

IF I COULD DO IT ALL AGAIN

By Nancy Telian, MS, CCC-SLP

I was recently asked to answer a couple of thought-provoking questions sent in by a graduate student in the field of Communication Sciences and Disorders. "Do you have any suggestions for students on how to start our careers off right? Looking back over your career, is there anything you would do differently if you could do it all again?"

For the "veterans" out there (as Oprah would refer to us), we actually do have much to offer in the way of offering advice to those about to enter the field, so I thought I would give this a try. After getting over the initial shock that I was old enough to be considered veteran of *anything*, and then dealing promptly with the hot flash that soon followed, I began to write, knowing that many "youngins" (another Oprahism) could probably benefit from my 32 years in the field. Now, let me be clear. You still qualify as a "youngin" if you are *new* to the *profession*, even if you are not a twenty-two year-old recent college graduate. Age is not a factor here. For any who would like to benefit from my experience, I have a few suggestions.

While under the stress of the academic demands in graduate school, I would continually repeat the following words to myself: "This is temporary." This saying is one of my favorites whenever I find myself overwhelmed in a particular situation. Try it... it works! My partner, and sister, Penny Castagnozzi shared this insight with me and I use it both in my professional life and my personal life. "Woah! My caseload numbers just went up again." (*This is temporary.*) "I'm overwhelmed with all these reports." (*This is temporary.*) "Where did these extra ten pounds come from?" (*Again, temporary.*) It's been two days and he/she hasn't called or texted (*Temporary.*)

When sitting in class, or listening to your clinical supervisor's feedback, instead of focusing solely on how you will retain all of this information for the test next Thursday, shift your thinking to include an awareness that this is the information you will soon be using to change lives, one client at a time, out in the real world. Know that you are becoming a true "agent of change."

During the process of seeking your first job (or making any job change), go out and do informational interviews and shadow professionals who work within the clinical work environments you may not have had a chance to experience while in school. When being interviewed for a position, ask many questions, and also ask for the name of someone who already works in this facility, so that you can interview him or her. He or she might be able to give you information from within "the trenches" of that job, offering the real scoop, such as the exact caseload numbers and the flexibility of the administrators.

When you do land that first job, become fast friends with the clerical or administrative assistants in your building. They will help you learn the ropes, such as where to find the complete list of students in a school for quick access to the contact information you need. Bring them a cup of coffee or a treat once in a while. Let them know how appreciated

they are for helping you do your job. Suddenly, because of these relationships, you will find your job getting easier and more enjoyable.

Finally, although you will walk into that new job setting as an ASHA certified and licensed expert in speech pathology or audiology, remain humble. Let others, especially those not in your profession, see you as someone who is there to help, and not intimidate, them. Hold your head up high and demand respect, but do it in a way that is tactful and engaging.

So, "youngins," have fun and enjoy the ride! As rides go, it will be filled with spins, turns, slow upward climbs, smooth sailing plateaus, and exciting downhill runs. At the difficult turns in your journey, remember to say to yourself, *"This is temporary."*

This article was written by Nancy Telian, M.S., CCC-SLP, co-director of Reading with TLC with Penny Castagnozzi. Nancy and Penny are the authors of Lively Letters and Sight Words You Can See, programs that develop phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word skills. They are nationally recognized speakers and can be contacted for inspiring keynote addresses or presentations on their own programs at 781-331-7412 or penny@readingwithtlc.com. For more information on Nancy and Penny or the programs they've created, visit www.readingwithTLC.com.