

HEARING LOSS IN THE WORKPLACE

**Presenters: Larry Littleton, Jane Schlau,
Christine Seymour, Char Sivertson**

LARRY LITTLETON: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to welcome you to the panel titled "Hearing Loss in the Workplace." I'm thrilled to have you all here. But I'm even more thrilled to have this wonderful panel of highly distinguished women who are going to share some wonderful experiences with you about their hearing loss in the workplace.

I have a list of questions. And these questions are going to light a fire under your seat. And they are going to prompt questions. But I'm going to try to hold off the questions. Let me go through the questions with the panel and then we will open it up for discussion.

With that I would like to give the microphone over to Christine. What I would like to do is state your name, where you are from, and what you do for work.

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: My name is Christine Seymour and I'm from Tacoma, Washington. I'm a school district accountant. I've been in that job for 17 years. I started hard of hearing. All I needed was two hearing aids and an amplified phone. I became deafened four years ago.

JANE SCHLAU: My name is Jane Schlau and I'm from New York City. This is my third year as an assistant principal in a comprehensive high school. When I started teaching, about 13 years ago, I had perfectly normal hearing. As I was looking for a job in school administration, about three years ago, my hearing loss began.

CHAR SIVERTSON: Good morning. I'm Char Sivertson. And I am publications manager for a defense company called Logicon. We are a subsidiary of Norfolk Bruman. I've been doing this for 18 years. I started when I was hard-of-hearing, and they knew that. But since then my hearing loss has progressed until I'm now basically deaf. But I still do very well with hearing aids. I can use the phone somewhat.

LARRY LITTLETON: Now, this workshop is titled "How to Achieve Success in a Hearing Oriented Workplace." Now, let me ask you the first question:

First impressions-- when we go in for an interview for a job being successful starts way before the interview itself. Now, I would like to ask the panelists: how did you address your hearing loss-- or did you even address it at all when you first applied for your job?

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: About a year ago I got the brilliant idea to try to change jobs. So I've had two interview opportunities in the past year. And in my cover letter, right along with information about my other skills I revealed that I was a late-deafened adult with excellent oral communication. My fear was if they saw the TTY number on the letter that I wouldn't get called, and I was gratefully surprised when they called me on the TTY, left me a message and told me they would provide interpreters for the interviews. For eight years I had stayed in my old job as I thought I wouldn't be hired because I was deaf. So I was greatly empowered by the first interview experience.

JANE SCHLAU: To become a school administrator in the City of New York, you have to face I think the world's largest bureaucracy. It's an experience that I believe, if you can get through, you deserve the job. When I started interviewing, I was just hard of hearing. I had tiny weeny little in the canal hearing aids. So it was a big debate, do I tell them that I'm hard-of-hearing? Do I gamble and think I'm going to get all the questions right and give the right answer, or risk giving what I think is a right answer to a question that wasn't asked?

I decided to tell people. I stated it matter of fact: I'm hard of hearing. I may ask for a repeat. And then I would just go on. I never doubted my qualifications, because I had to have my education to at least get the interview. I had to have my state certification. So the qualifications part I was comfortable with.

When I landed the job that I have, which was really rather serendipitous because in my high school, in addition to my special education program, I had a program of 50 Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, it was like I was meant to be there. I was open about the fact that I was hard of hearing. The interview itself was not one-on-one. There were about 20 people: parents, teachers and school administrators, and it was impossible to know where the questions were coming from.

The union rep that was there wasn't thrilled with me. So any time somebody would ask a question, he would cough. He would shuffle his chair. He made it next to impossible for me. But I was just determined. If I needed to ask for a repeat I'd say, "excuse me," and I'd ask for a repeat. I did the best I could under the circumstances.

I recently interviewed for another job in a School for the Deaf. I requested an interpreter from the superintendent who set up the interview. It was going to be another panel interview. I expected between about five and ten people, which is just what happened. However, there was no interpreter when I arrived. There were six people who were going to interview me. The interpreter I requested was not there. I did ask, "Is there an interpreter here?" And they told me, "oh, no; we all sign."

When people tell you “we all sign” that may not be true. They think they sign. I couldn't decide if it was a test of my communication skills or if I should tell them that I need a real interpreter, and insist that they bring one in. I honestly just didn't know what to do, but I really wanted the job, so I did the best I could in the situation. I asked for repeats. A lot of times it's a call that's up to you. And you have to decide at the moment what is the best thing to do.

CHAR SIVERTSON: In my interview they didn't care if I was hard of hearing. And I functioned so well that hardly anybody knew that I was hard of hearing. And you know this is a plus and it's a minus, because I am so tempted to fake it, as much as I can, because I do pretty well. And I don't know if that's good. I enjoy interviews. I think they are fun. And often if I want to interview, I don't care if I get the job, I just enjoy to interview.

And that's what I always tell people, you know, if you get a chance to interview, what the heck, just do it for practice. No pressure. During an interview sometimes we get so wrapped up in our hearing loss we think more about what accommodations and what we are going to ask for, and how we are going to present our hearing loss. You really don't want that to be the focus in an interview. You want the focus to be on what you have to offer.

If you start out that way, and then later just state what you are going to need as a result of our hearing loss it works well. I tell them about my past and my accomplishments and that my hearing loss did not limit me in the past. You want to put the interviewer at ease, but you want to sell yourself not as a person with a hearing loss, but as a person with the skills that they need to do the job.

If there are 12 applicants for a job and only you have a hearing loss why would that employer pick you? That employer doesn't have to pick you. And they're going to have to do accommodations. You have to sell yourself in such a way that not only do you have what they need, but somehow it's a step above. You show at some point how your hearing loss makes you an invaluable employee, not something that they will have to constantly accommodate. You want to minimize the hearing loss a little bit--talk more about your accomplishments and your skills, what you can do for them, not what they can do for you.

LARRY LITTLETON: Next question: if you are an employee and your hearing loss starts going downhill, how do you address your hearing loss with your supervisors and co-workers?

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: Well, I really had no problem at all when I asked for a mechanical accommodation. We got into e-mail just at the time that I was beginning to not be able to use the telephone. But when I asked for a TTY, my boss wasn't sure about that. So she sent me for a second opinion to see if I was really hard of hearing. The second opinion came through, so I got my TTY without any question.

When I became deafened, I got a new boss just at the same time. And so when I asked for interpreters at that time to be able to attend workshops and meeting, there was no question. He was very supportive, and gave me exactly what I needed.

This spring I had a wonderful opportunity when a training opportunity come up in our community called "Working Together, Deaf and Hearing," and my wonderfully supportive boss let me and five of my coworkers attend that. It was an 8 hour training, interactive workshop. It gave my co- workers an idea what it's like to function with impaired communication, and they came back to work with me with a whole new view of what communication was about. Prior to that time, I had withdrawn from them, and they allowed me to do that, but now they make every effort to keep me in every bit of communication, including the social communication around the office.

But most recently I got a new boss who I could not lip read, and for the first time since I became deafened. I was caught in a situation where my deafness was affecting my ability to function in my position. So I had to begin to ask for interpreters. Unfortunately, my boss didn't think I needed interpreters. She was just sure that if she forced me enough that I was going to be able to hear her. So I began a three-month battle to request scheduled interpreter time, so that I could do my job.

During that battle, I got sick. I had blackouts. I got depressed. I need to begin counseling. But I talked to people -- first I tried to take on the whole district at once, and I had a room full of hearing people shaking their heads at each other saying we don't see why you need this. So then I started dealing with people one by one. I took the union with me to talk with my boss. And then I took the union with me to talk to the personnel director. And then I took the union with me to talk to the superintendent. And then finally, after three months of battle, I was been granted scheduled interpreter time on a regular basis in my office. And I'm looking forward to a whole new way of working and understanding.

JANE SCHLAU: I think on this panel in terms of hearing loss I'm the newbie of the group. When I started having difficulty with the phone I almost needed an out of body experience to go to my boss and say: I need an amplifier for my phone. I've come a long way from needing that little portable amplifier that cost \$20. I now work 8 hours a day with a full time interpreter. And what I did was what my husband told me to do, put it in writing. I know the laws. I know everything is on our side. And I know we can all talk to the boss and say I need this or this, and the ADA says I have to have it. But none of us are going to do that, because it is a scary thing to do. I wrote a nice letter to my boss. I explained that I have a progressive hearing loss. I'm at the point where I've become deaf. I need an interpreter full time. I need a TTY. My principal needs a TTY so we can communicate if I don't have an interpreter. I need a portable TTY for when I come to conferences, so I can keep in touch with my office.

The list went on and on and on. I ended up meeting a section 504 coordinator. (WHAT IS THIS...PLEASE ADD EXPLANATION) He did nothing for me in the end. I have a boss who

was very supportive. And she said: “Jane, what must you have?” And I told her I needed an interpreter.

I got the interpreter. I'm very fortunate, because I'm in a position where I have a multi-million dollar budget. I order the equipment that my department needs. I owe my husband for my other accommodations. He supported me by saying: “ Moron, you need this to do your job. You're part of the department. Order the stuff.” That's just what I did. It can be a traumatic experience. And sometimes you need someone on the outside to give you a little support. Chris mentioned Say What Club, and they are wonderful. I'm a member. I'm very active in that group. It could be ALDA. It could be SHHH. It could be somebody that is close to you that sees that when you come home at the end of along day, your heart is broken.

There are times when I come home and I am devastated. I have had a horrible day-- a horrible, what I would call hearing experience-- or a deaf moment. And my husband will say: “Why are you going through this? You can stay home. You can get 75 percent of your salary and you don't need the hassle.” Then I blow up. I can't do that. I need my job. I love what I do.

Larry, you asked about coworkers. When I started my job three years ago I told everybody that I'm hard of hearing. You need to face me. I read your lips. The whole drill-- we all know what I am saying. The next year I showed up at work with an interpreter. I never said a word. I never told anybody how to talk to me with an interpreter. I never told anybody I had become deaf. I couldn't -- I couldn't do it. I couldn't talk about it.

After we gave this workshop in San Diego, I went back to work in September. I had a department meeting, 45 people, and I did an entire hour's worth of training on how to work with your deaf assistant principal. I have an interpreter, I told them. They are not going to clean up your English. They are not going to change your words. They will tell me exactly what you say. If you sound ridiculous, you're going to look ridiculous on the hands.

And I came out and I told them that I had become deaf. I don't hear their voices anymore. I hear noise. That's all I hear is noise. If a kid is having a fight in the hall or you're standing next to me and talking, I won't know the difference. That's why I have an interpreter.

You also need to be the one to decide what you need. Recently, my principal called me into his office and he told my interpreter to wait outside. I thought I'd have a stroke! It turned out yes; it was a very, very confidential issue. But, we need to realize that we must tell people that it is not their decision how I'm going to get information. My interpreters are confidential, they are my ears; get over it. I need to do my job. I can't do it unless I know for sure what you're telling me. Not guessing, not thinking I see it on your lips, not reading your body language and doing the best I can—but knowing. I needed to educate them that if they want a confidential meeting they need to ask me what is the best way to proceed.

CHAR SIVERTSON: I don't ask for accommodations. I think about it every once in a while. I try to visualize how it's going to work, and I can't. So year after year goes by and I still don't ask for it. I can't visualize it. In the environment in which I work, it's very fast paced. There are deadlines happening all the times. Meetings are called up spontaneously. People are working long hours, including myself, and I can't see that accommodation in there.

Soon as my hearing continues to deteriorate I am going to have to make some decisions. How far am I going to go to get the accommodation I need to continue this job? Do I want to continue in this job? That's what I'm thinking about now. The phone? Well, here is my strategy with the phone. I don't answer it. I let it ring. My voice mail picks it up. Then I listen to it about three times. And if I know who it's from and I've got the extension and I know the subject matter, I can call that person back and respond. Fine. I understand what they're talking about. If I still can't understand it, I pass it off to my secretary. I said: Write it down. What the heck is this person saying? And you know a lot of people, now they use their conference calling. They don't even pick up -- they're not even on the phone-- I tell people, please, please, when you phone me, please put the phone up to your mouth so that I can hear you.

So that's how I deal with that. But how long am I going to be able to do that? You know. Thank God there's e-mail. I must get 50 e-mails a day, all work related. I have 6 documents coming in at 2 o'clock and I need them out by 5. Boom. And if people call me, I'll say you'll get a better response if you e-mail me. That's the fact.

I'm the only person with a hearing loss there. And I supervise hearing people. In one sense it's like being in another dimension. You've left the hearing world, but you are still are part of it, and those hearing people don't really understand where you're coming from. I mean, you can have training sessions. In fact, I even asked the human resources person: do you think we should have a sensitivity session where we can just talk about my hearing loss? Oh, no, they said, everybody knows they have to look at you. But obviously I brought it up because I perceived there was a problem.

So I sat down at my computer-- and was really scared of doing this, and sent an e-mail to the entire company. And I said my molds are not fitting very well. And I'm walking down the hall and my hearing aids are ringing, and I want to thank the people who tell me. And please continue to do so. And for the people who don't tell me, because they think they're going to embarrass me, believe me, you're not going to embarrass me. I'm much more embarrassed by the ringing. And while I'm at it, I also want to thank the people who will look at me when they speak to me, because that way I'm not going to miss what you're going to say.

That was such an act of bravery for me. I didn't know what the repercussions of sending out this e-mail were going to be. So I sat there with the send button, because I could never take it back, once you send that e-mail.

But I sent it. And I got comments from people saying I didn't even know you wore a hearing aid. They just didn't know. That was a big breakthrough for me, and I'm much more open about it the whole subject now.

You are constantly trying to resolve these issues. You are in a different dimension. You have to do things differently. And some people aren't going to be happy with that. Some people do not want to accommodate you.

And then once you tell people, once I sent that e-mail, there were new problems. Having told them that they have to look at me, I found some people who would get right in my face and talk with exaggeration and excess loudness. And then I have to say: "No. No. Don't raise your voice. Don't get too close." There are all these rules and regulations. People hardly know what to do with you sometimes, right?

But it's been so extremely rewarding having done this. Today I think: wow! I have lasted this long, and my hearing has gotten worse and worse and worse and I'm still functioning out there. And I'm actually supervising more people and getting more responsibility. It's just awesome to me.

And I feel kind of proud of myself, you know? I feel proud of myself in a way that my performance is still right up there with everybody else's, and I don't let the hearing loss get me down.

LARRY LITTLETON: Now, this steers me to another question. Stress. Do you sometimes feel like life is a circus and you're one of those people that are running around with the plates on the sticks? How do you deal with stress?

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: All of the above. I have some daily practices in my life that help me deal with stress. I do journaling as a form of written meditation, and it's a way for me to look ahead to the day. I prepare myself for whatever communication issues might be coming up. As I mentioned before at one point the stress became enormous, the tension became physical. I became ill. I went to the doctor. The doctor offered me medication. I said I would not take medication to deal with an emotional issue.

So he suggested counseling. I'm going to school right now for a management supervision certificate, and when I went to the disabilities office to get my paper work for my class a friend of mine was there. And she knew what I was going through at work, and she told me that I qualified for free disability counseling here. So I did that. I went to counseling. And it helped me see what I was doing right and wrong in terms of communication efforts.

From there, I became -- I started understanding that my deafness was not the problem. What I had to do was instead of asking for things for myself, it was to show these people how accommodating me would benefit all the other people that I had to work with. That the people that have to talk to me or ask questions, get information from me, have the right to have clear communication. It's not just about me-- it's about the people that I work with.

That was a very important thing for me to understand. Because once I got there, once I realized it was not about me and my deafness, but about communication with other people, the stress immediately started resolving itself.

JANE SCHLAU: My stress is not as eloquent as hers. There is no way around it. I'm exhausted all the time. Sometimes I'm just overwhelmed. I don't have anything eloquent to say about stress. Not a word. In my job over the past few weeks, my school was being monitored. It's my responsibility. I'm struggling to adjust to hearing less all the time, but I can't let my emotions out at work, because I have my job to do.

People at work still come up and talk to me behind my back. They whisper in my ear. They stand there and they run on and on and on. I need to know what these people are saying, and they don't get the point. And I am thinking: I don't know what you're talking about. And it's like-- why the hell don't you get it? How many times do I have to tell you? There are times I'm snappy at work and there are times I go into the bathroom at work. Yes, I go to counseling. I hope it helps. We will see what happens. I think I have to find a way to deal with my own emotions, dealing with my deafness. It's very new to me.

Then I have to deal with time management. I love juggling stuff. I love the pressures of my job or I couldn't do it. I find my way day-to-day as I go. I don't have any great answers.

CHAR SIVERTSON: You know, I think one of the reasons I have my position is there's something in me that thrives on stress. And you heard about good stress, bad stress. I need obviously a certain amount of stress in my life, or I just kind of fall apart. So I think my job gives me this outlet for my need for stress. But there are times when things happen at work and you feel like crawling into a hole. You feel just so awful. It's related to your hearing loss and you're not hearing things. And I used to get depressed. I'd go back and close my door and try to get over it. Now I laugh. I laugh. I don't know why. I don't worry about it.

I walk down the hall and I'll start laughing. And people say what are you laughing at? And I say I don't know. It just gets to a point where it's so nuts and so crazy. But you are still doing it and you still get by. So the more you laugh, the more things become humorous, even when it's very difficult to deal with. Laughing about it gives you the energy and strength to just keep going and fighting.

I wasn't able to do this before. I'm a Capricorn. We just go one step in front of another. That's how we get there. So I'm at a point where I laugh a lot, for no reason whatsoever.

Yoga is wonderful. I don't do it enough. Walking at lunch is wonderful. Often just going into the situation and knowing this is a very stressful situation, and I'm just going to deal with it. I'm going to deal with it like I always have dealt with it and I'm going to get through it is enough. So knowing your strengths and calling upon them and making them something that makes you a stronger person will often help you deal with the stress.

LARRY LITTLETON: I have one last question before I open it up for questions and answers from the audience. I'll give you a minute or two to wrap this up. What pearls of wisdom do you have for the participants of today's workshop?

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: I think the thing that I learned in my most recent struggle is that when you get ready, when you decide you need accommodations and you are ready to ask for them, be prepared to not back down. When I started asking for interpreters because I knew I needed them, and they started challenging me, trying to figure out how I could get by without them, the only thing that kept me going was knowing that if I back down, if I give up now, if I say okay, I don't need interpreters now, I can never ask again, because I'm never going to become any deafer. So when it is time to ask, be committed. Go for what you want and stay with it until you get what you need.

JANE SCHLAU: I don't have such a good Pearl. I find people expect me to not be as good as I was, or they think maybe I really shouldn't be working. Like they don't expect me to keep at it. I find it's just really hard to do what I've always done so easily. But I'm just very determined that my ears are not going to take over my life. I have the same brain. I have my same education. I have the same skills. I just do it differently.

So it's now become my responsibility, I guess, to teach my students and their parents and my staff members and my administration, my supervisors, that I'm okay, that I can do it. Just please help me get what I need and we will all be fine. I'll do my job and I will advocate for my children and I'll be protective of my staff. I can do this. It's almost like I have to prove it. But if that's what it takes, that's what I'll do.

I guess what I'm trying to say is-- find your inner strength. I had a conversation with a dear friend last night about this. You deal with what you have to deal with. You never know what you can do until you're faced with it.

CHAR SIVERTSON: Well, that really says a lot. Maybe it says it all. You cannot let anyone else's expectations, or society's expectations, determine what you want to do. And I think, you know, people say that they want a certain type of job or they want to be in a certain type of environment. I think the important thing is to find a culture in which you think you could become comfortable, and show them what you can do.

When I started work, when I started way at the bottom, a proofreader, I went around and just volunteered for everything. I can do this. I can do that. There is nobody doing this, let me do that. Well, not a lot of people do that, frankly. And in today's job market, there's a lot of cross training going on. You can't just do one thing anymore. You have to do a lot of things. Make that your advantage. You have been adapting for years with your hearing loss. You have learned how to read body language. You're very good with people. You'd be very good about structuring things so that they are in the optimal way that you need them to be. Look how you can do that for your company. Show that your work effectiveness, your stick-to-itiveness, your ability to cope will be an asset to that company. If you can do that, I really think you cannot fail.

And if you have to fight for the accommodations, do that. But if you feel that you'll just not be able to climb that wall and you'll not be able to get that job done, think about moving on and finding a culture that will support you a bit. A lot of people with hearing loss are afraid to change jobs. And there was one woman, she was on a panel for CART, court reporters, and she was a very highly qualified. I think she was in biology or research or something like that. It took her 7 years to find that job. I just couldn't believe it. She was so intelligent and so bright. But the problem is, she said once you find a place, then you don't think you can leave. You worked so hard to establish yourself there.

So these are all the things that you have to consider. I'm telling you, it can be done. It can be done. And with your own individual strength, just go in and believe in yourself. If you believe in yourself, you can convince your company to believe and support you, also.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One of the things that I find with the hearing-impaired person on the job is that we do really well in our jobs. We are always determined to do our work. But I find people have a tendency to take advantage of that. I know my boss likes what I do. But how do I ask for a raise? How do I approach him to say: Well, you know, I can do all this for you, but I'd like more money. How do I ask for that?

JANE SCHLAU: If you have perfectly normal hearing, you still worry how you're going to ask for a raise. I remember that. I asked my boss for a 75 cent an hour raise. This is going back 13, 14 years. And my heart was in my mouth. I worked for a doctor and I said: "Dr. Miller, I've been here so many years. I make a decent salary, but I haven't had a raise in a year. I'm just asking for a bit." He refused me. Because of that, I went back to school, finished my degree and I am where I am now. The worst they will tell you is no. If you don't take the chance, you have no chance of getting it. That's just my feeling.

CHAR SIVERTSON: You want to come in with documentation saying here is what I've done over the last year. This is the out of my job category. I improved performance by this percentage. If you go in like that, they will give you a raise. They will do it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Another strategy that I have seen, especially in the first year of employment, is to go in and ask what you would have to do to get a raise here in this company? And ask them to kind of spell it out.

The other thing that I wanted to ask the two panelists that use interpreters-- in a previous job that I had where I had some responsibilities for job placement, when we made a change in procedures and made sure that all of our clients had skills in introducing the interpreter, it really made a difference in the job placement success. If you allow the interpreter to come in and do the introductions, it makes a whole different impression than when the hearing-impaired people sets-up the communication mode themselves.

I'm curious about what kinds of coaching the people that are using interpreters, what kinds of coaching have you done with your interpreter? Or have you...

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: Using interpreters in the office environment is new to me, because in the past I only used them in meetings and workshops. When I did begin to use them regularly we had an all staff training where an interpreter come in and train all the staff members in my building in oral communicating with the deaf, as well as in using an interpreter. After that training was over, I was given the interpreter for another two hours and I took the interpreter to each person's desk in my building. And I told them this is going to be a normal part of my life. This interpreter is going to be a team with me. And I want you to be comfortable talking with them. Do you have any questions? And I stood with each staff member in our building for about 10 or 15 minutes with an interpreter and let them get used to the idea.

JANE SCHLAU: In your question you asked something about coaching my interpreters. I'm so new that my interpreters coach me. I ask their opinion. Sometimes their job is to not be noticeable, so they won't say anything. Lots of times I'll just walk into a meeting and -- it was a tough adjustment to get used to having a side-kick -- everybody stares, looks, everyone is fascinated with the interpreter. They get over that quickly. And from my point of view, it gets tiring real fast. I need an interpreter. When we go into a meeting sometimes I say something and sometimes I don't.

When I deal with parents in my job, that's sometimes a tough one because I'll walk into a suspension hearing or a parent will walk into my office, they want to see Mrs. Schlau. I say: "Hi. I'm Mrs. Schlau. I'm deaf. Sandy is my interpreter." And that's it. We just go on. My interpreters sometimes will direct parents or people to look at me, not them. Sometimes I will tell them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just wanted to add my experience of using an interpreter in the workplace. I attended Gallaudet University for my degree in social work. For those of you who don't know that school, it's the only four-year Liberal Arts University for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the world.

We were given a lot of training in using interpreters, and were taught that when you bring your interpreter to a meeting or to the office, or work with a client for the first time, you explain to the hearing person how you're going to work with them. You tell them: "This is my interpreter. They are required to maintain confidentiality, the same as a physician or a lawyer. I want you to pretend that they are not here. You speak directly to me, they will sit behind you and sign for me. So just focus on me."

It's your responsibility as the deaf employee to make the interpreter as transparent as possible, so that you maintain your relationship, your working relationship, with your client or colleagues and your supervisors. You get them to focus on you as the person they are communicating with. And if they insist in turning to the interpreter and saying "tell him," you remind them to talk to you.

JANE SCHLAU: I have some phenomenal interpreters in New York City. The board of education has on staff a lot of the interpreters that do Broadway. They are all certified. And this year I don't have one interpreter, I have different interpreters every day. So it's a new adventure for me. I look at it as a learning experience, and I try to absorb as much as I can from them.

One of my interpreters is teaching me things to say to a parent. I'm there with an interpreter, and I'll say, "I'm deaf. Sandy is our interpreter." The word "our" a lot of times catches people off guard, but it's the truth.

LARRY LITTLETON: I think that's a wonderful way to close this workshop. Remember, it's "our," it's not me and you, it's "our."

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I work for a government department in Washington. Sometimes I go traveling. My interpreter goes with me. Sometimes in a meeting I have my interpreter there. And usually the people look at me. But people sometimes think that the hearing person is the one to take seriously, and they look at the interpreter not at me. And I'm supposed to be the one who is, you know, I'm supposed to be the one who is in charge. And I get the feeling that if I say something about it I'm being too defensive. So I just kind of let it go. Most people aren't really like that. But I'm wondering if there is a way to control what you would do about that?

LARRY LITTLETON: I understand exactly the question that you're asking. It's going to take a long answer. But I think the short answer would be if you're in control, stay in control. Don't give the control to the hearing person. Be in control. Like right now, I am staying in control. I'm not giving the microphone to these people who I know can answer it just as well. I'm

staying in control. So you have to be assertive, like they said. I have to be assertive. You have to take control. Don't give it to a hearing person.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But I can't control what the guy does. If he wants to look at that person, I can't say no, you have to look at me. He is talking to us. And he is looking at her, not at me. What do I do?

JANE SCHLAU: Sometimes you can't change a person from not looking at you. We tell them, and they still look at the interpreter, because I am focused on the interpreter. After a few exchanges they will see that I'm in control and the gaze changes. But sometimes you can hit them over the head and they still won't get it. When you go in and you do it, they realize who they are talking to and the gaze will often change. Sometimes you have to pick your fight. Is it really worth worrying about looking at the interpreter and not at you? Are you still doing your job?

LARRY LITTLETON: It's very easy to say, I really appreciate if you would have eye contact with me. It helps me in the communication, would you mind looking at me? I know my contractor can hear you. But would you mind looking at me? It helps facilitate communication, because I have a hearing loss.

You are the boss. Take control. You set it up to your advantage. Hearing people can sit anywhere they want to sit. You can't. So you tell the interpreter where you want the interpreter to sit. If you came in earlier this morning, you would see that all four of us interpreters were working together to see where we would be comfortable standing, where this interpreter would be comfortable for the panel. How close I can stand next to this one before I was here. Do your homework. Set it up, and be assertive.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I've been to about 15 interviews this year. And one thing I noticed is according to the ADA, they are not allowed to ask questions about your hearing loss-- even if you have an interpreter in the interview. So when you do the interview, I usually put the question to them. I say: Have you ever worked with deaf people before? Do you wonder how I use a telephone or when I use the interpreter? Do you have any questions about those issues? I'd be happy to answer them. That way I leave the interview having given them the opportunity to ask these questions.

CHAR SIVERTSON: One thing I forgot to say, and I think it's so important. You know how when you're good friends. You make fun of each other in a fun way, don't you, when you feel comfortable? I have come to understand not to be sensitive about my hearing loss. I want people to tease me about my hearing loss. I want to make jokes about my hearing loss.

Have a little fun with it. Let other people have fun. And they will become very comfortable with it. It's when you get defensive and any slight you're going to take offense, relax. Relax.

Char Sivertson is a San Diego based Publications Manager for Logicon Communication and Information Systems Division, a Northrop Grumman Company. Logicon supports tactical digital data links worldwide. For over 17 years she has survived numerous downsizing, reorganizations and political upheaval. (In fact, all three are going on right now!)

Although she is the only profoundly deaf employee, she supervises her department with the help of increasingly improved digital hearing aids and a willingness to share communication techniques with the company at large.

Char's long workdays include proposal development, data management, web programming, computer based training projects and more. She is excited not only about sharing her work experience, but also about the opportunity to learn from others who attend this workshop.

Jane Schlau began to lose her hearing 2 1/2 years ago and is now profoundly deaf. As an Assistant Principal in a New York City High School, a doctoral student at Hofstra University and wife and mother of two children she uses increasing accommodations, technologies and strategies to adjust to her hearing loss.

Christine Seymour has been a Fiscal Specialist at the University Place School District since 1983. She oversees, monitors and coordinates all the accounting functions of the school district. She uses her experience with progressive deafness in a work situation to educate those around her on how to integrate hard of hearing/late deaf and hearing in the work place.

Larry Littleton is a keynote speaker, workshop facilitator and speaker for conferences at the state, national and international level. His experience with profound hearing loss, coupled with an astute ability to navigate the corporate world, enables him to inspire and motivate alternate models of inclusion for both businesses and individuals. A diverse variety of community, state and national organizations benefit richly from Larry's efforts as an advocate for persons with disabilities.