

Why Asking Someone to Repeat Themselves is OK

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It irks me when people with hearing loss, including me, are reluctant to ask someone to repeat themselves. (Almost as much as it bugs me when we *do* ask for a repeat and people wonder if, perhaps, we've forgotten to put our hearing aids in?)

But I understand the many reasons for this reluctance, as well as the consequences. When we don't ask for a repeat of something we didn't catch, down we go immediately into the bluffing hole, which is more like a bottomless, dark bluffing *pit*. If we're lucky enough to know the topic, even though we chickened out on asking for a repeat, we can possibly catch up with the next comment. Or maybe the one after that. Or – we simply faking comprehension. And there are very few graceful ways to climb out of this mess. None, actually, except for this:

“I'm sorry, I have no idea what's going on because I was too embarrassed/bored/proud/insecure to admit that I'm not understanding you in this fast-paced conversation.”

The only way to not bluff for people with hearing loss is to stay on top of things. Make our needs known, reminding people as necessary, and adjusting the listening environment to reduce background noise, improve sightlines, and keep people talking more-or-less one at a time. This last

one is tricky, yes, but not impossible.

As hearing professionals, you need to help your clients understand that not only are they *allowed* to do this but are *encouraged* to – because there is absolutely nothing wrong with asking for a repeat. After all, we have *hearing loss* – this is what we *DO!* People expect it from us, at least the ones who know us well. We often do it because *they* have forgotten to face us, or they’ve mumbled while eating, or because they know it’s just the way we roll.

They may, in fact, be so used to repeating themselves that they do what the Hearing Husband does; he says something and immediately repeats it, sometimes even a third time. Which I find irritating, especially if I *did* catch it the first time.

And that’s another thing! What if we didn’t even get that there *was* a ‘first time’? Someone is waiting for a response from us, but we have nothing to work with. We didn’t know something was *said*, so how can we possibly answer?

Friend (looking at me expectantly) “So...?”

Me: “So....*what?*”

Friend: “So what do you think?”

Me: “About...?”

Friend: (impatiently) “About what I just *said!*”

Me: “Oh, *that’s* really helpful. You said something?”

Person: “Yes! Just now!”

Me: Well, what did you *SAY!?*”

Friend: (Pauses.) “I said...oh, now I can’t REMEMBER!”

Me: “And so you’re mad at *ME?! Sheesh*, your memory’s got holes in it!”

Friend: “And so does your hearing – and the holes are getting bigger!”

Me: “That’s not very nice.”

Friend: “Sorry.”

Me: “Me too. You have to get my attention before starting to speak to me – you know that!”

Friend: “Well, you seemed to be tuned in.”

Me: “Nope, bluffing! I was pretending to understand.”

Friend: “This is exhausting.”

Me: “Welcome to my life.”

It's OK to ask for repeats – without apology and without shame. It's part of our hearing loss toolkit. People in our lives *want* to communicate with us, and communication is a two-way street.