



Welcoming Motivated Workers!

ABILITIES

Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities

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Dear Friends ~ Celebrating Deaf Awareness Week



This week - the last full week in September - is Deaf Awareness Week. It is held in commemoration of the first World Congress of the Deaf that was held that week in 1951. It is also known as the International Week of the Deaf (or International Week of Deaf People). The goal of Deaf Awareness Week is to draw attention to deaf people, their accomplishments and their issues. We are pleased to take this opportunity to celebrate Deaf Awareness Week by providing you with valuable information and resources and by sharing with you Mike Farley's employment success story.

We'd also like to leave you with the wisdom of I. King Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet College, who said, "Deaf people can do anything but hear."

Best regards,

Fred Jones, Chair,

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

and

Susan Chicoine, on behalf of the Vermont Business Leadership Network

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A Simple Story of Employment Success



From left to right: Dave Brisson, Mike Farley, Mike Derway

The story of Mike Farley's 20 years of employment success at Offset House in Essex Junction is actually a simple one. Mike is a person with a hearing loss who communicates by reading lips, sign language, and verbal speech. He lost most of his hearing at age 1 due to the chicken pox. He has been working as a baler (operating a paper recycling machine) at Offset House for 20 years - since he was 26 years old.

When I sat down with Mike and his supervisors - Mike Derway, Shipping Manager, and Dave Brisson, Assistant Shipping Manager - on September 15, 2008, I was expecting to hear stories of barriers overcome, attitudes changed, co-workers won over. Instead, I heard nothing but the story of an individual who applied for a job, was hired, and has been contributing to the company for 20 years. Accommodations? Just one - a light was connected to his baler to let him know when it was full as he can't hear the machine itself. Also, new employees or outside truckers or vendors who arrive and meet Mike for the first time are advised of his hearing loss and told to face Mike directly so he can read their lips. That's it.

As it should be. Mike's employment truly exemplifies our goal with regard to the employment of a person with a disability - that a loyal, hard working individual with a strong work ethic is employed and successfully doing his job. That's it, oh and yes, he happens to have a hearing loss. A simple story.

Workers who communicate using sign language need the same kind of social interaction that hearing employees do.

Therefore, if you have a good worker who uses sign language who you want to keep on board, consider hiring other employees who sign - or train co-workers in signing. This will enhance socialization and increase the likelihood of your employee remaining with you.

You can find sign language classes through the Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Words of wisdom were minimal from Mike and both of his supervisors, as in a sense for them his employment was nothing special or out of the ordinary. The supervisors would encourage other employers to give an applicant with a disability a chance. Mike simply suggests that a person with a hearing loss should try to engage as much as possible with co-workers and colleagues - participate rather than separate. All agreed that Mike worked hard to prove himself, and that his positive personality and comfort with himself also helped him to be successful.



During the interview there was much apologizing that this story wasn't more compelling - that they didn't have meaningful answers to my more probing questions. For me, however, this story is extremely compelling for its ordinariness. As it should be.

Do You Know the Difference?

Do you know the distinctions between the different types of hearing loss?

Deaf (Culturally Deaf): Culturally deaf people are generally born deaf or become deaf before learning how to speak. American Sign Language (ASL) is their first language, and they often learn English as a second language. People who consider themselves "Deaf" are often very involved in the deaf community.

Deaf (Non-culturally deaf): People who are deaf usually have a profound hearing loss (they are medically deaf) but they cannot sign. They may or may not have attended deaf schools, but they often relate to the hearing world more than the Deaf community. Some of the challenges routinely faced by deaf people have to do with communication difficulties, identity, and social withdrawal.

Late-deafened: Late-deafened people are born and grow up hearing then they become deaf later in their lives due to medical problems, traumatic events or genetic reasons. This can happen "overnight" or over a period of time. Late-deafened people often experience severe difficulties when it comes to communication, self-identity and relationships. They normally continue to

consider themselves part of the hearing world rather than the Deaf community.

Deaf-Blind: This form of deafness includes people who also have vision loss. Deaf-blind people can be from both the Deaf community and hearing world. Some are born without any hearing or vision abilities. Others are born with one or both sensory abilities then lose their hearing or vision over time due to medical, traumatic or genetic reasons. Deaf-blind people often face challenges related to having to cope with two major disabilities, social difficulties, communication and relationships. Some Deaf-blind people use ASL and others use spoken English.

Hard-of-Hearing: People with mild to severe hearing loss in one or both of their ears are normally considered Hard-of-hearing. The majority of Hard-of-hearing people start off with good hearing abilities then they lose some of their hearing at any given age due to a variety of reasons. Those people almost never use ASL nor do they identify themselves as part of the Deaf community. Instead they rely on assistive technology, such as hearing aids and amplified telephones, communication strategies and coping skills. Denial is often an issue.

Interviewing a Person who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Taken from "Tips for Communicating with People with Hearing Loss", a publication from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology, www.ntid.rit.edu

The following tips will facilitate an interview with a job applicant who has a hearing loss and make the interview more productive and comfortable for both the interviewer and interviewee.

Provide company literature for the applicant to review before the interview. This helps the applicant become familiar with the company, its components, and terms.

Provide a written itinerary if the applicant is to be interviewed by more than one person. Include the names, titles, and meeting times for each individual the applicant will see. Speechreading an unfamiliar person's title and name during a meeting often is difficult. An itinerary allows the person to be better informed, at ease, and able to follow up later if needed.

Inform your receptionist or secretary beforehand that you are expecting an applicant who has a hearing loss for an interview. This will make it easier for the receptionist to assist the person and facilitate any necessary paperwork. Remember to find a location with good lighting for the interview.

Find out how the applicant would prefer to communicate before the interview. Ask if the applicant would like to have a sign language interpreter present. Through an interpreter you may receive a better idea of how the applicant's skills match the job. If you use an interpreter, position the interpreter next to you so that the applicant can look easily at both individuals. Clarify

whether the applicant will speak for himself or whether the interpreter will voice what the applicant signs. Maintain eye contact with the applicant and address your questions directly to him or her.

Questions and Answers about Deafness and Hearing Impairments in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces the employment provisions of the ADA. Click [here](#) to access a document that is part of a question-and-answer series addressing particular disabilities in the workplace. It explains how the ADA might apply to job applicants and employees with hearing impairments, including:

- when a hearing impairment is a disability under the ADA;
- when an employer may ask an applicant or employee about a hearing impairment;
- how employers can ensure the confidentiality of applicants' and employees' medical information;
- what types of reasonable accommodations an individual with a hearing disability may need;
- to what extent an employer must provide a reasonable accommodation to an individual with a hearing disability;
- how an employer should handle safety concerns and harassment issues; and,
- how an individual with a hearing impairment can file a claim against an employer under the ADA or the Rehabilitation Act.

Click [here](#) to access the complete document.

Reasonable Accommodations for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees

The following list is courtesy of [Vermont's Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf](#). To connect with a RCD counselor for personalized service, please click [here](#).

This list is intended to be a menu of ideas and technical, strategic, and procedural options. Each employee has individual strengths and particular needs related to the extent and nature of their disability. Each job has its own particular requirements and areas of flexibility.

Many of the options listed below will cost the employer nothing or only require a nominal initial expenditure. Some "accommodations" utilize equipment and

standard practices already in place at the job site. In fact, many employers find that implementing communication accommodations for a hearing impaired employee improves communication for all of their employees throughout their business.

This list is intended to be a starting point for dialogue between the employer and employee. The best solutions come from a collaborative effort around designing, planning, and implementing effective accommodations.

Procedural Accommodations:

- Get the employee's attention first before speaking (wave, flash the lights, make eye contact, walk into the field of vision)
- Face the employee from a distance of 3-5 feet when speaking
- When necessary, give written directions or instructions
- Hold meetings in a quiet location without noisy or visual distractions
- Use a circular or oblong table at group meetings so that it is easier to hear everyone and their faces are visible for lip reading.
- Take turns talking at meetings and indicate who is speaking by raising one's hand.
- Print out a meeting agenda beforehand or post it on the board at the meeting and refer to it.
- Have the employee sit next to the notetaker at meetings. Provide printed minutes where possible.
- Post a copy of all procedural or policy changes, and send via memo or email.
- Provide staff awareness training (i.e. sign language, or a communications strategies workshop).
- Ensure that video tape or CD training materials are captioned or have an accompanying written transcript.
- Use a buddy system for PA announcements (and follow up announcement with a written copy).

Communication Accommodations:

- Hire interpreters for meetings and trainings. (In Vermont, interpreters may be obtained through the [Vermont Interpreter Referral Services](#)).
- Use CART (live captioning) for meetings and trainings
- Use Telecommunication Relay Service for phone communication ([Vermont Relay / 711](#))
- Email, Fax, and Instant Messaging

Technical Options:

- Phone amplifiers and/or headsets
- Visual phone systems ([CAPTEL](#), [Sorenson](#) videophone, uniphone)
- TTY (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf)
- PC and modem with video relay service (to make / receive phone calls)
- [Sprint Relay](#) and [Sprint WebCapTel](#)
- Assistive Listening Systems (FM, Infrared, Pockettalker)
- Vibrating or Alpha (message) pagers
- Vibrating or flashing light call button
- Visual signal alerts (phone, door, customer arrival, fire alarm)
- Mirror on PC so employee is aware of staff and/or customers approaching from behind.
- Amplified stethoscopes, visual readout BP cuffs
- Flashing timer

For more information on available assistive technologies, the State of Vermont's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation offers a comprehensive [list of assistive technology](#) for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Employment Services for Employers and Job Seekers who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened

A wide range of services for the Deaf, hard of hearing, and late-deafened are available from the [Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (DVR). These services are unique because the State Coordinator and all of the Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD's) are experienced sign language users and have extensive knowledge of Deaf culture and hearing loss in general. This enables them to assist individuals to accomplish their individual career goals. They work with Deaf, hard of hearing, and late-deafened individuals, and can also provide support to potential employers.

Services may include provision of technical assistance in different settings, i.e., accommodations at work and home, adaptive equipment, technical assistance around the Americans with Disabilities Act, information about deaf and hard of hearing clubs, associations, and support groups, in addition to employment services. RCD counselors can also provide employers with information on resources and tax credits available to them.

Employment services for the Deaf, hard of hearing, and late deafened may include:

- Employment Counseling and Guidance

- Career development
- Finding your job interests and skills
- Resume writing
- Interview skills
- Keeping your job
- School and job training
- Job retention

- Accommodations

- Information on accommodations
- Accommodation tips for employers
- Special equipment for work (if eligible)

- Related Services

- Information and referral
- Wide-range consultation
- Job leads

Melita DeBellis,

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
melita@gcepd.org; 802-434-6600; www.hireus.org

and

Christine McCarthy

Vermont Business Leadership Network
vabired@aol.com; 802-878-1107; www.vtbln.org

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