

Does Hearing Loss Embarrass Your Clients?

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Do your clients admit to being embarrassed by their hearing loss?

Whether they admit it to you or not, if they are like every other person with hearing loss, there will be times when they feel mild to profound mortification. When they say the right thing at the wrong time or vice versa. When they're told they're speaking too loudly. When they get caught bluffing. Or just having to admit to themselves they're not as perfect as they once (thought they) were.

The *fact* of my hearing loss no longer bothers me and I don't try to hide it. But it still has the power to cause communication glitches that make me blush or squirm. Those lovely little social *faux pas* – perhaps laughing at a friend's back pain because of her weird little smile and you thought she was telling a joke.

I'm still haunted by a long-ago humiliating moment. During school, every single day of every year, I sat at the front of the class in order to understand the teacher. Except for that one day in high school. Just for once, I wanted to sit at the back with my friends. The teacher called on me to answer something, but I hadn't heard what he said, probably because my friend was whispering at me. Deciding to be honest, I stood up and said, "*Sorry, sir, I wasn't listening.*" The class went dead silent. The teacher said, "*Well, thanks for telling me that, Gael, but I called on Dale, not you.*" My face burned for the rest of the day. For the rest of my life, actually.



After six decades of hearing loss, you'd think I'd be cool with it – roll with the punches and all that. But even now, I *hate it* when I "talk over" someone. Talking-over is more than just two people starting to speak at the same time. It's more like:

Someone Else: "My husband I have decided that..."

Me (jumping in): "So! What's everyone doing for Christmas?"

Another Person: "Uh, Gael, So-and-So was talking..."

Me: "Oh, sorry." (Then I don't talk again until someone returns to my question about Christmas, or until I'm dead certain there's a significant gap in the conversation which, in my group of female friends, is usually never.)

Hearing loss causes painful moments, but it's mostly embarrassing for *us*, not other people, especially those who know about our hearing loss. Strangers, however, might think we're odd

when we answer inappropriately.

Server: "Would you like more coffee?"

Me: "No thanks, but would you mind filling up my coffee?"

In that case, the server might pause for a moment before complying. But if you were to answer "yes, please" to the question "would you prefer chicken or steak?", it takes a bit more work to straighten things out. Learning to laugh these moments off puts hearing loss into perspective and other people at ease.

And hey, it could be worse. You could stub your toe, hard, in the dark. Maybe that's what you have to tell your clients.

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