

AI and the Importance of Forgetting



For a company named Elephants don't forget, whose sole premise is guaranteeing the retention of vital workplace knowledge and information, the last thing you would expect is for us to be talking about the *importance* and more importantly, the necessity of forgetting!

Indeed, even within the neurobiological community the mechanisms of forgetting (known as transience) have also been neglected, with attention focused primarily on the processes involved in storing information (known as persistence). However, as with most dualisms, one would not exist without the other and recent research from the [University of Toronto](#) even suggests that forgetting is crucial for memory.

According to Professor Blake Richards of the University of Toronto Scarborough, the chief objective of memory is to optimise the decision-making process and thus the brain needs to forget irrelevant details in order to focus on information that will aid in real-world decision-making. Thus, failure to remember certain information, possibly useful in winning a game of Trivial Pursuit, should no longer be perceived as a failure in memory!

Instead, Professor Richards believes that with the ever evolving and constantly changing world in which we live information quickly becomes outdated and, thus, not as important to retain. Interestingly, Richards also states another reason which reflects a concept commonly used in AI models such as our Artificially Intelligent app, [Clever Nelly](#), known as regularisation. Put simply, regularisation aims to teach computer models how to make generalisations based on large quantities of data, a process which dictates that some information needs to be 'forgotten,' in order to give priority to information that is vital for decision-making.

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Professor Blake Richards

"The point of memory is to make you an intelligent person who can make decisions given the circumstances, and an important aspect in helping you do that is being able to forget information," Richards states. However, while Richards discusses the importance of forgetting to ensure space for more important information, he fails to discuss the importance of forgetting knowledge in order to later consolidate it within long-term memory.





Despite our best intentions, both within the workplace and outside it, humans forget very quickly the information they are exposed to even when that information may be vital to their livelihoods. Indeed, [Hermann Ebbinghaus' forgetting curve](#) demonstrates that the amount of information retained by an individual after thirty days was approximately only ten per cent of the original content—a deterioration that continues as the length of time increases! Within a business and workplace environment this does not bode well, particularly when costly training interventions have taken place.

The solution? According to [Nick Lee](#), Professor of Marketing and Organisational Research at Aston University, “learning cannot occur without repetition,” and thus to consolidate information vital to decision-making processes, it must be revisited repeatedly after the training intervention, particularly in a manner that tests employees on their understanding.

At Elephants don't forget, our AI app, Clever Nelly, delivers multiple-choice questions, based on the training you provide, daily to your employees and her AI quickly establishes what an individual employee knows and does not know which enables her to tailor her interventions in both volume and subject matter to favour what employees do not know. By targeting these gaps in knowledge and competency, Nelly ensures that the inability to remember information is not a failure of the memory process, but instead showcases the potential of the individual to consolidate this information to long-term memory, a feat which will create intelligent employees capable of making decisions based on sound value and judgement.

