I Can't Hear You … Could You Please Speak Louder???

Who hasn't assumed that speaking louder will help a listener hear clearer and better? While speaking louder does provide more sound, it does not provide clearer information to the listener. It also causes vocal abuse on the part of the speaker. Neither situation is of much benefit.

Loud voices are acoustically counter-productive.

The majority of all speech energy (90%) is found in low frequency sounds. These low frequency sounds are mostly vowels. The low frequencies account for only 10% of all intelligibility.

How much could you understand if someone only spoke using vowels?

Ih ou ah ee uh ae-ee oe-uh-ih ah-er-ae-uh. Ih ou ah-ah-ee ee ae-ee uh-ae-ih.

Translated: It would not be a very productive conversation. It would probably be very frustrating.

The majority of intelligibility is found in the high frequency sounds. High frequency sounds are mostly consonants. While the high frequencies contain 90% of all intelligibility, they only have 10% of sound energy.

Think about it: If you are in a room with the door closed, what part of the conversation in the next room can you understand? You are hearing the low frequencies which are mostly vowels. Quite often those vowels do not provide enough information for you to get a complete message.

What can you do when speaking to individuals with a hearing loss? How can you help your message get across clearer?

First and foremost, **talk in a natural tone**. Do not shout and do not speak louder. You'll only end up abusing your own voice and not helping your listener. Do not exaggerate your mouth movements either.

Secondly, **use an FM System (Williams Sound), a hearing loop system, Pocket Talker, or other assistive listening device.** Granted, you might think that your current speaker system is wonderful. You did spend a lot of money to get the best. You might even think you don't need to use assistive technology because it's the best speaker system available. Unfortunately, a good speaker system in a **large room** with people creates a very loud room and a very **soft signal**.

An **adult** with normal hearing requires the desired signal to be **twice as loud** as the background sound. For a **child**, this increases to about **ten times louder** than the background sound. Given that people with normal hearing have these needs, the needs of your friends with a hearing loss and congregation members is even greater.

Remember, a good speaker system does not mean people will understand. A good speaker system means speech is **audible** or able to be heard. It does not mean speech is **intelligible** or able to be heard clearly enough to identify critical words. Also remember that shouting or loud speaking only leads to vocal abuse and a distorted message. The best thing you can do is provide an assistive listening device and use a normal tone of voice.

Hearing Loss Examples

Normal hearing: Three blind mice, see how they run!

Mild loss: -ree blin- mi--, -ee --ow they run! (volume is diminished a little)

Moderate loss: ---ee --i --mi--, -ee --ow --ey ru! (volume is faint)

Severe loss: ---ee --i --i , -ee –ow –ey –u-! (volume faint like a whisper)

Profound loss: hears nothing, not even that someone was talking.

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