

## **What inspired you to learn about communications and take on the challenge to do it in such a big community?**

I was born completely, profoundly deaf, to a deaf mother and a hearing father. In addition, I have a deaf younger brother and a huge hearing extended family. Growing up, I had always understood that there were two separate worlds. I moved between them frequently.

This instilled in me an innate urge to “explain” things to one side about the another, as I understood that so much misunderstanding arose from a struggle to communicate. This motivation to help break down the barrier of misunderstanding and prejudice led me to become an advocate in my college days at Gallaudet University, where I was originally a Theater major. I had initially viewed Theater as a compelling medium to communicate perspectives, human experiences, and ideas. However, something happened during my college days that profoundly shifted my career trajectory.

While I was a college student, I was highly fortunate that then-Senator Obama ran for President and I created an accessible, bilingual blog that had information about voting & the election process in both American Sign Language and written English language. This blog quickly became an internationally read resource and shortly after Obama won the election, I received an award from a hearing Latinx organization praising my blog. When I received that recognition for my blogging, it hit me – I realized that my communications work mattered to the hearing community as much as it mattered to the deaf community. Communications is about enfranchising through information.

When I was very early in the field of politics, I would often say that the things I was seeing and learning – I considered it to be so interesting and curious, I immediately wanted to share my learnings with others. I fell deeper into communications. I am on my journey of growth. I don’t consider myself an “expert” but I do want to share my experiences in hopes that it may aid others’ growth. I am always curious and always ready to learn from others, as well.

I moved from blogging and grassroots social media communications to professional communications in several government posts, from both Democratic and Republican congressional offices on the Capitol Hill, to First Lady Michelle Obama’s Press Office in the White House, and with the [White House’s](#) Communications team. Specifically, when I was working in First Lady Michelle Obama’s press office – I remember working on many public-private partnerships to accomplish initiatives that were very meaningful. These initiatives ranged from addressing children health, employment opportunities for veterans and military families, and more. I realized that the private sector had just as great opportunity to address the world’s problems as the government. As a result, I started to seriously consider the private sector after my public service chapter concluded.

After departing the White House, I met [Jenny Lay-Flurrie](#) at a conference and shortly after that, I read Satya Nadella’s book “[Hit Refresh](#).” Everything just clicked for me and I realized that Microsoft was already moving full speed ahead in building a world that was inclusive, empathetic and increased trust. With the exponential growth and impact of technology on our world, it is indisputable that technology will shape our future. I wanted to be part of that so I came to work for Microsoft in a communications role.

At Microsoft, it’s the goal to have our purposes and actions to be [aligned](#) to helping solve the world's problems, not create new ones. This has been central to my vision of what it means to work these days.

To be a deaf person working in communications, through such an extraordinary time, it is very important to stay connected to the “purpose of work” – which is to help better the world. It is what grounds me and helps me stay motivated day after day.

### **Who was your role model growing up?**

Frankly, my role models are my own parents. Their stories exemplify the necessary values of empathy, growth mindset, grit and resilience.

My mother was deaf from birth but her own parents didn't know that, so she was raised for a bit before they finally realized she was deaf. Consequently, my mother had language deprivation because she wasn't able to learn any language until the age of four years old when my grandparents – her parents finally decided to learn sign language. She worked incredibly hard to learn how to read and went on to earn her advanced degrees. My mother taught me empathy. My mother's story also drove home the importance of supporting and welcoming deaf/hard-of-hearing people from non-deaf families into our community and ensuring they have all the tools they need to succeed.

My father, himself a mixed-race Mexican Japanese foster child in 1950s Los Angeles, had to learn to completely rely on himself and ultimately earned a Ph.D. in Adult Education & worked a long civil service career. My father is really the main reason why I have always sought for a giving-back component to anything I do in my career. He also taught me the values of a deep respect for education and a thirst for learning and growth no matter where you are in life. His story is one of great grit and resilience that continues to inspire me every day and helps put things in perspective when I face challenges myself.

### **How have you found technology to be helpful (or not) for you and others in staying connected during this pandemic?**

Even before the pandemic, it was already hard to fathom life without technology. Deaf people are often eager adopters of technology, and we had already embraced video meetings and video calling earlier than many. We were able to share our existing learnings on effective remote calls and meetings with our colleagues. It has become clear that communications-based technology are not just utilitarian – they are precious these days in helping individuals, households, and institutions build up their digital capability and resilience!

I have personally found loneliness to be a bigger issue to worry about for many deaf and hard of hearing, and people with disabilities in general. The struggle to maintain a human connection, when so many of us have to be separated through incredibly stressful time, can be very painful. That's why the future of technology, as it has been impacted by trends from the current pandemic, will have to take into account *wellness* considerations.

With the unquestionable impact of the pandemic, the economic disruption, and the Black Lives Matter movement, I do hope the key takeaways for us all from this collective shared experience is that the path ahead of us must be empathetic, equitable, and just. Our growth ahead – as we continue to build and develop more new technologies - must be inclusive at its core.

**What do you want the Deaf community to achieve in the future?**

At Microsoft, we often talk about the opportunity for technology to empower people and organizations, to help them achieve more.

Many deaf and hard of hearing individuals refer to a concept called "[Deaf Gain](#)" – which is the perspective that being deaf is actually a net-positive, that we help bring a "gain" to the world through our unique experiences rather than viewing the deaf experience as a negative thing. Fundamentally, that is about empowering the world.

It is my hope that the world will one day arrive to that place where broadly, societies will accept and embrace the empowerment that the deaf and disability communities offer up to the world. The day when that happens, I have no doubt we will all achieve profound things beyond our imagination.

**What do you want to show the younger generation or others through what you do?**

Don't be afraid to set off and try a new direction. Your growth doesn't ask for permission.

*Leah Katz-Hernandez is a Communications Manager in the Office of the CEO, Microsoft.*

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