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It's a Marathon, Not a Race

Communication successfully involves consistency and endurance.

Anna Gilmore Hall is executive director of HLAA and can be reached at agilmorehall@hearingloss.org.

Communication within a family, regardless of your family situation, can be challenging—just ask my husband and sons! At HLAA we know that hearing loss affects the entire family every single day. We provide individuals and their families support and strategies for living successfully with hearing loss.

But recently, I realized an important concept that might need to be reinforced for both individuals with hearing loss and for their family and friends: communicating successfully involves consistency and endurance!

At an Institute of Medicine (IOM) meeting last month, one of the panelists shared how difficult it was to interact with family members at family events such as Thanksgiving. This occurs even though he is a successful audiologist who has lived with his hearing loss for many years. He uses assistive listening devices (ALDs) with great confidence and has both a supportive spouse and family, but still estimates that he is missing about 70 percent of the conversation at large family social events.

How does this happen? It happens because even though they have known him for many years and are aware of his hearing loss, people forget to face him or use the simple communication strategies that he has taught them. He gets tired of reminding everyone to face him or not to talk to him when the dog is barking—so he tunes out and becomes left out of the good times happening around him. This experience speaks to my point that endurance is needed. Even when we know better, we can forget how to use the best communication strategies.

One of the staff members in the HLAA office recently shared a story about attending a wedding. It was not until a few hours into the event that she thought of putting an assistive listening device at the microphone to hear the toast to the bride and groom and other conversations that were occurring. This experience speaks to my point that consistency is required. We need to be prepared to use what works best in difficult listening situations as they arise.

Another story I heard recently was from a wife whose husband had lost his hearing several years ago. They had stopped going out to dinner because the background noise made it too difficult to enjoy a conversation with their meal. By accident, they learned about ALDs that could be used in these kinds of difficult listening situations. They have purchased one, used it successfully, and are now resuming their social life and going out again! HLAA does not want to leave a positive outcome like this to chance. Our organization works to inform you of changing technology and help you find new devices that are coming to market which could make a big difference for you.

Communication is a two-way street. The person who is talking has the responsibility to do what they can to make it easier. But, it is also the responsibility of the person with hearing loss to use technology and educate others when communication breakdowns occur. Both parties need to do their part consistently.

The point I am hoping to make is that even if you, as a family member or friend, or you as the person with hearing loss, have been faced with communication challenges for some time, it might be time to stop and check yourself. Be sure that there aren't ways your communication can be improved and that you aren't falling into some bad habits.

Over time we can all get complacent or tired of always having to bring up these issues. Sometimes it is just easier not to bother. Don't! Good communication facilitates healthy relationships. Don't fall prey to taking the easy way out.

Regardless of how long you have been dealing with your hearing loss—take another look at how you are managing and see if HLAA, one of our chapters, or another resource can help you live life to the fullest!

Do you have a story to share about consistency and endurance in coping with hearing loss? Share it on our Facebook page. **HLM**