

Give people with hearing impairments a chance in the workplace – SAE4D

“When applying for jobs or training, I was called in to so many interviews yet wasn’t successful because my communication is not good like other candidates – yet I had the relevant qualification.”

That was the experience of Refilwe Setlau (age), who was born with a hearing disability. This year, after struggling to find employment despite completing her N6 Electrical Engineering qualification, she finally obtained an apprenticeship as an Auto Electrician at Putco in February.

“Refilwe’s story is not unusual, but in this – the international month for the deaf whose theme this year is ‘Equality for Deaf People’ – it’s a story worth hearing,” says Dr Jerry Gule, Chairman of South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D), an employer organisation that is committed to addressing issues confronting the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace.

According to Dr Gule, people with disabilities generally find it far more difficult to find employment than their non-disabled peers. The reasons for this vary, but often it’s simply a case of people not knowing how to behave in the company of someone with a disability.

“Another issue is that employers may be concerned that employing a person with a disability may present a problem in terms of safety or communication for people with a hearing impairment. However, these concerns can usually be addressed relatively easily,” he adds.

Refilwe, who uses a hearing aid and reads lips, admits that it sometimes becomes difficult to communicate with her co-workers. “But most of them can relate to my situation and help where they can,” she says.

“At times, I feel like giving up but I tell myself that there are so many disabled people out there who work very hard and they are able to succeed and fulfil their dreams. It is so challenging and difficult getting a learnership whether you are disabled or not so I am going to use this opportunity to the very best of my ability and I am going to give it all and make the best for my future.”

[The Disability Toolkit](#), compiled by Mike Grobler of [Reakgona Solutions](#), provides the following tips for employing people with hearing impairments:

- Provide written instructions instead of verbal;
- Stand close to the person's face/in front of that person when speaking;
- Speak slowly and clearly, forming words clearly with lips. (It sometimes helps to talk softly and concentrate on articulation if an individual is not making use of a hearing aid to enhance volume);
- Use a visual sign (eg. a red light) attached to an intercom to draw attention when an intercom calling system is used;
- Use SMS messages, pop-up messages and email to enhance communication from one office to another in one organisation;
- Use text message phones; and
- Use a sign language interpreter (optional)

Last word from Refilwe:

“I think employers should give people with disabilities an opportunity to prove themselves. They should try and relate to their situation. I also observed that people with disabilities don't give up easily; they give their best in whatever they do and try hard to succeed, no matter the situation.”

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About SAE4D

South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D) is a body constituted by employers who are committed to addressing issues confronting the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace. The organisation was set up to share experience, develop best practices, confront and tackle prejudices that act as barriers to the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace, and form a common understanding of the challenges and solutions required to fully develop the potential of people with disabilities to contribute meaningfully to society and business.

SAE4D members are South African companies who are signatories to the Constitution of the SAE4D, its principles and values.

Current SAE4D members include: ABB; Absa; Anglo American; Barloworld; Bowman Gilfillan; Edcon; Ernst & Young; Eskom; Glenrand; KPMG; Lorimar; Nedbank; PPC; SAB and Total.

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