

Why Don't Universities Teach Students To Sell Hearing Aids?

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I was reading a professional magazine this morning while I was drinking my coffee. I have to admit that I generally do not read professional magazines. I see all the research articles with the wonderful graphs and statistics and my eyes glaze over. I may read the intro and the conclusion. But, reading the actual study does nothing for me. I just don't see the relevance for my daily practical life as an audiologist. I want to know how this study impacts my life selling and fitting hearing aids. I am glad that some people like to do research. I am not one of them.

As I was reading, I recognized the names of the authors of the articles. I read several of the articles. They were enlightening. Some of the articles I found confusing. It would have been nice to have the author's email address so I could send a message to them asking for clarification. A number of the articles were by leaders in the professional organization. I get it. It is the beginning of the year. Goals are articulated. New members are introduced. New people are running for national positions. Their biographical information and their philosophies were being shared. I am happy that some people have the time and interest for national professional unpaid positions. They take a lot of time, energy, thought, and emotion.

Professional Organizations

Over the years I have been involved in State professional organizations. When I lived in New Jersey I was the Audiologist on the Association Board. I met some wonderful people. When we moved to Massachusetts, I agreed to be Secretary for the Massachusetts Hearing Aid Society. I was co-chair of the New England Hearing Health Convention for three years. My husband, Steve, and I have been involved in National Presbyterian Marriage Encounter as the National Clergy Couple. That too was rewarding, but very time consuming.

In 1997 I was appointed by Massachusetts Governor Cellucci to be the Audiologist on the newly formed Hearing Instrument Specialists Board. I am still there.

Having been a leader of several organizations as well as a member of organizations, I understand that sometimes the goals clash. Or, maybe I should say they are on different trajectories. Sometimes we members do not take the time to talk to the leaders about our needs or goals. Sometimes we just don't see the bigger picture. And, sometimes we are not given the opportunity to voice our opinions.

Last year one of our professional organizations (I admit I do not remember which one!) sent me a survey, which I dutifully completed. The organization said it was trying to "hear" from its members. But, the way the questions were asked, and the multiple choices offered had little to do with my interests or concerns.

The questions were selected by people who work in a university setting, hospital setting or ear, nose and throat setting. The questions had little to do with private practice.

To me the survey had more to say about the people who wrote the questions than about those of us

who answered the survey.

Academia Often Clueless About Realities of Independent Practice

I am in private practice. I test hearing and sell hearing aids for a living. I do billing for my testing. I am a provider for most, if not all, insurance companies in my area. I do my own marketing, I train staff. I have a business to run. There are many skills I have needed over the years to make my business successful. The one main skill I needed from day one was being able to sell hearing aids.

One author I read this morning stated that many audiologists will enter the workforce either as independent practitioners or as clinic administrators in hospital settings. But, in the goals he listed there was no mention of selling hearing aids. Hmm, I thought. I must be missing something. To be in private practice means selling hearing aids. To be a hospital administrator means having some business sense that includes marketing and selling.

No student I have supervised over the last 35 years has ever taken a class on selling hearing aids or marketing. If students are expected to enter the workforce as private practitioners, doesn't this seem like a major oversight in the university curriculum? I talked to the director of the program about this very issue. She told me that there was "no room" in the curriculum for a class like that. I don't know the professors at the local university except by name. I do not know if they have ever depended on their selling ability to earn a living.

Students Need Clinical (and Business) Skills

This year I have taken a stand. I am insisting that every student who does a practicum in my office read books on selling and marketing. I have a number of books and podcasts that have influenced me. I purchased used books that I will loan to the students. I am determined to make the students develop a style that fits them so they can sell hearing aids by the end of the semester. If they are to make a living selling hearing aids, they need to learn this skill while they are in their doctoral program.

Over the years I have hired AuD students who were completing their externship. I had to teach them how to sell hearing aids too. Doing hearing tests, relating to patients, explaining test results, selling hearing aids, writing a contract, asking for thousands of dollars, fitting the hearing aids, explaining the care of the aids, and doing follow-ups need to be part of the university curriculum. By the time students are ready for their externship, they should be able to accomplish these tasks with ease. However, sadly, this is often not true.

That's why many audiologists in private practice will not hire someone on their externship year.

My friends who own private practices often say, *"The extern students cannot sell. And, they want too much money while they are learning to sell. It is too expensive."*

Students will begin looking for jobs soon. My advice is to learn to sell hearing aids in the next few months if you want to earn a living. Some books that have shaped my sales life have been "[Top Performer](#)" by Stephen Ludin. This book talks about creating a persona, which I find very helpful. "[Guerrilla Marketing](#)" by Jay Conrad Levinson was super helpful in finding inexpensive marketing methods. Recently I found "[Seven Reasons why you suck at sales and what to do about it](#)" by William Wyatt. It is pretty straightforward and blunt.

This morning I also read "[Never Be Closing](#)" by Tim Hurson and Tim Dunne. This book summed up that sales is about relationships and the process of getting things done. A [podcast by Jeb Blount](#) from Sales Gravy are five-minute talks about selling. I like to search the iTunes store for any sales podcasts. Sales are sales and I can learn from other professions.

These are some of the books on my list for the next student. I hope I can make a difference for the students passing my way. I want to help equip them for life after school.