

Comments From the Editor...

GRATITUDE: This issue we have an article on hearing loss. Recently I had an interaction with a legally blind lawyer who is struggling with her practice. She wants to specialize in criminal law. But because she has difficulty with transportation she cannot get court appointments outside of the county where she resides. After meeting with her I was impressed by her grit and determination to fulfill her dream to practice law despite her handicap. I know that I sometimes take my own recovery and the issues associated with it for granted. My experience(s) always remind me that I need to be grateful for all I have been blessed with since entering into recovery. It started with the support of the Oregon LAP and its members, and it continues today in my position as a LAP director. Where would we all be without the help of those in our programs who are willing to give all they give to help other lawyers in distress? I know that I wouldn't be where I am today without having received unconditional support from lawyers.—Hugh Grady

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Highlights

of the American Bar Association
Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs

Coaching and Late Onset Hearing Loss

by Homer Mullins, J.D. and Norma Svedosh, Ph.D.

As the nation's bulging population of baby boomers continues to "gray," increasing numbers of Americans over the age of 40 are beginning to lose the ability to read without glasses. First come the trips to the drugstore to check out the reading glasses. Then on to the optometrist to be fitted with bi-focals, tri-focals, and the progressive lenses. So many choices.

Hearing, much like eyesight, can diminish over time and we need the help of hearing aids and assistive listening devices. But in our country especially, Americans have become so fixated on youth and vitality that they will not even allow themselves to think about anything which might suggest they are, or appear to be, growing old. In addition to age and vanity issues, hearing loss is often associated with persons who move and think slowly. So, rather than "give in" to hearing aids and the stigma they symbolize, some people will attempt to "pass" for hearing by faking understanding with a nod of the head or inserting such words as "right" or "ok" at appropriate places in a conversation to indicate comprehension and agreement with something a speaker has said.

Another aspect of hearing loss that is particularly insidious has to do with the rate of decline. After first noticing a problem, the average listener will often wait from 7 to 10 years before having his hearing checked. During this period, hearing deteriorates so gradually that the loss is barely perceptible from one year to the next. He continues to assert that his hearing "just isn't all that bad," "it's not serious enough to buy hearing aids," or that "he does fine as long as people continue to speak up."

Unfortunately, this scenario makes it possible for some listeners to maintain a state of denial as to the existence of a medical problem they'd rather forget anyway. But at this point, it's no longer a casual matter. The corner drugstore is not an option. A hearing professional must be consulted to determine the proper course of treatment. If the patient has waited too long, his inner ear may have deteriorated to the point where part of his hearing may be irretrievably lost and hearing aids are no longer a viable option.

Coaching is an ancient profession dating back before antiquity. Then, it applied primarily to athletes, orators and musicians. Today, it is experiencing resurgence in growth and gaining popularity in such diverse areas as executive performance and specialized life issues. Hearing enhancement coaches are available to help you deal with the anxieties, stresses and embarrassment that many experience when hearing begins to deteriorate. A hearing enhancement coach plays a similar role to that of the modern athletic coach. The heart of the coaching relationship is the open and honest collaboration that occurs between coach and client in a totally confidential, judgment-free environment. This partnership focuses on identifying the particular problems that may be getting in your way, helping you design solutions for success by goal setting, strategizing, anticipating obstacles, monitoring progress and creating accountability.

If you are having trouble hearing, or feel that you are missing parts of conversations and have to bluff it to avoid embarrassment, or pretend to hear when you're not sure what has been said, you may well have a hearing loss. To ignore it over extended periods of time not only exposes you to serious emotional problems and loss of relationships with family members, longtime friends and co-workers, but raises the possibility that the brain may lose some or all of its ability to identify speech. A hearing coach can help you find the assistance you need. After an examination by a hearing health professional, a coach can help you understand your diagnosis and its potential consequences, and guide you through the complex and myriad decisions and options you may face regarding treatment. More important, a coach can help you, your family and co-workers understand your hearing loss and adjust to its challenges.

The first step is to recognize that you are not alone. Hearing loss affects more than 32 million Americans. Over 24 million have not taken any action to help themselves.

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