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Newsletter #3

"*Knowing a great deal is not the same as being smart. Intelligence is not information alone but also judgement, the manner in which information is collected and used.*" - Carl Sagan

I appologise if this Newsletter is too long, I'm trying to keep them to two pages if I can. But this subject does take a bit of explaining otherwise it might get misconstrued. There are some facts and figures and studies I can give you, but it may bore you to the point of not absorbing the essence.

The Luck Factor:
Obviously the more you know the better decisions you can make. Scrabble is to a degree a game of luck, and the more you know the luckier you get. Because of this luck factor, tournaments are played over a number of games in an endeavour to even the tile distribution out. Sometimes as you know the tiles are against you. And despite popular belief that Scrabble is a purely a word game, Scrabble is more about mathematics than word building. The top players are more mathematically inclined and look for mathematical probability opportunities in their strategy and in the words they memorise, good players don't memorise the whole dictionary only the words most likely to come-up given the tile distribution of the game (these lists are usually computer generated). It has been estimated that there is 10% luck when drawing tiles from a bag.

With Scrabble – strategy sits on top of words. **STRATEGY**
WORDS

To 'Learn' or to 'Memorise Dilemma:
A decision often faced by new participants into the game of Scrabble is whether to 'learn' or 'memorise'. To 'learn' means to think of the word in relation to its meaning- nothing wrong with that. If you go down the path to 'learn' words. It will take a very, very long time for your brain to abscorb the information. It's akin to overloading and confusing the brain at the same time.

Whereas to 'memorise' is to recognise a group of letters as a valid word. To 'memorise' is a more natural way to learn. If you look at how a child first learns the language, he/she learns to say and identify a word before actually knowing what it means. At 8 months babies can recognise groups of sounds and can distinguish word boundaries. Although they recognise these sound groups as words they may not know what the words mean. It is not until 12 months of age can they attach meanings to the words. By this age they have a vocabulary of around 50 words. In other words the meaning comes later. And so it is with Scrabble, you will come to know what the words mean over time.

In effect, with Scrabble you are learning a whole new vocabulary that isn't your day-to-day 20-30,000 word vocabulary range. Three things that are top of the list to fight Dementia are: learning a new language, board games and puzzles to keep the mind active. The way I see it, Scrabble incorporates all of these including mathematics thrown in for good measure.

Top players when asked, "What's that word mean" will often reply, "I don't know I'm only a Scrabble player". Let that be your mantra.

Top players typically 'memorise' lists of words without reference to their meaning – this is a type of short-cut learning. Eventually you will get to know the words and their meaning, you're planting a small seed that will grow. Of course, not all of us are inclined to want to memorise tedious lists of words, just do small lists then and don't clutter the brain or as I'll show you in the future tricks to help in the learning process that may be more enjoyable for you. With the three letter word list there is around 1400 words, however if you disregard the words you know it becomes more manageable. You can narrow it down to about 400 words or so, you've just decluttered the list and made it easier.

A Case in Point:
Nigel Richards (New Zealand) having won the World Scrabble Championship three times, got bored with the game and so decided to enter the French Championships. He 'memorised' all the relevant words he needed in six weeks and won. Mind you he couldn't speak French as he didn't know the meaning of the words. He has just won the 2018 World Championship.

Meanwhile back on planet Earth, us mere mortals have to 'be happy', (well maybe 'contend' is a better word) with what we are given and make the best use of it. Your goal should be to increase the neuron connections in your brain to stop it shrinking as you get older and keep Dementia at bay. Although Dementia is not a part of the aging process you may have contributed to or have a genetic predisposition to it. There are over 100 different types of Dementia and causes, although Alzheimer's is the one most known because it occurs in 70% of cases. Myself with my hypertension and cholesterol problem, I am a likely candidate for Vascular Dementia. By the way, forgetting where you left the car keys is not Dementia. It takes 20-30 years to come on. There is no cure for Dementia at the moment (I believe there is a breakthrough) but we can delay its onset.

Unfortunately in this day and age, technology has made the mind lazy, where once we would remember phones numbers etc, or pass stories on by word of mouth to each generation or do mathematics in our head, there is not the need to do so anymore. We must find new ways to exercise the mind or lose it, as they say.

The Mind:
The mind doesn't remember everything – it deletes and consolidates what it thinks is important. There are believed to be 60 people in the world who remember every single moment of everyday, and can recall everything on any given day. These peoples' brains are so active they find sleep very difficult. However for the average person the following applies:

- We speak 5 times faster than we can write;
- We forget 60% of events within 24 hours; &
- 75% within a week.

The brain sets up a pattern or template within its structure. This does a number of things:-

- enables us to carry-out mundane tasks without re-learning them everyday. If it didn't do this we would need to re-learn to tie our shoe laces every day. Some autistic people lack this pattern process and have to re-learn everything everyday;
- frees up the brain to concentrate on other more important things while carrying out mundane tasks where a pattern exists;
- becomes automatic (subconcious) without you having to think about it.

For example, have you ever repeated an action or task such as travelling to and from work everyday (pattern) and needed to deviate from that pattern, such as stop for some grocery item or call in somewhere, only to find you've driven past your turn-off point? Or taken a journey and been so deep in thought and didn't remember how you got there or the journey seemed shorter than usual? We each have a number of patterns for what we do, you'll find a lot once you start looking for them.

When we make these automatic patterns we need to be very conscious and careful how we learn them. Once you learn a bad habit it is very difficult to break it without a sustained and determined effort to do so. Some people find it nigh impossible. For instance, when learning something in music it is important to learn as slow as possible to get the technique right before you gradually increase the speed. To get the 'memory' in your fingers as they say. Once you set-up an initial pattern it becomes the default pattern and this the one your brain wants to revert to. Very difficult to break. So it is with learning lists of words for Scrabble – how do you eat an elephant? - one small piece at a time.

Individual Absorption Types:
It maybe of some benefit to understand how you as an individual select and store information.
Types:

- purely visual (must see it written down or experience it);
- purely aural (can absorb information through the ears);
- purely sensations (typically visually or hearing impaired people);
- spiritual;
- intuition; or
- a combination of any or all of these.

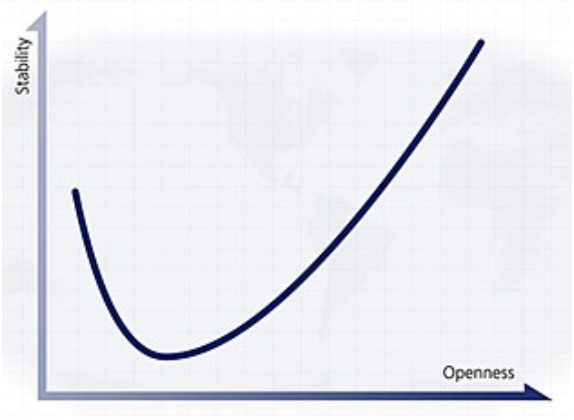
Which type are you? If you can recognise which type or combination type you are it will greatly assist in selecting the right technique to learn and retain the information. One theory suggests that if you attach memories to sensations there's more chance to remember. While another theory says the more stupid or outlandish or crazy the memory the more likely you'll remember it. Again it probably depends on the individual and how you choose to remember.

The ASSUME Concept:
However, when collecting information it is dangerous to 'assume' anything. It makes an Ass out of YOU and Me – Ass/U/Me. It falsifies your decision making process. It is best to wear the 'white hat' and only collect pure facts and information, that have been verified from a number of sources and to the best of your knowledge. You know the old gossip/rumour mill story, where you have purchased a white pet dog and someone passes the information on as a beige dog and each time the information (colour) is passed on it is distorted, until it is a black dog and finally it comes back to you that you're a MONGREL dog. But I didn't do it!

The 'J' Learning Curve:
The J Curve Theory was developed over 150 years ago to describe the economic behaviour of nations. It has been used to describe the process of change in medical conditions, the learning performance of students along with many other applications such as the performance of organisations. In its essence, the J Curve is a positve theory, "*During periods of major change, things tend to get worse before they get better*". It's optimistic perspective comes from the phrase;

'things will get better'.

Einstein has two quotes which are relevant to J Curve thinking. "*You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew.*" The 2nd is Einstein's definition of insanity as,"*Doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results*."
When we try to absorb a lot of information into our brain a strange event happens, as demonstrated by the following graph called the 'J' Learning Curve for obvious reasons. This graph is probably the simplest of the graphs to understand the theory.



As you flood yourself with information the brain goes into reverse. For a period it appears that you are not absorbing anything and in fact forgetting things. What is the brain doing? After this initial period learning capacity increases/rises, as shown by the graph.

Study Duration:
Someone once wrote in a book that it took 10,000 hours of learning to become proficient at a task. Since then it has been taken out of context, 'assumed' by the general populace that this is the norm for learning. But this was a reference to becoming a champion at a particular field of endeavour and was an analysis of champions at the time. For us mere mortals;

- academics suggest 40 minutes a day or 20 hours a month is all that is needed for the average person to absorb a special task;
- Australian Scrabble Association advises 20 minutes a day for a year to get to competition level. That would involve a number of tasks;
- for music it is recommened at least an hour of practice daily.

Whatever your individual absorbtion rate, it is obvious that it needs to be repeated daily to be of benefit. The North American champion Will Andersen does 30 minutes a day of anagram practice.

The Sound of Music:
Watched this show again the other day and reminded me of a few things. The following is how the original sol-fah scale (proper name is 'solfege' valid scrabble word) was written over a thousand years ago by medieval monks teaching students to sing the hymns and psalms, the first syllable of each line of the latin words of 'Hymn to St.John the Baptist'.

ut re mi fa sol la si

However, 'ut' was changed in the 1600s in Italy to the open syllable 'do', after the the first syllable of the surname of Giovanni Doni.

Then in the nineteenth century Sarah Glover changed the 'si' to 'ti', so that every syllable might begin with a different letter, this scale is called tonic sol-fah scale. Miss Glover's idea was to make music learning accessible for all not just the wealthy.

	ree	mee				
	reh	meh	faa			
do	**re**	**mi**	**fa**	**sol**	**la**	**ti**
doh	ray	me	fah	soh	lah	te
ut				so		si

The middle line is the tonic scale underneath is the variant spellings. Above the tonic scale line, though not related to the scale but may help you remember these words, by association to the scale. The singing pronuciation is as follows: *Doe – Ray – Me – Far – Sew – La – Tea – Doe.*

Three Letter Vowel Dumps for 'i' & 'u' :
The most popular vowel dump in clubs for the letter 'i' is - '***iwi***'- variant '**ywi**'.
Yes, takes the letter 'k' as a front hook & 's' as a back hook.

	Word	**Hooks**	
For the letter 'u' there is -	**'umu'**	**mumu**	**umus**
	'ulu'	**sulu**	**zulu**
	'utu'	**kutu**	**tutu**

Other vowel dumps: using an acronym as a way to remember the word.

Word	**Meaning**	**Remember as an Acronym**
euoi -	a Bacchi frenzy cry -	'**E**xcessive **U**nits **O**f **I**ntoxication'.
jiao -	a monetary unit of China also '*chiao*'. -	'**J**ohn **I**s **A**lways **O**ut'.

It is important to look at words differently. If 'ch' is present on the board 'iao' maybe added?

Longest vowel dump word: Will explain later why the 'u' & 'v' are interchangeable.
euouae - also can be spelt – *evovae* – a Gregorian cadence.

Scrabble on!
Keith Bancroft -Convener