

ALDACon2017
LET YOUR BETTER SELF GUIDE YOU
PANELISTS: Ken Arcia, Linda Drattell (Moderator), Jim Laffer, Edgar Palmer, Jane Schlau, Wendy Ting
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LINDA DRATTELL:

Good morning, everybody, we will be talking about how our self-image and interpretation of ourselves affect how others see us. Our body language is a projection of our self-image. When we talk to others we need to ask ourselves, "How does my body language project how I feel about who I am and what I am saying?" Before anyone else hears what we have to say, we are the most important audience for ourselves. So, that is where we are starting off.

One of the most important tools we can use to improve our self-image is the elevator pitch. How many of you have heard that term? A couple. Basically, you have 30 to 60 seconds to keep someone's attention and make an impression. Imagine yourself riding in an elevator and someone asks, "What's your story?" They want to know quickly about you, what you have to say, and now you have got 30 to 60 seconds to make an impression. Making a first impression not only happens in an elevator, but wherever you are – whether it is a job interview, meeting someone for the first time at a conference, or catching up with acquaintances here at ALDAcon. You want to make a good first impression, and usually people's attention span does not last longer than 30-60 seconds, so that is the amount of time you basically have.

By example, we, the panelists, are going to each give our elevator pitches to you, and you can learn from that what you would like or think about how you can improve upon what we do.

I will start. I am Linda Drattell. I have been a member of ALDA for about 10 years. Four of those years I was on the board of directors of ALDA National, first as a regional director and then as president and past president. My background is advocacy, that is where I like to focus my energies. I founded the nonprofit, Bay Epicenter of Advocacy for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, which serves advocacy needs for our community in the San Francisco Bay Area, sometimes statewide. I also was an advocate through my role as community relations director at the Deaf Counseling, Advocacy and Referral Agency. I do not know if you remember the lawsuit with Cinemark and the discussions with AMC to get movie captioning for all first run movies. John Waldo was the attorney, I was one of two individual plaintiffs, and I represented ALDA as organizational plaintiff because I was president that year. I have a MBA in finance and a bachelor's degree in social work. My husband and I have two kids, whom we adopted from Columbia, South America. I love languages, so, I am finally making myself learn Spanish. I know sign language, Hebrew, and a little French. I love to keep learning. So, that is my thing.

I am going to pass this off to Bernie and he will do his elevator pitch.

BERNIE PALMER:

Good morning, everyone, my name is Bernie Palmer. And what would I say in an elevator? Let's see. I am from Connecticut. I grew up with a large family of nine brothers and sisters. My parents are from Jamaica. I am a first-generation American citizen. I lost my hearing when I was 18. My preferred mode of communication is American Sign Language (ASL). I do not generally use my voice unless I must. In one-on-one, private conversations, generally, I will. But in front of a large crowd, I prefer to sign. I started out in the field of education working for the Maryland School for the Deaf, working with transition students. That was with the State of Maryland working for the Maryland Department of Education. I then went on to Gallaudet University for a job at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf where I served as a high school guidance counselor. Following that, I had a variety of different positions over the years within the University. Currently, I work with the Office of Multicultural Student Development and Mentoring (MSDM). I have also taught American history and general studies courses over the years. I believe that it is very important to take responsibility for your own life, the road less taken, as it were. We have choices when we are at a cross roads in life, but we never give up. "Keep on keeping on". My favorite movie character is YODA from Star Wars trilogy, and that is because of one of his quotes: "Do or do not; there is no try, just do." Just do. That is what I believe. So, I make a point to remember that mantra and it has led me through the many challenges that I have had in my life.

KEN ARCIA:

Hello, good morning. My name is Ken Arcia. I was a past regional director for ALDA on the board, then the president and past president. I have run the ALDA website and social media for many, many years. Like many of you, I grew up hearing. I became Deaf from NF-2, which is a long word, I will explain later. For a couple of years, I was in denial, then I finally accepted my hearing loss. I became very involved with the Deaf community, learned sign language, and I worked with several Deaf agencies. I have a BA in psychology and a master's degree in marriage family counseling. I was interested in working with other people who have hearing loss. Help them find support groups, find resources. So, that is what I have been doing for a long time. Now currently I work for Sprint. I am an account manager in Arizona, and I continue to work with a lot of Deaf people all over the area. One thing that I have always tried to emphasize for people I meet, when you lose your hearing, seek out other people for support, family and friends, support groups, Facebook, whatever. It is really important, critical to find other people who share your experiences. And they can help you adjust. Thank you.

JANE SCHLAU:

Good morning, everybody. I am Jane Schlau. I am also very connected to ALDA. I have been part of ALDA for 17 years. I do want to ask you a question, though, before I go on. For how many of you is this your first ALDAcon? Thank you. My first ALDAcon was in New Mexico back in 2000. I cried for two days, connected as Ken said, being with other people who know the struggle and know, and understand the change from hearing to not hearing. There's nothing like connecting with others. It is the best. And

ever since that experience, I have been coming to ALDA. I became a president of ALDA, a past president, and a board member as a regional director. Every year in some way I am involved with the conference. I haven't missed one except for when my granddaughter was born during the conference. That was the only time, and I almost tried to come that time, too, because the Con that year was close to where I live. I am a retired school principal, I've been an educator for 30 years. I started in New York City and worked my way up when I was hearing and became an administrator when I was losing my hearing. You would think that as my hearing declined I would have known how to advocate for myself, but I freaked out and I did not, but I had wonderful support through my family, through a past professor who happened to be Deaf and, of course, when I connected to ALDA. I was fortunate enough to be involved in a federal working group on closing the gap for children and youth with hearing loss. I started a similar group where I live now in Buffalo, so we are more connected with early childhood people to get more services to little babies who have hearing loss from as early an age as possible. I also started an oral program for Deaf children whose families want to focus on auditory verbal education.

I guess as I am speaking, I learning about myself, too. I am really committed to advocacy for us, of course, and for children, and getting them the services that they need. I have a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's in education, a professional diploma in school administration, and a doctorate in education. When I was getting my doctorate, I was at the same time losing my hearing. I was very fortunate that my learning community said Jane, if you quit, because I wanted to quit, you will look back in three or four years and say I could have been a Doctor if I would have stuck with it! I did stick with it, even though it was a struggle, but I earned my degree and became a principal in a school for the Deaf, which is the best job I ever had in the whole world. I worked constantly and loved it. More important than any of that though, I am a wife and mother and grandmother. My husband and I are celebrating our 41st anniversary this year. We got married, we came here to "Mickeyland", back when there were only two hotels, and two parks. And now we were with Mickey yesterday and I bawled like a baby. Some of my children will be at karaoke, which is a celebration that we all treasure from year to year.

WENDY TING:

I am Wendy Ting from the Washington D.C. area. I joined ALDAcon as a newcomer in Arizona two years ago and am happy to be here on this panel. I work as a senior manager in technical area in cyber security field – both in the private sector and the federal government, including NSA, CIA, and others – professionally, all in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) field. I have BS/MS degrees in Chemical Engineering and PhD in Information Assurance. Initially, I happened to be one of only two women in Chemical Engineering in college where I started my career as a nuclear engineer working in all-male environment, which was very supportive. I made a career change to cyber security ten years later. It was not an easy journey for me. It was during the timeframe when the term "mainstream" was a concept. I have been profoundly deaf since I was two years old, when I was sick with a high fever in Hong Kong and the doctor gave me strong penicillin that damaged my hearing nerve. From the seventh

grade through my PhD program, I was the only deaf student in hearing classes without any support services except some note taking assistance. I got my bi-lateral cochlear implants in 2010 and 2011. That is my story.

JIM LAFFER:

These people have some very impressive resumes. I was a bartender. (Laughter). (Applause). My name is Jim Laffer. I lost my hearing and I have been an ALDA member currently for about seven years. I have been leading the San Jose ALDA group for the last six. I learned about ALDA many years ago, actually, when I lived in Chicago, shortly after my second ear crashed. My hearing loss is idiopathic, which is a fancy word meaning they do not know what caused my hearing loss. I interpreted that positively; I thought "that means I am not dying, and that is good news." I am late-deafened by definition and have bilateral cochlear implants. I grew up hearing, but like I said I lost my hearing overnight, six years apart, in 1990 and 1996. I received my first implant in 2011 and the second one in 2013. My work, basically, is in restaurants and customer service. Today I work for CaptionCall. I am also a mentor for Advanced Bionics, working to help teach people about cochlear implant technology.

I believe it is very important that we share our stories. And everyone here has a story about their hearing loss. Maybe they were born hard-of-hearing, Deaf, or lost it later in life like I did. By sharing our stories, we become stronger together. I have become an advocate for hearing loss in the last few years, in particular, with a focus on attempting to help people get access to captioning and assistive technology. I have a bachelor's degree in science, information and decision sciences, with computer based programming. I do love technology as it does help us connect very well to the world. That is pretty much all I have got.

LINDA DRATTELL:

Okay. The first question that I have for the panel is, how is your elevator pitch (the way you introduce yourself) affected by your self-esteem and the way you feel about yourself? Who would like to start?

JIM LAFFER:

All right. Well, I think it is important, as I said, to be up front about your hearing loss., when you are meeting someone for the first time and you are struggling to communicate with them, do not be afraid to say, "Hey, I'm deaf!" It breaks the ice right away. You say "hard-of-hearing" and people look at you, like what? If I ask them to speak slowly, they say, "Oh, sure. I will speak slowly." And then they start talking really, really fast. Yeah. So, you just break the ice and say "I am deaf," okay, right away they make a better attempt to communicate with you. Maybe they will sign to you, and then you can say, "no, no, just speak slowly." I think it is important that you get that out there, if you are struggling to communicate with someone. I am not afraid to do that. It is the same as sharing your story, do not be afraid to tell people who you are and what you do.

KEN ARCIA:

I agree with what Jim said. I can remember when I first became deaf, a couple years out, I was in denial saying "I'm fine, I'm fine." And then later I realized I was missing a lot of information. So, I looked into different support groups. My audiologist used to be a marriage family therapist, and we would have weekly group meetings with people who just received their hearing aids. From that support group we set up a local chapter of HLAA. I can remember what we were talking about 30 years ago. I can remember the very first meeting there. We had invited the State coordinator for HLAA back then, it was called SHHH. We invited him to come and speak to our group. He walked into the room with bright red hearing aids on. And I thought, what is this guy doing? Why is he wearing such bright colors? Most people are like, do not tell anybody I have a hearing loss, or cover the hearing aid with their hair or something. He presented and said I want people to know I have a hearing loss, because that takes the first step in communicating. I have always remembered that.

When I got my CI a few months ago, I picked a color that is different, not like my hair color or my skin color, but something different. People see, oh, you have a hearing loss. So part of my elevator speech, when I meet people is saying "I'm deaf." I identify as Deaf or late-deafened, and then we start from there in our communication. I can remember when I first worked at the Deaf agency, I worked at a Deaf community center. When people would come in, the first person they would meet was me. And they would ask, are you Deaf? I would say "Yes, I'm Deaf." They would ask, which Deaf school did you go to? Where is your Deaf family? No. I changed my answer, I am Deaf, yes, but I grew up hearing. So they know I did not go to a Deaf school.

BERNIE PALMER:

First I think it is interesting, Jim, that you worked in the restaurant industry, and that you became deaf during that period of your life because that is what I was doing when I first lost my hearing. When it happened, I became a recluse. I hid. I was in denial. I did not want to interact with folks. But to make ends meet, I worked as a bus boy in a restaurant. One night my former high school guidance counselor was having dinner there with his family. Upon seeing me, he said "hey, come see me at Hartford Public High" which is the school from which I graduated. So, I went to see him. He told me about Gallaudet and NTID, and that I should go to Vocational Rehabilitation for help. Not trusting a teenager to follow through, he followed up by calling my mom before I could tell her. Of course, several weeks had already passed. My mom took me by the collar and we went to the VR office and made an appointment. I agree, I tend to tell people I am deaf. I am deaf. I do not use my speech. The reason for that is, because when I do speak, people speak back assuming I am hard-of-hearing and that I am able to understand them. I just say I am deaf, right away, I do not use my voice initially and we go from there. Because it is often frustrating, I do not want people focusing on my hearing status, instead, I want them to see me as a human, as a person that has feelings and emotions and desires and aspirations, the same as anyone else.

LINDA DRATTELL:

I agree. I find that when I want to introduce myself to someone, I think about whom I am introducing myself to. I used to think so hard about that. To this person I am going to say I am hard-of-hearing, to this person I am going to say I am deaf, to that person I say I am late-deafened. I am late-deafened, I lost my hearing in my 30's. I was so stressed out about how to introduce myself, and I remember a professor at the college who is deaf said, "Be yourself." Do not worry about who you are talking to so much as who are you representing. You want to be yourself. This is the reason I added elevator pitch at the beginning of this session. Sit down and write an elevator pitch for yourself, write an introduction about your hearing loss, hi, my name is so and so, I am hard-of-hearing, this is what I need, or whatever it is you want to tell about yourself, maybe a skill you have. If you write it down and you think about it, and you practice it, then it improves your self-image. I remember when I was writing my elevator pitch, I thought oh, yeah, I forgot about those things that I do. And you start feeling better. And the more you feel better about yourself, the more presence you have, and the easier it is for other people to get to know you.

JANE SCHLAU:

I am going to say I agree with you guys as well. But Linda, you make my smile because I went to school for my doctorate, must have been in my 40's or 50's, and I had a professor who said the same thing to me, he said Jane, just be yourself. You are a good self. When I am in a situation with new people, or I have to introduce myself, I get nervous because even though I do not like to admit it, I do think, are they going to like what I say? I think most of you would understand the questions that go through my head. I tend to just jump in and say hi, and introduce myself. And ridiculously, they start talking to me; I do not always say as the first words out of my mouth, I am deaf. I will just talk. They say something, and once in a while I will get it and more often I am like, what? Then I will just explain, oh, I am deaf, could you repeat that? Then it is out there. Sometimes people get really nervous, which makes it sort of fun for us just to watch their reaction. I am still the person who I was. I am just as capable and competent. But you have to work just a little bit harder so I understand you.

When people are silly and start to laugh, I used to just look at them and smile, thinking in my head, you are a moron, you know? Now I have gotten obnoxious and they laugh and I just look at them and honestly, usually it is a kid who is laughing and I ask, what's funny? Then they get nervous, they say blah, blah, blah, and I just ask them, repeat what you said, I am fine. I end up with a role of supporter to them, whoever the person is, be it in an elevator with somebody and I just want to introduce myself or just chat. I do not know if you can see, but my dog is down under the table here, she is an ice breaker. People will start to talk to her. She is labeled "hearing dog." Nobody knows what that is. They will talk to me and I will look at them and say, excuse me, I am deaf. Somebody else in the elevator will say oh, that is a hearing dog, oh, and they get quiet. That is sometimes fine with me, too.

Dr. I King Jordan is in the back of the room. When I was in school, we learned all about

King, King became “famous” from the Deaf President Now movement, I am going back years, giving away my age. But when I came to ALDAcon and met him, I was his biggest groupie. I could not talk or introduce myself, I could not say anything. Over time, I take to heart what my professor said. Just be yourself. And King knows, I am still challenged by him, which is a good thing. It raises the bar a little bit. But I just talk and if I make mistakes and people get nervous, I laugh. Let's move on. What did you say? And people will repeat the same thing. Say it a different way. Sometimes if they keep going, I just fake it. It's life.

WENDY TING:

In reference to the elevator pitch – it makes me feel successful to say that because I have come a long way through many obstacles due to my hearing loss.

LINDA DRATTELL:

Sometimes we talk about postures, smiling, and other non-verbal strategies to improve how you see yourself and how others see you. They recommend a fake it until you make it strategy. I brought Amy Cuddy's book today; it is on your resource list, and it talks about the way you present yourself, how you physically make yourself feel better about yourself just simply by the posture you hold. So, my question for the panel is, what do you do to reinforce the image that you want to convey?

KEN ARCIA:

I think it took a long time, but I think it is really important to have confidence. When you have accepted your hearing loss and then you move on to maybe educating others or becoming involved in advocacy or different things, you become an expert. People look up to you. I have been asked to give presentations, or go to different classes and talk about my hearing loss, talk about different things I am involved in. It is always nice because you become more confident and empowered, and I think that really helps a lot.

JANE SCHLAU:

Confidence, as Ken said, is key. But you do not always feel it. And that is part of why I was asking how many of you have been here before and who is here the first time. In the beginning of your hearing loss, it is terrifying because you are so used to knowing what people say, and in a workshop or in a class or in your office or whatever you are doing, you are used to very passively getting information, you can sit, stand, you hear what people say, you hear the incidental chatter, and all of a sudden it is gone. What do you do? It is like being a fish out of water. I remember when I was losing my hearing and I told the story, some of you may have heard it, it was a progressive hearing loss for me over about three years. One night I was in bed, right before sleep, you are not awake, you are not sleeping, but something was wrong. I just felt something was wrong. I got very scared. And the short version is, I almost felt like I was dead. I sort of clutched myself trying to grasp for breath. Then I said wait a minute, you are breathing. But I could not hear myself, I could not hear my heartbeat anymore. That was the progression. I had become really deaf. Not that it was a conscious choice. I just had to

adapt to different ways. I cannot say that my deafness affected my confidence at that time in a good way, but once I got passed it and I did my research for my doctorate on acquired deafness, the key was just time. As you go through your hearing loss and life with it, you kind of get used to it, and you adapt. My hearing loss sort of gave me confidence and I am going to say a bad word, in an ass backwards way, because all of a sudden I have rights to accommodations. I have a right to get the same information. I have a right to ask you to repeat what you said. I have a right to ask for an interpreter or for CART or whatever. It removed some of my lack of confidence in myself, and gave me confidence that I have some rights that I am going to get this information and be who I am.

WENDY TING:

In my professional work, I go to and sometimes lead many high-level meetings (without any support system like interpreters) and I do not always catch everything 100% so I sometimes look for cues to fill in blanks. That has worked for me most of the time.

JIM LAFFER:

Be yourself. You have not change. You are the same person. It is hard sometimes. For me, one of the things that I always prided myself on, was making people laugh. Okay? And it is hard to do that all of a sudden when you lose your hearing, because humor is very timing oriented. Somebody says something and you want to grab a joke on it, and you cannot crack that joke five minutes later after they have repeated it for the third time. You are still the same person. Do not be afraid to be yourself. All it takes is saying I am hard-of-hearing and then move on. It takes time to get that, it does. Everybody goes through it. I went through all of the things that Bernie and Ken talked about, loss of confidence, that I am not me anymore. Just keep digging; you are in there.

BERNIE PALMER:

For me, it is really important to remember what my mother told me when I was growing up. She would always remind me that: "Other people see you better than you see yourself." I know that now, but I did not back then. We do not always see ourselves the way others see us. There are two different images that we have - the perception of self, and the perception of others. As a Jamaican growing up, I was taught not to toot my own horn, but at the same time because I am a deaf person, I have to fight for what I need and give evidence of what I have done and can do.

KEN ARCIA:

I will add to that, I agree. I think part of that confidence is that many people, when you become deaf or you are losing your hearing, you do not know what your rights are yet; you do not know what your communication needs are yet. You do not know what you do not know. When you find other people that are like you, you can learn a lot from how they have dealt with communications, technology or different things. That is the wonderful part. Then when you learn how to handle different things, you can become an expert on that and that increases your confidence; we re-enforce each other.

LINDA DRATTELL:

When I first started working in a software company in my early 20's, men filled all the managerial positions. Then they hired a woman as vice president. So I made an appointment to go see her. When I got to her office, she said, "okay, what's this about?" I said, "well, you are the only woman in a management position that I have ever met. I want to look at you. I want to see how you sit, I want to know how you laugh, I want to know what you read." She just started laughing so hard, and we had the best conversation for about half an hour. It just shows that we all need mentors; we all need role models. You come to these workshops and observe how we are presenting ourselves.

One of the things I learned from Amy Cuddy's book is that when we feel powerful, we want to show that power. We open up our chest, we extend our arms. People winning a race throw out their arms in victory. Even someone who is blind and never saw it done before, extends his arms upward to express feeling powerful. Cuddy recommends in order for you to feel confident, before you introduce yourself, take two minutes, go into the bathroom, or into your hotel room, and do the Wonder Woman Pose. This is the Wonder Woman Pose (Drattell exhibits standing straight, legs slightly apart, chest open, fists on hips). For two minutes. It does two things, actually: It affects the testosterone and cortisol levels in our bodies. People who are more powerful have higher testosterone levels. Of course, men -- but women also have testosterone. In addition, low cortisol levels help you react properly to stress. By standing in a pose like that, you raise your testosterone, and you lower your cortisol. You are then better able to respond to stress and feel like you are putting your best foot forward.

It just so happened that I was advocating for accommodations with the local train, called BART, in San Francisco. I wanted communication access in the new train system they are developing. I went to a special meeting, we had already gone through our normal committee meetings, nothing was working. My lawyers came (at that time they were Disability Rights Advocates) and BART showed up with their lawyers. The assistant general manager who would give the yay or nay to accommodations is a huge guy. He walked into the meeting and projected all of his height and strength. He would not say hello to me. He sat down and it just so happened I had been reading in the newspaper about BART's sponsorship of a local arts organization. His argument was they had no money for communication access. I waited patiently, and this guy says I would love to help you, but we have no money, I am sorry. At this point he is sitting down, the big guy. I stood up, in something similar to Wonder Woman Pose, and towered over him. I said, I want to show you something. I had the San Francisco Chronicle with me, with the advertisement for the local arts group that said "Sponsored by BART." I slammed it down in front of him, standing over him, and said what is that? How do I explain that to my community? You have no money for accommodations but you have money for this? I rest my case. (Applause).
So, that is adding body language.

JANE SCHLAU:

You sort of turned things around a little bit because you were aware of your body language, yes, but I think over time, it becomes easier for us to also become aware of other people's body language. We get so much information from watching other people, because we cannot hear them.

We also learned, like Linda is saying, you know not to cross your legs because that says you are protecting yourself. Do not cross your arms; put your hand on your hips. Many times when I am in front of people, I do not know what to do with my hands. When you are relaxed and you watch other people, the information you get is really cool. Linda saw this guy come in trying to be a big blustery blowhard. Putting gender issues aside from Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, if you just watch people's body language, are they really as confident as their title? Are they really as confident as the authority they have been given for this situation? And use that information because when you watch, you often get more information than when you just listen.

LINDA DRATTELL:

Okay. Next question. Alison Levine, who served as team captain of the first America women competent expedition, reminds us to give ourselves freedom to fail. That failure is part of growing, that someone else will benefit from the risk you took because you had the courage to fail first. Can you give an example when you chose to embrace risk or failure in who would like to go first?

WENDY TING:

Hearing classes – there had been a couple of high school teachers/college professors who were skeptical about my hearing loss - not believing a deaf student should be in their classes. I was stubborn and went through all hearing classes and proved them wrong. I paved the way for other DHH (deaf and hard-of-hearing) students attending hearing high schools and colleges afterwards when support systems (interpreters, etc.) became available for them. Fear of failure – another example, I recently took up dance class just to learn how to dance on the floor. Actually, it was for a wedding when I heard there would be a lot of dancing. One thing led to another and I ended up entering a very formal Freestyle Competition for 9 different dance styles at my instructor's suggestion and that event happened about 3 weeks ago. I worked hard at it due to my fear of failure and spent many hours on dance practices even though it was fun dancing. Guess what happened? I got the Top Newcomer Lady award much to my surprise. You never know until you try!

JIM LAFFER:

I think we risk failure every time we go out in the world as a person with hearing loss because we deal with a world that is harder. For the people with normal hearing, it is easy mode. We are not in easy mode, we have got the hard mode. I think that every time we go out, it takes great courage to do that. And for me, it was such a process after my hearing loss. I knew I had to make changes and I knew I had to go back to school,

because I could not keep doing what I was doing. I went back to school and managed to graduate. And that led to a job, so then I tried other things.

The thing I think I time risked the most was when I took over the ALDA group. I had never led a group before, and I did not know how to do it. It takes time to really figure something like that out. Taking over the group, scheduling events and planning things, and learning ways to communicate with people better in that situation, led to so many positive things in my life. It really opened a lot of doors for me.

BERNIE PALMER:

As I said before, I had to be brave. I could not be afraid. I had to absorb myself in reading, which is what I did at home. And then eventually I met with my VR counselor, my vocational rehabilitation counselor, went to the school for the Deaf in my hometown, then I went to ASD to learn sign language. It is there that I saw other people the same age as me who were happy. That was a strange moment for me to learn that I am not alone. People my age, my peers, were doing everything, participating in whatever they wanted to do. That was a huge moment for me. It taught me that, in spite of failure, you never give up. That is something I learned here at ALDA as well. Again, do, “there's no try, do or do not.” I have noticed that there were Deaf people who were vibrant and alive, and that made me question who I am and to learn about myself.

KEN ARCIA:

I think, what we said before, that it takes confidence to learn to do things. We know some of you here are Newcomers to ALDAcon, and I really want to applaud you for coming. That is the first step. Now that you are here, you will meet others and, just like at our workshop, you will learn from other workshops. You will have a lot of fun, too. Just by meeting others you learn how to deal with different situations. I think that is the best part of ALDA is meeting other people like you. That was the first step for me, too, when I first joined, 23 years ago. So, I took my first step, that is key, the first step of the journey, right?

BERNIE PALMER:

I want to add one more thing. One other point about ALDA, my first conference was in 1999, and the reason why I attended that conference was because Dr. Jordan was indisposed at the time with a Gallaudet board meeting. At that time, I was serving on the Gallaudet University Marketing committee. As a late-deafened person, they asked me if I would go to ALDAcon in Dr. Jordan's stead. I had heard stories about the organization, but I was not sure I wanted to go, because I had traveled a long road to accept who I am as a person with hearing loss. But, when the president asks you to do something, you do not say no. Well, I have not missed a conference since then. At ALDAcons, you just get out there, start a conversation and you talk about the issues that we have all faced. It is like no other situation. It is therapeutic. It is the best medicine, really.

JANE SCHLAU:

I think all of us risk failure every time we try to communicate. Going very basic in any situation, you meet someone in an elevator, you meet someone at the front desk, you

go to a store. Even with your partner or at home with your children, whatever, any kind of communication we enter, we risk failure. One of the things that we can do is look at the failure and think about what we can do better next time. ALDA, not that we are a panel here trying to say ALDA, ALDA, ALDA, but ALDA really helps that because we get into communications with each other all the time here and they fail. And we look at each other and we laugh. Take that experience and build on it confidently, because then you can go out, and if you are with a hearing person and you misunderstand what they are saying, you really could laugh about that and then try again. The more that happens, the more confidence you get, the less the risk of failure or the less you feel that you are going to fail. How you feel is the key to the situation. At this point, I have been deaf 17 - 18 years, and if I misunderstand you, honestly, I do not care, I am going to try again. My family might tell you I might make them crazy. What? What? What? But let's keep trying until we get it. It is a failure, but I learn from it and keep plodding forward as I think everyone on this panel would agree. Keep going.

KEN ARCIA:

How many of you have been asked "do you lip-read?" when you tell a person you are deaf or hard-of-hearing. I think that is the most common question we are asked when we say I am deaf, so, do you lip read? You know my answer, "What?" If you say no, I do not lip read, then they ask, how did you understand the question? If you say yes, they will keep speaking really fast and you do not understand anything. I always say "What?" (Laughter).

LINDA DRATTELL:

Okay. I have a final question, because I think we have about five minutes left. Do each of you have a role model or a mentor, and if so, who is it and what have you learned from that person?

KEN ARCIA:

That is one of the benefits of sitting next to Linda. (Laughter).

KEN ARCIA:

I am not sure how many of you know, but we had a former president, board member named Edna Shipley Conner. She was like a second mother to me. She was involved in ALDA for a long time. She was really my mentor. I learned so much from her. One thing I learned from her, and I admired about her, is that she always would sign and speak at the same time. Instantly, the other people knew she was deaf. If most of us are late-deafened, if you start talking to another person, they are going to talk right back to you, even if they know you cannot hear, or if you tell them, I am Deaf, well, you are talking, so...they will forget you are deaf if you speak to them. I just have to say I learned a lot from her. Love you, Edna. (looking up). She passed on several years ago.

JIM LAFFER:

One of my mentors is sitting right here at this table. Linda Drattell. She was a person

who put me on a path to things like ALDA, and that has led to so many changes in my life. She gave me so much advice through her job at DCARA. Ken later filled that job position also. But I initially met Linda, and she is the one who sent me this way. I have had other mentors also in my life who have helped me with my cochlear implants. My philosophy is everyone on this planet is a mentor, if you pay attention you can learn something from anybody, you just have to open your eyes, open whatever ears you have got, and pay attention, everybody has got something to teach you.

WENDY TING:

Yes, I give credit to my Dad who taught me this philosophy: "To know success is to endure failure" and it has helped me a lot in facing whatever obstacles come in my way.

LINDA DRATTELL:

I have a couple mentors here at this table. But I will first start with when I first lost my hearing. My audiologist sent me to SHHH, which is now HLAA. There was a deaf woman who was presenting at the SHHH meeting I attended. She was the very first deaf woman I had ever met. She was standing there, looking so professional. She had a beautiful light pink suit. Her hair was perfect and you could see that she felt great about herself. She was presenting about a new phone product. This was Christine Seymour, who became a president of ALDA. I remember I looked at her, my mouth just dropped open, and I thought, I am going to be okay. Because I saw that she was okay, that she was successful. After the meeting she came over to me, gave me a hug, and said, come to ALDA. I listened to her and came to an ALDA-East Bay meeting, and who do I see? Ken was standing up on the stage giving instructions to the group. He was signing away and I had never seen sign language before. I thought wow, he is so comfortable, and everybody else is signing with each other. This is before cochlear implants became popular, of course. They were chatting with each other. It was just awesome. Then I came to ALDAcon. And I met Bernie. And I met Jane. And these people all were self-assured and feeling great about themselves and in leadership positions. I thought, this is great! I had all these people to learn from.

So, that is my advice to you. You, too, can become a mentor to the next person, who will then be the mentor to someone else.

JANE SCHLAU:

I have a lot of mentors. There was a woman online who lived in New Jersey, and I lived in New York. It was just by happenstance, we went back and forth and she invited me to a party. I was like, I do not know who she is, I am not going. We are going back about 20 years. People were afraid that people we met online were ax murderers. She kept inviting me and I said to my husband, we do not have to go, do we? She is bothering me. My husband said, you need to go, we are going. I almost fell over, as my husband is a very quiet man, but we went, and I learned about us, people like us, and ALDA. From that party I ended up presenting to the SayWhatClub where I met Edna Shipley Conner, whom Ken spoke about. Thanks to Edna I went to my first ALDAcon in New Mexico where I cried for five days because there were at that time, I think there were 500 people at that conference, and everybody was like me. They signed, as Bill would

say Crappy Sign Language, they spoke, we wrote, and all of a sudden I had another family of people who were just like me. Nothing else mattered. We do not communicate well and we learned how to get past that.

At that conference, I met Bernie. It was his second ALDAcon. I will never forget that he came over. Everybody hugs at ALDA. Bernie came over and hugged me. He asked me, is this your first Con? We have been friendly ever since. It is like family. It is people who have gone before, you know, we have walked in the same shoes, we felt the angst and we share the same experiences. You learn you are not alone. And suddenly you become a little bit more okay.

KEN ARCIA:

One of our themes at ALDA is, "Lost my hearing, found a family." A lot of people feel this is our second family, and we get together every year. Like we said earlier, it is really important to see other people who have been through the same things.

BERNIE PALMER:

I agree. There are many different role models whom I have been fortunate to have had in my life, and I want to mention three by name, one was my mother, she was always telling me, "Do not let anyone tell you that you can't do something, regardless of who they are and do not let them put limitations on you." Another is Dr. I. King Jordan who said essentially the same thing, to set expectations for ourselves. Following that path has taught me a great deal. My third role model was a deaf person as well. I guess, perhaps, he is actually hard-of-hearing. His name is Dr. Bill Marshall. He was the director of the Administration and Supervision (PhD) program at Gallaudet. He wore a body aid, hearing aid that was very visible when there were smaller hearing aids available. This gentleman is incredible. He writes beautifully and he is always sincere and succinct; very to the point. As the adage goes: he said what he meant and he meant what he said. As time went on, I would have sit down meetings with him when I was facing issues at work or just life in general, and he would be very cut and dry with his approach. He said, look, this is what you have to do, do not beat around the bush, do not try and manipulate people, just get to the point. That left such a strong impression with me and so, I learned to incorporate that in my own life over time. It was an important lesson.

KEN ARCIA:

One last thing, Jane mentioned a little bit, but you see our philosophy here at ALDA is "whatever works". You see some people signing, you see hearing aids, cochlear implants, writing notes, gesturing, whatever. That is really what draws people here. It is open communication. Whatever works in communicating with each other.

LINDA DRATTELL:

Thank you all and the panel, thank you all for coming. If you want to take a look at this book, you can look at it for a few minutes. Jim wants to add something.

JIM LAFFER:

We do not have time for questions and answers at the moment, but I know for a fact that anybody at this table will talk to you if you have questions. I know I will; I am not going to volunteer anybody else, I am going to volunteer me. You have a question, you want to ask more about your hearing loss, about anything at all, about my journey, your journey, your experiences, my experiences, you can walk up and ask a question, I will talk to anybody at any time.

KEN ARCIA:

I won't bite.

JIM LAFFER:

That is right, I won't bite either.

LINDA DRATTELL:

If we can, is it possible for us to grab an extra couple of minutes? Good. For a couple minutes, does anybody have any questions? I cannot guarantee you answers, but we will do our best.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I am wondering how you feel when you tell someone oh, I am deaf, and then they take a step back, like, oh, I do not want to catch it from you. How do you feel about that?

BERNIE PALMER:

I have seen that. I have been through that. I just tell someone, I do not have Ebola, I am deaf. That's it. I am just like you. If you are patient with me, then we will be able to communicate. If you are not patient with me, then we cannot communicate. It is your choice.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Ken said, it is their problem.

LINDA DRATTELL:

John?

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

This is a statement, not a question, but I think it is appropriate for this panel. One of the first things I ever heard when I came to my first ALDAcon in Seattle was Doctor Jordan say among other things, "deaf" can be frustrating. But "deaf" is also hilarious, and we know that to be true in our own lives. I think one of the most rewarding things we can actually do when we are all together is share the hilarity that we all experience. I mean, the things we thought we heard and we heard wrong, or the song lyrics we make up for ourselves, or the time we left the water running all day, or that sort of thing. You know, in so much of life, we always feel like we are going to be outside, we are the ones who do not get the joke. But here at ALDA, we are all on the inside, and let's share the jokes with each other.

KEN ARCIA:

I want to add a funny story. I went to help a friend of mine work on her computer and as a reward, she was going to make dinner. So she asked me, or what I thought she asked me was “would you like tacos amigo, for dinner?” I said yeah. She asked me “which one?” “What do you mean, which one?” She said, “would you like tacos or meat loaf?” (Laughter).

BERNIE PALMER:

Speaking of funny stories, I would ask each of you, that if you have not met with Tess, please take a moment to go talk to her about funny stories, she has got a good one from two nights ago, the CART writer, Tess.

LINDA DRATTELL:

Okay, great. Well, thank you all for coming. And as Jim said, if you have any questions, or you want to share a story, come on over, we will be here for a few more minutes. We would love to chat with you. Thank you very much. And please do not forget to fill out the evaluation forms.

(Applause)