

If I Can't See You,



I Can't Hear You

Communication Skills for Hard of Hearing People

And

Those Around Them

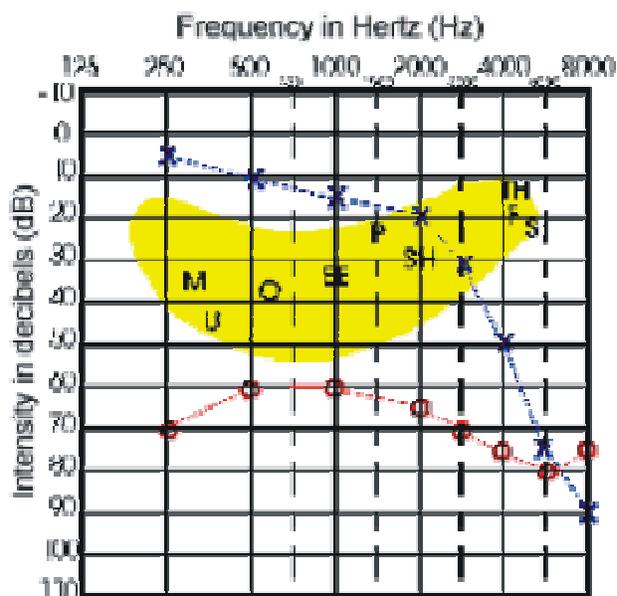
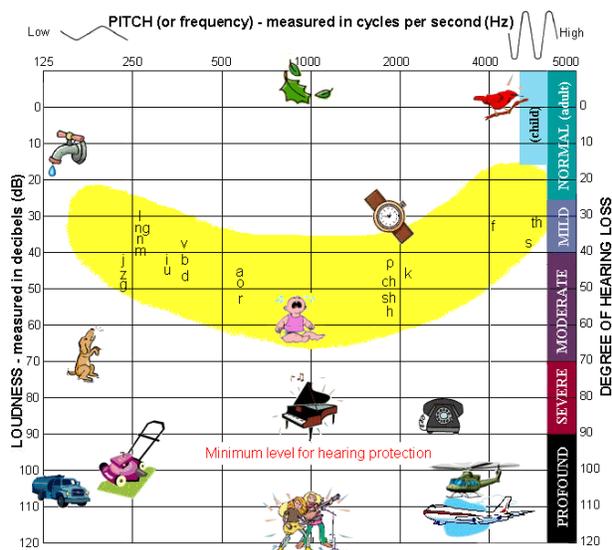
Learning better communication skills starts with understanding what the issues are. What symptoms need to be addressed and what strategies will be used.

Being hearing Impaired is like being in Paris and knowing just enough French to ask and articulate a question, and then being completely unable to comprehend the answer. Being hearing impaired means that I have to ask myself how many times did I bluff, laugh at something I didn't hear or agree to something I didn't understand? At times it seems that trying to hear takes so much thought and energy that I have nothing left over to process what I actually heard.

Dr. Frank Linn says that for Hard of Hearing people, greater cognitive resources are dedicated to auditory perceptual processing to the detriment of other cognitive processes such as working memory.

Kaland and Salvatore put it: Late deafened adults report that their hearing loss robs them of an understanding of their identity and often initiates an identity crisis. Other HOH people have said that they are discounted within their own families (Sam Trychin).

To further understand we must review our audiogram. If you remember our previous paper, we discussed the speech banana and how a person can miss syllables or consonant blends depending on the type of hearing loss.



Basically the sounds of the English Language fall inside the yellow area, the Speech Banana. Specific English sounds require a specific sound frequency and volume level in order to be heard. In the 2nd picture, the right ear is graphed in red and the left ear is graphed in blue. If you notice the left ear hears better and more sounds are understood. The right ear misses more sounds. Both ears do not hear some sounds.

- Hard of Hearing people have to fill in the sound gaps that they did not hear (Beth Wilson, PhD).

Under_tand

- In noise there are more gaps.

U_der_ta_d

- With competing speech from multiple conversations, the gaps get filled in with the wrong sounds

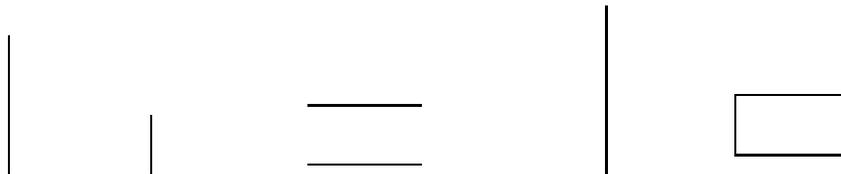
Uqder_tard

- When the next phrase arrives before sorting out the previous one it becomes too hard to keep up. The HOH listener loses concentration and begins to feel fatigue. People with hearing loss need extra time to process.

Can't we just move the person to the front and increase the volume?

Below, we have tried to illustrate the hearing of a HOH person.

- What is the word below



- Now it is louder but not necessarily clearer.

Help

- Now it is clearer.

Increasing volume is not always the answer. HOH people hear differently. There is an optimum volume level that they can understand. Below that level, they can't hear. Above that level they only hear distortion like the PA system at a football game. The amplifier is cranked up so high, that the sound coming out is actually distorted. If the PA is turned down, it can't be heard over the crowd noise.

Hearing ability varies according to situation:

OK	Problem
Quiet Office	Noisy Classroom
Carpeting	Bare Floor
Bright room	Dark or Inconsistent lighting
One on one	Discussion
Voice I Know	Stranger/New person
Close Distance	Middle of room
Healthy and well rested	Head cold
Can see speaker	Tapes, People behind me, people at the end of the table.

Beth Wilson

Listening is an active sport (Beth Wilson). I can listen for short periods but not for an hour. I can listen with assistive devices for an hour but not all day. **I can run around a block, but can't run a marathon.**

For Hard of Hearing people the journey is at full speed The Hearing people are allowed to walk.

Dr. Wilson says ambiguity is the real problem.

- A few numbers sound the same: **15, 16, 50, 60 etc.**
- **Fifteen, that is 1-5; Sixty, that is 6-0**
- Letters sound the same **B, C, D, E,G,P,T,V,Z**
- **C as in CAT**

Sometimes the HOH person merely says "WHAT". The more one repeats the less is understood. One often needs to rephrase rather than repeat. If I don't hear a sound frequency, repeating it won't cause me to suddenly hear that frequency. When one rephrases, I can put the two sentences/words together and have a better chance at comprehension.

The biggest problem is often **not** what I didn't hear, but what I think I heard. Repeating back what I think I heard, is a great way to check and to clarify.

Getting past Denial and Vanity is very important:

- It's Your Hearing Loss (and it's probably worse than you think)
 - People Aren't Mumbling!
 - The TV really is TOO LOUD for others!
 - You have trouble understanding some words if it's noisy
- It Matters to Your
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Job
 - Happiness
- People Respect Your Efforts to Solve problems
- People Care That You Can Communicate
- They Don't Care Whether You Have Hearing Aids
- Realizing I had NOTHING to be vain about worked for me ☺

Getting Others Past Denial and Vanity is very Important

- Nagging probably isn't effective (just makes YOU their problem).
- Better to make it their problem, not yours
- Get them with others successfully dealing with hearing loss.
 - Hearing Loss Association of America
 - Not Aunt Tilly who doesn't know how to operate her hearing aids.
- Get age out of the equation. (It's about communication.)
- Focus on positives:
 - Technology (It really is better now.)
 - Fashion (Hearing aids are now fashion accessories.)
 - Ear-level devices for phones and music (Make hearing aids invisible)
- Which is better?
 - Can't hear well; try to hide it and look like a fool?
 - Wear hearing aids; hear better and look like you're proactive?
- Developed by HLA-Wake County, Raleigh, NC

People with hearing loss often overly depend on their spouses/family members and spouses/family members often become co-dependents and take up the role. It is important to realize that this creates a great strain on the relationship and fosters a dependency that is not healthy.

Communication Basics

- FACE-TO-FACE SPEAKING ONLY
 - Never try to speak from behind a hearing impaired person or from another room.
- LIGHT-ON-FACE OF SPEAKER
 - Never have light source behind speaker's face.

Rules for a HOH Person When Communicating with a Hearing Person

- Pick the best spot to communicate by avoiding areas that are poorly lit and very noisy.
- Anticipate difficult situations and plan how to minimize problems.
- Tell others how to best talk to you.
- Pay attention to the speaker.
- Look for visual clues to what is being said.
- Ask for written clues of key words, if needed.
- Provide feedback that you understand or fail to understand.
- Do not bluff.
- Arrange for frequent breaks if discussions or meetings are long.
- Provide feedback to the speaker by saying how well he or she is doing.
- Try not to interrupt too often.
- Set realistic goals about what you can expect to understand.

Rules for a Hearing Person When Communicating with a HOH Person

- Get the person's attention before you speak.
- Do not put obstacles in front of your face.
- Do not have objects in your mouth such as gum, cigarettes or food.
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace.
- Use facial expressions and gestures.
- Give clues when changing the subject.
- Rephrase when you are not understood.
- Don't shout.
- Avoid noisy background situations.
- Be patient, positive and relaxed.
- Talk to a HOH person, not about him or her.
- When in doubt, ask the HOH person for suggestions to improve communication.

More Tips for Hearing People

- Leaving messages:
 - Speak slowly, clearly, with mouthpiece close to mouth
 - Do repeat yourself-especially names & numbers
 - Spell out names
 - Repeat/Rephrase Numbers: 349-6792; (3 forty-nine, sixty-seven, ninety-two)
 - Avoid using speaker phones
 - Does the person you are calling have an effective way of retrieving messages?
- In the conversation:
 - Rephrase, don't repeat
 - Allow extra time (TTY, relay, captioning, repeating)
 - Consider sending confirmation letter
 - Consider alternative forms of communication

Thus, Hearing Loss is an issue for both the speaker and the listener (Sam Trychin). It is an issue for the hard of hearing person and every family member, neighbor, friend and vendor. Each has to learn strategies of engagement

The hard of hearing person must be upfront about the hearing issues--outing oneself, so to speak. We must begin to understand that Hearing Loss can be something over which we have control. It is how we choose to deal with it. Dana Mulvaney says it is **demanding to hear**, even when we can't. It is assertively taking control.

Material for this paper has been taken from **Effective Communication Rules** and **How HOH Hear.** We are grateful to:

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Compiled by Ed Schickel