

## Mick Posner's SWS Transcript

### **Stephanie [00.09]:**

Hi, I'm Stephanie Hakulin. Today, on STEM Workforce Stories, we're joined by Mick Posner, who teaches social studies and American Sign Language. We'll learn why he choose a career as an educator...

### **Mick [00.31]:**

I wanted to take my experience and bring that to others.

### **Stephanie [00.36]:**

Mick has got a really incredible outlook and he'll share it with us today, on STEM Workforce Stories...

### **Mick [00.55]:**

Well, first of all, hello. My name is Mick Posner. I'm originally from New York. I grew up on Long Island. I went through a mainstream experience in school. I never went to a deaf residential school. I did go to Gallaudet University. I finished my undergrad there, and then I went to RIT and I stayed there for my master's. My second master's, I went to Central Connecticut State University. Out of college, I worked at the Rochester School for the Deaf.

I ended up leaving Rochester and came back to Connecticut. That's where I am now. I started working at the American School for the Deaf as a scientist. I taught science there and I taught

English and Language Arts. From American School for the Deaf, ASD, I started working for the government in the Department of Rehab Services, and I've been doing that for over 10 years. I'm working here in West Hartford in a public school, actually, and I teach full-time ASL here.

**Michael [02.24]:**

You said you started working at ASD, the American School for the Deaf. What was your motivation to start working there?

**Mick [02.35]:**

Honestly, I always wanted to work with deaf children. I grew up in a mainstream situation. I never had the chance to go to a deaf residential school, so I always wanted to work with that population and be able to give back, use my own personal experiences, my challenges and struggles, and use that to benefit the students.

I'm certified to teach social studies and American Sign Language. My original goal was to teach social studies at a deaf school. That was the goal when I was in my first graduate program, studying education. That was what I was planning to do, so I took a lot of social studies courses, I took a lot of history, art, Middle East history.

At the American School for the Deaf in Connecticut, they had an opening. No, actually they had two openings. One was for the elementary school level, and my wife ended up getting that job. The other one that was not filled was a science teacher position, and they said, "How much do

you know about science?" I said, "Well, I've taken classes. I've always been interested in science. I wouldn't mind giving it a try." That's how I got that job. That was what got me into science.

**Michael [04.12]:**

Where did that inspiration come from? Why did you want to get into the field of education?

**Mick [04.20]:**

Now, looking back when I really break it down, I was inspired by so many good teachers that I had in high school. They were not deaf or in the deaf community, they were hearing, but they were role models. I wanted to emulate that and be able to pass that on. That's when I realized I really wanted to be involved in education.

**Michael [04.44]:**

You had mentioned that you were mainstream in school when you were younger, and then you got to go to Gallaudet, which is the deaf Mecca, what was that like for you to experience that?

**Mick Posner [05.04]:**

When I got to Gallaudet, it was culture shock. It was a lot easier, because I could communicate with everybody. I didn't need to have a pen and paper ready at all times. I didn't have to have ink all over my hands and arms because I didn't have paper, and I was really able to just be and live and function.

When I got there, I started out in computer science, then I realized that I didn't want to spend my life working in front of a screen, so I changed my major to philosophy, because at that time I was thinking about possibly going to law school. I thought, "Yeah, philosophy will be a good lead to that." But I didn't graduate from Gallaudet, I ended up going to RIT, Rochester Institute of Technology, where I finished my undergrad work in criminal justice instead.

**Michael [06.06]:**

Maybe you can tell us a little bit more about what made you transfer over to RIT.

**Mick Posner [06.14]:**

I didn't feel like I was growing. Gallaudet was too much of a utopia. Everything was just too available. There was just almost too much access, I guess.

Every summer, I would go back home and I'd have a different type of culture shock, because I'd have to reintegrate to being around people who didn't sign, to people from a different culture and had a different view on life. All summer, I was experiencing one thing, and then in the school year having a completely different life experience. I thought, "What skills do I need to succeed in life?"

I wanted the best of both worlds. By that, I mean in the deaf community I can thrive, I have confidence, but I had gotten rusty at being around non-signers, the rest of the world, what we call the hearing world. I realized I needed to do more work in that area. Rochester Institute of

Technology, RIT, offered that balance because it's a more integrated campus with both deaf and non-deaf students.

**Michael [07.32]:**

I'm wondering... I know that you had changed to philosophy and criminal justice, but when did you first get interested in computer science? Was there something you experienced as a child or maybe your parents were involved in? I'm curious.

**Mick Posner [07.50]:**

Oh, yeah. I grew up in a house where I was introduced to computers from a very, very young age. My dad, and still to this day, is fascinated with technology. He was an accountant. Even in the early days, he was interested in computer programming and how to do his accounting work better. He was always willing to test out new programs. We had those old, big mainframe box computers when I was growing up, and so there were always computers and technology in the house. I was always exposed to that from a really early age in my life.

It was also true that my dad was always looking for technology to make our lives easier, to be more efficient. He didn't just use it for work, but he also used it for home budgeting. He was always making spreadsheets to figure things out, keep track of things, and so we always had conversations about that. I feel as though I guess I had an edge based on my early experiences with that from my dad.

My dad was also the type who would have meetings with his coworkers from the bank at the house. He'd have dinner meetings at our home. He would talk about computer software, what types they should be using, what types they shouldn't be using, which ones were going to be better for the fields that they were working in. I was always a part of those conversations. Because of that, it really impacted me.

And, growing up as a '90s kid, we had the internet. I learned about HTML. I started to teach myself back in the early days of Java scripting before everything moved over to just Java. I did a lot of that on my own. I was designing webpages for my friends when I was in high school.

**Michael [10.10]:**

Related to your job now, you're teaching American Sign Language. Are you the only deaf person in the school that you work in?

**Mick Posner [10.21]:**

Yeah, I'm currently the only deaf instructor on staff, yeah.

**Michael [10.25]:**

What has your experience been like at the school?

**Mick Posner [10.30]:**

It's funny, I was just thinking about this yesterday. I'm so lucky to work here. The administration is very progressive. They believe strongly in authenticity. They believe in the power of

authenticity, they believe in the power of diversity. I'm fortunate that generally, even though I'm the only deaf person here, it's a very good experience. I'm working to increase deaf awareness, which means that the administration knows that they need to get interpreting services, because occasionally they would have impromptu staff meetings and no interpreter would be available.

They've been really good at meeting my needs in terms of accommodating for students, giving me what I need to teach effectively, and the administration has been really open to using technology like email, Zoom, Google Classrooms. They also believe in the curriculum strongly here, and so they've given me a lot of leeway to be able to design a curriculum that works with our student body that is still up to school and state standards.

**Michael [11.47]:**

Now, currently with the pandemic, are you teaching on Zoom?

**Mick Posner [11.54]:**

Well, for most of the school year until just recently, we were using a hybrid approach, which means that half of the students would come to school part of the week and the other half would stay remote. Those would switch off every other week, or every week, rather. At this time, we're currently back to full, in-person teaching and learning, masking, socially distant.

The challenge is that American Sign Language is not just about the hands. It requires use of your face, and so I rely on all sorts of facial behaviors to understand the fullness of my language. I've had to get really creative. We're using technology to make it work. There's an app called

Flipgrid, which what it does, is a student works on understanding ASL, what we call receptive language skills.

**Michael [13.03]**

What advice do you have to give to students who are ready to start college, for example, deaf students who, maybe they're trying to decide what college to go to or thinking about their future careers and what major they want to take?

**Mick Posner [13.18]:**

My advice is that there are so many good colleges out there. The challenge is going to be picking one. Which one's going to be the best fit for you? Because every institution is going to have their strengths, and so what I tell my students is to look beyond the college itself and look at where is it located? Does that work for what you want? If you want to be in a people-related field, like let's say you wanted to become a social worker, look for a college that's more urban-based rather than a college that's situated in a rural area.

You want to have more opportunities as a social worker to be around people. If you're looking at technology, make sure that the college is near a tech hub, someplace that's going to be really accessible to the tech and business community. Now of course, those are the schools that are going to be much more in demand and a lot more competitive, but you'll be able to network and meet people in your field, and those people are the ones who are going to bring you to the opportunities that you get.



Think beyond just the college itself. Think about the location. Just like when you're setting up a business, you have to think, "Where do I want to have my business? Where is demand going to be?" It's the same thing when you're looking at your future career or even your major, where's the demand? Go where the demand is.

Oddly enough, the advice that I've given to people before is what we have been talking about all along, is the key is asking questions, not being afraid to ask questions. I tell people that I'm like a fungus. I will latch on to a person and I just grow all over them. I don't really take no for an answer. "Hi, I'm here. I'm growing on you. Answer my questions."

The key for that is that I seek out people who are doing what I want to be doing. Surprisingly, most of the time, people are more than willing to talk about what they do because they love talking about what they do and they love that recognition. It's always good for the overall industry to develop those types of partnerships, so that's always been my approach. If you want to become a science teacher, seek out your favorite science teacher or the best science teacher that you had, and ask them how they got to where they are, because you never know what you're going to learn. Oftentimes, they're going to have really good advice and they'll say just the right thing that you need to move you in that right direction.

We know that STEM is rapidly evolving, daily it changes. If you have your mind set on a particular field, be open to change, because let's say somebody's interested in math and they're thinking about possibly going into teaching or being a statistician for a company or something. Because the field is changing, be open to other options like maybe sports analysis, because that's

an area that's currently working with a lot of STEM, especially math and engineering fields. Be open to opportunities. It might not be your first choice, but it could be a stepping stone to leading you to the next thing that you want to do.

**Michael [17.18]:**

Thanks so much for your advice, for sharing about yourself, for giving us a glimpse into your experience and at your school. Thanks so much.

**Mick Posner [17.29]:**

Well, yeah. Thanks for having me.

**Stephanie [17.34]:**

Hi, it's Stephanie again. So glad you were able to join us, today. Mick's unique career journey is just one of many interesting stories. Be sure to check out more of them - on STEM Workforce Stories.