

The Sign Post

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Must be Present to Win: Looking at Interpreter Stress and Health

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Have you ever thought: "I will take care of myself when I have time" or "It's a luxury to care for myself, my job is to make it all work out, and well!" Self-care is a necessity and becomes an ethical mandate when it results in a noticeable effect on our ability to work:

CPC Tenet 3: Conduct: 3.2 Decline assignments or withdraw from the interpreting profession when not competent due to physical, mental, or emotional factors. Self-care in our profession has focused on wrist care, arm exercises and ergonomics. These are important, and there is much more to this equation.

Supported by occupational stress research conducted with interpreters (Dean and Pollard, 2005, 2009), when the demands of any environment surpass the real or perceived options to respond (controls), a stress response occurs. How are the people we work with, our partners, and families also affected by our repeated stress exposure?

The neurological imperative to protect ourselves is behind the stress response of the body. This is full system reaction, affecting changes in our bodies: the way we feel, our thoughts and behaviors, as well as our ability to connect with others. Altered posture, aches and pains, injuries, acute and chronic disease, depression and anxiety are all related to this basic response.

In a job that requires us to think on our feet and expect the unexpected, where we most often work alone, it's much more likely our bodies will respond with a "fight or flight" reaction. We see how this plays out in our work: the body is in a state more prone to isolate, put ourselves first, and be narrow in our world view because we are in survival mode. It also compromises our ability to work in our non-native language(s). It is interesting to begin to realize how this leads to decisions about how and *if* we team, ethical decision making, language competency and cultural sensitivity.

In our workshop, we experiment with scenarios and responses, discuss tools to discover and address our human needs and how to go about bringing ease and integrity back



into our work on a human level.

The work of realigning our focus on health and stress reduction begins with the following concepts of interpreter stress and health: the impact of stress and the fact that we are individually and collectively a 'network' neurologically and socially speaking; we are a community. There are three main areas of strategies that we currently use for 'survival' and that we can consciously develop – the physical (neurology, the cellular level, our posture/spinal adaptations), the mental/emotional (frontal cortex responses included), and finally, behaviors - the overt part of our inner strategies. In the context of our work as interpreters, more specifically, our decision making, our workshop provides practice in what we call "The Decision Conga Line" beginning with self inquiry: What prompted my decision? What are the effects and side effects of our decisions on those I work with? How do I know if my decisions/actions are ethical and effective? How is my

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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.

Must Be Present to Win (cont. from pg.1)

interpreter identity and stress playing out professionally? What is “professional esteem” and how can I have more ease in my work?

Learning our individual coping strategies on a physical, mental, emotional and behavioral level and then learning of strategies that actually support our well-being, our professional decision-making processes and our connections with others in our work and personal lives will open doors of awareness and decrease stress.

Audre Lorde said, in her chapter “Poetry is not a Luxury,” that “the quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives.”

Poetry is not a luxury – and neither is self-care.

“I will make time for self care, for I am a luxury I cannot afford to lose”

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References:

Dean, R. K., Pollard, R. Q & Samar V. J. (2010, Winter). RID research grant underscores occupational health risks: VRS and K-12 settings most concerning. *VIEWS*, 27(1), 41-43.
Lorde, Audre. “Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde,” *The Crossing Press Feminist Series / Trumansburg, NY, 1984.*
NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct, www.rid.org

The following excerpts are from “Great Interpreters Don’t Grow on Trees: 123 Steps to the Top of the Sign Language Interpreting Field” by Kelley C. Clark

CHALLENGE

Career Line & Skill Improvement

Today...draw your interpreting career line as it relates to the advancement of your skills. Begin where your career first began. For example, start with the first time you met a deaf person or the day you graduated from an interpreting program. Include every event and sabbatical that impacted your skills. When did your skills spike, plateau, or decline? Next, plot the future of your career. What might your future hold? Contemplate the possibilities and dare to dream. (Page 26)



Emotion-Laden Work

We can be called upon to work in extremely personal situations. It is not uncommon for us to see people at the worst times in their lives and to share their pain through our work. What do you do after an especially emotional job? Do you have a safe place to process your grief, anger, frustration, anxiety or other distressing reactions? Do you pretend nothing happened, or do you hold it

in waiting for the emotions to slowly drain away?

If you have strong reactions, you are not crazy, weak, or along. I recommend one or a combination of several of the following self-care options. Try exercise or yoga. Spend time in nature. Seek mentorship or establish a self-help group for interpreters—a safe place to process feelings while helping others in your same situation. Journal your emotional reactions (omit all client-identifying information). Contact your spiritual advisor. Engage in recreational activities such as art and music to express your feelings in a positive, creative way. And, if you believe it to be necessary, seek counseling. (Page 96)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Stepping Up

CCRID Members who have passed an interpreting assessment, certification test, or have completed an aspect of professional development:

- Amanda Bosworth, EIPA
- Heather Jordan, EIPA
- Jennifer Larsen, NIC Master
- Suzanne Conway, OTC

All names included with expressed permission.

EVENTS

April

9, 9am—11am, Terp Time, Professional Development: **Strategies for Dealing with Stress & Disconnect**
10, 2pm—4pm, Leadership Meeting; Suzanne Conway’s residence, Fresno
email ccrid@ccrid.org for directions

May

6, 6:30pm-9pm Let’s Talk about Sex! Workshop & Annual Business Mtg, The Conference Center at The Tower, 205 E. Riverpark Circle, Fresno

May

8, 2pm—4pm, Leadership Meeting; Suzanne Conway’s residence, Fresno
email ccrid@ccrid.org for directions

June—August

CCRID will be on hiatus for the summer months. Look for information about our annual kick off and fall workshop lineup via email and in our July issue!

For details and event fliers go to the calendar listed at www.ccrd.org