in my senior English class. I had to memorize a passage from *Macbeth* and recite it in front of the class. I still can feel the terror, as I was very shy and avoided speaking up or asking questions in classes. I successfully memorized the passage — in fact, I overlearned it. However, fear prevailed when I stood in front of the class, and I did poorly, only to be able to recall it perfectly thirty minutes later.

From these beginnings, I decided to major in psychology and earn a Ph.D. from The Ohio State University (my master's degree was in experimental psychology; I specialized in learning and memory with an emphasis on psychoneuroendocrinology — how's that for a mouthful?). I was a university professor in my early career, during which I published many

research papers and contributed several book chapters on learning and memory. As an educator (teaching students from preschool age to junior high, college, and graduate education), I had the privilege of mentoring hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students (mainly at the University of North Dakota). I briefly returned to teaching at the University of North Georgia during 2017 and 2018.

During the last twenty-five years of my career before retirement, I helped found and develop a memory clinic, a behavioral health department at a retirement community, and, later, a private practice specializing in memory in southern Florida. I was able to apply my academic skills to real-life problems as well as broaden my knowledge of memory and emotions. I developed a comprehensive memory evaluation and treatment center where I consulted with thousands of older people who had both excellent memory (sometimes referred to as the “worried well,” but I prefer the “proactive well”) and declining memory (from various etiologies such as head injury, stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, and Parkinson’s disease). At the same time, I contended with changes in the efficiency of my own memory as I aged and with the onset of Parkinson’s disease in my sixties.

My conclusion from decades of experience with memory is that *trying to remember doesn’t work*. You must plan on *how* you will remember. You must develop your plan before you need it. Better memory takes effort and evaluation. Writing this book helped me to translate this experience and knowledge into a practical guide, not only for you but also for myself. Despite the changes brought by aging, most of us will not become demented. *We do have a say in how we age*. We can make self-enhancing lifestyle choices that move ourselves toward self-actualization.

An array of aids and techniques underlie good memory, allowing you to learn, retain, and execute new information and skills. As will be elaborated later, some memory systems benefit from practice/repetition, or “mental aerobics,” while others do not. Even though I’ve learned many skills and gained much information during my life, I have always had to put time and effort into this process. You will come to know this as **The One- Minute Rule** — anything given less than one minute of thought will fade from your memory.

As I grow older, I use more notes, rely on a more detailed calendar, and keep myself better organized. I also have to increase my efforts with each passing year. Despite the changes from aging, I’ve developed an evolving plan in which I can successfully engage, enjoy my life, and recall my experiences. If I practice what I preach (and I do not develop a memory disorder), I will learn and grow as long as I live, despite having Parkinson’s disease.

This book is not a textbook. Rather, it distills information that has helped me to develop my personal and professional appreciation of normal and abnormal memory as well as to understand how to better manage my own memory. This book is practical rather than academic. Therefore, I am not using a scholarly format for referencing ideas. You will find many helpful sources in the Annotated Bibliography at the end of the book.

Individuals who have experienced memory loss resulting from neurological disorders (head injury, Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, Lewy body disease, stroke) as well

as medical disorders (kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer) will benefit from the information in this book. Even young persons who don't experience memory loss will find valuable ideas here, as will individuals who, like me, are trying to handle the normal changes in memory efficiency as we age. With all of these challenges, there are no easy ways to a better memory. Although some exercises and experiences can strengthen or reinforce long-term memory and habits, unfortunately, no exercises will strengthen short-term memory.

The strategies in this book that reinforce and strengthen memory will help support memory whether you are ten or ninety years of age. You will find help, whether you apply the principles in this book for home, school, or work. You will feel strengthened in facing the changes of aging as well as the challenges of illnesses that interfere with memory. The practical techniques you will learn involve spending more time and effort in *deciding* what is important to learn and track. You will gain confidence in your ability to cope with information and to compensate for changes as you mature.

This book has three major sections. The first consists of nine chapters that will help you (1) to better understand how memory works; and (2) to develop and use specific techniques that will propel you to more effectively learn and remember new information, remember what needs to be done and when, and remember where to go and how to get there. These chapters describe what memory is as well as the factors that influence forgetting. They also discuss the changes that can be expected during aging and the practices that have been proven to support learning and memory regardless of age.

The second section (Chapters 10 and 11) describes disorders of memory and the concepts of Mild Cognitive Impairment, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease. They are the most technical and clinical chapters in the book. The third section (Chapters 12 through 15) discusses managing controllable factors (such as diet and exercise) that may improve mental operations as we age and may slow down memory decline. In these chapters, you will also learn how to plan ahead, whether or not you have risk factors associated with memory disorder or have mild changes in memory beyond those of normal aging. The main message of this last section is to *be proactive about your memory. Stop trying to remember. It does not work. Rather, plan how you will remember and how you and significant others can live a more engaged life.*

We insure ourselves against financial contingencies as best we can. We create a financial road map for retirement. We also must get organized to protect ourselves against the inconveniences of aging and possible fading memory skills. If you have vulnerabilities for developing conditions such as Alzheimer's disease or stroke, planning ahead becomes critical for successful management of your future. Unfortunately, if you wait until you need the skills described in the first part of this book, you may no longer be able to learn them. That's why it's important to develop good memory "hygiene" so that *you will have the skills before they are needed.*

According to a *New York Times* article, many elders (a description I am increasingly finding distasteful but accurate for myself) fear developing Alzheimer's disease more than they

fear their own death. This need not be the case, as Alzheimer's disease progresses over the course of decades. The early phases of the disease create annoyances and inconveniences that can be well managed by careful, advanced planning, ideally beginning in at least middle age. *It is never too early to plan ahead.* Your memory is the best it will ever be. Now is the time to learn memory management skills *before* you need them. If you don't experience a decline in memory, you have lost nothing. Instead, you have developed habits that will give you a well-remembered life. Design a plan to preserve your past for active conservation of your future. That is what this book is all about.