

The Hearing Loss Revolution and Nine Guiding Principles

By Pat Dobbs

The Hearing Loss Revolution grew out of years of being ashamed of my hearing loss and trying to hide it. If I couldn't hear, I simply faked it—mimicked people's facial expressions or gave answers that I hoped were right. But I often wondered if I had answered inappropriately. Then at a national convention, when I heard Dr. Sam Trychin talk about the psychological impact of hearing loss, I was surprised to learn that I was not the only one who did that.

Why do we do this, I wondered? I came to believe that we had taken on the prevailing attitudes about people with hearing loss – that we are slow, not all there and perhaps even a little stupid. Even though we know it isn't true, we're afraid others will associate us with those characteristics. A vicious circle develops – the more we hide our hearing loss and fake hearing, the more we sell ourselves short, and reinforce people's negative assumptions about us.

But it didn't affect my behavior until a particular day at work. Now, any extra noise makes it difficult for me to hear, especially on the phone, and I shared an office with another sales representative. So when she was on the phone, I just dealt with it in a quiet way, I did other work. I never told anyone about my difficulty. That day, while I was on the phone, she began listening to her messages on the speaker. When I asked her to please listen on the phone instead, she yelled and screamed at me and told me that I was selfish.

I couldn't believe it. After being upset for a few days, I realized that the quiet way wasn't doing me any good. I needed to let go of my own negative ideas about hearing loss and openly advocate for my needs. Everyone deserves respect and a chance to participate in conversation. Then I began to imagine what that change would look like. I fantasized that people like me would become so comfortable with hearing loss, that we would show off our Gucci & Dior hearing aids just like others show off their Gucci & Dior eyeglasses. It's no different; we have to take care of it—that's all.

The Hearing Loss Revolution calls on us to transform how we feel about our own hearing loss. If we want others to change, we have to do it first. We must be the change we want to see.

We accomplish this through the 9 Principles:

1. Our lives define us, not our hearing loss.
2. We're intelligent, engaged, and valued in spite of our hearing loss.
3. We're the heroes of hearing loss, not its victims.
4. We tell people what we need them to do so we can hear them better.
5. We use assistive listening technology and advocate for them in public venues.

6. We are honest with ourselves and others; we don't pretend to hear what we don't.
7. We laugh when we misunderstand a word(s), seeing the humor in it.
8. We accept with grace the hearing challenges that we cannot change.
9. We feel grateful for our courage and strength in living these Principles.

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