

Effective Communication Techniques: Communicating with People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Things to know:

- ◆ Deaf and hearing-impaired persons are entering the workplace in record numbers.
- ◆ Not all persons who are deaf lip-read.
- ◆ Not all persons who are deaf are unable to speak.
- ◆ American Sign Language is not another form of English; it is a separate language with its own grammar, syntax, and rules.
- ◆ Not all persons who are deaf use sign language.
- ◆ Lip-reading, while helpful without sound clues, is only 30%-50% effective, and sometimes less.
- ◆ Long conversations with persons who lip-read can be very fatiguing to the person who has the impairment.
- ◆ More persons who are deaf or hearing impaired have some hearing rather than no hearing at all.
- ◆ Not all persons who are deaf write and read well.

Things to do:

- ◆ Find out how the person communicates best.
- ◆ If the person reads lips, speak in a normal, not exaggerated way. Short, simple sentences are best.
- ◆ Be aware of situations where a person may be waiting for a service (transportation, a table, the start of an activity) where the common way to communicate is an announcement or the calling of the person's name. Make sure you take note when someone cannot hear you and develop an alternative way of notifying them.
- ◆ Gain the person's attention before starting a conversation.
- ◆ If the person lip-reads, avoid blocking their view of your face. Make sure the lighting is good.
- ◆ If there is some doubt in your mind whether they understood you correctly, rephrase your statement and ask them if you have been understood.
- ◆ If the person uses an interpreter, address the person, not the interpreter.

Things to consider:

- ◆ When someone asks, "What did you say?" the answers, "Never mind," "Nothing," or "It's not important," are very common replies. These are insulting and demeaning, because they communicate that the person is not worth the effort of repeating yourself.
- ◆ Persons who deal very well one-on-one in communication may have a hard time with two or more speakers, especially if there are many interruptions and interjections.
- ◆ Showing impatience to someone who is deaf or hearing impaired may cause someone who is less assertive to back off from telling you of his/her needs.

Things to avoid:

- ◆ Make sure there are no physical barriers between you and the person while in conversation.
- ◆ If the person is using hearing aids, avoid conversations in large, open, and noisy surroundings.
- ◆ Do not become impatient or exasperated with the person if it takes longer to communicate.

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