

BECOMING AN ASSERTIVE ALDAN

Presenters: Pam Snedigar and Steve Larew

STEVE LAREW: We will be talking about becoming assertive and advocating for yourself in different situations. What is involved with becoming assertive? Each person has different needs.

The first issue that comes to mind is communication. I know for myself, communication is an issue. I had normal hearing for 18 years and took communication for granted. Then, I became deaf. I tried hearing aids and asking people to speak louder. It did not help. Asking people to speak slower doesn't help me. I need sign language or written communication. Knowing yourself what you need for situations is the first step.

Once you know what you need, you must learn to speak up. Many times I don't do that when I should. For example, Sunday, I was flying from Atlanta back home to Florida. The plane left the gate. I fell asleep. When I woke up, the plane was still on the ground, going back to the gate. What was wrong? I don't know. I didn't ask anyone. I didn't see anybody else leaving the plane. I didn't see any people that looked nervous. I just stayed there quietly. The woman sitting next to me did say 10 minutes, that's all. That's all I knew. I didn't act or speak up for myself, so I was not assertive in that situation.

We do need to take charge of the situation. An example here, one woman in the beginning of the workshop preferred the speaker to stand here so she could see the captions and my face. Fine. That's an example of being assertive. Many times people don't do that. They are afraid. Fear may not be the right word. But I know myself, I'm very reluctant to speak with hearing people, because I know; well, I'm 99 percent sure, that I won't understand their reply. I don't take charge of the situation because I'm worried about communication issues. I'm worried about becoming embarrassed because I have to ask my questions four or five times or I have to ask them to write. The idea of taking control of the situation, taking charge, that's part of being assertive. Knowing what you want and then asking for it.

This morning we are going to talk about three general situations. First, your rights in job situations. If you become deaf and have been working at the same job for a long time, you want to keep that job but you need a little bit of accommodation. You need to know what your rights are as far as asking for that accommodation. In job situations, we have laws that protect you or support you for requesting and receiving the accommodations you need for communication. Some late deafened people are afraid to ask for accommodations because they are afraid of being laid off. They feel if they ask for too much, if they ask for real-time captioning (CART), if they ask for an interpreter or if you ask for a TTY or other equipment that you may need for the phone, that the employer will say it costs too much and they will be out of a job.

The law does not allow employers to do that. You need to know what your rights are and stand up for them. The same is true with community situations. You want to get involved in politics, you go to the city council meeting, you want to go to different events, play, movies, different

things like that, you have rights. You ask for different kinds of accommodations for community meetings.

I am involved with ALDA's e-mail discussion group. We have different people on e-mail communicating with each other and sharing their experiences. Recently, we have had four or five new people join. They have just become deaf, and are trying to deal with communication in family situations. Communication with the husband, wife, kids, grandmother, grandfather, becomes very sensitive when deafness intrudes. Many of them are not sure what works best. In the family situation, you really do not have legal rights, but you do have the right to "speak up," explain what you need.

Of course, when you first become deaf, it's hard to explain what you need because you don't know what you need. After I lost my hearing, it took me ten years to figure out different parts of becoming deaf. The psychological part, my emotional part, how to explain that you're deaf and what you need with family. Even now, after having been deaf for 30 years, I have never explained to my mom and dad exactly what I need for communication purposes. Like I said, maybe I'm not the best person to be standing up here. We are here to share experiences and maybe learn something about how to better assert ourselves.

PAM SNEDIGAR: The skills for advocacy and assertiveness are almost identical. I may talk about legal issues or workplace issues that may not be your primary concern right now; however, those skills are still transferable in family or community situations.

We will also touch on the legal issues and your rights as deaf people under the ADA.

When we talk about rights, we are talking about rights in terms of "civil rights"; those that are guaranteed by the constitution of the United States. There are other civil rights acts; included in that group is the ADA. I often ask people: "who is covered by the ADA?" I'll get different answers from different groups and different disability identifications. The answer is everyone is covered by it. Whether or not you have a disability you are covered. The law lists deaf/deafened people as a protective class.

It is important to know as much as possible, to learn as much as possible about yourselves and your self-identification in order to see how the laws apply to you specifically. In other words: who am I, and whom do I want to project to the world?

This is part of the process of becoming more assertive and learning how to speak up for yourself.

It's a long process, which doesn't happen overnight. There's always something new to learn. Taking charge of your situation may take some getting used to. Some people just don't want to become assertive; they don't know how to deal with. Assertiveness may be out of character for them. But with time and practice you might find yourself becoming more assertive without realizing it. It takes time.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: A big problem I found is when I'm in a situation. For example, in a store: if I assert myself and I say I need to see your face to hear you. Then they turn and seem to treat me like I'm dumb. I try to be nice but that problem can't be resolved then, and I'm not going

to go to court to do it. So what do you do? I'm ashamed of myself, because I feel like a coward when I sit there and I don't take it the next step.

PAM SNEDIGAR: My response to that issue is that there is always a time and place for everything. Not everything requires a legal approach. Sometimes if you're in a store and a clerk is not being nice, it simply means finding the manager and making a verbal complaint or write to them later if that makes you feel comfortable. The important part is discovering how you feel better about the situation.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What I need is to feel better about me—it's like Steve was saying earlier. I'm afraid to talk with hearing people because I don't know what they're saying. Here I feel safe, because even if I can't sign well I know we will work it out. There's no right, there's no wrong. But out there, in the hearing world it's hard.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm Nancy Hammons. We worked together for a long time. I know in my experience with losing hearing, I found that when you become deaf, you become educated to tell people how you need to communicate. I found that by being open, once you really accept your hearing loss, you tell someone I'm deaf and I need you to... either look at me or speak slower. You relax about your hearing loss. I find it works like a charm. It's the attitude of being confrontive to people and telling them what you need. There are times it doesn't work. Those are the people you don't need in your life anyway.

PAM SNEDIGAR: You have a lot of agreement with that statement.

KEN ARCIA: I was going to say the same thing: that when you lose your hearing, after you become assertive and educated, you become the expert. You're responsible to teach others what your needs are. Most people are willing but they don't know how. If you take your time and teach them things go much better. It also depends on the situation. If there is a line of people waiting, forget it. But if you are in a one-on-one situation you can do that

We are the experts. We teach them what our needs are.

PAM SNEDIGAR: I want to add to this statement. The key is every person is different. With regard to some of the legal issues we talk about, the important thing is you have to know yourself--because no employer or service provider should assume anything. If they know a little bit about deaf people, they may assume that you need an interpreter. If you have decided that sign language is not for you, a signing interpreter will be a waste of time. This is one reason why it's important to know yourself. To start that process; and figure out what works for you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What I do with this is I make it a point to not take it personally, and immediately tell myself that I'm now a hearing pioneer educating people! It's not about me. I have information to give them that will save others in the future the same trouble. I use that concept that I'm a pioneer, because you know you're going where no one has gone before, you never know what's there. You never know if you are going to find anything worthwhile and it keeps me from taking it personally which gives me the power to function without getting emotional or upset.

PAM SNEDIGAR: I'll give you a quick story of what happened to me last week and then I'll turn it back to Steve. Last week, I flew to Washington, D.C., to go to Gallaudet for a meeting. And my flight from Oakland was horrible. We were delayed all day because we had 65 mile an hour winds. So I was really crabby and really tired and really hungry. Airports have horrible food and airline food is worse.

By the time I arrived in Washington, D.C., it was 1 in the morning. I arrived at Dulles in Virginia and discovered they only have taxis, and they had a long line of 200 people. At 2 in the morning, I'm tired and cranky and I finally get in the cab. I have a driver who doesn't speak much English. So I try to explain that I'm going to Gallaudet University. He looks at me and I realize I may not have said it clearly. I tried again with the address: 800 Florida Avenue Northeast. His reaction looked better.

We get in the cab and take off. He gets on the phone and he speaks in whatever his native language is, I never figured it out and I didn't ask. I caught that he kept saying 800 Florida Avenue Northeast. They must have called back with directions, I was never quite sure. On the way, he asks me: "Is that the place where people don't talk?"

Now remember it is 2 in the morning. In the back of my mind I'm thinking 'Gallaudet University, the place where people don't talk?' Well, deaf people are among the most talkative people I know.

What's the right answer in that situation? I could become an educator and explain about deaf people. I could explain about Gallaudet University. I could do all of that. But it's 2 in the morning and I'm cranky. My answer was 'yes.' That was it. At that moment, it was important I arrived at Gallaudet. It was not important to educate that man at that time. If it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon, I would have probably had an in-depth half hour discussion about Gallaudet University.

The point is, when I left I was not happy with my reaction, even though I felt it was the only appropriate one given the circumstances. I might have said something that was horribly wrong because it was 2 in the morning and I was very cranky already.

The important thing to remember is, you pick your time. Pick what's important to you. What do you need to do to get the job done? Sometimes it's time to be more assertive. Other times it's time to just let it go.

STEVE LAREW: Now, let's talk about situations. One, who am I? If we tried to answer that question we could be here all day trying to figure out the question: Who am I? Let's go back to the situation in the store, dealing with situations. Growing up as a hearing person, I never had that problem. Now as a deaf person, it changes. When we look at ourselves after becoming deaf we may feel more negative. Really, there is no reason we should be feeling negative about ourselves because we can't hear. It's not our fault. There is nothing we can do about that.

Becoming deaf really has had an impact on my life in a positive way. I've had many positive things happen to me after I became deaf. I have had many wonderful opportunities as a result of becoming deaf. So look at it in a positive way.

Situations do confront us. The question is: what are my responsibilities in those situations? What do I have to do? In your job, you have responsibilities. You can't fail to do your job because somebody is not communicating properly with you. You have to know what your responsibilities are. In certain situations you can pick your time to be assertive or not. In your work situation you have no choice, you have to deal with it.

In a family situation, too, you have to deal with it. Maybe you have a hearing spouse. Maybe he/she interprets for you in different situations. You become dependent on your wife to interpret everything. Is that fair? The idea, if you are asking your spouse, husband, girlfriend, whatever the situation might be, if you are asking that person to interpret or help you communicate all the time, what do you give back in return?

It is a hard situation, and it is our responsibility to explain what we need. That's our responsibility. But, if it is asking a lot of the other people at work or family or different situations, you have to understand that it's not all take. You have to be able to give something, too.

Two questions I'll ask all of you to think about a little bit: what situations do you feel you need to become more assertive?

Think of one situation, and then ask yourself two questions.

One, what do I want? When you're becoming assertive, imagine you're asking for something, need something, and determine what it is you want.

Second question, what do I need? I'll give you a few minutes just to think about those two questions. Hopefully you will be willing to share what you want and what you need.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In the past, I was very shy and had low self-esteem so I wasn't assertive. I since have tried to become assertive. When I get into situations where my needs aren't being met, I try to do the right thing. My question is when do I know I'm being appropriately assertive to get my needs met and how do I know if I cross over that line and I start expressing inappropriate anger, which is really not good for me? It's not helping me.

STEVE LAREW: That goes back to knowing yourself. I think, I have had similar experiences. I start trying to be assertive and then I become angry. You know for yourself where that line is. I tend to be very shy, too. It's hard to confront the clerk. As long as you feel yourself talking in a normal voice, if you're not starting to shout at that person, then I feel you're in the right. It's an individual decision.

PAM SNEDIGAR: You can gauge how well you're doing by the responses of the other person. The more you escalate, the more resistant other people become. That tends to be where people find themselves crossing the line. Just as each of us here in this room is different, people on the outside, they are all different too. Some people don't like any kind of discussion others do. We don't know what a person's background is when we meet them or deal with them for the first time.

The best gauge is to ask yourself if you are feeling anger. Do you start feeling hot and flushed? Do you want to be argumentative? Do you feel your voice going up, getting louder? Is the other person backing off or trying to be oppressive? You have to judge the situation. Step out of it and look to see what's happening.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Another thing to remember is that many clerks aren't too sure what's going on. They're afraid of anything different. They're scared. We think of our fear. We forget sometimes they're more scared than we are.

PAM SNEDIGAR: Sometimes the clerks or frontline people don't have any decision-making authority. They are following someone else's rule. Their boss told them they have to do these things in a particular order. When you come up and ask for something different. They don't know how to make decisions or how to do things. You have to try and remember that. Then you might want to ask to talk to the manager. It's often that simple. Sometimes that will diffuse the situation because the clerk wants to be helpful.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I wanted to mention that it's very important that you take responsibility for your hearing loss as well, which means, if you're going to a hotel, you make sure you call and you get those accommodations ready. Before you are flying, you call them again to remind them: I need a third bed in the room. I need a TTY. I need a doorknocker. Is it available? Ready for me? Yes. And then when you arrive, you express your appreciation for the effort that they have made for you.

Never apologize. You are making life easier too for the second person that comes along behind you that might need the same kind of help. Be prepared and responsible for your own hearing loss.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: All that has been said is right and it's not like I don't know it. My focus with this assertiveness is me. For example, what you said about the hotel. I called and I told them what I needed weeks ago. For four days since I've been here, I've been telling them the same thing and I still don't have it. When it comes to fire alarms, I'm paranoid. I want an alarm. Their response is okay. We have somebody that is going to go from door to door, open it up. I don't want to get into the stupidity of that, even though that is their answer.

When I don't have my hearing aids in, I can't hear my voice to know if it's going up. I'm Irish. So I don't know if I flushed from anger or just because I'm Irish. I need to find out the signs -- I can't control you. I can't control the manager. I don't want to. God help me, I can't control myself. And that's what I need to do to learn these signs that you're talking about, so that I am

assertive, not aggressive. Or the worst part, and I kick myself, is when I back up, because I'm afraid I go too far.

That is my problem with assertiveness. It's me. I'll educate when I can. I know there are some people that don't want to learn. I need to know what I can do to make myself assertive, not aggressive or not a cringing coward. Not a victim. I don't want to be a victim, but I also don't want to be used.

PAM SNEDIGAR: Once again, self-identification is important. "Who am I? Where do I come from, what is my perspective? How do I respond to things?" No one can tell you how long that process takes. 'It takes as long as it takes.'

Often it helps to discuss issues with people you feel comfortable with, get ideas from them. Like people from ALDA, people with similar situations. That is why many people come to conferences like this. So you can share and get ideas.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One thing I found is a willingness to go beyond half way. If you're willing to go a little bit more than you expect from the other, it works wonders.

PAM SNEDIGAR: It is often quoted that a marriage is a 50/50 proposition. I don't believe that is accurate. A marriage is 100 percent participation by both parties, and often more than 100 percent on both parties. I think that's the way life is. You have to participate in your life 100 percent. It's a self-discovery process.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'd like to say that, I'm from San Diego, California, and we were having the city council. They were talking about ADA. One of the members of the ALDA San Diego was watching it. His wife is hard-of-hearing and he is hearing. They don't have captioning. Well, he called city council; E-mailed them and said you know my wife couldn't understand this and it would be good if you have closed captioning. He was told it's too expensive. This is the same city council that is spending millions of dollars to build a ballpark. He was not satisfied with that and is taking them to court. I'm just curious of what will happen in the future when we take them to court.

PAM SNEDIGAR: Here the first thing I would want to know is: "did you ask?"

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did we ask?

PAM SNEDIGAR: If you asked for services, were they denied? City councils may not provide accommodations, because they don't know what anyone wants. They can't possibly know what every individual's needs are, just as you can't be expected to remember everything. It's important that you ask. Let them know. Tell them: "I'm interested. I live here in this town. I want to know what is going on. I want to see these meetings captioned. I want to go to the meeting. I want CART. I want a sign language interpreter."

You know whatever it is you need. Let them know that you are an active person in the community and you want to be involved. Yes, sometimes they will look at you with this blank

look, and not know what you're talking about. That's when it's important to be able to tell them what it is they're looking for.

If you ever have gone to the library and happened to walk by the legal section of your local library, you'll find all the state law books, the statutes for your state.. They're huge. No one is expected, really, to memorize all of them. Some of them are so old they probably shouldn't be on the books anymore. Even people that are in the state legislatures or city council people don't know everything. They know their laws there in general, but if no one confronts an issue or a specific law, they are not likely to use it.

It's important for you to find out what the laws are and express clearly what you need.

And be flexible, too. Be flexible by being the person who provides them with the information to be able to get that accommodation. You can tell them you need CART even if they say, "CART? What is that? It's a box thing you roll?" We know that's not t that kind of a cart. They might ask, "Is it when you put a horse in front of it?" Of course, it's not that kind of a cart. You have to tell them what CART means.

STEVE LAREW: Regarding asking for CART, I have a good story I just read in the ALDA chat group. One woman was assigned to jury duty. So she called ahead of time and said I want CART. She explained CART and how it is provided. She called several times to inquire about availability of CART. The day before she called again. She showed up, and said where is my CART? They tell her to go back in this room and there she found a nice cart with coffee and donuts. No captioning.

The important thing is if you make a request, you have to document it. Especially with government situations or public situations. You have to document your requests. Sometimes it's easier to say well, I told you I asked for a TTY. I told John Doe, my supervisor, I told him 10 times, I need a TTY to help me do my job. So it's only been verbal communication. I know that we all abhor paper work, but it's important to show on paper or disk that you did make the request and how many times you made the request.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'd like to make one suggestion in relation to what that woman was saying about the city council meeting and getting CART. I think we all have to look back at how much we had to learn when we became hearing-impaired, deafened. We didn't know about all these things like CART. We didn't know about alerting devices. We didn't know about the things that we now need and we have to learn. So we can't just call someone and expect them to know what it is. We also can't expect them to know how to procure it. How do they get it? Where do they call? They have no idea where to start. I didn't know where to start when I started becoming hearing-impaired. Who do I call? How do I get help? Nobody knew.

So maybe it would help to provide them with a referral. This is where you can get information in your state. Maybe they can call -- I'm from Arizona. They can call the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing. They have referral sources for everything. Or I know specifically of where you can get this company that does this. Call these people and they will give you the prices. Maybe ALDAcon or ALDA can -- has referral places around the country that they can help get people in touch, so that they can get the devices.

We have to assume that they don't know, and we have to point them in the right direction by giving them specific information. They can't just go to the phone book and figure out where do I call for these things? So that's one suggestion. We have to be the teacher. Remember how much we had to learn.

The other thing is that when it comes to something like taking legal action there are also resources in your cities and states to help you. For example, in Arizona, we have the Arizona Center for disability law. That's a nonprofit. It doesn't cost anything for an individual with a disability to work with a lawyer there. They have all the laws and they have all the methods. They try to work it out before it gets into court to get you what you need. So there are resources there that can help you. You don't have to become a lawyer in order to get what you need when you go down to the corner grocery store.

STEVE LAREW: Right. As a former president of ALDA, I'll just say that ALDA is trying to develop those resources, information through the regional directors. The other thing is, it's hard to ask for CART when there is no one around the area that can do CART. Pat and some of the other court reporters you see here, CART providers, are training other people in the court reporting field to do this.

We asked about needs and wants. When I started work, I wanted an interpreter. I wanted an interpreter. I go to my boss. I want a sign language interpreter. I want a CART provider. Is it enough to say that? No. You have to explain clearly what it is. You also have to figure out how much time you need that service? They give me up to 20 hours a week. I had to plan my work schedule around the 20 hours the interpreter could work. If something happened, I was called to a meeting in the afternoon and the interpreter wasn't there, I was out of luck. I had to find other interpreters. You have to be able to deal with the responsibilities. I receive interpreter accommodation a limited number of hours a week. I have to budget that into my work schedule. It's not easy. Especially when you have to explain to the legislature and things, when you are asking for money, too.

There is also our identification as a late-deaf person. It was hard for me to admit that I can no longer hear people talking to me. Now, 30 years later, I can accept it. I said it took me 10 years to really start to feel comfortable with it. Maybe I never would have learned to feel comfortable with it if I hadn't gone to Gallaudet University and met other people who are deaf.

I was lucky. I understand that. But the important thing is our perspective. We are still equals as people. We can't hear now compared to before. We need to develop a plan. It's not easy but we need to develop a plan. What will work for us? What do I need from my family?

My mom and dad have taken three sign language classes, I think. They are at the point where they can go A through Z without making a mistake with finger spelling, and simple signs. But, the thing is, I now live in Florida. My parents still live in Iowa. I see them 7, 8 days out of 365 days a year. It is not a reality for me to expect that my parents will become fluent signers because I am the only deaf person they know. I'm the only deaf person they see on a regular basis. They have met some of my ALDA friends, but it's not realistic for me to expect them to become skilled signers. I expect them to become sensitive to what my needs are.

At the same time, I don't help. I go home for Thanksgiving dinner. Eat, then when I'm finished eating, I leave the table and watch football on TV. The football game is more important to me than conversation with the rest of the people in the family. Am I helping that situation? No. But at the same time, none of them sign well. Sometimes my mom, if she feels it's important, she will point out to me something that happened. What is wonderful, I have younger nieces and nephew, they are becoming interested in sign language. They want to talk with me. But the idea of covering the situation with the family, it's hard.

Now, I'm fortunate, I work for Gallaudet. If I need accommodation, I arrange for it myself. I don't have to ask approval. I've advanced to that level of authority. I'm more fortunate than some of the people here.

PAM SNEDIGAR: Let's talk about teenagers right now. It's an easy topic for me, because I have two of them. And it really doesn't matter if I'm hearing and my children are hearing. The point is that it's hard for teenagers just to be teens. When they realize that there's something different about their parents, they have to try and figure out how to accept that. Anything that parents do that may be out of the ordinary is embarrassing to a teenager. If something happens to make a parent different, then teenagers tend to go through the emotions related to that as well.

Here it is important to remember is that you have to pick your battles, figure out what's critical, when it may be a good time to sit down and discuss things. Teenagers' lives are not trauma free. There's always some catastrophe happening. So it's hard, sometimes, to say, "we want or need to discuss this issue." You can't do it out of the blue. It has to be directly related with some event. Sometimes you have to say—"it's time to sit down, let's talk about it."

If you don't have that kind of a relationship with your child before you become deaf, it's hard to develop it after. You have to try and keep things in the same personality vein, your same character. Things about you will have changed. Sometimes children are not always as accepting as we'd like them to be. It takes them a while. Give them time. Other family members go through similar things.

One key thing to remember is that communication is not a language. It's not picking sign language over verbal English or writing. Communication is communication. It's any way it happens. It sometimes requires being creative; taking advantage of a situation. Sharing things with family members might be different.

Some people don't adjust well to differences. Give them time. Time is a wonderful healer. But it also requires a lot of patience.

This is a good time to share. Anyone have a family relationship, a situation where you found a way around communication?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I found something interesting in my own family. I found out that e-mail has been the best communication between my brothers. At home, I have a hard time understanding them, but sometimes I use my mother as an interpreter. I found that we get more

one-on-one when we use e-mail back and forth. They're fascinated. They haven't talked with me for years and they think it's great.

PAM SNEDIGAR: E-mail is a wonderful tool; a lot of people open up to that. Some people are uncomfortable in one-on-one discussion. If your family members are like that, e-mail might be a good way to try and open up some communication. It may give the feeling of a little bit of a distance, but an opportunity to express and to communicate with each other you might otherwise not have. It's a wonderful thing to use.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think one of the most important things, I had two daughters when I went deaf. They said you can still talk, we can still understand you. We can't make you understand us. They became disabled by my deafness. If you start thinking about that, the minute you approach any person, you immediately disable them. It's no wonder they are defensive, because they feel like they can't communicate.

My brother had the same problem. He was totally resistant because he felt helpless. He knows I can still communicate. I still talk. I just can't hear. He can't make himself understood.

I think if all of us took more of that concept that our disability handicaps others it might make things easier. I tell everyone: "I'm deaf. And that's makes you disabled, because I can't hear you. Can I help you learn to communicate?"

PAM SNEDIGAR: That's a really interesting perspective. I like that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I want to react to what you said. We have had the privilege of educating those people who lose their hearing and their families. And one of the most important things to realize is that when one partner loses their hearing it impacts on the rest of the family. It is a growth process. Anger is also part of the grief process that is involved when you experience a loss. It is important to be flexible. In my family, I have a deaf mother and a deaf brother and I was a Coda (child of deaf adult). When I lost my hearing, I became disabled, and it became a whole different scenario. We both had to learn how to communicate all over again. So it's a two-way street. That's why you are all here is to learn tools in order to enhance our lives and our partners or our spouses.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: All right. You have to learn to be assertive, but another thing is you have to keep telling people over and over and over again, both in your family, friends, the workplace, whatever. They forget. They say oh, yes. That's right. I forgot. I'm sorry.

I work in a deaf program. I'm a learning disabled teacher that works with Deaf and hard-of-hearing kids. Before every meeting, I ask people to sign for themselves. At first it may be fine, but then people forget. They start out signing, and soon nothing. It is like you just have to keep reminding people over again and again. So whether it's your family or work-- people do forget and you must keep reminding them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In addition to reminding people again and again, you have to support their good behaviors. I remember when I was training my family, my kids, how to handle my

hearing loss. At that time we often went out to the restaurants for birthday parties. It was my birthday and they took care of all the plans, and they felt so proud of themselves because they picked a quiet restaurant. They picked a table in the corner as far from the bar as possible. They did everything, they thought. But it was dark. I couldn't see their lips. I knew if I said anything about the darkness, I would damage the good things that were happening with them.

So I sat down and very quietly excused myself to go to the bathroom. I didn't go to the bathroom. I went and I found the waiter and I told him, please bring as many candles as you can to our table. He very quietly brought the candles to the table and I could see well enough, and when I was walking out of the restaurant the waiter was standing there, and he winked at me, because he knew the two of us had made the evening a success. If I had said anything about the darkness, I would have damaged the other good things that they had done. That way, it allowed them to feel successful about taking care of mom's needs.

STEVE LAREW: I want to wrap up now by noting three attitudes that are important.

1. Flexibility is important. You have to be flexible on what you can expect and ask for what you need. Be truthful and straightforward about what you need. Communicate, if you're not happy with the situation, tell them it's not working, it's not good enough.
2. Compromise. You are not always going to get 100 percent of everything that you ask for. Compromise as a start, whether it's communication or other kinds of accommodation needs. Then you build on that compromise.
3. Offering help and finding supporters. I count about 45 people in this room. So, every person in this room has 44 supporters.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM THE HANDOUTS:

- Assertiveness and Advocacy
Speaking and acting on behalf of yourself. Knowing your rights and standing up for them.
- Know yourself
Know what you need for communication and accommodations. Understand the equipment you may need (assistive listening systems, TTYs, hearing aid compatible telephones/handsets, real time transcription, interpreters, relay services, etc.). Be able to explain how it is used and where to procure such equipment.
- The Best Advocate Is often the most informed one
- Keep in mind
What do you hope to accomplish from your assertiveness/advocacy efforts?
Know who you are dealing with and what type of authority they may have.
Know how to gather information.
Be professional, tactful, authoritative, firm but courteous.
Be clear.
- Key Techniques
Flexibility, Truthfulness, Compromise, Offer help, Find supporters

Pam Snedigar is Director of the Gallaudet University Regional Center of Ohlone College in Fremont, CA. Pam received her B.S., Paralegal Certificate and her Masters in Public Administration from California State University Hayward. She was a paralegal at the California Center for Law and the Deaf for 10 years; in that capacity she provided direct services, legislative review, advocacy training and community education.

Steve Larew is Director of Gallaudet University Regional Center at Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL. Steve became deaf at the age of 18 years. He is a graduate of Gallaudet University and received his M.A. degree fro Northern Illinois University. Steve has served on the ALDA board of directors as President and Treasurer. He has been employed in the area of human services for the past 20 years.