

Taking Responsibility for My Hearing Loss

Preaching to the Choir

Am I my own best advocate? Do I take responsibility for my own hearing loss? A recent article about children and hearing loss focused on advocating for the child through various age levels and then letting the child take on the responsibility for his/her own hearing loss. This is hard for a parent. Letting go is always difficult.

I started thinking about adults; about how often I just let things go rather than make a scene or an issue of my own hearing loss. Did I press my audiologist/instrument specialist when I didn't quite agree? No. I let it go. How often do people with hearing loss just let it go? "Hearing aids are too expensive." "I don't hear that badly." "I don't want the church to spend money on me." "They don't need to put in an assistive listening system for me." "I don't go to movies any more, I can't understand." "I don't go to family gatherings anymore. It is just too tiring to try to hear and understand. I'll be OK at home."

It seems to be in our nature to advocate in all areas of our lives except in regard to hearing. If we can't see at a theater, we change our seats or ask the person in front of us to take off the hat. Yet, rarely do we hear someone say, "I can't hear, use the microphone." It's as if hearing loss is our fault and we can't impose on a theater to provide a hearing assistive device even though the ADA says they must do so. Hearing loss is an embarrassment so family members don't have to speak up, face us or get our attention before talking. "It's my fault if I can't understand when they talk to me from another room."

I attended a training program on RV Safety this past week. Repeatedly, I had to ask the speaker/panel members to use the microphone. "Oh people can hear me without it." "Well, I can't so please use it." I paid my fee like everyone else and I deserve to be able to understand. If I don't let them know I can't hear, how can they help me.

This is where I have to be responsible for my hearing loss. I have to "Out Myself" and deal with the situation in a positive but assertive manner. So many times I choose to purchase the smallest of hearing aids not because it will assist my hearing best but because I don't want anyone to know I have a hearing loss. Somehow I am embarrassed/ashamed of my hearing loss so I have to hide it. Either I purchase the smallest of aids or I don't purchase any. I just make do. I hide it. I bluff.

I have to realize that every time I advocate for myself, I am actually advocating for others as well. Hearing loss is a hidden disability and few hearing people think of it. When I bring it up, they then become more aware of others as well. Yes, they will forget. Memory is the process by which we forget. It takes "X" number of times to make something a habit. My continuous reminders help them to make a habit of thinking of HOH people. Continuous reminders help me and others.

Self-advocating doesn't stop there. I am responsible for still more. I'm having more trouble hearing. When is the last time I saw my audiologist or instrument specialist? Do I see him/her every six months to get my aids cleaned, checked, new tubes, filters, new programming etc.? It is my job to make the appointments and see the hearing professional on a regular basis.

It is my job as a good consumer to learn all that I can about hearing aids and assistive devices. I do that by periodically searching the internet and checking on various hearing related websites. I do that by attending HLAA meetings whenever I can. I get involved with helping others for two reasons. One in helping others, I help myself. In teaching others, I learn better. Two, because a man named Rocky Stone met with a group of people in his living room and eventually started Self Help for Hard of Hearing People now called Hearing Loss Association of America; because, a woman by the name of Melanie Magruder met with some friends and talked about their hearing losses; (They founded Hearing Loss Assoc. Kentuckiana.) I have a responsibility to Pay It Forward. I have the responsibility to do for others what Rocky, Melanie et.al. have done for me.

I can hear on a cellphone because HLAA advocated for me. I do have to search for the phone or assistive device that will allow me to hear. That is my job. The technology is there, I have to search for it and obtain it. HLAA has helped me, how can I help HLAA and others?

What have I done today to help my hearing, my communication?

If you are reading this, I am probably preaching to the choir. The choir, however, has to sing. Please sing.

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