Community Garden
Mapping Project

Name Tag Project

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Julio Loves You

> I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.
>
> - Mr. Luther King Jr.

What Is A Name?

Perhaps it is just a sound. But it refers to a person. And that name is valuable to them.

Daniel on paper

I used to think I was *bad with names*. Really, I did. But it's not true at all. I can remember people's names just fine. It's mostly that learning a persons name requires work; things like time, attention, care, and familiarity. Certainly, we all have memories, and we know them to be imperfect and ephemeral. However, I can no longer believe that I am bad with names. It wasn't biology... No, it was a lie that was causing us to drift apart.

I was making a typical kind of poor excuse. I wasn't putting in the work. I wasn't giving people enough love and attention. So, sadly, we carried on not knowing each others names. We were losing our sense of community and I was trying to blame it on biological dysfunction. It would be nice if I really was *bad with names*. It would mean that I was suggesting an unchanging principle of my mind and identity. It would mean it's something in me that I couldn't control. It would do all the work to protect me from the *lie* I heard from someone else... and began to tell myself until I believed it too.

It's so obvious, to me, how powerful an excuse can be. For so long I let those lies control me, and it felt so wrong and so sad.

Until, one day, in a state of concern, I was reminded that I have always had a name tag at the Quaker meeting house. I realized that there are many Friends, and that I knew their names through name-tag acclimation in business meetings and at worship. So I said to myself, what if I wore my name tag outside of meeting?

I sensed that I rediscovered an ancient technology and went about to deploy my project and to learn from my mistakes. I decided to use it as a communication tool for others, to express my frustration and difficulties with names. I reasoned that others wouldn't have to feel weird if they forgot my name because it would be clear on my chest. Also, I discovered that decorating the name tag was fun, and made my name more memorable as it attracted lots of positive attention.

I'm always looking for a method with as little coercion as possible. I am asking people to engage in the work of intimacy and love with me, I want it to be as easy and as frictionless as possible.

Result

I wore the name tag for months starting back in the beginning of 2023. I kept wearing one as much as I could until shortly after a surgery when I took a break. I learned 10 million names. Tons of the people around me that never spoke to one another began to learn each others names too. It built community and elicited a magnificent response. It inspired me and others, and it cost almost nothing, and other people came through by putting in the work once I made it easy. Below are my two testimonies.

The name tag project affects me and other people deeply. It brings the community closer together. It moves hearts and changes the world for the better.

Eureka! We proved it.
Thanks, Tallahassee <3

"you look like you work in an aquarium" -fuck yeah, that's perfect-

The wind ripped off my last name tag on FAMU way. The new name tag looks awesome, and people say the sweetest things about it. I think Romiro was saying "you look like the kind of welcoming and approachable person you would expect to see staffed in an educational setting that includes children." That's a spectacular compliment. I don't want people to feel anxious around me, or threatened by my large personality. This name tag art project has taught me so much. All I had to do was be vulnerable enough to wear it and brave enough to say hi.

I can't generalize my experience to everybody else. But, having learned from what I am, I find it difficult to believe that so many people are bad with names and nothing can be done. I find it difficult to believe that our brains can't do math, or history, or music, or other rigorous subjects, when what I see is so many people, disinterested, and not putting in the work.

Let me be the first to admit it publicly. I used to be scared of or disinterested in people, and I would get insecure when I couldn't recall a persons name or have to ask them to repeat it. I began to blame myself, and used, with no consultation with a psychologist or doctor, a popular and ego protecting excuse. After I convinced myself, I told people I wasn't good with names, cause it was easier for my ego than admitting I was being a bit lazy and too much of a coward.

I'm not hard on the old Julio, though. He made mistakes and deserves, as a human with dignity, compassion as well. I am glad he found his way, and I am happy he is sharing it with others. So, having done the work, I know what it takes to love a person and hold their name in memory. What's more, I have in my hands a name tag, from an experience, from a tradition, from something real that other people can use - if they want to.