

SOME FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEAF ADULT'S POOR IMAGE

By LEO M. JACOBS

A great deal of discussion and concern have been spent on how the deaf are to obtain employment and keep their jobs. Perhaps volumes have been written about their training, and how to provide the needed diversity of trades, methods, machinery, materials, and instructors.

However, there are other factors which probably play just as great a part in the success or failure of the deaf in their employment as their training and experience. Their attitudes toward their jobs, employers and co-workers, and their public image should probably be given much more consideration than they have been, but, unfortunately, in their anxiety to provide the necessary training, many educators of the deaf have overlooked the deaf children's negative attitudes and then failed to take this factor into consideration when they attempt to find an explanation for the failure of their deaf students to make a satisfactory living.

Because of their handicap, and a lack of effective communication during their formative years, many deaf children have developed undesirable traits which are peculiar to their handicap.

Perhaps the most obvious are the undesirable noises that deaf people make for the simple reason that they cannot hear themselves. They frequently shuffle their feet or tread heavily. At meal times the attention of hearing people is often attracted to the deaf people by the extraordinary clatter they make when they drop silver on their plates, or when they move their dishes and let them fall on the table.

The vocal noises that deaf people make are frequently difficult for the others to tolerate. Many times the deaf make grunting or

humming noises when deep in thought, or make weird-sounding noises when they let themselves be carried away while telling about an exciting incident, or when they are emotionally upset.

The deaf also make other unnecessary noises without realizing it, such as crumpling paper in an assembly, or munching noisily on popcorn in a theater.

Probably just as repugnant to hearing people as the noises the deaf make are their facial expressions. Whereas hearing people regulate the tone of their voices to place proper emphasis on their speech, the deaf fall back upon facial expressions for the same purpose when they employ manual communication. Although the more cultured deaf adults use these expressions in moderation, the less educated deaf often use extreme facial expressions to show their feelings, or when they are carried away by their own rhetoric. Their listeners also frequently grimace to show their understanding and sympathy. Unfortunately, these facial grimaces are more often than not startling to the unschooled hearing adults—and the adverse effect is also heightened if the deaf use their voices in accompaniment.

Deaf people have developed these undesirable habits and other attitudes because their families failed to establish effective communication with them. Because the deaf have never been taught so, they do not know that certain things are just not done. For instance, they do not think anything of asking people extremely personal questions. They are interested, and they have never learned that it is impolite to ask such questions. They are never taught that age has its prerogatives, and so they address their elders by their first names or even nicknames. Although chivalry to the fair sex may now be going out of style, many deaf boys have never even learned about ordinary courtesies that are usually extended to the opposite sex. They often create a bad impression by their crude attitude toward women.

As anybody who has been schooled in elementary psychology well knows, the average person is likely to become suspicious or prejudiced as an automatic defense mechanism whenever he encounters something which is new or strange to him. The deaf person is also likely to become suspicious when he sees something that he does not and cannot understand. Thus, he is often offended by hearing persons who may give him side glances while talking with each other, and even more so when they smile or laugh at the same time. The more ignorant deaf may make an unpleasant scene right

there, much to the astonishment and mortification of the probably innocent hearing persons. The better educated deaf person knows better than to make anything of it, although he may have some slightly nagging doubts.

Due to a lack of communication during early years, many deaf adults may never have learned to reckon for anything. If their parents cannot communicate with them, they may silently lay their deaf children's plates before them and say nothing further if the children proceed to clean up their plates with gusto and a complete lack of table manners—or if they whack off a big hunk of expensive butter and spread it thickly on their bread. Counselors at residential schools may be too busy and preoccupied, or treat the children with more sympathy than understanding. Since the counselors do not have to dip into their own pockets to support these children, many of them do not even bother to make them more conscious of wastage or excessiveness in their daily habits. Teachers and other people also often exhibit such soft-hearted pity that deaf children consequently develop an outlook which knowledgeable friends would call the "gimme" attitude. Because nobody has bothered to tell them differently, they grow to expect that everything would be done for them. This attitude is not helped very much by the growing practice of having rehabilitation counselors take charge of them before they even graduate from school, and lead them into their life-time careers. Thus, all along their path of growth, many deaf children have never had an opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility and to weigh the consequences of wrong decisions. In fact, many of them have never been allowed to experience any consequences at all!

Because they have never been given a chance to develop a sense of responsibility, deaf adults have chalked up a bad record of tardiness and failure to notify their bosses in cases of absence. Many of them also think nothing of playing hookey from their jobs.

Expensive academic and vocational training have come to naught in many cases because the deaf students have never been taught desirable attitudes to supplement their excellent training.

A year ago the writer headed a committee who prepared a job preparation course in order to improve these habits and attitudes. The older deaf children are given a daily class period to go through this course. It is yet too early to evaluate the usefulness of this course, but it is to be hoped that they will get some help from this course, although it will never be equivalent to an early and thorough

training in correct habits and attitudes. In order for this to be effective, *full* communication must first be established between the deaf child and his parents as well as his school teachers and counselors.