

HLA-NJ News and Views

A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of N.J.

By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ

Hearing Loss and the Workplace

Finding a job and keeping it is hard in today's economy. For someone with hearing loss, the problem can be even more nerve-wracking. This month, I'd like to offer some tips.

- Don't pretend. If you don't understand what someone says, ask them to repeat the part you missed and to speak more slowly. For me, this is still hard. Much easier just to smile, nod and guess – a strategy that can lead to serious mistakes. Even worse, people probably won't realize that the problem is hearing. It's known as "the invisible disability" for good reasons. If you keep misunderstanding, they are likely to decide that you don't care, aren't motivated, or, if you're over 50, too old to do the job. No need for long explanations. Just a simple phrase, such as "My hearing isn't great. Would you mind repeating that more slowly." You may be surprised how much people want to help...as long as they know how.

- Make technology work for you. Have regular check-ups with your audiologist. If you don't wear hearing aids, maybe it's time. If you do, they may need adjustment, or an upgrade. Or a cochlear implant might make a big difference.

- Learn about Assistive Listening Devices. FM transmitter-receivers, or loop technology that can help in meetings. To help with the telephone, you can get telephone amplifiers, or use CapTel technology that gives you real-time captions. Texting or BlackBerry devices not only work for messaging, but also for checking with a colleague across a crowded meeting room to verify what was just said.

- If appropriate, discuss your hearing with your employer. If and when it feels right to you, you might sit down with your boss to discuss your hearing and what would help you do even better work. The changes might range from telephones suited to your needs to a possible change of assignment.

- Reach out for help and support. There are many sources of advice and counseling. You might start with the Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey. Contact us at info@hearingloss-nj.org. Other good sources are the Hearing Loss Association of America, at www.hearingloss.org, the Center for Hearing and Communication, at www.chchearing.org and the New Jersey Division of the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing, at www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddhh. Their services include demonstration centers for Assistive Listening Devices. The State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation might also help. Contact Nancy Yarosh at Nancy.Yarosh@dol.state.nj.us. If you need information about your rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act or the state Law Against Discrimination, reach out to the New Jersey Office on Civil Rights, at www.state.nj.us/lps/dcr/news/images073002/090902.html.

Reminder - new book on hearing loss – HLA-NJ President Romoff's new book is now available. Titled *Listening Closely: A Journey to Bilateral Hearing*, it is available from Charlesbridge Publishing (www.charlesbridge.com), www.amazon.com and bookstores. Her previous work,

Hear Again—Back to Life with a Cochlear Implant is available from Amazon.com. Make sure your friends with hearing loss know about these important resources.

Get involved - A great way to get involved with the Hearing Loss of New Jersey is by attending chapter meetings. We have three chapters, serving Bergen, Middlesex and Ocean/Monmouth counties. Information is available from info@hearingloss-nj.org, or at www.hearingloss.org