



## Communication at Black Dot Coffee - Not a Problem!

Why did I open a coffee shop? Just because! I wanted to show the community that I can do this. The fact that I am profoundly Deaf does not stop me from achieving in any dimension of life.

The challenge of communicating with hearing people at Black Dot Coffee Shop is nothing new for me. I have been Deaf since the age of six months. I use gestures to indicate items on the menu, or I write back-and-forth. A few customers prefer to just talk with my business partner, who is hearing, and that's fine with me. Owning the coffee shop together with my partner is great! I am right behind him, ordering, handling the books, setting up displays, and spreading the word about the shop through the internet.

We want the atmosphere in the shop to be deaf-friendly, as well as welcoming to the general public. Our television runs captions. I've got my video phone set up in the shop. I'm very comfortable finding ways to communicate. We are hoping to have interpreters for live bands, comedy nights, and so on. Interpreters-in-training might want to volunteer as an excellent practice opportunity in a live entertainment setting.

When I write or gesture, some people tend to freeze, at first. I guess they don't realize right away that I am deaf. I don't feel the need to tell them that I am Deaf unless something comes up that makes it an issue. Misunderstandings do happen. My business partner noticed one customer's special request and relayed the information to me right away so I wouldn't miss anything. I lip-read pretty well, but some things interfere, such as a full beard, minimal mouth movements, or someone covering their mouth while talking. Most customers seem comfortable with communication at the café.

Bank officers gladly write back and forth for optimal clarity. I typically use email to communicate with wholesale vendors, exhibit booth representatives, and others outside the shop. When interviewing potential Baristas, I use a sign language interpreter to make sure that the candidates understand and respect me as a Deaf person.

I plan to teach our Baristas sign language so we can communicate well. I have had Linguistics classes covering sign language and have traveled all across America training interpreters and performing at events. I can't wait to train police officers and firefighters in sign language; so that these community workers can serve the Deaf community as well as they serves the general population.

It's been my experience that people assume doors would be closed to me simply because I am Deaf. However, I open my own doors. Some time after graduating from college, I worked as an accountant and business manager at Marketplace Mall. Little did I know that this experience would stand me in good stead for my own entrepreneurial venture, later on!

When I relocated from Rochester, New York to Seattle, Washington, I fell in love with the art of sign language performance. I've been a performer for over 25 years. In 1998, I embarked on an adventure, setting up a business providing shows that appeal to both Deaf and hearing audiences. I like to call these "One-Deaf-Woman" shows! My bookings continue to grow. This is my 12th year. A pet peeve is the unreasonable yet constant flow of requests for "free" performances. Naturally, the problems with the economy have cut school budgets and reduced sponsorships from nonprofit organizations, but I'm not going to let this stop me.