

Antidisestablishmentarianism

Who Am I?

Hello, my name is Snoopi Botten and I want to start by thanking Caroline Musselwhite for allowing me to share tips 2 times a year, I am deeply honored. I thought about it and I want my first tip to be about how to introduce someone to AAC, and also what not to do. This way I can tell you all what I've been through so that you will get to know me and have tips along the way.



My AAC Journey

When I was 15, my speech therapist introduced me to a device called a Handi-Voice. I believe it was the first AAC device, but I'm not 100 percent sure. It had a monotone voice that was very hard to understand and five levels of words. I was given it for one month and told to try it out and do anything I wanted to with it. So I did. On the fifth level was phonetic sounds so that if you wanted a word that was not in the device, you could build it. However, I was told that no one was able to use level five because at that time it was believed that if someone couldn't talk clearly, they might not understand how to build words. That was the wrong thing to tell me.

Level five became my very favorite level because I loved building words. One of my very favorite words to build was antidisestablishmentarianism because it was the longest word in the dictionary and it was the hardest word for anybody to say. My next favorite word was – get ready for it - Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. And then I would create real hard compound sentences that I didn't know the meanings of. I just liked doing stuff with the device that no one ever thought could be done. At the end of the month I gave it back. It was fun to play with, but that's all it was to me.

Three months later, the speech therapist called me into his office. It became the worst day of my whole life. He said he had a surprise for me and handed me a box. When I opened it, he told me it was my very own Handi-Voice. I looked at him and said, "I didn't want one." He looked back at me and said, "I know you're able to use it, you used it for a whole month, and from now on no one will listen to you unless you use the Handi-Voice to talk." I can't put into words how I felt. I put the Handi-Voice under my bed for two years

and just didn't talk. That was the hardest two years of my life. So finally I picked up the phone and called Legal Aid, told them what had happened and that I was tired of not talking. They came to the school and told them they had to let me talk with my own voice. That was the happiest day in my life back then because after two years I could talk again.

Tip # 1: So my first tip is, **ask** the person if they want the device, and let them choose what device they want to use.

Comedy Central

At age 21, I was in a Bible study, but I could never have a turn reading because no one would understand me. So I decided to look into a communication device. This time it would be totally my decision, and I wanted it so that I could read in Bible study. I ended up with a TouchTalker and back then, it didn't have Dectalk. The voice was kind of understandable; it had one male voice and one female voice. But I love to play with stuff, and I found a way to create other voices. So at that point I fell into doing comedy. It was all around one couple with two children and I did comedy every week, it was almost like a soap opera. Every week the audience couldn't wait till I played around on the software to hear what I came up with next.

Sing Out!

About six months later, Dectalk became available for the device. I got it because it was far more understandable. A friend of mine paid for it and every day he would joke around saying that "When you get your new Dectalk, it will sing." When I got the device back, I don't know what made me read the manual because I never ever read manuals, but when I looked to the manual, one of the topics was how to make it sing. I lit up like a Christmas tree because all my life I wanted to be a singer but I thought it would never be possible. So from that point on I took all my time, money and energy into learning music. that is all I wanted to do and that is all I did. It took me a year and a half to understand how to make it sing one note because I didn't understand what phonetic coding was. I was trying to spell normally and I didn't know why it kept telling me I had errors. Then the day came when I finally understood it had to be done phonetically, and when I got it to sing my very first sound I went nuts because I knew I finally had something to start with. Everyone around me could not understand why I was so excited about one sound. But that one sound turned into a word, and then a line, and then a verse, and then a chorus, and then the most off-key

song you ever heard. But that was how I started. Over the next five years I could finally learn music and get better and better and better.

For me, I had to learn music before I could learn to communicate in normal words. I didn't know it but I was born with music in me and it just had to come out. Today I do concerts, I have a number of albums out, and I am happy as an entertainer.

Tip # 2: Help people pick out a device that will do what THEY want to do! I know not everyone wants to go into music like I did, but I feel part of the key thing when helping someone pick out a device is what do they want to do with it. This way the device will become part of the person. Of course the idea is for them to talk with it, but what more do they want out of it? Do they want to access a computer, write a book, take a picture, run their studio, fly a remote-control airplane? I mean, you have to think outside of the box. What do they like to do, and what do they want to become. If you can build around that, I feel they will be more likely to want to use their device.

Let me share one more thought. I love to do long songs and let me tell you why. Some people believe that a disabled person can not keep their mind on something for a long period of time. So I do long songs not only to prove them wrong, but to encourage parents who have a disabled child. I want everyone to know that anything is possible no matter what their disability is.

How To Program Songs

I have a CD on my web site:

www.theflameofhope.co

It is called Dectalk 101. Anyone who is interested in music can order that CD. It will tell them everything needed to know in order to program a song. If music is not their thing, I hope it will at least inspire them to go after their own dreams.

Tip # 3: Never give up, and never let people around you tell you that something can't be done. With technology today, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!