

## My Undetected Hearing Loss



**Connor Quinn** has lived in Point Saint Charles since 2019. After studying history at Bishop's, and cultural theory at Groningen (The Netherlands), he continued with Business at McGill and HEC. He worked at Lifestyle Hearing in Ottawa, and presently works for a chain of hearing clinics called Lobe, based in Quebec City. He finds it a pleasure to work closer to home, with his Labrador puppy named Walter.

**M**y hearing loss journey started at the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport 10 years ago. I was walking through the corridors of the international terminal after a business trip to the US when my boss looked at me and said, "you should really do something about that." I didn't know what he was talking about, but apparently I was completely oblivious to my phone ringing as I was marching towards a long customs line. "How many calls are you missing a day?" he joked.

The ironic thing is that I was working for a chain of hearing clinics in Ontario at the time. "I know someone who can help you with that," my boss joked again. Access to audiology services and products was not the prohibitor to me realizing my hearing loss. Denial was also not the prohibitor. Financial obstacles then? Nope, my company had a benefits program for employees to subsidize hearing aids and provide hearing care. It was simply pure ignorance that a person in their early thirties could even develop a hearing loss.

We don't often think of getting our hearing tested regularly. We go to the dentist, optometrist, or family doctor regularly. I'm literally in a hearing clinic every day of the week, but me? A new study in management with

hard of hearing researchers from Portland State University and York University sheds light on how hearing loss can impact a person's success in their workplace. The study mentions that employees with a hearing loss use social isolation as a coping mechanism to avoid awkward, anxious, and frustrating communication experiences while on the job. This social isolation relieves the employee from uncomfortable situations at work, but can have damaging long term consequences to their advancement, commitment levels, satisfaction, and salary. In effect, the person becomes more disengaged in their professional life due to their disability, and not their actual dedication. This prohibits them from reaching their full potential.

The researchers recommend that it is important for managers to have a tailored approach to support their employees with hearing loss. An example of this might be to not use a cocktail party or restaurant as a preferred venue to introduce sales executives to potential clients. Instead, support your sales executives with hearing loss by allowing for a catered one-on-one lunch meeting hosted in your quiet office to introduce them.



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In my previous role with the large multinational hearing aid manufacturer, we had an EDI program that had many great initiatives in place based on several goals. However, nothing on helping employees with hearing loss at all, and this is a hearing aid company for crying out loud. This is the case for many different groups that are “invisible,” who tend to be underrepresented

I think it's great that we have studies like this to reference and provide us with some guidance on what to do. But we must ensure that the hearing loss is identified first, and this isn't always automatic like identifying a vision loss. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) best practices have become mainstream for many large business settings in the past few years. Companies are starting to realize the value creation being left on the table by not tapping into ALL their employees' full potential with accessibility programs and tools. This is a wonderful trend and gives the hearing loss community the opportunity to confirm when they require support to feel like they have the same access to opportunities as those with normal hearing.



However, as I mentioned previously, I wasn't even aware of my own hearing loss – it was not on my radar for years as the loss increased gradually over time till it was apparent to others and not me. The fact is, even with all the EDI programs that companies are putting in place, hearing loss has the likely potential of being left behind as a priority. It is the “invisibility” of the disability that does this, I believe.

For many companies, recognizing hearing loss as being a legitimate disadvantage that their personnel may experience is not obvious. Companies prefer to focus on more visible populations to include in their EDI programs, for example targeting gender, ethnicity, religious, or people with a physical disability to support with their programs.



without some equality measures put in place, yet don't make the cut for EDI initiatives.

This is all to say that EDI is an encouraging social phenomenon that many organizations are taking very seriously. The hearing loss community cannot sit idly by waiting for EDI initiatives to start having a positive impact for them. People with hearing loss will still need to recognize their disability, communicate it to others, and put their fate in their own hands by asking for help when needed: closed captions, quiet environments, asking others to speak clearly, etc. This is why I am so impressed with all the work Hear Quebec does to educate the population on hearing loss, its impact, and how to overcome it so we can all reach our full potential!

**This is why I joined HearQuebec!**