



SPECIAL REPORT
SUPPORT EMPLOYEES
WITH HEARING LOSS TO
PERFORM AT THEIR BEST

BY TINA LANNIN

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INTRODUCTION

*Rates of hearing loss have doubled in the last 5 years
1 in 6 of your employees could have hearing loss*



15% of all adults have some level of hearing loss. That's almost 1 in 6 of the world population. In addition, 1.1 billion teenagers and young adults are at risk of hearing loss from listening to loud music through smartphones, MP3 players and concerts, meaning the number of deaf people in the workplace is only likely to increase.

In spite of technology's best efforts, once you lose your hearing it doesn't come back. So, what can we do to ensure employers like you are able to retain skilled and capable workers who happen to have a hearing loss?

This special report aims to guide you, the employer, in supporting hard of hearing employees confidently and effectively. This report has been put together by our expert team of deaf awareness trainers, careers consultants, and communication support providers.

I am deaf. I am a certified careers consultant, a company director, and a qualified deaf awareness trainer with over ten years' experience in delivering training courses. I am delighted to be able to share some of my expertise with you in this report.

With warm regards,

Tina Lannin

Tina Lannin
Director, 121 Captions



HEARING LOSS: THE HIDDEN ISSUE AFFECTING YOUR ORGANISATION

Hearing loss is a hidden condition that affects more members of staff than many employers realise. Maybe you're one of them?

And, with employees working to an older age, and younger people experiencing hearing loss through, for example, listening to loud music, the number of staff members with hearing loss in your organisation is only likely to increase over the coming years.

*Over 40% of 50 year olds have
some hearing loss*

(Source: Action on Hearing Loss)

The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2031, an acquired hearing loss will be in the top ten medical conditions in the UK, more common than diabetes and cataracts.

Employees with a hearing loss can do anything, they simply don't hear as well as most people. And, with a few workplace adjustments, they prove to be loyal, productive and resourceful employees. Organisations can retain skilled staff and minimise disruption to the business by implementing simple and often inexpensive adjustments to enable employees with hearing loss to continue working effectively. The business case for investing in the retention of people with a hearing loss is overwhelmingly positive.

WHY YOU'RE AT RISK OF LOSING STAFF WITH HEARING LOSS

As hearing loss is a hidden condition you may well be unaware of just how many of your employees are living and working with it. There are many reasons why members of staff with hearing loss might not want to be open about the challenges they are experiencing:

- 1 There's still a **stigma** about hearing loss. As well as being sensitive about the association with getting older, employees might be worried about being the butt of jokes from colleagues and losing their respect.
- 2 **Disclosure.** They worry knowledge of their hearing loss may lead to managers or team members believing they cannot do their job properly. Which could mean demotion, redeployment into another role or dismissal.
- 3 They feel **excluded**. Having a hearing loss often means employees miss out on the team camaraderie, as well as information that's passed along casually, rather than in formal meetings. This can really affect the employee's confidence as well as the team dynamic.
- 4 The **culture**. If they see little support for deaf or other disabled employees they will be reluctant to ask for help.

At best you'll have an employee unable to work at their most effective because they're worried about being 'found out'. At worst your employee will hand in their notice having found a job at another organization they perceive as being more supportive to staff with hearing loss.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Once you do become aware of an employee's hearing loss, your organisation must provide reasonable adjustments to make your workplace as accessible to hard of hearing people as to hearing people.

In the USA, the Americans with Disabilities Act has been law since 1990, and requires all organisations with more than 14 employees to offer equal opportunities to all employees from the hire process right through to termination of employment. Your business may be eligible for tax credits.

In the UK under the Equality Act (2010), employers are under a positive and proactive duty to remove or reduce obstacles faced by employees with hearing loss. Funding may be provided by the Department for Work and Pension's "Access to Work" scheme.

The good news is that many reasonable adjustments need no more investment than some time and effort.

8 REASONS TO INVEST IN RETAINING EMPLOYEES WITH HEARING LOSS

1



They are skilled in their role.

Helping them to manage their hearing loss at work enables you to keep that valuable knowledge and experience within the organisation.

2



They're reliable.

Studies show that employees with a disability will remain loyal to your firm, resulting in increased productivity and lower recruitment costs. Their passion and drive to work hard in order to prove themselves will positively impact the rest of their team.

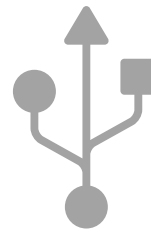
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It saves you time and money.

When employees leave due to hearing loss you have to spend time and money in recruiting and upskilling for that post.

4



They're adaptable.

Most people with hearing loss have improved creativity, patience and flexibility through finding ways to make a hearing environment work better for them. They excel at adapting to challenges in the workplace.

My company offered me a permanent contract now the live captioning service is set up and working. They finally start seeing the positive sides of my disability as well!

Jolie Lanser, Scrum Master, Unboxed Consulting, London



8 REASONS TO INVEST IN RETAINING EMPLOYEES WITH HEARING LOSS



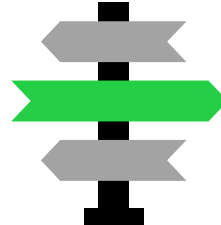
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They're really focussed.

Employees with hearing loss are able to focus intensively on their work and get more done. They have the advantage of being able to switch off their hearing aids to focus better.

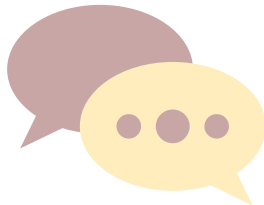
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Deafness brings valuable diversity.

Demonstrating diversity in your workforce leads to diversity in your customers and ultimately an improved company turnover. The different perspectives of employees with hearing loss have added value too.

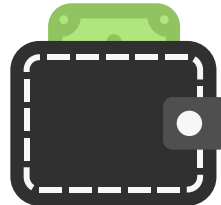
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They communicate brilliantly.

People with hearing loss are used to bridging communication gaps, demonstrating strong problem-solving and interpersonal skills. Your employees will naturally pay more attention to their communication skills and improve how they work as a team.

8



Deafness has incentives.

You can take advantage of UK government support for your employees with hearing loss via the Access to Work scheme, or in the US, company tax credits up to \$5000 are available.

Employers found my hearing loss an asset because it helped improve their understanding of their disabled customers. This resulted in more business, as news that they were disabled-friendly spread among the disability community.

Lisa Caldwell, Communications Specialist, Manchester

11 SIMPLE CHANGES TO RETAIN YOUR HARD OF HEARING EMPLOYEES

Here are some simple tips that the entire team can implement to ensure happy, engaged and productive hard of hearing employees:

- 1 Treat them as much as you can as you would any other employee. So include them in meetings, lunchtime chats and social events.
- 2 Get the hard of hearing employee's attention before you begin to speak. Ask them how they prefer you to do this e.g. tapping them on the shoulder or waving at them. You might also offer a little mirror that attaches to the computer screen so they can tell someone is behind them.
- 3 In meetings, make sure employees with hearing loss can see everyone and give them a choice where to sit and where to position any communication support provider.
- 4 Having employees with hearing loss is also a great opportunity to re-visit meeting etiquette, ensuring that an agenda and handouts are prepared and circulated in advance, and that only one person speaks at a time.
- 5 Remember not to turn off the lights when you're giving a PowerPoint presentation. It's hard to lipread or follow an interpreter in the dark!
- 6 Look at hard of hearing employees when you speak. Many people with a hearing loss supplement what they hear with lipreading so don't chew gum, eat, or cover your mouth while speaking.
- 7 Confirm that the employee with hearing loss has understood you. You may need to rephrase what you've said.
- 8 Speak at a normal speed and volume – speaking more slowly makes it much harder to lipread, and can make it look like you think they're dumb as well as deaf.
- 9 Pet hates of employees with hearing loss are hearing "it doesn't matter" when it clearly does and "I'll tell you later" which often never happens!
- 10 Consider what simple reasonable adjustments could be made to help communication, for example, writing notes on paper or on a computer or laptop, or using instant messaging.
- 11 For meetings and other important events, get a captioner, notetaker or lipspeaker. Ask the hard of hearing person who they'd like to use.

10 WAYS TO HELP EMPLOYEES WITH HEARING LOSS PERFORM AT THEIR BEST

Did you realise only 16% of employees with hearing loss use a hearing aid. Hearing loss cannot be fixed by using a hearing aid or a cochlear implant. The amplification of sound they provide can be of some help, but for many people the benefits are limited, which is why your support is so important.

How deafness affects an individual at work will vary widely depending on their level and type of hearing loss, when they lost their hearing and if they have hearing aids. It's always a good idea to ask the hard of hearing employee themselves about how you can support and include them.

Here are 10 simple adjustments you can make to help employees with hearing loss to remain productive:

- 1 Treat them like any other employee – with the same high expectations!
- 2 Consider reasonable adjustments that deal with any difficulties hearing in the workplace, such as equipment for the phone or captioning for meetings.
- 3 Share informal information as well as formal briefings.
- 4 Be sure to include hard of hearing employees in conversations, work break activities and social events.
- 5 During regular reviews have a standing item that checks there is no extra help they need for their hearing loss. Raise the topic yourself in case a hard of hearing employee is concerned about being seen as a nuisance.
- 6 Use captioned films or videos, if available.
- 7 If there is going to be a meeting, provide appropriate information such as names and acronyms beforehand.
- 8 Think carefully about where you seat them. Is it light enough to lipread? Away from background noise?
- 9 Review safety procedures, including the need for flashing alarms and an evacuation buddy.
- 10 Assign a mentor – someone they trust and feel comfortable with - to work directly with them. If you don't have one internally, consider using an outside mentoring or consultancy service with experience of supporting employees with hearing loss. 121 Captions provide this service.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYERS



Much of the information and guidance in this e-book costs nothing but effort to implement.

But, to support and retain a valued employee there may come a point where you need to buy in a piece of equipment, or a service, which will help them to work effectively and productively.

The good news is that, thanks to government support, you may be able to reclaim all or part of any outlay:

- In the USA your business may be eligible for up to \$5000 tax credits.
- In the UK funding may be provided by the Department for Work and Pension's "Access to Work" scheme.

It's worth noting that whatever financial outlay – if any – you have to make, will certainly be cheaper than replacing the skills and experience of that hard-of-hearing employee.

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES THROUGH ACCREDITED CAPTIONING



Live captioning is a flexible and inexpensive way of helping employees with hearing loss to be fully involved in meetings, teleconferences, training and events.

High-quality captioning, as provided by 121 Captions, enables your employees to read what is being said, word-for-word, with less than one second delay from the time it's spoken.

Quick and simple to organise and use, hiring a captioner is a way to demonstrate to all employees that you value the hard of hearing employee and their contribution to your workplace:

- A captioner listens in to the meeting, event or conference call.
- You speak directly to the hard of hearing person, not to the captioner.
- Captioners relay everything they hear to the hard of hearing employee.
- Accredited captioners adhere to a professional code requiring accuracy, confidentiality and impartiality.

CHOOSE WISELY – HOW TO BE SURE YOU’RE PROVIDING THE RIGHT SUPPORT



So, what’s your next step?

There’s a wide range of support available for employees with hearing loss. How do you know what would be appropriate for your staff members? What would give you best value for money?

We’ve got a great opportunity for you to get expert advice **without paying a penny**.

For a limited time only we’re offering a small number of **free access audits worth \$500 (£350)** which will help organisations like you to:

- Review your current position
- Find out where you might want to make changes to help both staff and customers
- Understand what those changes might look like, and your options for implementation
- Improve your disability awareness
- Retain more staff and help them to work productively
- Attract a larger and more diverse client base.

At the end of the audit you will receive a report specific to your organisation incorporating our findings, together with any recommendations.

All our audits are carried out by disability experts, with significant experience in helping organisations develop the right approach for them to support disabled employees.

To minimize disruption to your business we conduct these audits over the phone at a time to suit you.

**A FREE
CONFIDENTIAL AUDIT
AND REPORT WORTH
\$500 (£350)**

Take advantage of our time-limited offer of a **free, expert audit and report on your organisation’s disability access worth \$500 (£350)**.

Due to the value of these audits there is a limited number available so:

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