

Work talk

By Damien Howard © www.eartroubles.com

This article covers some of the common experiences of people with auditory processing problems in the workplace. While people with listening difficulties often excel when able to use their skills effectively, 'talk-focused' work processes can present challenges.

The job interview process can be challenging as people are quite understandably anxious that they will be judged if they misunderstand a question or take too long in answering the impromptu questions asked by unfamiliar people. The anxiety of interviews can be minimized by being able to prepare answers for questions beforehand. If the application process does not allow for this to occur, then it can be helpful to prepare answers for questions that are likely to be asked.

Starting a new job, changing jobs or changes in the workplace is often difficult for those with listening difficulties. Until work demands and routines are clearly understood, there is often pressure to quickly take in large amounts of verbal information. People can cope better if they are able to structure how information is presented to them so as to maximize visual and contextual learning. If possible, try to negotiate at the outset of job orientation to be able to observe people carrying out work in the real life situations. It can also help to read as much as possible about the work, especially to get 'the big picture' of things. Understanding the full context of tasks helps to work out what may have been missed in verbal explanations.

Face-to-face contact or reading are often preferred ways of communicating for those with listening difficulties. Face-to-face communication provides lots of non-verbal cues that help interpret words but even this can be difficult in situations where there is background noise. Open plan offices, noisy equipment, social gatherings and meetings can all make it harder to listen. Some workplaces, such as the public service, promote a culture of detachment from work issues that can make it harder to listen for people with listening difficulties. The absence of emotion can mean there are fewer non verbal cues that can help interpret what is being said. One person described it as being like listening to "blank faces going blah, blah, blah". At these times listening

overload is common, where people simply tune out from being overwhelmed by having to listen to too many words. People who 'go on and on', rather than get to the point quickly, can also create listening overload.

Reading can bypass having to gain information by listening. The rise of email as a communication tool is much appreciated by many people with listening problems. It is commonplace to ask people to email as well as, or instead of, talking about it. It is especially appreciated as a replacement to talking on the phone. Phone communication demands people listen without any visual cues being available to help clarify words. It is common that phone communication, especially talking to unfamiliar people about unfamiliar things, is very hard for many people with listening difficulties.

As well as difficulties there are lots of assets people bring to the workplace because of their adjustment to listening challenges. People often excel in areas where visual information processing is needed and may gravitate to areas such as graphics, design and information technology. Their use of preparation as a way of dealing with listening demands means they are often good at planning. The need to find different ways of doing things can result in problem solving skills and persisting in the face of adversity, as well as understanding the feelings of others with learning challenges. People's skills in reading body language may contribute to them being adept in areas such as sales or teaching. While some may enjoy working with many people when providing services they know well, others prefer to work with a small number of co-workers, where they have high levels of control over work that does not involve lots of listening demands. Some people prefer working in a team where their strengths are appreciated and weaknesses compensated for, while others prefer to work largely by themselves.

There is a range of work contexts and tasks where people listening difficulties

excel. Support, flexibility and persistence may be needed to face challenges, both by workers with listening problems and those who work with them. People often cope better if they are allowed the flexibility to find the best way for them to do the job. Workplaces that seek to achieve greater efficiency by 'talk focused' standard processes can make people with listening difficulties appear inefficient. It helps if supervisors and peers understand that auditory processing problems do not reflect lack of motivation or limited capacity, as workers remaining confident and being respected are key factors for successful employment outcomes for those with listening difficulties. The work of APDUK is an important contribution toward better employment outcomes for those with auditory processing difficulties. Share the information in this article with others to help overcome the common misunderstandings people have about those with listening difficulties in the workplace.

The tsunami and auditory processing

Auditory processing problems are likely to be prevalent in the areas devastated by the tsunami last year. The areas devastated are mostly poor and persistent middle ear disease, which commonly leads to auditory processing problems, is widespread in poor communities where there is inadequate nutrition and limited access to health care. This means that auditory processing problems will be widespread in the population of tsunami devastated areas. This will impact on recovery and especially hamper the work of outside development agencies.

To read more on this read trauma and tsunami on the articles page at www.eartroubles.com

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When you speak to me...

By Nina Robertson ©

When you speak I want to hear your words, but my brain hears:



The traffic outside



The dog barking next door



The phone ringing in the next room



The laughter and voices down the hall

The clicking of the keyboard



The ticking of the clock



The radio playing

The clacking of footsteps on the floor

The rattle of papers

The humming of the air conditioner

The brushing of the drapes

The rustle of the leaves on the window



And your voice.

When you speak I want to understand your words, but my brain tries to understand:

The traffic outside

The dog barking next door

The phone ringing in the next room

The laughter and voices in the hall

The clicking of the keyboard

The ticking of the clock

The radio playing

The clacking of footsteps on the floor

The rattle of papers

The humming of the air conditioner

The brushing of the drapes

The rustle of the leaves on the window

And your words.