

Each person is unique and made in the image of God. It is better to help the Deaf person understand God's goodness in an atmosphere of love than to criticize him/her continuously because he/she does not measure up to our standards.

Deaf people want to be an integral part of society. They want and need to be heard. Like anyone it is important for their opinions to be properly evaluated. They need the opportunity to ask questions and to be given thoughtful responses. By being a friend to the Deaf you are giving them an opportunity to live a more fulfilling life.

--Thompson U. Kay is CEO of TEAMS Educational Center Lincoln, Nebraska. He is an interpreter for the Deaf and a frequent speaker at training events for both the Deaf and hearing.

“Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'”

—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 143.



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BEGIN WITH A DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND

By

Larry R Evans, D.Min.

The principles that Thompson Kay has outlined are critical. This kind of respect will make a lasting difference. Yet, we must remember that the most important ingredient we put into any relationship is not what we say or do, but what we are. Doing and saying the right things is important but building lasting relationships doesn't begin there. Building any relationship begins with our own character. Perhaps this is why the way we relate to the blind, the Deaf and the lame is said to be a “test of our character.” (See E. G. White, *Christian Service* p. 191.) Stephen R. Covey coined the phrase, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” (*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, p. 239). He says it is the “single most important principle” that he has learned in the field of interpersonal relations. Most of us listen with the intent to reply; not to listen. To build a lasting relationship with the Deaf we need to put their needs, their agendas before our own. It begins with our desire to first understand them.



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HOW TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DEAF



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HOW TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DEAF

By Thompson U. Kay

Developing a friendship with a Deaf person is not that much different from befriending someone else. The same communication principles apply but are especially important because of cultural and language differences. The following ten principles will be helpful in developing a lasting relationship with a Deaf person.

Communicate. Be respectful of the Deaf person by not frustrating him or her by using language that is unfamiliar to them. A Deaf person with a large vocabulary will have no difficulty communicating but many Deaf people have a small vocabulary.



Be Normal. Your motives might be questioned if you try to be too friendly or too kind to them. Talk “with” and not “to” Deaf people. Share, interact, give and take. Enjoy what the Deaf people have to say. You will learn from them. They have much to offer you as you strive to gain a deeper understanding of them.

As you do so, your own communication skills will improve.

Relax. Do your best to create a comfortable and relaxed setting. Sometimes too many hearing people in a class or group can create anxiety. Be sensitive to the possibility that the Deaf person may feel intimidated or threatened.

Listen. It is the gateway to a deeper understanding. Hear what they are really saying, not what you think they are saying. If you do not understand something, ask them to repeat it. Listen to them before any plans are made that involve the Deaf.

Love People. Acceptance and love go hand-in-hand. It is the first step towards being accepted by the Deaf. Effective love is the kind that doesn't depend on being loved in return. Love overcomes many faults—both in you and in them.

Be Understanding. It is easy to think we understand the Deaf when we really don't which is why the hearing person needs to be flexible. Deaf often feel misunderstood. It is important to work towards understanding their thoughts and feelings on matters affecting them.

Support Independence. Help and encourage the Deaf develop a sense of independence. This is an important step for them



to take and most will welcome your gestures in this direction. Encourage the Deaf to do things for themselves which helps them maintain a sense of pride.

Be a Good Christian Role Model. Show the Deaf how to find God's will for their own lives. Help them find ways to enrich their lives as Christians but be sure to "practice what you preach".

Trust and Be Trustworthy. The Deaf person needs to feel that you are a trusted friend. Keeping their confidence is very important. They need to know that the questions they ask are not ridiculed nor made public.

Promote Self-respect. Workers should help the Deaf in a way that shows constructive supervision rather than ordering them around as children. Harsh criticism can damage the Deaf person's self-respect.