

ALDAcon2017
Career Success After Hearing Loss
Dr. David Baldrige
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DAVID BALDRIDGE:

The agenda for today is:

- Employment trends
- General career success predictors
- Hearing loss & careers
- Common strategies & tactics

First, I want to talk about employment trends. Some of the trends are hopeful for us, others are troublesome. It is good to have data on things that predict salary and happiness in the workplace. We can look at the job market and see how it is going to change in years to come. There is a lot of research on the general predictors of success, mostly for people with hearing; this research does not consider disabled people, however. We will start with that foundation and then look at how it is different and how it is the same for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. We will end by talking about common strategies and tactics that people use to find success in the workplace.

In business, we talk about the highest and best usage for a piece of property or equipment, and for individuals. As part of that, our talk today really is not about disability, it is about ability. People do not pay you for what you cannot do, they pay you for what you can do. That is the same for everybody. Sometimes, for people with hearing loss, it is harder to showcase what they can do. Sometimes communication can get in the way of people adding value at work. Our focus, however, should be what you can do - your abilities, not your disabilities.

At work, the main focus needs to be the value that you can add, what you can give to your employer, to your co-workers, and to your customers. It is fine for us to ask for accommodations for things that we need in order to contribute, but we cannot lose sight of making sure that we are focusing on how we add value to the workplace. And that gets into the notion of “job crafting” which refers to changing our job just a little bit so that we can add the most value to our employer's workplace. For example, how many people use e-mail instead of the telephone when you can? Yes, thank God for e-mail. You could switch so that your co-worker could do the phone work and you could do the e-mail work. That is what we call “job crafting” - taking a job and making it fit you. Accommodation helps, too, but if you can craft the job so it fits you with or without accommodation, then you are better off.

I most admire people who have purposeful lives, purpose-driven work and I think that is the ultimate goal. Bill Graham talked about finding yourself, or refining yourself, and figuring out how you can add the most value to the world around you. That is the same as finding your purpose and your hearing loss needs to be a part of that.

I am going to talk you through my background quickly. I got “the hearing test” in third grade. I walked into that test normal and left that test hard of hearing. Nothing changed except that, suddenly, I was different from the other kids. I was able to function as a fairly normal, little kid, and was not too worried about communication. I was able to pass through junior high and high school, always sitting up front in the classroom. It was not until college that I could no longer communicate on the phone. I took classes where I knew the professor had written a book (thinking that the lecture would match the book.) I would follow other students’ notes. That is how I got through undergraduate programs and graduate school in Michigan for my MBA. I had an FM system too, which helped a little bit.

The MBA led first to my regular business path, as I worked for IBM, Hewlett Packard. After a couple years at Hewlett Packard, I was bored and socially isolated so I quit to become a ski bum. When I ran out of money, it was time to rejoin the work world. And that led me to Project Adventure and my first experience in education. During that time, I went from hard of hearing to full on deaf. I really could not hear anything. I understood a little bit with help from speech reading and FM equipment.

At that point of being totally deaf, for various reasons, I decided to go back and get my PhD. In retrospect, I was very naive for someone who is completely deaf to do this. All my learning occurred via captioning, which is very difficult when dealing with an instructor doing PhD level statistics on the board at the same time. I am so glad I did it when I was young.

During this time, my initial research was on accommodation and why people do not request the accommodations that they need, I realized people do what I call cognitive calculus, in that they weigh the cost and benefits. Sometimes the costs are not real, like they are afraid of asking. Other times they are very real, as they worry that if they add accommodation expense, they may become more marginalized.

After becoming completely deaf, I started to interact with people who were born Deaf, and learning to sign. I realized how smart many of these people were but that when they spoke, hearing people perceived them differently. People who are hearing want to do the right thing most of the time. Typically, they do not know what the right thing is, and when they hear someone who speaks differently from them there is an automatic negative attribution. The biggest picture was that there is a lot of wasted ability out there which ties into my purpose of helping individuals like you and helping organizations, tap into abilities, tap into under-utilized abilities. That benefits everybody.

And I realized that for me, in academics, there was an opportunity to take a lot of research from a rehabilitation context into a management context. Rehabilitation is about getting you back into the workplace and my focus is more about diversity management. I asked, what is it with leadership, including self-leadership, and with management that allows people to express their abilities in the workplace?

A lot of the business research is about people with disabilities. But people with disabilities are not a group. We do not hang out together necessarily. In fact, we are incredibly different from one another: different disabilities, different ages of onset, different insecurities – all which lead to different needs in the workplace.

As I mentioned before, we need to get people to think of abilities instead of disabilities. Look at Stephen Hawking who is disabled in many different ways. He is brilliant. You have to remind people that the disability is not being “less able.” People with disabilities, people in this room, are above average, average and below average in what they do. I also remind people that persons with disabilities - they are men, they are women, they are parents, they are young, they are old, they are all these different things that also need to be taken into account. Often where we describe disability we lose sight of everything else.

How many of you are currently employed? Mostly we have people who are currently employed. That is the main focus of this workshop is to help people who are currently employed and, also hopefully be helpful to some people who are looking for work.

What do people in the general population mean by career success? They are looking for good pay, equal status or promotion, and job satisfaction. I learned from researching people who are deaf and hard of hearing that the same things apply. We want pay and we want to be paid well. We want promotions and status as well as job satisfaction. However, for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, the focus shifts more to finding and keeping jobs, job fit, finding a good boss, finding an organization where you can be yourself and you can contribute your abilities. All this is key for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. We all hope for a boss and co-workers who understand and empathize with us and help us do our best job at work. When you have a great boss, and then he/she possibly moves on, retires, then a new boss comes in, you really struggle with that transition. That is a common experience with deafened people. Inclusion is another measure of success for deaf and hard of hearing people.

These are the general predictors of career success:

Salary: Educational level, Political skills, Work experience, Cognitive ability

Promotions: Training and development, Extraversion, Social capital, Hours worked

Satisfaction: Locus of control, Supervisor supportiveness, Career sponsorship, Training and development, Proactivity

A couple of key points about this study. First, these variables (on PowerPoint slide) only predict about 20 percent of the overall variation in *Salary* and in *Promotions*. These same variables, however, explain almost twice as much variation in *Career Satisfaction*. In other words, it is easier to predict, and perhaps control, one's level of *Job/career Satisfaction* while people may have less control over their *Salaries* and rate of *Promotion*. They are more likely to be able to control their level of Satisfaction. I suspect that this may be especially true for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Second, one key variable is a personality trait *Locus of Control*, or the degree to which people believe that they are in control of their lives or life course. People described as

having an *Internal Locus of Control* believe that they are in greater control of their life course, while people with an *External Locus of Control* believe that external events — beyond their control — have a greater influence on their life course. This study finds that people with an *Internal Locus of Control* have higher *Satisfaction*. *Supervisor Supportiveness* is another important predictor of *Career Satisfaction*. While more research is needed, these variables may be even more important for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

These are the general job market trends that I am sure a lot of you are aware of and they are worth talking about in the context of hearing loss.

Job Specialization. We used to be “Jacks of all trades.” Increasingly, however, people are paid to do something narrow and specific where they can add a lot of value. I see Job Specialization as favorable for most people who are deaf or hard of hearing, because they do not need to do everything, but instead need to do a few things well.

Job Flexibility. This is also increasing, and that is also favorable for us. Being able to work from home is a huge help to people who have impairments, including people who are visually impaired. For people who are deaf and hard of hearing, it can be that notion of job crafting, carving out a job that fits you well.

Technology, such as cochlear implants, is a huge benefit for many of us; E-mail, as opposed to phone, is a huge benefit. Job specialization, job flexibility, increases in technology, all help us a lot.

Globalization is tricky. That is because we are increasingly competing against workers all over the world.

Job Security. Increasingly, employment is not like a five, ten, or 20-year prospect. That makes it hard for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. The ADA is even more difficult to apply in the context where everybody is kind of an independent contractor. A trend that I worry about, is that there will be less and less job security for people.

All these things just make it more important for you to find your highest and best usage and find contacts where you can add value.

From there I want to focus on a specific study that a colleague and I published last month. It is entitled “Human Relations” (Baldrige and Kulkarni 2017). We did 50 in-depth interviews with deafened people; some are members of ALDA, some are members of other organizations. We focused on people who are successful. We asked these people how they went through the transition after they became deaf or hard of hearing and what they did to stay successful or regain success after that transition. We identified these common processes:

Accepting Hearing Loss. Recognizing that your biology has changed, you are now a person who has hearing loss. Everything else about you is still there, though. If you

continue to try to operate as someone who has normal hearing, it is going to be difficult.

Changed Identities. This is a little bit different. Understanding you changed biologically is different from identifying that “I am a deafened person.” Bill Graham actually coined that word “deafened,” because he experienced not being culturally Deaf. He found that if you are in conflict with yourself then, employers, co-workers, supervisors, cannot be comfortable with you, either.

Managing Hearing Loss. This is a step where your audiologist becomes your best friend. It is when you learn what you can do to maximize your hearing, and about other tools and places such as ALDA.

New Networks: This can involve meeting people like yourself. Bill Graham mentioned that our relationships with old friends change as does the level of communication. Intimacy changes. Not everyone will be patient, and you have to let people go. That is fine. Save your energy for people who “get it,” who want to connect with you, with people who are like you, who are also deaf or hard of hearing. These people can become your new family, your new best friends.

Redefining Career Success involves being able to help other people to add value. It is not as much about money and getting a promotion. If you feel helpless, help someone. It is so easy to do. In helping other people, we are helping ourselves. As part of that, allow yourself to be helped, because you are often helping that other person when you do. In some ways, that makes us more mature in our pursuit.

Job and Career Crafting is the final step. After people deal with the other steps, they start to figure out how they can take their job and make it fit them as a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. Again, an example would be focusing more on written communication, focusing on individual meetings, not group meetings. I know a fundraiser who stopped taking people to Starbucks, the world's noisiest place. Try to meet people in quiet locations. Sometimes, though, adjustments can mean a whole new job, a whole new organization. Start with what you have first, though then if you need to change your job, or change your employer, you can do that. It is hard getting back in. Sometimes it means going back to the school, retooling, going to something like accounting or computer systems that is not verbal communication intensive.

In the research that we did, the most common challenges that came up, not surprisingly, were regarding communication. We all experience challenges on the phone, in meetings, communicating with supervisors, in particular, sometimes with co-workers, sometimes with customers. Finding a way to make communication as easy as you can is key for a lot of people. Again, the simple things are one-on-one, in writing, quiet locations, good lighting. For example, when I have a meeting with colleagues, I know I want my back to the window or my back to the light so the light is other faces and I can speech-read as I need to.

The less obvious challenges would be impression management, isolation, stress, and

fatigue. And several of these often go together.

Speech-reading is stressful; it is hard work. It causes stress and also fatigue. We have to think about that next meeting, we have to worry about other things that other people do not worry about. When I go to a conference, arranging captioning starts two or three months before I present. Not here, but if I go to an academic conference, it takes time, it takes work. So, stress and fatigue, can lead to isolation as we try to conserve our energy. It is hard work and this leads to the impression that you are unsociable.

On the other hand, we want to express ourselves as capable, confident people who are worth being paid a lot of money to work someplace, so we need to present ourselves as capable, competent professionals. At the same time, we need to let people know about our hearing loss. Managing those things is referred to as impression management. Other people also do impression management. They come across as being helpful, good bosses, good co-workers, but they also do not want to say something stupid. They do not want to have misunderstandings or cause embarrassment. The easiest way to do that is to avoid people who are deaf and hard of hearing. So, stress, fatigue and impression management really work together as a challenge, in addition to the communication context.

Below is the process that people go through in adjusting to becoming deaf or hard of hearing. The day-to-day, boots on the ground strategies that people use in order to remain employed, in order to have the highest job satisfaction that they can.

1. Maximize the benefit that you receive from hearing aids, cochlear implants and other technologies.
2. Know yourself and find your highest and best uses.
3. Take an unflinching look at how hearing loss impacts your work and your relationships.
4. Job crafting.
5. Maximize your human and social capital.
6. Choose a positive mindset.
7. Build strong individual relationships.
8. Practice positive self-advocacy.
9. Stay abreast of assistive technology

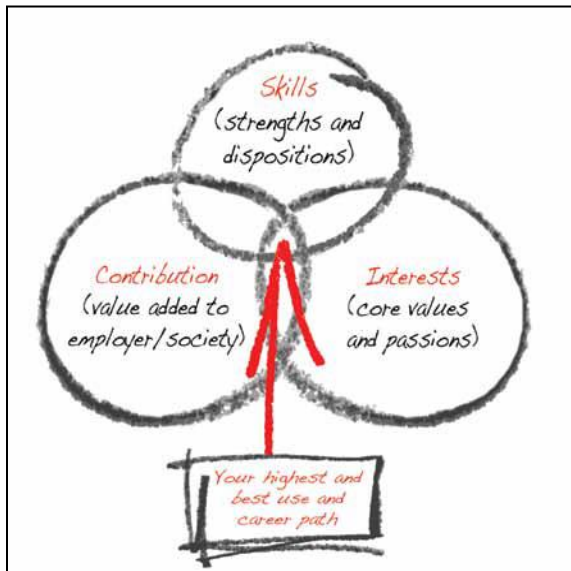
I want to stress number three: take an unflinching second look at how hearing loss impacts your work and your relationships. That notion of people not wanting to mess up means that people will not share feedback with you, and sometimes when they do that, our initial response is to take their heads off, so to speak. But it is important to really understand how maybe sometimes when you are at work, you can make other people's jobs more difficult. If you want them to help you, you need to be able to help them as well. Other people will not necessarily tell you what you are missing or if you are cutting people off in meetings or if you are missing key things, so you have to be willing to seek it out, ideally from your boss. How to be a best friend or friend at work with those who can help fill you in, is critical.

Social capital is who you know, who knows you, and the strength and value of those relationships. That is also something that you bring in the workplace that makes you valuable. The deaf and hard of hearing people who are most successful manage the human and social capital. They tend to make sure that they stay on top of their work in a technical way, because often that is the easiest way for people who are deaf and hard of hearing to succeed. Of course, being deaf or hard of hearing can also make it hard to stay up to speed in a technical aspect of your job. But it is absolutely critical that you do so.

It is important that you try to fight the natural isolating factors of hearing loss. For example, often my colleagues go out to lunch in a group of five or six, which is very hard for me. I do not enjoy pretending I can follow what's going on. What I do to be proactive is invite people out individually.

That leads to the next point, about strong relationships, and also positive self-advocacy. For example, when you hand the boss a list of your accommodation needs followed by your attorney's card then all the energy of the boss is going toward a lawsuit solving a problem. There is a flipside. Try, "I love working here, I really value my position in this organization, I want to do the best positive job. Here is what I need in order to add as much value to the organization as I can. If there is anything else I can do to add more value, please let me know. It is really important to me and to my job to do the best possible work that I can." Then the boss becomes an ally, not the enemy, which is critical.

This is a diagram about finding your highest and best usage.



The goal is finding what things that give you energy, things that you enjoy doing. There are different things for different people.

Interests Including Core Values and Passions. Sometimes the thing we enjoy most,

we forget that not everyone enjoys doing that. Some people love being out there and talking to everybody, other people prefer people one at a time. Some people love math, some people hate math. So the things you enjoy, is this circle.

Skills. This circle includes things that you are really good at. As a deaf or hard of hearing person, it is even more important to find things that you really add value to you. There is an overlap of those things that you enjoy doing and those things you have a natural skill in doing.

Contributions. The third circle would be how the dots connect to the world and people around you. As a simple example, I love skiing in deep powder. I love that out-of-body experience. I am also really good at it. So far I have not figured out how to make money just skiing in powder. It does not seem to add value to other people.

The Inner Circle: (arrow) For me, my inner circle is doing research about people who are deaf or hard of hearing. I have that experience. I have a PhD in research. It is something I am passionate about. It is something that there is a huge need for, particularly as our workforce ages. That is my way of moving toward the center or “my inner circle.” I try to spend as much time as I can there. That is where my highest and best usage occurs.

Thank you for your attention today. Hopefully you found it helpful.

Do you have any questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

You talked about career sponsorship, can you talk about what that is?

DAVID BALDRIDGE:

Career sponsorship in a classic form would be, that you have a mentor who sponsors your career and helps make sure you get the training and the job assignments to move through an organization. Some organizations have formal career sponsors. Other times you can do it for yourself. You can find somebody who takes an interest in you. Again, though, if you want help, be prepared to offer help.

Also, people who are most interested in helping us are often somehow impacted by hearing loss: children, spouses, parents. If you know who in your organization is impacted by hearing loss, those are often your best resources for career sponsorship.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I am wondering how this applies to someone who is self-employed. I do not know, maybe that is out of the purview of this.

DAVID BALDRIDGE:

I think a lot of it still applies but the focus is typically more on your customers or your co-workers. It is a common career transition, where people have so much difficulty

interacting in organizations that they create their own business and become their own boss. The communication that is value-added is more between you and your customers, not you and your employer. I think almost all of this is still applicable.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

In doing your research, are you able to separate by degree of hearing loss and identification between Deaf culture or hard of hearing? Do you see any differences between the two types?

DAVID BALDRIDGE:

I do. Today I focused primarily on people who are not culturally Deaf, and it is just a function of me and who I have access to. If you are culturally Deaf, you have much more of a language barrier than a cultural barrier to contend with and those are separate issues. Culturally Deaf people have all the stuff related to hearing loss, but added to that is a language barrier. People who are culturally Deaf, in my experience, tend to work in jobs where that background is an asset to them. So, they work in schools for the Deaf, they work for other companies, trying to help people who are culturally Deaf.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I found it interesting that you mentioned Wal-Mart. I worked for Wal-Mart for 21 years. Their accommodations were crazy because I explained to them that I could not hear on the phone and instead of giving me a captioned phone or something, they would bring me an amplified telephone. I explained that that was not enough, and instead of understanding that, everybody expected for me to call the number of the extension I needed to call. And we actually were having a conversation here this morning about this issue. Hearing people tend to think that people who are deaf and can speak are just hard-of-hearing instead of deaf. It is kind of a catch-22. Because my speech is primarily good, hearing people do not see me as deaf, and therefore do not think that I need to ask for accommodations that I do need.

DAVID BALDRIDGE: I could totally relate. In my own experience, I hear really well in some contexts. It is hard for people to understand that that does not apply to other contexts. Particularly because in a noisy situation, I can speechread really well for about five minutes if it is a simple conversation. Then I get exhausted or the conversation gets deep, and that is just difficult.

Your comment is great, and it is really common and I do not have perfect solutions. It is important for all of us to understand that most people do not understand the diversity of people with hearing loss and the diversity of our needs. We have to be patient about educating them. It may take six or seven attempts for people to understand what we personally need.

I think your best ally is your supervisor or your co-worker. Sometimes it is HR, sometimes it is the union. But on that side, it is easy for it to become more adversarial. All I can say is that you should keep trying, and if your boss does not get it, hopefully a

co-worker will get it, and help out, and help explain when you miss something.

Also, when you look at big companies, they have the cash available. What accommodation could you request that would be undue hardship for Wal-Mart?

I know someone who quit AT&T instead of asking for a captioned phone. Big companies have the cash, but they also have a load of bureaucracy and rules that they have to follow. The boss does not want to screw up, so big companies can also be less flexible. Short answer is keep trying to get what you need, and try to gain allies in that process. It is easy to gain enemies, so do not gain enemies. Try to get allies. Keep in mind, I have not said this yet, but the odds of, if you are going to court, winning an ADA suit are very, very small, particularly around accommodation, because there is always something else. Keep that in mind. It is not the case you think it is. If you experience blatant discrimination and want to advocate for your rights, that is fine, but have no illusion that you are going to win when suing your employer. It is tough to do.

My attorney, I think, would like to add something.

ATTORNEY:

A couple of years ago, I got on one of my legal research computerized tools and tried to look for all of the cases I could find around the country in every state or federal court where people with hearing loss had won a lawsuit against their employer for failing to provide accommodations. You know how many I found? None. There have been people who have won lawsuits because the company refused to provide accommodation before they were hired. If it is a question of asking for an accommodation, and your employer does not provide it, so that you get into a fight with one another and you end up boxed up on the street, well, you ain't going to win. The notion of giving your employer your lawyer's card at the time you ask for accommodation, then you have got a "bad boy" (lawyer) who has taken a case that he or she cannot win.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

As a hard of hearing person myself, I am really glad to hear you have been talking about the diversity of people with hearing loss and experiences including identity, accepting our hearing loss and how we identify ourselves with our new reality of being hard of hearing or functionally deaf. I think it is really important that hard of hearing people not allow ourselves to be erased and I do not support the invisibility of the hard of hearing community at all. The national Deaf Centers (formerly PEP) continue to use capital D, Deaf, and then they have this little disclaimer buried down in the website that says we mean everybody, but they do not mean everybody. When an organization like National Deaf Center puts out research and they say "here is the status of Deaf people" in employment, where are the hard of hearing people in employment? For a lot of us it is a very different identity. I really appreciate what you are doing in your work.

DAVID BALDRIDGE: Thank you for that. I appreciate the comment. I want to note that, if you go someplace, you go to a movie theater and you say I want captioning and

they give you headphones. Often my initial reaction is UGH. You have to understand for most people it is confusing. They got the theater looped and you go and tell them I cannot use the loop, I need captioning. It is someone who is trying to do the right thing and it can be frustrating. All our different needs can be taxing on other people, and that is coupled with them not wanting to embarrass themselves, not wanting to be awkward. So be patient with other people, they really just do not understand our needs. The majority of people want to do the right thing. They either do not know or they have their own problems. Maybe the single mom with four kids, one of whom is sick that day was focused on her own problems, not yours. The people who treat me poorly and do not mean to, are less educated, do not have the same life experiences, so, I am the lucky one. I need to be patient with them.

Thank you for being here, thank you for your great comments.

David C. Baldrige is a Newcomb Fellow and Associate Professor of Management for the Oregon State University college of Business, USA and is also a Research Associate for the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). He has a PhD in Management from the University of Connecticut, Storrs, and an MBA in Finance from The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research interests include: diversity and inclusion, in particular in relation to disability and age, access technology utilization, disability accommodation, and career success and sustainability.