



The

3rd Edition

Professional

# Sign Language Interpreter's

## Handbook

The complete, practical manual  
for the interpreting profession

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CSC, CI and CT, OTC, SC:L



## **The Professional Sign Language Interpreter's Handbook**

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Third Edition

## STRESS

I am sure you have heard people say that a little stress can be good for you because it keeps you sharp, focused, "on your toes." What I address here is negative stress and constructive ways to deal with it.

### YES...INTERPRETING CAN BE STRESSFUL.

- The pressure and stress of interpreting assignments is real. Dealing with traffic, parking, finding the correct building or room, and so on, can be frustrating. Even before you lift your hands to interpret, you may already be "stressed out." (See pages 57-58.)
- You may find yourself interpreting an unfamiliar topic or a topic for which you were unprepared. An unexpected change in venue often causes stress. (See pages 57-58.)
- Your partner may show up late - or not at all! How will you deal with your negative feelings toward the other interpreter and yet not strain your professional relationship? How will you explain to both the hearing and D/deaf clients why you cannot interpret alone for the next eight hours? What is the best way to serve your client's needs while still protecting yourself both physically and mentally? (See pages 134-137.)
- Clients, both hearing and D/deaf, might make inappropriate requests of you. They might ask you to perform tasks outside the boundaries of your role as an interpreter and in violation of the Code of Ethics! (See pages 131-132.)
- The room may be hot and stuffy and you feel as if you are going to melt. The building is freezing and you are so cold that you can see your breath! The speaker or participants begin to smoke and you are allergic to cigarette smoke. (See pages 132-133.)
- You may be having an "off" day (as we all sometimes do) when you are required to execute platform interpreting. You are already a little "off kilter" when platform jitters kick in. This is performance stress. (See pages 133-134.)



- Negative self-talk can get the better of you while you are interpreting. Interpreters can be their own worst enemy and harshest critic. This negative thinking often kicks in while experiencing an "off" day, perhaps the same day that you are doing that platform interpreting. It is difficult to turn off the negative self-talk in your head. (See pages 133-134.)
- You arrive home from work totally stressed...and start stressing-out about the day to come.

I am sure that you have your own list of situations that causes you stress. I hope your list will not be too long or too complex. In the next section I will offer coping strategies to help you manage your stress.

## **SUGGESTED REMEDIES:**

### **BUDGET YOUR TIME:**

To avoid hassles related to any aspect of travel or location, I strongly suggest four things:

- First, during the intake process, record specific address, cross streets, building number, room number, and parking information. (See page 58.) If the parking is not on site, write down the names of the cross streets where the parking lot is located. If the job is to take place on a campus or military base, be sure to inquire about specifics such as where to obtain a parking pass, where to park, in which building the assignment will take place, and the telephone number of the contact person who may need to escort you to the interpreting location. Prior to the assignment, have the contact person mail/fax you the facility's map indicating buildings, parking lots, and the exact entrance you are required to use.
- Second, on the night before the assignment, map out your route and record it clearly. Consider alternate routes in case primary roads are impassable due to weather conditions, accidents or heavy traffic. If you are "directionally-challenged", consider purchasing a Global Positioning System (GPS).

- Third, always leave early, especially if you are going to an unfamiliar location. Learn to budget your time. Estimate the time it will take you to arrive at the exact location (room, office, or auditorium). Remember that it may only take you 45 minutes to arrive at the site, but it may take an additional 20 minutes to find the specific room. Tack on another 15-30 minutes as a cushion in case of an unforeseen event (storm or traffic accident). Will you need extra time to stop at your local ATM or gas station? Be sure to allot enough time!
- Fourth, carry enough cash with you to pay for parking, meals, and gas. Check your wallet the night before to make sure that you can easily cover these three expenses.

## SOMETIMES, YOU MAY HAVE TO JUST SAY "NO"

It is imperative to get thorough and accurate information regarding an assignment prior to accepting it. If possible, have the contact person send you a copy of the program or agenda. Ask questions. Never assume anything. You will never feel as though you are "thrown" into a situation if you screen your assignments carefully. There will be times when you will have to decline when asked to do an assignment. Accept the fact that there will be times when you:

a) may not be qualified to accept the assignment

### **AND/OR**

b) may be qualified but there is a conflict of interest or role conflict

Although you may have the appropriate certifications and credentials, it still may not be appropriate for you to accept certain assignments. We all have "buttons" and inevitably, there will be a type of work that will push your particular button. Although we cannot always foresee our reactions, politely and graciously decline any job offer which you know will adversely affect you.

Examine your thoughts and feelings to identify specific situations and content areas you should avoid. If you feel that you are "button-less," I encourage you right here and now to sit yourself down, take the time and opportunity to get to know yourself better, and be brutally honest. Identify situations which might make you upset, uptight, distraught, judgment-



tal, disgusted, or contemptuous. Likewise, in what situation might you lose sight of the Code of Professional Conduct? Is there any content that you wouldn't interpret under any circumstances? In which situations would you feel a need to "tell it like it really is," preach/sermonize, omit information, offer "the interpreter's perspective" or "the real deal" to the client? In which situations would you go home upset and lose sleep? Feel personally oppressed? Give some thought to these questions; save yourself and your clients a lot of grief, heartache, and lost sleep. In order to decide which situations might adversely affect you, ask yourself these questions regarding:

### **ETHNICITY**

Can you relay thorough and accurate information without prejudice when interpreting for persons of a different national, cultural or ethnic group?

### **RELIGION**

Can you remain neutral while interpreting religious services? Will you be upset when interpreting services or lectures espousing the beliefs of religions other than your own? Religious organizations that are vehemently opposed to yours? Yours to theirs?

### **VALUES**

If you support the "Right to Life" movement, could you impartially interpret a meeting for a pregnant woman discussing procedures for an abortion? Could you interpret for her during the procedure? If you are Pro-Choice, could you interpret during a Right to Life seminar? Counseling session?

### **SEX**

If you are opposed to certain sexual preferences, practices, or lifestyles, could you interpret sexual information impartially? If a client has a high-risk, sexually transmitted disease, could you be neutral/non-judgmental and interpret for this person?

### **POLITICS**

If you are a member of a political party and if that is an important part of your personal identity, could you be neutral and interpret for the opposing parties?

The more you reflect on these and other charged topics, the more your personal "buttons" list will grow. **SELF-AWARENESS** is your vantage point when deciding whether you will take an assignment. Remember, you can always **just say "no."**

### **KNOW YOURSELF!**

### **KNOW YOUR LIMITS!**

### **SET BOUNDARIES!**

In large metropolitan areas, there is usually a substantial pool of interpreters and an abundance of work from which to pick and choose your assignments. What about areas that have few qualified professional interpreters and the work is not as plentiful? You may worry that if you do not accept a certain job, other work may not come your way. You may be anxious that the D/deaf person may be stranded and "interpreter-less."

Please think about the following when considering a "button-pushing" assignment. While it's true that you may not immediately get other offers of work and your calendar may remain blank while the bills keep coming in, you must decide for yourself if the upset is worth it. Is it fair for you to do that to yourself? Is it fair to the client or others involved? Can you truly stay neutral and not impact the message and intent of the persons involved?

Also consider that sometimes, having no interpreter is better than having an interpreter who cannot remain objective. Having no interpreter present may then create the opportunity for the parties to reschedule with a more appropriate interpreter. Just think about it.

## **PERSONAL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS**

A friend taught me her definition of harassment. She states that harassment is any behavior exhibited by another that is unsolicited, inappropriate, unwarranted, unwanted, and unwelcome.

Unfortunately, I have heard horror stories from other interpreters involving these behaviors, have witnessed such conduct toward fellow interpreters, and have personally been on the receiving end.