

# The TOASTMASTER

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## You Can *Sell* Your Ideas



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# What Did You Say?

By Frank J. Felsburg Jr., ATM

**A**s speakers and communicators, we are sometimes challenged in ways that we may not even be aware of. For instance, approximately 33 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss. Some members in your home club could be among them. You – and they – may not even realize that they have this problem. Some of us have family members or other loved ones who are hard of hearing.

Here are some suggestions as to how to communicate more effectively with people with a hearing disability, keeping in mind that some of them may not admit that they have the problem.

**1 Be aware of the acoustics of the room in which you are speaking.** For example, where there is no carpeting to absorb sounds, words will rebound, creating a poor listening environment, especially for the hard-of-hearing. Being conscious of our environment should remind us to project our voices accordingly.

**2 Turn down – or off – radios or televisions that may be on in the room – or in an adjoining room.** It's best to do this before trying to communicate with anyone, even people with no hearing problems.

**3 Before talking with someone who has a hearing disability (whether or not he or she is wearing a hearing aid), get the person's attention.** You can do this by saying his name or perhaps


touching him; then use gestures. Position yourself directly in front of the person — at a comfortable distance.

**4 Don't talk louder – talk more slowly.** The auditory processing system slows down as we get older, and most hard-of-hearing people are elderly. Again, whether you are talking to people with hearing loss or to a young audience with normal hearing, the more animation and excitement you put into your speech, the more receptive to your message your audience is likely to be.

**5 When you have not been understood, it's often wise to rephrase your comment.** Since different words or phrases may be more easily understood, it's best not to parrot the same thing over and over. Take a tip from the Roman statesman and general Cato the Elder, who said, "Stick with the subject and the words will come."

**6 If your message isn't getting through, the problem may be due to something you could improve other than the words you're using.** Start by looking at your habits. How well do you enunciate? Is anything covering your mouth, such as for instance, a mustache? For women, it's sometimes helpful to wear darker lipstick. It also helps the audience if the light is shining on a speaker's face, rather than behind him or her.

**7 Be patient.** Your sincere support is important to people with hearing loss. You can encourage hearing-impaired people to use hearing aids by helping them realize the benefits.

Helen Keller, who was both deaf and blind, said, "Deafness is a worse misfortune, for it means the loss of the most vital stimulus – the sound of the voice which brings language, sets thoughts astir, and keeps us in the intellectual company of man." 

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