Tips for Communicating with Employees who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

There are many effective strategies that can facilitate communication for deaf and hard-of-hearing employees.

www.rit.edu/NTID/coops/jobs
Communicating One-To-One

Ask your deaf or hard-of-hearing employee how he or she prefers to communicate.

Get the employee’s attention before speaking.
Call his or her name—or a tap on the shoulder, a wave or other visual signal will get the employee’s attention.

Look directly at the employee when speaking.
Avoid looking down at papers, looking at a computer screen or writing on a board. A deaf or hard-of-hearing employee benefits from facial cues.

Facilitate speechreading.
Many deaf or hard-of-hearing people rely on lip-reading, also known as speechreading, to understand the spoken word. Because your mouth needs to be visible, try not to put your hands on or near your mouth while talking.

Make eye contact.
Eye contact makes communication direct. Even if an interpreter is present, talk directly to the deaf or hard-of-hearing employee.

Speak slowly and clearly.
No need to raise your voice or exaggerate. Try to enunciate each word. Short sentences are easier to understand than long ones.

Other Strategies

Share information directly with the deaf or hard-of-hearing employee.
Deaf or hard-of-hearing employees may not pick up information (such as announcements, news of promotions or job openings, or social events) via informal channels.

Enhance safety of deaf or hard-of-hearing employees.
For emergency alerts like smoke or fire alarms, use visual signaling devices such as flashing lights as well as the buddy system.

For more information about interviewing, hiring and working with deaf and hard-of-hearing employees, visit www.rit.edu/ntid/coops/jobs, email us at ntidcoe@rit.edu or call us at 585-475-6219 (voice) or 585-286-4544 (videophone).
Communicating in a Group

Ask the employee to choose the best seating for his or her communication needs.
The employee may need to sit next to or across from the speaker so he or she can see the speaker’s face. Round or semicircular tables allow the employee to see everyone’s face.

Make sure only one person speaks at a time.
Indicate to the employee which person is speaking.

Use technology for remote conferencing.
Videoconferencing software is available and enables the deaf or hard-of-hearing employee to fully participate in meetings.

Use visual aids.
Vision is the primary method for receiving information for a deaf or hard-of-hearing employee. PowerPoint® presentations and captioned video programs are useful. Allow time to read the visual information before speaking.

In a group setting, work with a sign interpreter.
Interpreters are usually available through interpreter referral services. It’s also a good idea to assign a notetaker to record and distribute information discussed.

Assign a mentor.
The mentor can discuss corporate culture and career advancement opportunities with the deaf or hard-of-hearing employee.

Take advantage of assistive technology.
Use email, instant messaging, texting, fax, pagers, videophone and online relay services. These are easy and inexpensive to use.

Use hands-on demonstration for training and assignment of tasks.
Often verbal communication is clearer with a hands-on demonstration.
Rochester Institute of Technology’s National Technical Institute for the Deaf is the world’s first and largest technological college for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. It represents the first concerted effort to educate large numbers of deaf and hard-of-hearing students within a university planned principally for hearing students.

• Among RIT’s more than 17,000 full- and part-time students are nearly 1,300 deaf and hard-of-hearing students from the United States and other countries.

• Students are enrolled in more than 200 technical and professional programs offered through RIT’s nine colleges:
  - College of Applied Science and Technology
  - E. Philip Saunders College of Business
  - B. Thomas Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences
  - Kate Gleason College of Engineering
  - College of Health Sciences and Technology
  - College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
  - College of Liberal Arts
  - National Technical Institute for the Deaf
  - College of Science

• RIT is known worldwide for its superior cooperative work experience program, which gives students practical on-the-job experience before they graduate.

• For more information about hiring co-op students or graduates, contact the NTID Center on Employment.

Rochester Institute of Technology
National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Center on Employment
Lyndon Baines Johnson Hall
52 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-5604
585-475-6219 (voice)
585-286-4544 (videophone)
www.rit.edu/NTID/coops/jobs
Email: NTIDCOE@rit.edu