

**Program:** Aging, Cognition, and Memory

**Speaker:** Charles Morris, PhD, Professor and Provost, Denison University, Granville, OH

**Introduced by:** Glenn Bingle

**Attendance:** 148

**Guests:** Rodney Basson, Jo Davis, Paul Giesting, Jeanette Jeffries, Jan Lane

**Scribe:** Don Mink

**Editor:** Carl Warner

The presentation offered ways to make lives better and improve quality of life regarding normal ageing. It focused on “remembering self” as compared to “experiencing self”. “Memories are all we get to keep from our experience of living. I am my remembering self.”

Research shows that as we age, there are changes in the brain including reductions in volume in the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus. Vocabulary, speed of processing, reasoning, and, recall tests are used to evaluate brain changes. As we age, four major challenges are speed of processing, executive functions, inhibition of irrelevant information, and, memory. Memory includes: remembering recent events (Episodic Memory), remembering intentions (Prospective Memory), remembering who, where, how (Source Memory), remembering information (Semantic Memory), and, remembering life events (Autobiographical Memory). The loss of episodic memory leads to a loss of autobiographical memory. Hermann Ebbinghaus (1885), using lists of “nonsense syllables”, developed a curve that showed a significant decrease in his recall ability to remember these syllables over time. Studies have shown a similar decrease in recall of meaningful data as we age.

The presentation gave strategies to handle when episodic memory losses become autobiographical memory failures:

- Strategy #1: Elaborate (The Sooner the Better) – Write what should not be forgotten.
- Strategy #2: Variable Encoding Principle - Many memory problems associated with normal ageing are retrieval problems.
- Strategy #3: Externalize Your Memory (Converting Recall-to-Recognition) – Lists, lists and more lists, “consecrated” places, cues in environment, use of peg words.
- Strategy #4: Simplify - Respect your limitations, eliminate distractions, one thing at a time, no multi-tasking, use of acronyms and algorithms.
- Strategy #5: The Engaged Life.
- Strategy #6: Physical Exercise: “I often tell my patients that the point of exercise is to build and condition the brain.” (John J. Ratey, MD)

“You have to begin to lose your memory to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all...our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action ... without it we are nothing.” --Luis Buñuel, film director



**Charles Morris**