

# EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND TRENDS AND THE DEAF CLIENT: A RESPONSE

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The papers presented for the panel discussion on the *Employment Practices and Trends and the Deaf Client* by Messrs. Staab, Silver and Williams offer much food for thought. Each of these gentlemen has had direct and extensive experience in interviewing deaf applicants for employment. We are indebted to them for their able presentations at this conference. Furthermore, the results of their experiences—problems, difficulties, successes as well as failures, hopes and heartening suggestions for the future—bring into focus many questions which need careful examination.

It is not possible to cover all the important items pointed out in these panel presentations. However, it might be well to mention some significant general impressions which seem to receive the most emphasis.

1. Changes in industry are occurring at a rapid rate due to technological advances, electronics, computers, new methods and new machinery. This will affect the deaf worker profoundly unless he is adaptable and can be retrained.
2. The deaf employee seeking work (even those now on the job) will need more expanded technical and vocational training at special trade schools or on-the-job training to keep abreast of the changing trends.
3. Supplementary or special courses in basic English, mathematics, technical fields of applied sciences, and skill in the use of common tools and machines should

be made available to the adult deaf on a more extensive scale.

4. Courses in communication skills to facilitate better relationships and harmony between deaf employees and their hearing co-workers and supervisors are needed. (Speech instruction and lipreading for the deaf; manual alphabet and language of signs for the hearing.) Many problems would be resolved where there is good rapport.
5. Vocational rehabilitation counselors, placement officers and educators of the deaf have the tremendous responsibility and obligation of preparing the deaf worker for a highly specialized and competitive labor market. This includes initial preparation, testing, evaluation, and training. They need to keep their programs realistic in the light of job opportunities and employer needs.
6. The deaf worker needs to be aware of the common courtesies and social standards which hearing people take for granted. He must be imbued with those desirable attributes of disposition, personality and character.
7. Industry wants workers who can work under pressure and produce well day in and day out. The deaf person must possess good marketable skills if he expects to obtain employment.

All three papers indicate that industry, especially large industry, is becoming more selective and more careful in screening deaf applicants. Mr. Staab mentions that in the future the printing industry will require that the deaf applicant have a high school diploma, be well grounded in fundamentals of general printing, have an ability to type 40 words per minute (teletype), have some knowledge of new processes (newspaper photocomposition and platemaking), and serve a six-year apprenticeship. Mr. Silver reminds us that his plant wants deaf workers who are adaptable; those who can be re-trained with a minimum effort. He stresses particularly the need for communication skills and an ability to get along with other employees. Mr. Williams feels that there are many future possibilities for the deaf applicant in industry, who can qualify in such areas of key punch operation, computer operation, drafting, electronics, and programming. This latter group requires a reasonable intelligence level, a good reading

level, strong vocational interest scores and good manual dexterity.

It seems to me that we are doing a fairly good job of preparing the above average or average deaf person for the labor market. Some get jobs on their own after graduation from school. Some go to Gallaudet College or trade schools. Some need only a little push from the counselor or placement officer. The National Technical Institute for the Deaf and the proposed secondary high school program and regional technical-vocational centers should help this group even more.

However, there is another side to the picture. The average or above average constitute only about 25% of the deaf population. What about the other 75%—the below average, the underachievers the drop-outs, and those with personality or discipline problems? What are the future trends in the way of plans, programs or possible placement in employment for this group in our modern industries? This is another serious problem for us to take into consideration.

Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and placement officers are having considerable difficulty in placing this group of 75% in employment. Their case-loads are piling up.

A football coach is only as good as the material he has to work with. Our counselors find themselves in the same boat. They do and have succeeded in preparing and training many deaf applicants for employment in industry. But they are having a very hard time with this so-called "hard-core" group. The number in this group is increasing while with advances in modern industry, the employment situation is bound to get worse before it gets better.

Undoubtedly, there are other facets and matters which deserve attention. The observations and experiences of the panelists from various industries give us insights to the problems they encounter. In the light of changing trends in industry it follows that there also are some changing trends insofar as it affects the deaf client as he searches for employment. It is to this purpose that we should direct our attention.