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The Way I Hear It

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Help Your Clients Go Where the People with Hearing Loss Are

This year I had my annual post-conference blues – the feelings that always follow my time at the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) convention.

As much as I love my Hearing Husband and wonderful Hearing Friends, after consumer events such as HLAA's, I miss the *connectedness* of people who *get* each other. We acknowledge that even with the best technology, our hearing loss disrupts, often severely, our ability to understand what other people are saying. We live daily with the consequences.

When people with hearing loss come together, there's no shame in saying *pardon*, in looking blank for a few seconds while we make sense of auditory signals and speechreading cues, or fiddling with our hearing devices to adapt to the current listening environment.

We laugh at hard-of-hearing and deaf jokes – because it's *our* humour. It's funny because we live it and understand it.

We get to tell our story, and people listen to us with an interest that our families and friends often no longer have.

We can air our grievances with technology, with our ‘hearing’ people who continually forget the courtesies of good communication, and even with ourselves when we don’t stand up for our rights.

We *learn* stuff. Here, we can see the past, present, and future of our lives with hearing loss. The past, when we didn’t know how to make things better and technology was something we fought against. The present, where we’re equipped with new information and digital technology, and where improving norms of access and accommodation are shaping the way we live. The future, where we dream of the unprecedented promises of Auracast and artificial intelligence that can radically change our communication lives.

But technology only works when we enable it and *use* it. What’s equally important – and this was the theme of several presentations at the convention (including mine, delivered with Shari Eberts) – is understanding that we have the *right* to ask for communication support. When we take charge of our own hearing loss journey, sometimes simply by looking at it in a new way, communication cracks open and thrives.

This is what we learn when we come together with *our* people, the ones who have hearing loss. This is what your clients need to learn *outside* of your office.

In my presentation at the Newcomer’s Session kicking off the HLAA convention, I talked about how my life changed dramatically when I attended a hearing loss conference in Canada for the first time. I walked into that conference as one person and walked out another. The people I met seemed to glow with confidence and possibilities, and I wanted what they had. My hearing loss stigma vanished. I walked taller, prouder, because I now had new knowledge, options, and hearing-loss *friends.*

Offer your clients a powerful experience. Help them go to where the people with hearing loss are.