

## You Can Make a Difference

“*What is leadership?*” That is the question posed by Ainsley Latour, the opening speaker of the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Youth Retreat at the 2015 Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA) National Conference. Leadership is not about running an organization, executing projects, or other activities where working in a group is involved. Leadership is about communicating and visioning, where the person exerts an influence towards others into realizing that change is necessary and guiding them to develop goals. Ainsley introduced the concept of **anti-positional leadership** and as the words indicate, leadership holds no value on the position a person holds. For instance, a board president may be skillful in maintaining an organization via administrative and logistical tasks, but fails to communicate the vision to the member community, that person is only at most a manager, not a leader.

According to field expert John Maxwell, we reach the highest level of leadership when we establish a status of respect from others such that they follow us because of who we are and the values we represent. This constitutes as **personal leadership**, in which we look towards ourselves to identify the values we believe in. Leadership happens within our lives; in fact, it starts in our own lives. To lead others, we must be authentic in our words and actions, showing others that an issue matters to us personally, thus giving them the justification to join the cause because they also relate to the issue at a personal level. A clear example of such leadership was shared at the conference.

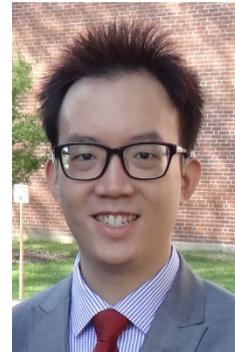
In a panel session about induction loops, Tim Archer shared a story of an elderly woman with a hearing loss who took action to remove the barriers she encountered at public spaces such as the banks and grocery stores. Identifying the noisy background as the factor hindering her ability to communicate with others, this woman then made her case known to management, calling for the need to make the facilities accessible. Phone calls were made, meetings were held and eventually, both her local bank and grocery store installed an induction loop which served as an effective and permanent solution that will not only benefit her, but other hard of hearing people as well. Furthermore, this caught the attention of the bank’s head office which led to branches in nearby regions also setting up the induction loops as a trial experiment. This woman had no idea that she would become the catalyst of a chain reaction leading to positive outcomes at a much larger scale. It is because she took the time to advocate for an issue that matters to her, others are inspired to follow and do the same, thus creating a rippling effect. She is not a board president and yet she demonstrates the highest level of leadership, influencing others to strive willingly towards the achievement of a common goal for all deaf and/or hard of hearing people: improving **public accessibility**.

For the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Walk2Hear taking place this September in Vancouver and Ottawa, CHHA Vancouver has launched a local campaign on public accessibility. This event marks a significant milestone because for the first time, there is a focus for conversations on public accessibility, leading to concrete actions. The topic of public accessibility could not have come at a better time, especially when Dr. Juliette Sterkins from Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) presented her work in advocating for induction loops across the United States. She contributed her success to the hard of hearing individuals who, once learning the benefits of induction loops, went to their local government officials and requested accessibility. HLAA and

Dr. Sterkins were not the key people making the difference; they contributed to the process by providing the facts, the empowerment came from each and every member in the deaf and/or hard of hearing community. This goes back to the concept of **anti-positional leadership**, we do not need to be in a certain position to possess qualities of a leader. Deaf and/or hard of hearing people in America were listened to because of who they are and the values they represent. The principle applies equally to anyone, anywhere and so I ask my fellow members of CHHA and other deaf and/or hard of hearing people in Canada the following questions with the utmost respect:

- Who are you?
- What do you value? What matters to you?
- What is your vision for other deaf and/or hard of hearing people?
- How do you see yourself in relation to this year's theme of public accessibility?

I am Bowen Tang. I am 24 and hard of hearing. I am an educator and a learner. I place important value in open communication. Relationships matter to me because they enable me to seek and learn information from my peers and mentors. It is my vision to see deaf and/or hard of hearing children and their families be given equal access to and opportunities for high-quality education across Canada. I see myself as a facilitator to encourage and guide conversations with my students, colleagues and peers on how education can contribute to improving public accessibility.



Let us embark on a journey to reflect within ourselves, find the values we hold most dearly, and use our abilities to transform that into personal leadership. I invite you all to join in this discussion and share your thoughts. Together, we can unify to be the wind of change.