

Good Communication Strategies for Hearing Health Care Providers

“It is all about what you say and how you say it!”

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Our goal as Hearing Instrument Specialists/Dispensing Audiologists is to assist the hearing impaired population in achieving optimal communication in their everyday life situations. When we do this well, we are in turn rewarded with a successful business practice and even greater rewards. Often times, we focus on the testing procedures and technology while ignoring the basics of good communication strategies. Recently, we have been made aware of the importance of involving all staff members in the process of forming relationships with the hearing impaired person. This begins with the initial phone call from the consumer and follows through with every phone call and office appointment (Taylor, 2009; Hansen, 2007). When we master good communication skills, we will be successful in our relationship building and that in turn will help us to achieve our goal.

When working with the hearing impaired population, we are faced with many factors that compound the difficulties with the communication process. The average age of new hearing aid users is still in the range of 69 years old (Kochkin, 2009). Often times, with the aging process comes a decline in cognitive and psychoacoustic auditory processing abilities, manual dexterity compromises and sensory difficulties beyond hearing loss (touch and vision) (Kricos, 2006). To communicate effectively, we must consider the whole person and we must establish communication skills that benefit our consumer first and foremost. “Poor communication skills, disagreements and misunderstanding can be a source of anger and distance, or a springboard to a stronger relationship and happier future.” (Scott, 2009).

“In dealing with persons with limited physical or mental abilities, it is important to listen, speak clearly and slowly and use non-verbal communication (body language) to help convey your message.” (Elder Care Online, 2009). When addressing a hearing impaired person, speak in a normal fashion without shouting. When the person to whom you are speaking does not understand, remember to rephrase your wording and avoid using the same words over and over. Use simple, short sentences to make your conversation easier to understand. When speaking with a consumer by telephone, remember that you do not have the advantage of conveying information with body language so it is important to speak more slowly than you would when speaking to the consumer in person. Be careful to avoid chewing, eating or smoking while speaking with the hearing impaired person as you will be more difficult to understand, especially on the phone (ElderCare Online, 2009). As you master these simple skills, encourage your staff members and the family members of the consumer to do the same.

When speaking with the hearing impaired person, it is important to stay focused. Stay focused on the person before you, the feelings that they are conveying and in understanding the situation better. Often times, we are working with many people at one time; try to address the needs of the person in front of you and if necessary, ask for a moment to excuse yourself while you answer the phone. Be certain to WAIT for an answer before doing so (Madden, 2008). The courtesy you offer will convey the sentiments of a truly caring professional.

As Hearing Instrument Specialists, we are consultative sales persons. To be successful, we must listen carefully to what is being said by the consumer. Often times, people “think” that they are listening but are really thinking about what they’re going to say next when the other person stops talking. To be good at listening, you must HEAR the person, and then reflect back what they are saying so they know that you have heard them. “Others will more likely be willing to listen if they feel heard.” (Scott, 2009).

To do a job well, regardless of profession, one must incorporate good communication skills at every level. To do *our* job well, we must augment basic good communication skills with the understanding of our consumers’ special needs. Addressing the whole person, focusing on their needs and the needs of their family members and giving them the extra time they need to be successful in communication with you

and your staff will be a win-win situation for all. Remember, it is all about what you say and how you say it!

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