



**sign** Good afternoon. Your lunch good? My name is Gloria McGregor. I want to talk about being hard of hearing and lipreading. **Signer signed and speaks**

Hello - I think you can see that my presentation would take me a long time if I signed it because I am not very good at it. I learned BSL but I don't know anyone who signs so I have no chance to use it and I have forgotten a lot. What I was trying to sign is this!!

For me lipreading and deaf awareness go together because if the person I am trying to lipread is deaf aware it is usually much easier to lipread them. I am hard of hearing. I was a primary school Headteacher with aspirations to become an Inspector. In those days, I didn't tell anyone I had a hearing loss. For a year I had been an advisory headteacher with responsibility for newly qualified teachers. It was a wonderful year. However, I realised that my hearing would not be good enough either for the classrooms or meetings and after returning to my school for a few years I felt I should take early retirement. I wasn't ill but I couldn't do my job to my satisfaction!!

Having had no time to spare, I now had all the time in the world. I was very depressed and felt very isolated. My hearing aids then, were not as powerful as today's hearing aids. I was Very depressed!! Finally, I picked myself up and went to a lipreading class, which was like a lifeline. Learning to lipread was the best thing I could have done. People often say to me "I had no idea you had a hearing loss" – which is great but it is also amazing because following a recent hearing test I discovered that my hearing is even less than I had thought. I have 10% of conversational hearing in my left ear and only 1% in my right ear. So how do I manage? I use my lipreading skills to help me make sense of what others are saying and I use all the other clues I can see/sense, together with my knowledge of language.

My presentation is "I see what you say". For those of us with hearing loss seeing is very important to help us make more effective use of what we hear. **(Take glasses off)** Most of us lipread to some extent: "I hear better when I have glasses on". **(put glasses back on)** You know what I mean.

I would like you to think for a moment of all the things that you have listened to today. Did you hear your alarm clock this morning? Did you hear the telephone and the doorbell ring? Did you hear your children or grandchildren speaking or singing or did you listen to the radio? For some of you, like me, who have a hearing loss, it may have been a long time since you heard these sounds. Did you know that 1 in 6 people have a hearing loss in the UK and this rises to 1 in 5 in older age groups? That is a large number of people many of whom are of employment age. I was 51 when I retired.

Deafness and being hard of hearing is one of the hidden disabilities. It cannot easily be seen and not hearing what has been said is sometimes attributed to the listener being stuck up, stupid or rude. I'm not sure which is worse. One of the results of this is that hard of hearing people can become isolated, lose their self-esteem and lose their willingness to speak for fear of making themselves look silly. Hearing people cannot cover their ears and understand what it is like not to hear the everyday sounds around them. It is hard to imagine being deaf or hard of hearing. Its hard to imagine what it's like to live with hearing loss.

Hearing aids help but for those with a severe hearing loss they are not the complete answer.

So why not sign? The fact is that many deafened people belong in the hearing world and do not know many, if any, others who sign. For them learning to lipread can be a lifeline that helps them to cope in everyday life. Lipreading is not a magic wand because it is not precise. There are many pitfalls that can cause a few problems with interpreting what is being lipread. Many sounds look similar on the lips causing confusion and a few laughs at our expense and some scrapes. Watch pea –be - me - did they all look the same? There were three words. pea /be/ me. If I said - I'm talking about honey and then said this "Bees make honey" a lipreader would probably see **bees** with no problem. There are many other examples of this. Knowing the context is so important! CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT!!

One "Access for all" document states that "lipreading is an art not a science" and relies heavily on

- knowledge of language
- an understanding of the context
- good lighting
- good acoustics and a quiet environment
- an awareness of lipreading ambiguities – that is- some sounds and words look alike on the lips and without knowing the context a lipreader can lipread correctly but still be wrong!
- Lastly you need clear speech delivered at a natural, if slightly slower pace.

I would agree with these but I think that by studying the sound formation on the mouth and by practising substitution, lipreading can be really useful. It is also important to read visual clues, facial expression, gestures and other body language and where necessary writing. When lipreading one should bear in mind that only about 30 per cent of speech can be lipread. Knowing the **context** makes it easier to lipread what the speaker is saying. Those of us who lipread **do** depend upon the actions of others. If people observe a few straightforward points we can manage quite well. If you are deaf aware you will know that if possible:-

- We need a quiet well-lit environment, free from distractions.
- We need people to face us either full face or so that we can see most of the persons mouth. Some people find it easier to lipread a side view face. Covering the mouth makes it more difficult. Do any of you remember Tom Peters. the management Guru? He would on to the stage and pace backwards and forwards whilst speaking (walk back and forth). NO, we shouldn't do that!
- If people speak clearly and a little slower- keeping the natural rhythm it is easier to lipread because so much of what we say is rhythmic and can give extra information about the speaker's feelings and ideas. We need the rhythm because if we speak like this so much is lost! Our language is full of stress, emphasis and has rhythm which we can often recognise subconsciously. Hello - how are you? (without voice then repeat with voice.) I'm sure you all recognised that.
- It is also useful, especially in social situations, to have a buddy – someone who will check that you are following the conversation and will discretely let you know that the conversation has changed direction and what is being discussed now! For instance, if you are talking, about ice - you could still be going down the slippery slope and everybody else is putting it in their gin & tonics. So do have a buddy if you can. This is so helpful!

When I retired in 1995 I thought that I would never teach again. How wrong can you be? I discovered I could use my skills, firstly teaching children who had particular learning difficulties or who needed coaching for private school's entrance exams and then by teaching lipreading. This was so satisfying and did a lot to restore my self-esteem and feeling of self-worth. It really helped me! Never mind that I was helping other people.

There are many people like me who have had to give up a very satisfying and worthwhile job because of their hearing loss. In today's world, this should not happen very often. We are much more aware of how to help people with any kind of disability and to ensure that they are not asked to do something that is not suited to their capabilities. Attitude is the key!

I have run out of time and there is so much more I wanted to tell you. so quickly let me tell you about my website – a free resource for anyone who wishes to practise lipreading.

There are fewer lipreading classes across the country now. I wanted to do something to help and so created the website “lipreadingpractice.co.uk”.

I aimed to demonstrate the value of lip reading in everyday life and to provide an opportunity to practise in a safe environment. It is **free to use!** because I hope that the users will be motivated to go to a lipreading class most of which are not free.

Finally, there is more information on the memory stick in your delegates bag and also on my website. I hope you will be encouraged to find out more about deaf awareness and lipreading and the place of hard of hearing people in the workplace.

Thank you very much for listening. I am happy to answer any questions. Vanessa is hard of hearing and is a working woman. John is a Company Director has employed hard of hearing people. We are happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you very much for listening.

Gloria McGregor, Lipreading Practice (Gold Sponsor)