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*Leadership Training Program in the Area of the Deaf San Fernando Valley State College Northridge, California*

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## NEW VISTAS FOR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OF DEAF PERSONS

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**Leadership Training Program in the Area of the Deaf  
San Fernando Valley State College  
Northridge, California**

When I was asked to provide a summary for this conference, my tasks were described as threefold:

- To give a succinct statement which you could use upon your return home when your boss or co-worker asks, “What’s new in the rehabilitation of the deaf?”
- To very briefly summarize the highlights of the conference speeches and group discussions and,
- To conclude with a “charge to the conference” which would send each of you back to your homes anxious and ready to do a better job in providing service for your deaf clients. I am not sure whether that charge was to be in the form of a shot in the arm, a pat on the back, a kick in the pants—or perhaps a combination of all three.

Here’s a story that will perhaps fill the first part of my assignment.

A wealthy Pasadena woman visited a horse farm and offered \$100 for a horse—she didn’t care what kind of a horse, but it had to be delivered according to her instructions. The manager brought out a nag ready for the glue factory and certainly not worth \$100. The woman indicated that she wasn’t concerned about the age or condition of the horse and paid her money and left her address.

Later that day the manager delivered the horse to a rather swanky apartment building, put the horse in an

elevator, and delivered him to the proper apartment where the woman was waiting expectantly. He was instructed to bring the horse right in, then take him into the bathroom and line him up parallel to the tub. The woman then handed the man a pistol and asked him to shoot the horse, which he did, with the horse tumbling into the tub.

The man was by this time thoroughly disturbed and asked, "Lady, would you mind telling me what this is all about?" "That's simple," the lady replied. "Today is our 50th wedding anniversary, and each night John comes home and as soon as he gets in the door, he asks, 'Honey, what's new?'"

Now when you return home and your boss or co-workers ask you, "What's new?" you'll have a ready answer.

The theme of this conference, **NEW VISTAS FOR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OF DEAF PERSONS**, has been developed very effectively by our various speakers. For the second part of my assignment I will not attempt to summarize these speeches. Rather, I would like to pull some common threads that suggest the "NEW VISTAS" awaiting us in this exciting field from the speeches and group discussions, and then propose a course of action which I believe should be taken if these vistas are to be realized.

*Common Threads from Conference Speeches and Discussion Groups.* In the keynote presentation, Mr. Klein gave an overview of the current economic scene, a summary of major industrial trends, and a look at today's labor market as it affects deaf employees. Employment opportunities for handicapped persons will be good—provided they are trained and prepared to compete in the job market.

Several speakers have identified the current trend in industry to demand workers with more highly developed technical skills and with higher levels of academic education. The high school diploma is today regarded as the minimum requirement for entering many blue-collar jobs. Many white-collar jobs require a minimum of two years of college training for entrance.

In an era of exploding technology today's worker can no longer expect to train for a specific job and remain on that job until retirement. Today's worker must be prepared to re-train as many as four or five times during his lifetime in order to keep up with the changing job market. Deaf workers are no exception to the above and must be prepared to re-train

for new employment opportunities before their present jobs are eliminated through automation or advancing technology.

There appears to be a growing plea for the rehabilitation counselor not to close the case file on deaf clients too soon. If the file is closed at the time of initial employment, the deaf person may be denied essential services which could assure adjustment and advancement on the job. It is encouraging to note that business and industry are beginning to recognize their social responsibility to employ and to provide on-the-job training (or re-training) for the handicapped worker. One west coast industry proposes to hire teachers of the deaf to teach classes in the company-sponsored courses and to pay for interpreting services for deaf employees who wish to take courses in public institutions.

There is an urgent need for closer coordination between educators of the deaf, rehabilitation counselors, and directors of post-secondary training institutions in order to successfully "bridge the gap" between training and employment.

Finding successful placement for deaf employees calls for creativity and imagination on the part of the employment counselor. One group proposed a demonstration project in which an electronic technician could be utilized to increase the effectiveness of the deaf worker. The use of simple light signals, telephone communication training, or minor changes in job assignments could open new vistas for employment opportunities for deaf persons.

From another group comes the urgent plea of a lifetime worker in this field—the son of deaf parents. He urges that we do not sell the deaf short by assuming that they are incapable of real achievement or responsibility. They are individuals first, individuals with the normal range of intelligence and abilities, but individuals who also happen to be deaf. We must not underestimate their abilities.

While no two communities are alike, each has its own "untapped resources" of community agencies and interested citizens. With creative leadership these resources can be effectively focused on programs to help meet the employment needs of deaf persons.

Throughout this conference the speeches and group discussions have conveyed the awareness that deaf persons coming to vocational rehabilitation counselors for services generally lack the basic educational skills and the work attitudes required for effective job training.

This awareness is confirmed by the findings of a recent national study of the education of the deaf (Babbidge Report) to the effect that deaf persons in America today are, as a

group, poorly educated and as a result, poorly served by our community agencies.

Our task of opening new vistas for competitive employment of deaf persons calls for a bold course of action aimed at the disease (and not at the symptoms) of undereducation, which has plagued deaf persons in America for too many generations.

*A challenge for the Conference.* On the wall of the Allegheny County Soldiers' Memorial here in Pittsburgh is the following statement by Abraham Lincoln:

"This war for the union is the people's conflict to make certain whether there shall be preserved in this world that form and substance of government the object of which is to remove the obstacles from the pathway of all—to open the avenues of honorable employment for all. And to give to all an unfettered start in the race of life."

I submit that the focus of this conference and the challenge as we return to our home communities is to "open the avenues of honorable employment for all (including deaf persons) and to give all (including deaf persons) an unfettered start in the race of life."

**PROPOSAL NO. 1 THE ADOPTION OF A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR DEAF PERSONS IN AMERICA.**

In our Declaration of Independence our founding fathers have said, "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

The proposal that we adopt a "bill of rights" for deaf persons in America recognizes that in the 190 years since the founding of our nation deaf persons in America have been denied many of their constitutional rights and have, in effect, become second-class citizens in our great democracy.

Let me suggest the following three articles for our "bill of rights":

*Article One* Deaf persons in America are citizens and taxpayers and are entitled to the full protection and rights guaranteed under our constitution

to every other citizen. Deaf persons are no longer willing to accept second-class citizenship.

*Article Two*— Today the right to the “pursuit of happiness” is inexorably tied to equality of educational opportunity. The goals of self sufficiency and family security can be fully achieved today only through education and gainful employment.

*Article Three* To insure the right of “educational opportunity,” any deaf person in America otherwise eligible for admission to an education or training institution shall be entitled (at government expense) to interpreting service which will enable him to compete for education and training on a reasonably equal basis with his hearing peers.

Someone has said: If you feed a man, he will hunger again, if you clothe him, the clothes will wear out; if you heal him, and he returns to his old life, he may be diseased again—but educate a man and he can help himself!

I am sure you will each have suggestions for other articles to add to our “bill of rights” but these three give us a starting point.

**PROPOSAL NO. 2 THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF DEAF PERSONS BE ESTABLISHED IN THE COURTS THROUGH APPROPRIATE TEST CASES**

In California recently a superior court judge denied a deaf couple the right to adopt a hearing child solely because of their deafness. Fortunately the case was carried to the state supreme court where the decision was reversed. This case has attracted nationwide attention and the court record stands as a witness to the legal profession that discrimination against persons solely because of their deafness will no longer be tolerated by the courts.

Court cases establish precedent for a particular legal issue and the fact that there has been a previous court decision tends to protect the rights of persons in similar situations in the future. Litigation in the courts is expensive and time consuming, and those of us who profess concern for the welfare of deaf persons in America must be prepared to share

the financial cost of such action.

Here are other issues in which court action may be required in order to establish the constitutional rights of deaf persons:

1. The right of deaf persons to the service of a qualified interpreter in criminal and/or civil court action. Recent supreme court decisions in the Escobedo vs Illinois case and the Miranda vs Arizona case establish that persons apprehended by the police must have the benefit of counsel and full knowledge of their legal rights. What about the deaf person who goes through criminal court proceedings without benefit of an interpreter or with a court-appointed interpreter whose qualification for service has not been verified or challenged? Are the constitutional rights of an individual protected in this situation? Judge Joseph Pernick of Detroit recently completed a survey of laws relating to the deaf in fifty states. His survey revealed that providing an interpreter for a deaf person is discretionary with the court in forty-nine states, and that there is no local or national organization prepared to certify the competency of an interpreter.
2. The right of deaf persons to study the language of signs in state supported schools. Deaf persons are one of the few minority groups in America who have been denied the right to study their own language formally.
3. The right of teachers to use any method of communication necessary in order to effectively teach deaf children. Laws in some states restrict the teaching of all deaf students to a single method.
4. The right of deaf persons to receive vocational rehabilitation assistance while attending a college of their choice.
5. The right of deaf persons to pursue professional careers in fields of their choice, such as engineering or teaching.
6. The right of deaf persons to seek employment as teachers of the deaf in our public schools.

**PROPOSAL NO. 3 THAT WE SUPPORT APPROPRIATE ACTION AT THE NATIONAL, STATE AND COMMUNITY LEVELS TO:**

1. Eliminate discriminatory practices which bar otherwise qualified deaf applicants from civil service or other employment.

In several states (including Michigan) civil service examinations have been successfully challenged on the grounds that (a) the norm is based on a hearing population—hence unrealistic and discriminatory for a person without hearing, and (b) that the examination is essentially a test of language proficiency and unrelated to job performance. The October, 1967 issue of *Changing Times* reports that the Jewish Employment and Vocational Service in Philadelphia recently retested 125 young men and women who had flunked the General Aptitude Test battery. Using performance tasks in a work setting, most young men and women came through with flying colors.

2. Effectively lobby for legislation to protect the constitutional rights of deaf persons. States such as Texas have taken the lead in successfully lobbying for initiating appropriate legislation to protect the constitutional rights of deaf persons. In the past, legislators have been quick to see the crutches and wheelchairs of physically handicapped persons, the seeing eye dog and white cane of the blind person. In our contact with legislators keep in mind that the interpreter gives visibility to deafness. Now let them see interpreters for deaf persons in action, and be informed on the special and critical needs of these handicapped people.

**PROPOSAL NO. 4 IN OUR SEARCH FOR "NEW VISTAS FOR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OF DEAF PERSONS" LET'S EXAMINE OUR OWN VISION OF THEIR EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL**

Let's imagine for a moment that each of you are back in your various agencies and that a deaf client comes to you for counseling. What would be your response if your client stated that his vocational goal was to:

—Become a senior scientific programmer and to work in our nation's projects to explore outer space?

—Study for a doctor's degree and to seek employment as a professor of rehabilitation at a hearing college?

Become a key administrator in a major governmental agency?

—Serve as a principal in a school for the deaf?

—Become a director of state vocational rehabilitation services for the deaf?

Become an orthodontist or consulting psychologist?

Enter the theater as an actor or actress?

Would you encourage your clients in their aspirations, or would you attempt to suggest more realistic goals as key-punch operating, body and fender work or printing, where there is always a good market for well trained deaf employees?

If you choose the latter course, you will be denying to your deaf clients the right to prepare for positions already held by such deaf persons as Roger and Robert Skinner, Victor Galloway, Boyce Williams, Tom Dillon, Robert Sanderson, James Marsters, Bernard Bragg and many others. No business, industry or profession can survive if it neglects to train future leaders. Somewhere in our schools and in our communities are the deaf men and women who can be tomorrow's leaders. An ancient prophet has said, "Where there is no vision the people perish." Surely this is true for those of us who profess to be leaders in the area of the deaf.

Anyone who can read a physics textbook knows that a bumblebee can't fly. According to the laws of aerodynamics his body is just too heavy to be supported by his tiny wings. Fortunately, the bumblebee doesn't know this, and he goes merrily on his way unaware that he is doing the impossible. Perhaps too many of us know what deaf persons "can't do" and are ready to impose "more realistic vocational goals" on those whose vision and level of aspiration may exceed our own.

During this conference and in studies related to vocational placement of deaf persons, there have been numerous references to the inability of deaf persons to use the telephone. As we have listened or read, we nodded our head in agreement assuming that the inability to use the telephone is "just one of those things" that deaf persons can't be expected to do. Yet, last night many of you met Miss Kukleski, who has been deaf for twenty years. With only a few hours of training, she is making independent telephone calls to her home, to friends, to her employer and has gained a new image of herself as a self sufficient person. In the area of telephone communication for deaf persons, we are not limited by technology; we are not limited by finances. We are limited by our own vision.

They say that an optimist is a person who sees a light where there isn't any, and the pessimist is the darned fool

who comes along and blows it out!

Two research studies are reported in the September 25 issue of *Education U.S.A.* (1967) that have great implications for those who work in the helping professions. One study conducted at a school in South San Francisco disclosed that if teacher expectancy of a pupil's potential for intellectual growth is raised, startling improvements can be achieved in the pupil's I.Q. within eight months. This study began by administering a standard intelligence test to all students in the school under the guise that it was a test to predict "academic blooming" or intellectual growth. Within each of the school's eighteen classrooms, 20% of the students (selected by random sample) were reported to the teachers as showing "unusual" potential for intellectual growth. Eight months later these "unusual" children did show significantly greater gains in I.Q. than the remaining pupils in the class. In one class the "unusual" children gained 24.8 I.Q. points more than the remaining pupils in the same class. In a research project, conducted in New Jersey, entitled "Who Failed—A Study of Subject Failure at the Secondary Level" it was found that, of those who failed, the parents, teachers, and students had low expectation levels.

A few weeks ago the newspapers carried a tragic report that a deaf man with an I.Q. of 135 had been found among residents of a state mental institution. Committed as a child thirty years ago, this individual was not retarded but deaf! For thirty years he had been expected to act as other retarded patients, and he had measured up to expectations.

The above citations confirm the findings of earlier research sponsored by the Kellog Foundation (1961) to the effect that students seldom rise above the expectations of their teachers, and that teachers seldom rise above the expectations of their administrators. If we are to raise the level of achievement among the deaf persons we serve, we must begin by raising our own vision of their potential.

As we leave this conference and return to our homes throughout the nation, God grant us the vision to see the potential of our deaf associates and the strength and determination to work and to fight, if necessary, to "OPEN THE AVENUES OF HONORABLE EMPLOYMENT AND TO GIVE TO ALL AN UNFETTERED START IN THE RACE OF LIFE."