

Congratulations, You Have an Interview. What Now?

By Mary Clark

It's one thing to have experienced a misunderstanding at a party or at the dinner table when many overlapping conversations are going on. We can usually just laugh at those times, but to have that happen during a job interview is no laughing matter! Let's talk about the job interview process.



You've just answered a question during a job interview with what you thought was an intelligent, succinct and thoughtful reply. The person on the other side of the table is looking puzzled, and there is an uncomfortable period of silence. Maybe one of the following thoughts is going through your mind:

- Oh no, I misunderstood the question.
- They are testing me to see how I handle the obvious—that I don't hear well.
- I just blew another job interview!

Job interviews are stressful enough without having to deal with the uncertainties about revealing our hearing loss, either intentionally, or inadvertently as in the example above. First of all, we should only be applying for jobs that we are qualified for. Although this seems obvious, there might be some duties that are not fully described in the job description, or the information we have when we are applying.

The interview is the time when potential employers learn about you and your skills and when you learn about the job, the people you will work with and how accommodating they might be to your hearing loss. Make the most of this getting-to-know-you situation.

Should I Reveal My Hearing Loss in the Interview?

It is important to know that we are not required to reveal our hearing loss, or for that matter, any disability during an interview, and the interviewer is not allowed to ask us either. This article is not a position statement to say you should or should not reveal your hearing loss. My goal is to provide a sort of road map toward giving you confidence when going on a job interview. Since hearing loss is an invisible disability the burden falls on us to ensure that the interview will showcase our skills and talents and not our disability.

When we have a hearing loss, the solutions for communication come in two main categories.

- First, are the behavioral solutions. These are things like facing the

person who is speaking, or asking him or her to not sit in front of a window with bright light shining in our face.

- Second, are the technology communication solutions. Some solutions can remain invisible, such as using the setting on your hearing aid to minimize the background noise, or turning up the volume. A clipboard loop can be a clever way to use a technology solution without revealing what it does if that is the way you want to handle it. Other technology solutions will require an explanation, such as an FM system, or a microphone that connects to hearing aids.

Take Charge of the Phone Screening Interview

Most screening interviews will be about your background, qualifications, your current job or last job, salary questions, and some generic screening questions. If the potential employer feels there is enough to pursue, a face-to-face interview is usually scheduled. Consider these options:

- If you can't use the regular voice phone then ask if the screening interview might take place in person, and we'll be obliged to offer some reason why. *I have a hearing loss, and using the telephone can result in difficulty understanding the questions. (Always use "I" language.)*
- Use a captioned telephone, but be prepared to explain unexpected delays since sometimes the captioning falls behind or the quality is not perfect. Don't assume the captioning will work perfectly, and be prepared to explain. *I have a hearing loss, and I am using a captioned phone. This helps me make sure I understand what you are saying. Sometimes there is a delay in the captions, so if I don't seem to be responding, it could be because I am waiting for the captions to catch up. This is a tool I use to help make sure I hear you best. It is also a confidential conversation.*

Face-to-Face Interview

If we have **not** revealed our hearing loss prior to the face-to-face interview, there are several conditions that can work

against us during the interview, so try to get out in front of those situations. Here are some examples:

Interviewing with one person:

- Try to control the environment so the person we are talking to is not sitting in front of a window (*The sun is in my eyes, could we move our chairs so I can see your face better?*) This request doesn't say anything about having a hearing loss.
- If the room is especially noisy, with a loud air conditioner, for example, we could ask if we could move to a quieter place.
- A technology solution could be using a clipboard loop. This allows us to use our t-coil, and zoom in on the interviewer for improved listening.

Interviewing with several people:

- Position yourself for the best view of everyone without light in your eyes.
- If you have an assistive listening device that will significantly improve your ability to hear and understand, then decide if you want to use it—along with the explanation of why. Show confidence when you briefly explain how it helps you hear.

Do Research Before the Interview

Applying for a job that allows us to be well situated for success is part of the research we need to do before we show up for the interview. If this isn't possible, we need to be prepared with questions, such as:

- How much phone work is required in this position? Will I be expected to participate on speaker phone calls?
- Will there be a lot of virtual meetings, using conference calls with team members who are not on site?
- How many are on the team of people I will be working with?
- Is the environment where my work station is located a noisy one?

Once we've exposed our concerns about these things, there might be some recognition that we have special needs, but it's still not required that we reveal

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Top 5 Reasons Why Job Interviews Terrify Us

- 1 We are afraid of revealing our hearing loss.
- 2 We are afraid of sounding stupid if we misunderstand a question.
- 3 We are afraid that the job will highlight our hearing loss, and not our talents and skills.
- 4 We don't want to be dismissed without a chance to demonstrate what we CAN do instead of what we can't do.
- 5 We don't know how to tell our potential employers about our hearing loss if it becomes necessary.

Interview *continued from page 19*

our hearing loss. That is totally up to you and what you feel is best. Revealing your hearing loss could be perceived as being proactive and having a can-do attitude when we are looking for ways to be successful on the job. However, we never want to sound confrontational; how we say these things can have a huge impact on the success of the interview:

Instead of this... *If I get this job, I will need some ADA accommodations.*

Say this... *I look forward to working with you. When I join your company I can explain the things that will help me with my hearing loss.*

Instead of this... *When I use the phone I can only be on the phone for about 45 minutes in one continuous time.*

Say this... *There are several options for telephones that will make it easier for me to do my job when teamwork is required and distance meetings require conference calls.*

Instead of this... *I have trouble with impromptu meetings with small groups.*

Say this... *When I start this job I can teach my co-workers and supervisors communication techniques that work best with my hearing loss.*

In all cases, it is up to us to make the people we are talking with feel com-

fortable. The more natural we behave about our hearing loss during the interview, the less likely it will become a factor when considering us for the job. It is important that we project confidence and being at ease. This doesn't mean that our hearts won't be pounding in our chest, and feeling terrified about the actual job interview, but the more confidence we project, the better. The interview is about how well we match the requirements for the job and showcasing our skills and experience—it should never be about our limitations.

Even people with good hearing get nervous on job interviews. How we handle ourselves during the interview will be a direct example of how we will handle our hearing loss on the job. A successful and confident interview will reap positive attitudes toward us for a long time. **HLM**

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How to Tell a Potential Employer about Your Hearing Loss

- Use "I" language.
- Don't say "I am hard of hearing or I have a hearing loss" and stop there. The interviewer will feel like they are being put on the spot, and won't know how to react, creating an awkward moment.
- Say "I have a hearing loss and.... Offer a brief explanation like "I have a hearing loss and I wear hearing aids to help me hear better."
- Say "I have a hearing loss and it helps me if you will face me when you are speaking." Or, "I have a hearing loss and it will help me see you better if you are not sitting in front of the window with the bright light behind you."
- Say "I have a hearing loss and I need to see your face, so if you can avoid putting your hand in front of your mouth, it will help me understand you better."
- Say "I have a hearing loss and it has not interfered with being successful in my previous jobs."