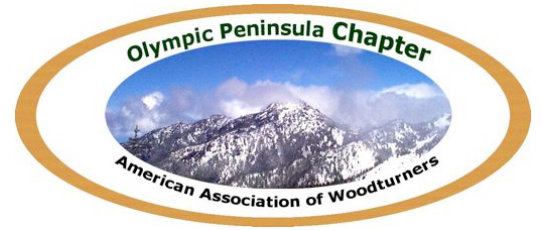




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### Special Issue on Hearing issues

#### **BETTER COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HARD-OF -HEARING AND HEARING PEOPLE**

Courtesy of Hear For Life

Audiology LLC

Marilyn Loy-Every MS

**Certified clinical Audiologist, CCC-A**

Conversation between hard-of-hearing people is certainly different from conversation among hearing people. When one person does not understand speech easily, special speaking and listening Skills are needed on both sides to achieve comprehension.

Most hearing people really do want to talk with hard-of-hearing people, but, they do not know how. Too often hearing people assume hearing loss simply means loss of volume, so if you speak loud enough you will be understood. This, of course, ignores the greater problem of loss of discrimination and the ability to discern one word from another. On the other hand, many hard-of-hearing people do not know what can be done to help them "hear", so they fail to help the hearing conversationalist to talk. Communication truly is a two-way street, needing effort from both hearing and poor hearing participants.

Below are listed some guidelines on how personal communication can be improved through the use of speaking skills. One important reminder: when hearing becomes more difficult, hearing impaired persons must, make better use of visual input to augment what they do hear. The hearing speaker must also be aware of this visual need.

#### **SETTING THE STAGE**

**Face the Audience Directly:** Always look at the hard-of-hearing person. Never talk from behind the person's back, from another room or turn your face away while speaking. If talking with several people, face the hard-of-hearing person; she/he has to "see" you to hear you best, while hearing people do not need this visual input.

**Spotlight Your Face (no backlighting):** Face a window or a lamp, so the light falls on your face to help the hard-of-hearing person see your mouth as you speak. Move around to find the best lighting. If the spot is very dark, postpone substantive conversation for a better place.

**Avoid Noisy Backgrounds:** Noise is a great challenge for the hard-of-hearing person as it typically interferes with conversation sounds. Check the immediate surroundings before you start to talk. Turn off the TV or radio, garbage disposal or vacuum; move away from an air conditioner or humming equipment; do not try to talk above the traffic noise on a busy street.

**Get Attention First:** Be sure the hard-of-hearing person is aware of you before you start talking. Move around in front of the person; gently touch her/him; flick a light switch or turn a window shade. Note what the person is doing, so not to startle her/him.

**Give Cues When Changing Subjects:** Hard-of-hearing people may get lost if a subject is changed without warning. Assist by saying something like, "Now I want to talk about the meeting," so they can get set for a new situational vocabulary.

### **PROJECT YOUR COMMUNICATION**

**Refrain From Shouting:** Shouting often makes communication more difficult. Your face and mouth may be distorted, the sound may be uncomfortable, and the impact of the delivery of your message may be misunderstood.

**Speak Clearly at a Moderate Pace:** Speak more slowly, and pause occasionally to let the listener keep up with you. Enunciate carefully and clearly. Refrain from speaking with exaggerated expressions which may make speech more difficult to follow.

**Keep Visual Mouth Cues Clear:** Refrain from hiding your mouth with gestures or positions, by chewing food or gum, or smoking while you talk. All of these activities make visual information unclear. Mustaches and beards also contribute to reduced visual information.

**Rephrase If You Are Not Understood:** If the hard-of-hearing person still does not understand after you have repeated, try saying the same thing in different words. If that does not work, write key words on a notepad.

**Use Facial Expressions and gesture:** Smiles, frowns, head shakes hand signals are all beneficial in following the conversation

**Give Clues When Changing Subjects:** People with hearing loss often get lost when a subject is changed without warning. Assist by saying something like, "Now, I want to talk about the meeting", so they can be ready for a new situational vocabulary

### **ESTABLISHING EMPATHY**

**Be Patient If Response Seems Slow:** Sounds sometimes can come in "bursts" for hard-of-hearing people, with many vacant sounds. Desperately trying to fill in vacant vowels, consonants or words often slows down a response from the hard-of-hearing person. Understand this and allow time. Realize that concentration required to follow a conversation can be extremely fatiguing. If the person seems tired, consider postponing your talking until a later time.

**Stay Positive and Relaxed:** If you become irritated and annoyed, your speech will deteriorate making communication even more difficult.

**Talk Directly to Hard-of-Hearing Persons -Not Around Them:** One hard-of-hearing person said, "Only my ears are broken, everything else works." Be courteous and engage them directly in conversation.

**Be Aware of "Bluffing":** Bluffing is when a hard-of-hearing person lets someone assume they understood what was communicated when it was not understood. If you realize the hard-of-hearing person is responding inappropriately, ask her/him if they understood. Clarify the communication if necessary.

**Offer Respect to Help Build Confidence:** Encouragement and positive reinforcement can be of great benefit to a hearing impaired person facing the confidence-shaking strain of continuing to communicate with hearing individuals.

### **SETTING THE STAGE**

**Tell Others How Best to Talk to You:** Explain that you have a hearing loss when it may be helpful to the communication process. Know what helps you most in communicating, and share with others. It may be speaking into your better ear, slowing down the talk, or moving away from noisy backgrounds. State what would be helpful for you and what they can do; they will be glad to assist. Remember, you do not need to apologize for your communication needs.

**Identify Your Best Spot:** When entering a room or situation, identify where you want to sit or stand for best conversation results. Evaluate the lighting, and situate yourself with backlighting (where the light come from behind you) if possible. Choose quieter places away from noisy areas. Sit within close proximity to the person(s) you will be communicating with or listen so you can see to speech read and also reduce sound distortion from noise.

**Anticipate Difficult Situations and Plan How To Minimize Them:** Think ahead. If you have a meeting to attend, can you get an advance agenda and/or list of participants? If there is a party with guests you don't know, can you ask your host ahead of time for names and connections of special

people, so you won't get mixed up on introductions? At a large or noisy event, you might ask a friend, companion, or relative to help you interpret as needed. The approach is one of problem solving. Consciously think through the expected problems, then see if you can come up with something or someone to help. Admittedly, you can't solve all potential hearing difficulties, but any alleviation is surely worth the effort.

### **PROJECT YOUR COMMUNICATION**

**Pay Attention:** You know that you have to watch, listen, and concentrate to follow a conversation. Withdrawing or daydreaming terminates communication. This may be perceived as discourteous. It is best to listen to the speaker and participate in communicating until you ask for release.

**Concentrate on the Speaker:** Where conversation is the prime objective, watch the speaker exclusively and attempt to not attend to the background. If observing is your goal, politely excuse yourself from the conversation. Remember, hard-of-hearing people cannot accommodate both talking and viewing at the same time.

**Look For Visual Cues:** Watch for facial expressions, gestures, body language, all of which are beneficial indicators for the direction of the conversation.

**Ask For Written Cues, If Needed:** Carry a notepad and pencil. When you cannot follow the conversation, ask the speaker to write the key word(s) for you. Often, just one key word will keep you apprised of the topics.

**Ask for Clarification:** If key words are missing and the conversation has lost meaning, explain you do not understand and ask for a repeat.

### **ESTABLISH EMPATHY**

**Show Appreciation for Efforts Made to Assist You:** When you have lost the meaning of the conversation and have asked for assistance, let the speaker know if efforts she/he has made helped in your communication difficulties. Let her/him know what has been helpful and what further assistance is needed. For example, "I understood you were talking about future meeting schedules, but I did not get all the dates. Will you please repeat them?" Or, "Wait just a minute. I got lost after talking about the television program. I am unclear about the current topic." Thank others for the efforts they make to assist you.

**Admit When You Don't Understand:** Refrain from bluffing, which usually leads to further difficulties, i.e. missed meetings, assignments, social engagements, even critical data such as medical or other emergency information. Be clear about misunderstanding when you do not comprehend the conversation.

**Defer The Conversation If Too Tired To Concentrate:** It is typical to experience fatigue when extreme concentration is needed to follow a conversation. It is best to recognize this factor and to request deferring serious discussions rather than jeopardize what is understood when fatigue limits your power of comprehension.

In summary, these suggestions involve a change in speaking and listening habits, which can be very difficult. Persistence on your part can be productive. Better communication is possible through better speaking and listening skills!

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## MENTORING PROGRAM

We are looking for some new mentors. The folks who are currently doing the great service have been doing it for a long time. George Kromka has stepped up to the plate but based on what I see every month at the show and tell table there could be a lot more. See any of the board officers if you are interested.

The mentoring programs has been set up to answer questions and give help to new members and those whom may be having a problem in a specific area. Although not intended to be free lessons in woodturning (many of those volunteering are professional turners and derive their income from turning and teaching), these are some friendly folks willing to give you a point in the right direction.

Dan Ackerman..... (360)796-4155  
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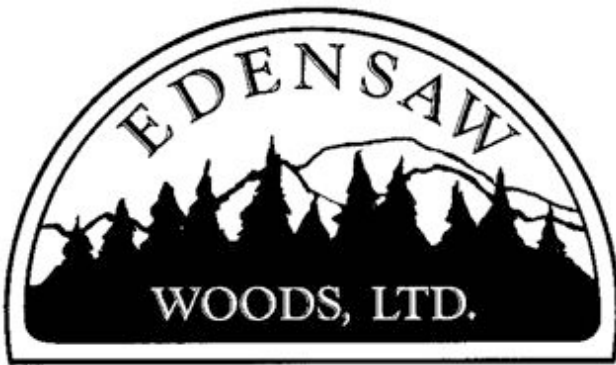
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