

## Listening With Liz

May 2016

Hearing loss is a 24/7 deal. It is with us wherever we go, whatever we do. No matter what degree of hearing loss we have, mild, moderate, severe, or profound, it impacts our lives, our work, and our relationships. It does not define us, but it does help to shape who we are and how we live our lives.

Whether we are young children, teens, adults, or seniors, whether we are in school, working, or retired, we must decide how we will cope with the challenge of hearing loss each day. We can choose to be passive by withdrawing and isolating ourselves because it just gets too hard. We can opt to be aggressive and angry and blame others for our frustration because we don't know what to do. Or we can be assertive, examine our options, be realistic in our expectations, and employ strategies that can help us succeed despite our hearing loss.

Communication strategies are the key to fully and successfully participating in life. To address our frustration, exhaustion, anger, and stress, we can share our needs with those around us, thank people who help us, and feel good about our personal assertiveness and accomplishments.

We must promise ourselves that we will not bluff, that we will tell people about our hearing loss. Whether it is the teacher in the classroom, the kids on the playground, the boss, the coworkers around the water cooler, the neighbor, the doctor, the pharmacist, hospital personnel, etc. we must make them aware of our communication needs.

We need to ask the boss for an amplified or captioned telephone and CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) or RCC (Relay Conference Captioning) for meetings, conferences, and teleconferences. We need to raise the consciousness of teachers and coaches so they will not speak when facing the chalkboard, so they will repeat students' questions and comments, and use assistive devices as necessary. We must ask our doctors and pharmacists to face us when they speak, to be sure we understand their instructions, and to write down important information should that be necessary.

We need to ask our friends and family to be aware of our needs by facing us, turning off environmental noises, re-phrasing things we miss, offering us optimal seating, and never saying, "Forget it. It wasn't important!" And we need to sincerely thank everyone for their efforts.

Most importantly we need to educate ourselves. We need to be sure we have a telecoil in our hearing aids or cochlear implants. We need to use captions on TV, captioning devices and neckloops at theaters and other public places, captioned telephones, and a variety of alerting devices in our homes. We need to become advocates for ourselves and others with hearing loss so we can experience equal communication access.

There are so many ways we can learn about communication strategies, available technology, and our rights. Consider contacting the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing to learn of all the support, education, and advocacy they offer. Attend the meetings of one of the Arizona chapters of HLAA (Hearing Loss Association of America), ALOHA (Adult Loss of Hearing Association), or the cochlear implant companies' get-togethers where you will meet others who understand the challenge of hearing loss. Find online groups to share resolutions to difficult communication situations.

Be assertive. Be kind to yourself. Teach others. Educate yourself. You will succeed.

Happy hearing!!!

ACDHH Commissioner Elizabeth Booth