

The Sign Post

Newsletter for the Central California Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf



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Accepting the Job: At What Cost to Clients?

Amy Hall-McLaughlin, NAD V

An eternal question for interpreters: is an unskilled, unqualified or even bad interpreter better than no interpreter at all? Initially, you might think not, but in a world where there are not enough interpreters—both qualified and not—who decides if someone should accept an assignment and how is that decision made? Is it based solely on certification, years of experience, personal opinion, or the need?

Professionalism is Tenet 2 in the RID Code of Professional Conduct. The guiding principle states, “Interpreters accept assignments using discretion with regard to skill, communication mode, setting, and consumer needs...” but what if discretion is skewed by the need to gain experience or earn money? Interpreters have a need to make a living, but at whose expense?

There has long been a debate about where to place novice interpreters. People often suggest putting them with young children since their language is so limited. This is a common misconception - children’s language is not limited. They need to be exposed to the most fluent language models. So, where do we place novice interpreters? Medical settings, legal settings, job interviews? There does not seem to be a *right* place to put someone who is inexperienced.

Additionally, there are interpreters who might consider themselves seasoned. Whether they have become complacent with their work or their ego precedes them, they too are not qualified for many assignments they accept.

I do feel that interpreters should step out of their comfort zone sometimes and try an assignment that is a little beyond their current skill set. This is how we grow professionally and determine which types of interpreting jobs we are qualified for and those we are not. Unfortunately, we often see interpreters accepting jobs for which they are unqualified. Whether their

judgment is lacking or there is no one else available, the point still remains that they are doing these jobs at someone’s expense - frequently the deaf consumer.

We are in a practice profession and should behave as such. If you compare interpreting to another practice profession, such as medical doctors, you will see some vast differences. A doctor cannot legally practice medicine without being licensed, whereas interpreters can work without being certified (although certification alone is not equal to qualified nor do all qualified interpreters have certification). Furthermore, a doctor typically completes more schooling than an interpreter and a longer internship or residency. These differences have a considerable impact on the profession.



My answer to the original question is no, I do not believe that something is better than nothing. I believe many interpreters should not be accepting jobs unless they have a skilled and proficient interpreter who can oversee them until they are ready to work on their own. I believe first and foremost that a person needs language proficiency before they even start interpreting. In addition, educational and/or certification requirements need to be more rigid. I also believe that we need a governing body that

continually monitors beginning and veteran interpreters in order to determine if more training is needed.

While interpreters might not have the same job as doctors, one principle is the same: “do no harm.” Perhaps when you are contemplating accepting a job, you will put yourself in the deaf person’s shoes and think, if you had to depend on someone for complete communication access, would mediocre be good enough?

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Leadership Meetings are open to all CCRID members. See the calendar at our website for date, time and place.

Contact ccrid@ccrid.org with any questions regarding meetings.

The Sign Post is prepared quarterly. Please send ideas, items or information for announcements to newsletter editor Shannon M. Simonelli at ccrid@ccrid.org one month prior to publication date.



CCRID Member Spotlight: Kristy Gonzales

What kind of interpreting do you do and why? VRS; it can be challenging but very rewarding in several ways. I am a CODA and growing up I did not have the luxury of

being able to speak with my mom over the phone. Growing up we used California Relay Service ... but lengthy conversations were rare. So being a part of connecting families is just one reason I love doing VRS. Also, I love seeing how VRS can be so liberating for people.

What drew you to the field of interpreting? Actually it was by accident that I ended up in the interpreting field. My mom ALWAYS wanted me to become an interpreter, but I never had any interest in becoming one growing up. I needed to find a part time job and heard about the new VRS center in Fresno. I knew I didn't have much experience, but heard that they had a mentoring program, so thought I'd give it a try. After meeting with Chantel [Cox] who was the manager at the time, I knew I had a lot to learn before I actually started interpreting. I started the mentorship program, attending

workshops, reading, and learning more about interpreting. The more I learned the more intrigued I became, and I just fell in love with it. It felt so rewarding in so many more ways than I could of ever imagined. To serve my mom's community and my community just felt right. After much mentoring, studying and practice, I eventually became NIC certified! That was a huge accomplishment, and I felt like it was some sort of confirmation that I was exactly where I was meant to be.

What keeps you in the field of interpreting? My mom. She is my inspiration. I want to be the interpreter she always deserved.

Why is the Deaf community important to you? The Deaf community is important to me because it is and will always be a big part of who I am. Growing up with a deaf parent, the deaf community was my family away from family.

What aspect of interpreting gives you the most joy? Being a part of bridging the gap between the Deaf and hearing communities.

What has been the most nerve wracking part of interpreting and how have you addressed or overcome it? Conference

calls are the most challenging calls for me. I want to do the best job possible, but feel at times the circumstances work against me instead of for me. So one way I have overcome this challenge is by not focusing on myself during the call, but being very open and communicating everything that's going on with my deaf consumer. My focus and goal is that they have a successful call with or without me, so whatever it takes I try to do.

If you were going to give any advice to a novice interpreter, what would it be? Stay humble, never stop learning, and love and respect the community you're working in!

Do you have any interpreter or Deaf mentors? If so, what encouraged you to work with a mentor? Yes I had two interpreter mentors, Amy Hall-McLaughlin and Chantel Cox. What encouraged me to have a mentor is that I felt I needed training before I started interpreting. I am the type of person who doesn't like to go into anything blind. I wanted to be completely prepared before I started interpreting. Having a mentor was a great benefit for me and I would recommend to anyone just starting out in the field.

CHALLENGE

The following excerpt is from "Great Interpreters Don't Grow on Trees: 123 Steps to the Top of the Sign Language Interpreting Field" by Kelley C. Clark

Do you have a mentor? If not, today consider getting one or even several mentors. Before choosing mentors, prepare by readying a list of your strengths and a list of skills you want to improve. You can have one mentor to work on vocabulary and another for topic transitions. A mentor can monitor your use of ASL glosses in your English interpretation. You can use a mentor to discuss particularly sensitive situations, knowing and ensuring that confidentiality shrouds the conversations.

Some interpreters living in rural areas will have a more difficult time locating a mentor. Knowing this, mentors can still be found and used. Look for mentors in your own community, surrounding areas, and at workshops. If proximity is an issue, tape or videotape your work and mail it to your mentor. Finally, because mentorship takes time, try to find a way to reciprocate the favor.

Are you getting CCRID emails? Many member emails, especially Comcast addresses, are being returned undelivered. Please be sure to add ccrid@ccrid.org to your safe senders list!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Stepping Up

CCRID Members who have passed an interpreting assessment or certification:

Kendra Keller was awarded the Qualified Mental Health Interpreting certificate by the State of Alabama - the only state in the U.S. offering a specialized certification in mental health interpreting. After three years of study and 40 hours of practicum, she is proud to be a "Q"!

All names included with expressed permission.

EVENTS

April

15, 2:30pm—4pm, Leadership Meeting; Location TBA, Fresno email ccrid@ccrid.org for more information

20, 6pm-8pm Accepting the Job: Profit or Expense? Presented by Amy Hall-McLaughlin, DHHSC, 5340 N. Fresno St, Fresno, CA 93710

Terp Time Professional Development dates to be announced at a later time. For details and event fliers go to the calendar listed at ccrid@ccrid.org