

Time for some sensitivity

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The responses I have had for an article that appeared recently in this column - on the travails of the hearing impaired - have been a real eye-opener. It is almost as if the flood-gates had been waiting to be opened. Let me reproduce some of these, to give you an idea of just how long the authors of these emails must have been bottling up various causes for frustration and anger.

1. A mother of a hearing impaired son says:

It is so true that hearing impairment is not overtly visible to people and because of this it is not even considered an impairment vis-a-vis physical impairment/mental impairment or visual impairment. Actually it is a double impairment not being able to hear clearly and not being able to speak clearly. There are many hearing impaired who have overcome their disability with the help of technology, support of care-givers and enough financial resources to use the first two. Some tips that might help a normal person communicate with a hearing handicapped person effectively are:

- *Get the person's attention before attempting to talk or communicate.*
- *Stay in their field of vision. Make eye contact.*
- *Establish the gist of what you are going to talk about.*
- *Your speech will be more easily understood when you are not eating, chewing, smoking, etc.*
- *Keep your hands away from your face while talking.*
- *Don't talk too fast. Pronounce words clearly.*
- *Have them repeat the specifics back to you. Many numbers and words sound alike.*
- *In case of failure in communication, try to find a different way of saying the same thing, rather than repeating the original words over and over.*
- *Keep a note pad handy, and write your words out and show them to the person if you have to.*
- *Use gestures and visual cues.*

And she also adds:

A program Sathymev Jayathe highlighting the problems faced by People with Disabilities, would have been truly more touching if it had sub-titles for the hundreds of hearing impaired who were watching the show. This show which is creating awareness about so many issues would have been interesting for these people also.

In fact, more of our TV shows (News, Sports channels covering topical events like IPL, Wimbledon Championships, UEFA Euro Cup, etc.) should seriously consider close captioning their telecasts!

2. A teacher, with a hearing impediment, says:

I am a deaf person since childhood. In my early childhood I was left to my grandmother. My most beautiful memories are associated with her. That illiterate lady with her unconditional love has given me so much strength that I am capable of handling any adverse or favourable condition with appropriate attitude. I am a faculty in my organization. Though as a matter of its policy, deaf people are not assigned to be a faculty, I was adamant to be one. Now for me every new batch for training is new challenge to handle. When I enter in classroom with hearing-aid chord dangling on my chest and masking units inserted in both my ears, I find it a thrill to observe the body language and facial expressions of all participants. How different we human beings are to our reactions for physiological inadequacy of a fellow human?

It is apparent, from such an outpouring of sentiment, that there is a whole section of people whose problems have been ignored/overlooked for (too) long, only because their disability is not an overtly recognisable one, and that it is high time that 'normal people' started being more sensitive to their problems!