

**ALDAcon2017**  
**Tina Childress and Karen Putz**  
**How to Spin 27 Plates**

**KAREN PUTZ:**

Welcome to ALDA. We are very excited to have you here. Today we are going to talk about a really unique topic: How to spin plates and keep them from crashing.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

My name is Tina Childress. I live in Champaign, Illinois, so I live where I call south of the state of Chicago because people think that all of Illinois is Chicago; it's not! I am an educational audiologist. I became a hearing audiologist first before beginning to gradually lose my hearing and with no history hearing loss in my family. I became deaf at 29, got my first cochlear implant in 2000 and my second cochlear implant in 2005. I have two implants.

I am both a consumer and a professional and I believe my strength is that I understand both perspectives. When I am presenting to consumers, I want to help people understand technology better and understand the viewpoint of audiologists better.

When I'm an audiologist presenting to audiologists, I want them to understand the consumer viewpoint and realize that people with hearing loss are all whole people. We are not only about our ears. That's what I love to do. That's my passion and why I am here today. I want to help you and I am always happy to help out both as an audiologist and as a fellow ALDAn.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

I am Karen Putz. I live in Naperville, which is about 40 minutes from that state of Chicago. My husband and I have been married for 28 years. We have three adult children. They're 24, 22, and 20. All three of them are deaf or hard of hearing.

I was born with normal hearing. I can remember at a very young age being able to hear. I started losing my hearing in elementary school, got a hearing aid at age 9, and became completely deaf at age 19. (My mother, brothers, and sisters all are hearing impaired.)

My entire life I struggled being hard of hearing and I struggled to fit in. I hated being different. Then, I just woke up one morning and realized I had two choices: I could continue to struggle, or I could embrace the journey. And I'm here today because of that second choice of embracing the journey, instead of continuing to struggle.

Today, my job is working for “Hands and Voices” in Colorado. We are a global, nonprofit organization. We serve families with deaf and hard of hearing children around the world. Our philosophy is simple: Whatever works for your child and your family, is the right choice. It is the same philosophy that we have here at ALDA. Whatever works. How you get your communication does not matter as long as you communicate and connect. That’s the most important thing.

I have two hearing aids that I wear proudly today. I grew up hating my hearing aids and always hid them. And today, I’m proud of them.

I am known as the passion mentor because I love helping people unwrap their passion. My passion is for communicating; that is what I love...whatever works, right?

Tina and I were thinking why not present together?!? We talked about it for years and years. So today is the day that, finally, we are going to talk about some of the things people say to us because they see us spinning those 27 plates.

One of the things they ask is: “How do you do it?” My answer is Passion...

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

When people also ask: “How do you do it?” my answer is that it is because I love what I do. Also, I am organized (I am very Type A) and I have a very good support system. (I also do not require a lot of sleep and drink lots of coffee). Loving what I do, my passion, fuels the fire and keeps me going, but also, in addition to the passion, what works for me is being organized and having a very good support system.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

Another question that we are asked is: “Where do you get all that energy?” It goes back to the passion; the energy comes from focusing on what really attracts me and what I am good at. We lose energy by focusing on things that are not important to us, or by spinning too many plates at the same time (some of which are not all important plates), and by spreading ourselves too thin.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

Another thing people say is “Your husbands must be very supportive”. Yes, both Karen and I have been very lucky with our husbands. They have been very supportive of us, of our children (one of those plates is our children); and, I think that is one reason that we can do what we do

Karen and I are also often asked: “How do you deal with staying positive as a deaf/hard of hearing person?” How do I stay positive? I know to expect that both good and bad days will happen. I think that there is always a grieving process. Many people do not realize that when you lose your hearing, you are losing part

of your hearing self if you were born hearing. How many of you think that?  
Grieving is normal. You have to grieve, because your life is different.

Remember that everyone here has their good days and their bad days. You are here, to get support from all of these amazing people who understand what you are going through. I think that learning from other people and knowing that we are helping each other keeps me going.

I also think to stay positive it is important to surround yourself with positive people. (I am not saying to forget negative people; the negativity might mean that they need help, too, and often those are the people that need love the most.) Just do not surround yourself with negative people because it can cause you to think like they think.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

Yes, some people in your life are energy vampires. Are you familiar with that? You know the people in your life you might spend an hour with them and when you leave, your energy is just gone. They make it harder for you to focus. Try to recognize who are your energy vampires. On your journey, the best and most successful plate spinning happens when you have a positive team around you, people who support you so you can keep your focus on the spinning.

Now I can look back and see the positive side of becoming deaf. I learned the greatest lesson of my life. While I was struggling with it, though, the last thing that anyone could have told me was that this would be a blessing. In the middle of this very real struggle, in the middle of the darkness, I could not see the light. Since that pivotal moment of accepting the journey, things have been amazing.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

When we were discussing this presentation, the first time I did this slide, I thought about using hats. And then I realized I could demonstrate with plates.

In this slide (indicating picture on screen) you can see the various kinds of plates we use in our lives that I want to connect to being hard of hearing. They are disposable paper, plastic, every day, and special occasion.

Disposable plates can represent the less important things we deal with often. Social bluffing, for example, when we pretend we understand and just nod.

Plastic plates represent the things in life we have we try out and practice to learn what works. We practice spinning with plastic plates again and again and the plastic plate may fail, but that is OK. Sometimes we might give up.

Everyday plates are the ones maybe you got from Target. I still have my plates from college. I like them. I'm comfortable with them. I don't care if they get

chipped. They are important plates but I understand that they can endure a little bit of wear and tear.

Special Occasion plates, special plates. That kind of plate that says, "You are special today." Those fancy occasion plates represent the times when you are doing something that you don't normally do.

Every day, we encounter any of these various kinds of plates. We are spinning them.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

This whole deaf and hard of hearing thing is a journey. And (depending what you are doing) the journey spins like the plates at different rates, at different times or when you try out different things. If we are tempted to spin all 27 of all of them, for sure, they will crash. That is why we want you to focus more on the plate spinning in your life. The more you focus, the more you learn how to select your plates, and the more successfully you can spin.

Back to the idea of plates: (showing a picture on the screen. FAMILY PLATE)

This is my family plate. My husband and kids and I treat this plate like fancy china. I spin this plate very carefully, but occasionally it will fall and crack. That's the nature of having a family. It's important to not be distracted when spinning the family plate. Something we tried when our kids were teenagers was cutting out technology. When we went to a restaurant we would pile our phones in the middle of the table. If anyone reached for the phone they have to pay for dinner. It's important to avoid being distracted when you are spinning that family plate.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

Those that know me, know that I cherish my whole family. I'm lucky because they have been my life blood since the beginning. I have two children still at home ages 15 and age 10 and I am doing a lot of juggling so I try to be very organized with this plate.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

(Indicating a different slide: THE PASSIONS PLATE)

Our passions in life are really important. It is important to choose the right plates to spin. When you get to the end of your life and you start looking back, you might look back with regret because you were spinning the wrong plates.

I want to encourage you all, before you leave here, think about the plates that you are spinning in your life. What are some of the plates that you can eliminate so that you can spin the one thing you really want to spin? Spin what you are passionate about. Stop spinning the things you are not passionate about, then focus on spinning the right ones.

Passion is your joy. Here is the thing: For every person in this room, joy, the definition of joy, the definition of passion is an individual thing. That is why you cannot compare your life to someone else's. You and you alone, can define your passion and joy. Only you can live it.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

Ask yourself, whether there are things that you really want to do that you have not done yet. Sometimes trying new things and stepping out of your comfort zone can be very scary, especially when you can't hear.

(Referring to new slide) There is something called "the power of no." Sometimes you just have to say "NO." If you want to maintain balance (with the plates) you sometimes have to stop spinning something. Suppose you are on some committee, like, PTA and that plate is spinning all by itself, but then you are asked to add more. If you add more, that plate is going to topple and something else is going to suffer and not in a good way.

I have come to the realization that I can help people more and am healthier when I say "no" sometimes.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

Every time you say yes, you are adding another plate and saying no to something else. There's only so much of your energy and your time that you can give. So, when you are in a situation facing a decision about more plates the next time, ask yourself whether you can realistically spin one more plate? Is that the plate you want to spin? If it is not, you must say no. I suggest "The Rule of Five." Did you know that your brain can only hold five things at the same time? You can realistically focus on only five plates in your life at a time. So, pick those five plates and make sure you are spinning the right ones.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

(Referring to new slide entitled CHOOSING YOUR TRIBE) Did you know that only 2% of hearing healthcare professionals refer their patients to peer support groups (according to Dr. Sergei Kochkin a specialist in marketing surveys about hearing loss). It saddens me that most audiologists do not refer patients to support groups like ALDA. People with hearing loss want to talk about it with others, but their audiologists are not helping them to find groups like this.

One way you can help change this is to ask at your local or state ALDA chapter for brochures to leave at your Audiologist's office. It's a good way to share with people.

ALDA is where you can learn a lot about things you can do. It is a wonderful resource of people who can help you discover your passion. Please make use of the people in this conference to help you find support.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

How many of you here were mentored by someone shortly after you became deaf or on your deaf hard of hearing journey? A few of you were mentored.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

It doesn't have to be formal mentoring. It's about "learn how to do deaf or hard of hearing" from another deaf or hard of hearing person.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

What we really want to do is challenge you to pay it forward, to spin that plate forward. Spin a plate together with someone especially with those who are new here. I want those of you who are experienced to seek out the newcomers and find some buddies. You could be a mentor. When you mentor someone, you give, but you also get. It goes both ways. If you think back on your own journey, and you recognize the same struggle in someone else, that's where mentorship comes in.

It is being supportive. I think the biggest 'plus' for mentoring is your own personal growth. You grow as a mentor as well as helping someone and being with someone you, yourself, can help them go through it. It's a unique feeling of, 'wow, I recognize your journey. I honor your journey. And I'll be with you on your journey.' That's mentorship.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

Sometimes we do not realize that we need help, until someone offers it. Sometimes people are a little bit shy, so it might just take, like, 'hey, welcome to ALDA, do you have any questions?' It can just start with a conversation. Share your passion. That is how a mentorship can happen; it doesn't have to be formal.

**KAREN PUTZ:**

When you are spinning plates if you don't keep them in motion, you know what's going to happen, right? They are going to crash and some of them are going to break. Life guarantees that some plates are going to crash despite your best efforts. We have learned that sometimes it's okay to let them crash. They crash for a reason. Maybe we are meant to spin fewer plates. Maybe we are meant to spin them differently. Maybe we have to let go of something.

**TINA CHILDRESS:**

That comes back to the "power of saying no."

How many of you feel like you might be spinning too many plates?

How many wish they had more plates or they want to learn new plates?

We start out with those plastic practice plates. When they crash sometimes we pick up the plate and try again; but, sometimes we sweep up that plate and we throw it in the garbage, because it did not work. And that's okay

We will end this session with this quotation:

It's okay to be a glow stick.  
Sometimes you have to break before you shine!

Thank you.

(Editor's note: The above is a summary of this session. Direct quotes are in quotation marks.)

**Tina Childress**, AuD., CCC-A is an educational audiologist in the mainstream and residential school settings, technology and social media aficionado, late-deafened adult fluent in ASL and a bilateral cochlear implant recipient. With her unique perspective and passion for sharing information through social media, she is a sought out international presenter and adjunct lecturer to families, adults and professionals on a variety of topics but especially Hearing Assistive Technology, apps, cochlear implants, advocacy and effective strategies for coping with hearing loss. Dr. Childress is active on many local and national Boards and Committees where she is a strong advocate for accessibility and disseminating resources.

**Karen Putz** is the Co-Director of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Infusion at Hands & Voices. She is a mom to three deaf young adults. Karen is the author of several books, including *The Parenting Journey: Raising Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children* and *The Passionate Lives of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People*. For fun, she walks on water as a barefoot water skier.