

Limitless or Limited?  
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The idea of a pill that could make us smarter has always fascinated me. This was the plot of *Limitless*, a 2011 science fiction film starring Bradley Cooper as Eddie Murrow. The character Eddie is a down on his luck author. His girlfriend breaks up with him because of his lack of ambition, motivation, and focus. Trying to console him, His sister's ex-husband Vernon gives him a sample of a Nootropic drug called NZT. While on the drug Edward has perfect recall and can analyze vast amounts of information very quickly. As he continues to take the pill his mental capabilities improve, he tidies up his apartment and receives inspiration for his new novel. Eventually the pill transforms him into a financial genius.

The movie made me think of what I could do. What if I could become limitless from a pill. I soon was singing the Huey Lewis song "I want a new drug, one that won't make me crash my car, or make me feel 3 feet thick" but one that could make me pretty darn smart. There are in fact plenty of nootropics out there in the real world, including caffeine, nicotine, racetam, Adderall and Modafinil. However, I had no luck becoming *Limitless* with the Nootropics I had tried. I'd already maxed out my caffeine intake, and I found some truth in the Cuban coffee Queen by-line "drink more coffee and do stupid things faster". Unfortunately, I cannot say that I ever felt any smarter after smoking a cigar, although I always found it enjoyable. Pursuing the other Nootropic drugs would mean that I would be rummaging through high schoolers backpacks for Adderall or lying to a doctor about having narcolepsy or early onset dementia. I was not having any luck...until one day, when I decided to give it a different kind of shot.

What If instead of finding a new drug, I was to reframe the question, rather than chasing after those elusive 'limitless' mental capabilities, I chose to explore ways in which I could become less limited in my current capabilities.

I thought about what aspect of my Life that I wanted to be less limited in and would have everyday practical value to me and be achievable, I decided to focus on three things that my mind does poorly and that I could make significant process at by learning new techniques.

They are:

1. How can I remember names of new people I meet or for that matter names of members of a society that I've been in since 1999?
2. How can I remember where I put my car keys when I obviously was able to drive the car home last night?

And finally,

3. How can I remember the name of the password to the TV subscription service when my 3-year-old grandson is demanding Paw Patrol now?

The attainment of these skills did not seem insurmountable, however there was a reason at age 63 I was still bad at them. I was going to need a new approach to help guide me through achieving these capabilities, and fortunately, I came across a segment on the Today show, part of the New Year/New you series, which featured the author a new book titled Limitless, upgrade your brain, learn anything faster and unlock your exceptional life. The book's author Jim Kwik showed a variety of kinesthetic brain exercises for the Today show hosts. The first was circling the hands in opposite directions, which turned out to be easy enough, but then he had the host placing palms up the double timing one of the hands when flipping them over,

My non-dominant hand would never cooperate. I learned quickly why I can't hold a beat. Jim ended the segment with stating "there is no such thing as a good or bad brain only a trained or untrained brain". Intrigued by Jim's methods and success stories, I decided to buy his book 'Limitless', with hopes that it would guide me through improving my capabilities. If he had helped Jim Carrey and A-Rod, he could help me.

Jim's story was inspiring as he overcame his own limitations by finding better methods for learning. He had suffered a traumatic brain injury after a fall into a steam radiator at school. He was unable to read well or develop good comprehension skills. At one point he overheard a frustrated teacher say, "that's the boy with the broken brain". He realized that everyone thought of him that way as well, leaving him discouraged. He made it through high school but was struggling again in college. A classmate's father took Jim aside and said, "Jim what do you want to be, to do, to have, and to share with the world?", he asked Jim to write those things down. He looked at the list Jim had written and told him, "You're this close Jim". He was holding his hands about a foot apart, the distance across his brain. His friend's father's confidence reinvigorated Jim. The father shared books with Jim that included *The Power Positive Thinking* and *Think and Grow Rich*. Jim went back to school and was now working three times as hard, studying for classes, and trying to absorb all the new reading material given to him by his friend's father. Jim eventually fell into a state of exhaustion and tumbled down the steps of his of the school library, hitting his head yet again. It was in the hospital that it finally dawned on him, that instead of working harder, what if there were better methods to learn, that could be more effective, efficient, and even enjoyable. Jim set his studies aside and obsessed with solving the riddle. How does my brain work, so I can work my brain?

Jim Kwik's book *Limitless* supplies methods for focus, study, memory, speed reading and thinking. The capabilities I wanted to focus on were my memory and more specifically, 1. remembering names, 2. Finding keys and 3. Remembering passwords.

There are other good reasons, besides mine, to improve memory. A neurologist, Dr. Klemm at Texas A&M University gives five:

1. Memorization is discipline for the mind.
  - a. Our minds are lazy thinkers, distracted. Memorization trains the mind to focus and be industrious.
2. You can't always Google it.
  - a. And I agree, no one likes it if their doctor or auto mechanic goes over the computer and looks at Google when presented with an issue. We expect a level of competency from our professionals.  
  
I really like this next reason to improve memory.
3. Memorization creates a repertoire of what we need to think about.
  - a. In becoming a private pilot, I learned about the weather, the systems of the plane, flying parameters and techniques of flight. This memorization helped create a mental model of how to safely fly a plane.
4. We think with ideas held in our working memory.
  - a. We can only access our working memory from the brain's stored memory.  
  
Having little stored memory, leads to fewer ideas.
5. The exercise of committing things to memory helps develop the learning model that promotes the ability to learn.

- a. That is the more you can remember, the more you can learn.

So, with the three capabilities I had selected for improvement, along with five more reasons to improve my memory, I had dived into discovering the tools from the book needed to help me on my journey.

One of Jim's fundamental tools for improving memory is always remembering your mom. The tool is a mnemonic called MOM, M for motivation, O for observation and the last M for method.

The first letter M stands for motivation. We're going to remember the things that we value remembering. If I say, "Hey, I'll give 20 bucks to the first person that tells me at break what MOM stands for", which by the way stands for, motivation/observation/method, there is going to be someone in the audience that will remember and come up to me at break and tell me. So, if you want to have a strong memory you must have strong motivation.

The second letter O is for Observation. Most of us are distracted by the phone or thinking about the week ahead, the weather outside, or whether the Chiefs will make it to the Superbowl. When we do not remember something, it is primarily due to our lack of attention, not our retention capability.

The final letter M is for methods. All during school were taught what to memorize, rarely were we instructed on how to learn to learn. We need to discover and learn methods to learn.

Using the MOM tool would be my process for becoming less limited in each capability, find my motivation, observe how my lack of attention could play a role, and then armed with Jim Kwik's book, extract applicable methods to overcome my limited self.

Starting with the following capability.

1. How can I remember the names of people I met for the first time or for that matter members of a society that I've been in since 1999?

Flash back to May, it is the open meeting for Athenaeum, many of us will have our spouses there, we have taken a seat, it's then when the question starts from my wife, who is that you just said hello to, who's sitting at the table over there? I know all the faces and smiles but remembering the first and last names and their spouses' names I was batting poorly. It was embarrassing to struggle to remember the names of people I know, and I want that to change.

I applied the first letter of mnemonic MOM for motivation. Why do I value remembering names? Here it's relatively simple, I spend 8 times a year since 1999 for 25 years for an hour and a half meeting, let's see  $25 * 8 * 1.5$  hours is 600 hours, that's a lot of time breaking bread, listening to papers, and sharing the moments of members success in the delivery of those papers. I value each member and simply being able to rapidly recall their name would show that.

O in Observation, All those times during regular meeting roll call I was always focused on saying "here" and not listening to the other "heres", missing an opportunity to put a name to a face. In meeting someone new the issue was moving on to the conversation before

actively engaging in a process to commit that person's name to memory. Addressing the names started out tricky, how was going to listen to conversations to pick up names at comfort break, when my hearing is not that great when there's a lot of background noise. I've even had one member suggest the society have name tags. I'm not sure this group is prepared for that magnitude of change. Focusing my awareness of my available resources was revealing, every year the society prints a calendar with a roster with complete names and not only that, but there's also a roll call of all the names with response at each meeting when the room is quiet, and I can hear. I will use roll call to put the names to faces.

The method I'll apply when meeting someone new is to use the mnemonic to BE SUAVE.

The B in B suave is for belief, knowing that you can meet a goal is an essential first step. If you try too hard to convince yourself that you couldn't remember names, you'll succeed.

E is for exercise, as with other tools this is going to take repetitive exercise.

S is for say it, when you hear a person's name for the first time, say it back, this will confirm that you've heard the name correctly.

U is for use the name at least twice in the conversation.

A is for ask, ask where the person's name came from.

V is for visualization, vision is an incredibly powerful memory tool, try to attach an image to that person's name, for example if you meet someone named Hollis Newcomb White you can imagine that person Hauling Ass with a New comb on his White head.

E is for End, when you part ways with that person, end your conversation by saying that person's name before moving on.

Knowing all your names, with immediate recall is important to me, Let's see how I do at the next May meeting.

On to the next capability,

Number 2 How can I remember where I put my car keys?

I obviously was able to drive the car home last night. But where are my keys? I run around the house and they're not on the kitchen counter, or on the bedside table or the pants I left on the floor, I had them last night. Dang, why didn't I change the battery on that Apple Air tag when my watch said it was low.

My motivation for always wanting to know where my is to pick up the grandkids on time at school. Nobody wants to be the last kid in the pickup line.

Observation. That's where I'm lacking. I do not take time to notice when I leave the keys in my pockets or place them on a counter. I need to be aware, take that extra amount of time when I arrive home, leaving the keys where I can remember I left them. I need to practice attentiveness in my daily life.

The methods I'll use for improving this limitation are twofold. One method will be prevention and the other Technology. For prevention, I marry two tools, chain linking and spatial placement. First, I will create a chain link sequence of events and have a habit of putting the keys in the same place every time. When I park the car in the driveway, I'll exit the Car, remove the key from my pants, Lock the door to my car with the Key FOB, continue to hold the Fob in my hands on entry to house and place the keys in the wooden bowl on my bedside table.



Secondly, I'll use technology, I've got an Apple Air Tag, and it is effective, it alerts you when you leave things behind, it has truly been a lifesaver, but I do need to remember to put the batteries in when it's low. Next up, Passwords.

#3 How can I remember the name of the password to the TV subscription service when my 3-year-old grandson is demanding Paw Patrol now?

Trying to remember the Netflix or Disney or Peacock password is frustrating, although I do like how Scott Adams reframes it, he says when frustrated on remembering a password just imagine your computer hacker, and your missions to break into your own personal accounts. I think that reframing might the frustration, but it still leaves me needing to get to Disney Channel with impatient six and three-year old grandkids.

My motivation is to make sure my grandkids are happy. Simple enough. Flawlessly entering the password each time would be a good first step.

For observation, I am distracted, especially when first entering passwords. When I create a password, I am usually staring at an "\*" in the entry box and my earlier password entries have already been rejected for not having a capital letter or having too few characters. Not only that, when I am creating the account, I am in a hurry, it is when the Chiefs are playing Miami and then Purdue is playing IU basketball in the next 5 minutes. (Thanks Peacock). If I am going to remember the password I am going to have to slow down and be aware of what I am inputting for the password. The next 6 seconds, the golden 6, after creating a password are critical to committing it to memory, but usually I have moved on.

There are a couple of methods I'll share on how to remember passwords. The first is using an acrostic reminder. An acrostic can be a poem or a sentence where the first letter of

each word spells out a message for you. In this example if your password is lod17cocbrwd you can turn that into I once drank 17 cups of coffee before realizing it was decaf. The second is the use of technology. There are several password managers out there that would help in storing passwords. Bitwarden, Keepass, and Proton to name a few.

In conclusion, in the movie the protagonist Eddie Morrow had limitless capabilities, and he claimed that the nootropic he took had rewired his brain. Author Jim Kwik overcame traumatic brain injury, taught himself to learn how to learn, and provided me a resource on overcoming my limitations with his book "Limitless". Tonight, I've described some of the ways I'm going to be less limited in 2024, remembering all your names, not losing my keys, and getting the Disney password on the first try. Thank you for your attention. Now is there anyone that will remember what MOM stands for?