

Editor's word:

Dear friends and colleagues,

The summer is still here, nevertheless, I dare to be probably the first one who is going to remind you that the fall is ahead of us. And I do not know how in your case, but here in the Czech Republic it means even more work for all the Sign Language interpreters, as the new school year begins and all the clients come back from their holidays. So, even though I am the first one who reminds you of the upcoming back-to-work days, I do it on purpose – I am bringing you the new Bulletin in Pictures, which lines could possibly help you to cope with the amount of work which you can expect now. The topic of this BIP is STRESS. I know, I know, you do not want to hear about stress, not yet. But I suggest taking it as it is – we all have to deal with stress, the ugly issue, the unfriendly feature of our beloved job. As Sign Language interpreters we are under the pressure even more often than people in other professions, I guess. And although I call stress „ugly” and „unfriendly”, there is still something good about it. It makes us to try harder, to fight, to achieve even further goals, than we supposed we would ever be able to achieve. That is why I say: „Thanks for all the stress, which makes us stronger, but let's think of tools which could possibly make it less annoying.”

How to become stronger, but keep our „human face”? How to make stress more acceptable, when we cannot get rid of it? These are the questions I have asked my colleagues here in the Czech Republic, throughout Europe and even in the USA as well. Following lines will bring you some personal experience with stress, interesting hints and useful advice.

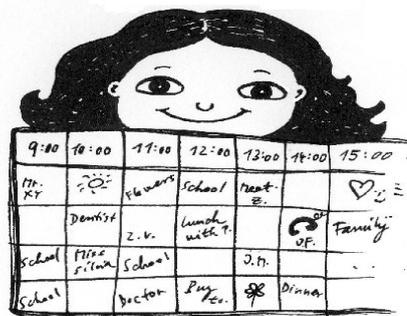
Many greetings from the Czech Republic, we hope to see you all soon at the EFSLI AGM and conference in Italy,

Radka Faltinova and CKTZJ

PS: THANKS TO ALL THE NICE SLI COLLEAGUES WHO HELPED ME TO CREATE THIS BIP WITH THEIR ANSWERS ON MY QUESTIONS!

1. The first question towards my colleagues was:

What are for you the most stressful factors during interpreting?



A good in-advance plan can save half of your time.

Well, I guess you will not be surprised by our/your number one – time. Time pressure, too many appointments in one day, the fear of coming late for an appointment with a Deaf client. Most of the Sign Language interpreters confirmed that they feel stressed by the lack of time. They are afraid of being late and spoiling the communication right at the beginning. One of our Dutch colleagues said she feels much more comfortable, if she arrives on time and has an opportunity to chat with the Deaf and hearing clients before the assignment starts. She feels safer, she even understands better and she can tell that the whole translation is then better. A very experienced interpreter coming originally from Italy added to this that he hates to be unprepared. But he makes a difference between two types of „being unprepared”: „I have learned that if I am unprepared because I have not received preparation, people get the service that they deserve and that I will perform the best I can. If I am unprepared because I did not have the time for it, it is my fault and I have to live with it and try not to make myself angry for it.” I can just agree with this opinion – even a Sign Language interpreter is just a human being (irrespective of the „SLI as the air” or „SLI as a machine” theories). Human beings make mistakes – there is nothing we can change about it, we have to take it as it is and not to blame ourselves for each single of them. Nevertheless, there is always something to improve, not just concerning time planning and getting ready for an assignment ;-)

We have to

realize our mistake, accept it, think about it and make a decision for the next time. But there is no sense of blaming ourselves too much. That just brings fear and uncertainty to similar interpreting in the future. One of my Czech colleagues have surprisingly answered in a kind of funny way, that the stress causes her the worst stress :-). This is how it works – the more we are stressed, the worse results we achieve and when we fail, we feel even more stress next time. Our colleague from the Netherlands has commented it in a funny but true way: *„And what stresses me most of all? The feeling that I have to be a perfect interpreter!”*



Concerning the preparations, Paul from Scotland mentions the other side of the „getting ready” issue: he gets stressed when he has too many pages of preparation and no time to read it. Or if he does not understand any of it!

We all need a bit of pressure, but we still have to survive first.

One of the frequent stressful factors repeated by many of our colleagues is when we do not know the Deaf client in advance. We are afraid of the level of his language skills, which might not match our own ones. Cynthia from USA comments: *„Stress for me often happens when I go into a situation where I don't know what is happening.”*

An interpreter from Canada shared his opinion with us, she feels uncomfortable when *„feeling overwhelmed with the information I have to interpret and knowing there is no way out and no help at the moment.”* Our colleague from Romania says roughly the same. She does not like interpreting in areas she is not familiar with (for her it is medicine, law, and technology). She feels distracted by an unpleasant speaker's behavior or the way of speaking. One of my Czech colleagues does not like too many people in front of her. The crowd makes her nervous.



Be ready for various personalities and ways of behaviour.

The problem of feeling a lack of skills in a field I do not feel comfortable in or in front of a crowd is somehow similar to the problem of Paul from Scotland, who feels certain discomfort in high-profile meetings (for example at the government) when he is struggling to keep up. A Greek colleague admits that she gets stressed also when she knows the assignment will have a great impact on the participants and their lives, and the interpretation is „very important” (in the eyes of the SLI). My Czech colleagues often mentioned that they feel stressed when the client is stressed by the situation or when he/she is pushed into decisions he/she is not ready for. In such situations you just cannot escape – you have to deal with the situation. If this causes you an enormous stress, maybe re-consider accepting such an assignment next time.

We would almost forget the typical stressors, but our colleagues from Sweden and Finland have reminded us of them: Bad place or light in the room, bad hearing conditions, too hot or too cold environment, people not taking turns during a conversation and speaking too fast and too quietly, no breaks... And of course the fear that we will not understand the client. Our Greek colleague says for example: *„What stresses me the most is when I don't understand what is meant and I cannot interrupt the speaker to ask for clarifications.”* A Polish interpreter adds to it the typical issue of all of us. Fear of lacking competence in Sign Language, especially while interpreting sign-to-voice. Some of us feel insecure when there is a SLI present in the audience, because he could judge the way we interpret. We all have gone through all of this, am I right?

We all have our fears



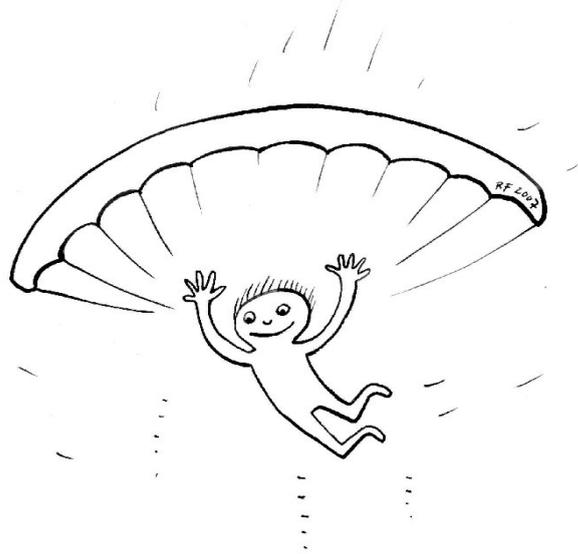
And we probably all know the next issue often mentioned as a stress starter – a colleague, who is either not qualified enough in interpreting or the interpreted field, or just not able to work in team. One comment from the Netherlands: *„I hate having a co-interpreter who doesn't pay attention. Someone who looks away and doesn't see me when I ask for support/feed.“* The interpreters get stressed not just by ignoring and troubles causing colleague, but as well by a non cooperative ignoring client. Our colleague from Italy has a brief but good advice: *„Now after few years of experience I have decided not to address the issue during the assignment but to leave it to after the job is finished and offer feedback.“*

And with the words of our Italian colleague we will conclude this long long list of possible stressors and troubles. He says that the big trigger of stress is „the unexpected“. Many of the SLIs could join him with the same comment. Katerina from the Czech Republic have shared a story of „the unexpected“ occurring during an interpreting assignment. She went to an official event and she made her best to get all possible materials. The responsible clerk assured her there will not be anything else. When she arrived, there was a group of young children ready to perform some poetry pieces just to enhance the atmosphere of the event. Wow, how typical! She says in the end everything turned out quite well, but I bet her blood pressure went very high at the moment...

And the Italian advice for these moments of „the unexpected“? Fully corresponding with the cheerful Italian nature: *„...there is nothing or very little that can be done with*

this, so in the years I have learned to expect the unexpected and go with the flow!“ This is one of the best advice. We will hear about it much more and get more advice from our colleagues in the next part of this article...

Go with the flow



2. ...because the next question for the SLIs was:

How do you cope with stress, what makes you feel better in the moment?

Well, this is a question we would all love to know the answer to! And thanks to our colleagues willing to share their personal experience

I can bring you at least some tips and advice in following text.

So, to warm up a bit, before I flood you with all the great advice, life observations and shared wisdom of our colleagues: what is the funny advice of my Czech colleague, when you are in trouble and the stress seems to be here in a minute? *„I try to pretend even for myself and*



Cope with your stress in the way you like ;-)

convince myself everything is fine." See, sometimes you have to lie to yourself ;-) But this is just an exception.

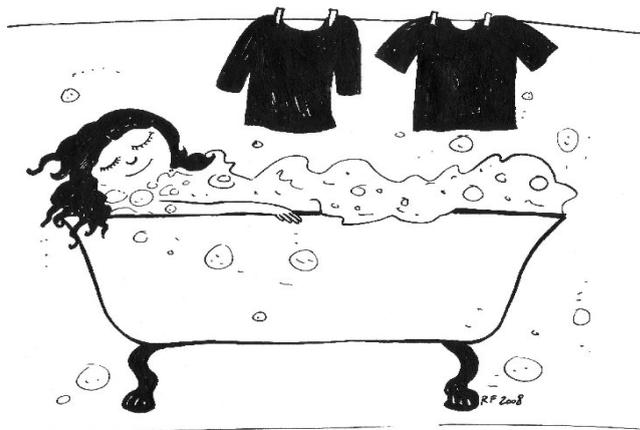


Jump out of your head for a while

One of our Dutch colleagues has a really helpful strategy: *„Makes me feel better if even though the situation started I can still make eye contact with my clients and check if everyone is satisfied.”* It might make you calm down, be-

cause you see that the fear and negative emotions are just in your head and everything goes smoothly. Just jump out of your head for a while... Not easy, huh! The Czech SLIs agree by saying you should try to catch the positive reactions of your client. We are usually too stuck in the negative emotion of the stress and failure and forget to look around. Maybe the others in the communication do not feel the same frustrating way... An interpreter from Greece says about it: *„What helps me the most is to think that I am doing my best, there is no point to lose energy thinking that if someone else were here would make it better because I am there and this is a fact. Also that I am human and this is what I can do. If it is not enough they could choose not to hire me again.”* Another interpreter from the Netherlands believes that the adrenaline which flows into our blood during the interpreting already helps us to deal with the stressful situation. In his opinion *„I as SLI can handle any situation by breathing, by focusing on what I can control, considering what my options are (and trying to create/negotiate better ones, if possible), make a choice and then 'let it go', in the belief I made the best choice I saw at that time. If it turns out to be the best theoretically possible choice, so be it.”* According to another Dutch colleague it is important to concentrate on little triumphs ('I got the main point across'). It is important to realize the options and then to choose the best one, if it is possible. When we decide for one choice, we have to let go the other one (ones). We have to trust ourselves that we are able to choose the best what we are able

to see. And if this possibility turns out to be the best in general and for all the participants, great! If not, we did our best to choose the best. Our wise Italian colleague has a nice comment: *„fight or flight”* – in an unpleasant situation there are just two solutions. We can either fight or give up and run away. Either face the situation, or leave the ring for a while and come back when the things are a bit settled down inside us – and continue in our interpreting dance.



Think about breaks and breathing

One of my Czech friends suggestions corresponds with mentioned above: she recommends either a short break to calm down, or taking just couple of seconds to stop, take a deep breath and start again. Other Czech SLI tries to concentrate on the interpreting process, on the single steps, and on keeping the routine, even though there is not much left out of it. Another Czech calms down with a help of a rather exhausting strategy. She tries to imagine all possible failures, mistakes and problems which could occur and she thinks about all possible solutions and strategies which she could use in such a moment. For me, this is quite a negative approach and it must be really time and energy consuming :-). But well, we all have our ways, the important thing is that it works for her!

Easy, but useful advice comes from Romania: *„I drink water or juice and I make myself aware that what I am doing is important for the Deaf.”* Swedish interpreter tries hard to do her best: *“I do everything I can to do a good job. Beforehand and during the interpreting. But*

I try not to focus on the things which are "out of my hands". I keep just focusing on things that I can change, affect, that is a good strategy. For example if the sound is poor, I let the technical person know, and if he cannot do anything about it, I have to just relax and focus on what I can do - interpret the things I do hear. I use my co-interpreter a lot, get support/help from her during the assignment. Experience of stress is helpful to have. Then you know how to recognize it. Try to force your body not to raise the shoulders. It does not help to also have stiff muscles and joints! Breathe! And stay positive!"



Chocolate – our friend in hard times.

Another fun advice comes from Paul from Scotland once again, I like his story: „Use your imagination!

During breaks from interpreting at Deaf Action, we have built snowmen, flown a kite, made model animals

and tried origami and balloon modeling. Recently, on a particularly awful day, we bought some bottles of bubble mixture and spent a happy half hour blowing bubbles in the office. It was a brilliant stress reliever! Until we decided to blow some bubbles out of the window at the exact same instant as our Chief Executive came into the car park. Oops! Luckily Liz Scott Gibson is also an interpreter (and President of WASLI) so I think she understood... Seriously though, it's amazing how much fun and relaxation you can have in a lunch hour. The only limit is your imagination." I admire Paul's approach to life :-)

A bit odd advice comes from the Netherlands, we can take it as a joke or we can learn from it: Try to engage in meeting people and conversations during breaks, rather than in preparation. Avoid negative people. Paul from Scotland describes how to relax during a break: „If I get stressed while I'm actually interpreting I try to make my body relax. I sit back in my chair, cross my legs and try to voice over with a relaxed throat and a low voice. If my body starts to relax, sometimes I can trick my mind into relaxing too!"

Some of the interpreters say that the years of experience do help against stress. This is my experience as well. So, do not worry – sometimes to grow older does not mean to become useless and worn out – for us as SLIs that means to be more experienced, to become more self-confident and to get better in the profession! As one of our Dutch colleagues says: „If I get stressed, I tell myself that I'm experienced enough and have to rely on myself....and keep on repeating that!" You can copy the strategies of more experienced colleagues. The experience is great and you can gain a lot from a cooperation with an experienced colleague, so try to work in a team with them as much as possible. Your colleagues can take off a lot of stress during the interpreting, as many of the SLIs have confirmed in their answers. The same opinion about the team work comes from the Czech Republic – team work helps. Your colleague can give you not only professional but as well emotional support.

We all need emotional support

If we have troubles with time and preparations, the only advice is a better time management. As one of our experienced Italian colleagues says: „Fail to prepare - prepare to fail, so try to get as much information to prepare yourself even at the last minute there and then before you start the job". He adds a very important thing: „Do not bite more than you can chew! (meaning do not undertake assignment that you know you would not be able to cope with)".



And what about being overwhelmed by tons of preps? In worst case, if we have too many preparations and materials to read, according to our Scottish friend, we can only read the parts that are printed in bold and look at the pictures. :-) An overview is usually enough. A good advice from him is to schedule time in our diaries to prepare for difficult assignments. Do you do it? I do not... That is a good one...



Good time management is important.

Anyway, almost all the SLIs think it is very important to keep your diary updated. Coming on time is not only polite, but it helps you with the interpreting. You can get acquainted with the participants and the place. So, you should take care of your diaries and prep-materials, they are important. But be aware of the confidential materials and appointments, be sure that no one can read any confidential material on your table or in your diary.



Destroy the confidential prep-materials.

Next advice, very easy, but we all often forget that we can discuss, ask, even interrupt the interpreting and ask during the interpreting. As one of the Dutch SLIs says: „Ask the speaker to repeat what they were saying (...)

Decide to ask for a break if it starts to affect your work.” Her colleague adds that we are not alone in the settings – we can discuss with the participants how to go forward with the fact that no prep was available. If we dare to do this, it turns out that the preparations are not only the responsibility of the SLI. And discussing the whole issue does help cope with the stress.

Trust in yourself.



A neat advice comes from Canada: „I try to breathe deeply and remember that we are only humans. And I try to think if anybody else in the room thinks he/she can do a better job, they can take over. But since no one is saying anything I must be doing fine ;-)

3. It is good to have strategies to cope with the stress during an assignment. But it is important to use our free time to keep balance on a daily basis as well. Therefore I have asked my colleagues:

How do you relax after work to get energy for the next days?

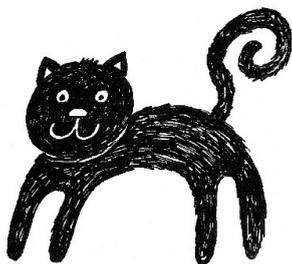


Stay balanced.

The most surprising and very often answer was „a pet”. Walk your dog, hug your cat. People love to do manual work when being totally exhausted from psychical work. Every time you eagerly do some cleaning stuff, take a hammer and nails and create something, or work in the garden – you are going to join a big group of your colleagues SLIs who do the same to relax. Lots of SLIs go to gym, run, dance, literally to „shake the stress off”. Lots of SLIs go to for a walk to the nature right after work.



A hobby helps.



A pet gives you emotional support.

For example Paul from Scotland likes to go out after work, either go for a cycle ride by the sea or go with a colleague for coffee and lots and lots of cake. **A cake helps too.**

One of the interpreters probably said what many of us would just repeat: „Relax?... Sorry no such word in my dictionary at the moment... I have to



remember to add it!" That is so true... And we all should think to add the word RELAXATION to our personal dictionaries... Later he admits he likes to enjoy a coffee (espresso!...an Italian ;-)) (SMAJLIK)," then have few minutes of "switching off" time, looking at moving images on the box (television programmes), then I get to look at e-mails, to get a bit more stress, but after having dealt with few e-mails, I tend to feel

better so I can cook or help cooking and this help a lot (I am Italian, and the convivial - eating together - thing help us a lot. I read sometime non work related books. Occasionally a film at the cinema and even more rarely theatre (I interpret theatre but I rarely go for my own pleasure). I personally rely a lot on friends and family, I talk to them a lot. Some of them are colleagues and friends and this helps." Also other SLIs mention a chat with a team partner or a colleague as a good way to relax.



Cooking is a way to switch off the brain.

A Czech colleague likes to relax in a similar way, but with a tea instead of the coffee :-)... And another Czech woman drinks a hot chocolate as a reward for an interpreting and chat with a friend. A SLI from the Netherlands likes to meet up with sign language users, just have a conversation and sign away instead of interpreting. And some of us like to have a glass of wine, or beer .-)

I have found out one interesting thing: some relaxing strategies are the same in all SLI minds, or at least some colleagues match. I have already mentioned the coffee/tea/hot chocolate drinking ritual, the manual hobbies etc. Lots of people, and this probably includes not just the SLIs (but it does include me!) do love to sleep as much as possible in their free time. Some enjoy shopping (for me it is just about as exhausting as interpreting). But I was really surprised when I read that a Canadian way of relaxation is the same as mine: „I drive home with the music in my car turned really loudly and I sing along with my favorite songs. By the time I am home the stress is gone."



Whatever helps to relax is good.

Similarly, I could guess that our Dutch colleague probably went through a similar life and professional process as I did, from feeling bad for being lazy to using every spare minute, because his advice is to enjoy schedule crash-days after crazy stretches of work. If anything like this happens, he likes to sleep, take a bath, have sauna days with friends, see friends, enjoy a minute of sunshine, walk or do some stuff in the garden, go to the beach or flirt. :-)

Some of the SLIs relax the best when they leave the place where they live for several days. They make a short holiday and feel better. Other ones love to stay home for a longer time, just enjoy their home and family, the safe place to be at.



This for sure depends on one's nature, not on the fact that one is a SLI.

Home – safe place to rest.

One of our colleagues concludes: „How to relax? By taking enough time to do other things in my life besides interpreting.”

4. And my final question for my kind colleagues willing to fill in my crazy questionnaire about stress although being tired and stressed themselves:

Do you have any special or fun/funny advice for the colleagues SLIs how to avoid stress and how to relax?

I am happy I was not close to all my nice colleagues when they tried to think about fun advices after answering all the questions before :-). Thank you once more for helping me with the contemplation about stress, I have used your answers twice - to our Czech Bulletin and to our Bulletin in Pictures which is right in front of you.

So, enjoy your colleagues' wise advices, the fun advices, the funny advices... And then goodbye and thank you for your attention!

Anti-stress advice: good preparation, good team partner, and good laughter before and after!

If there is prep, prepare! If there is no prep, do the best you can do.

If you feel stressed all the time, consider another profession that would give you less stress, and is more predictable

Enjoy stress as inherent to our job. If you can't improvise, perhaps another profession suits you better.

Don't think about stress; that's too stressful in itself.

Change the activities of your brain frequently to stay in mental shape.

Know what makes you happy and do that more often.

Find 15 minutes a-day to do the thing that makes you happy. A cup of tea, a bath, a walk in the park, hugging your loved one, etc.

Listen to music. That always helps.

Interpreting is Jazz: it's an improvisation job, it's about playing with the given material, it's about co-creating communication. Robots can't play jazz.

Stay in touch with the Deaf community.

Find a way to really agree on how to handle a situation when working with other colleagues. If you have a clear understanding about each other's roles, almost every job becomes fun!

Fail to prepare - prepare to fail

Get together with a couple of colleagues and discuss about interpreting settings that gave you stress and afterwards have a couple of dry white wines on the beach!

Continue with educating, get a supervisor to help you to improve.

Do not use your energy on things you cannot do anything about (during the interpreting).

Treat yourself with a Thai massage.

Do not always demand that you will deliver 100% quality and will be perfect. Make sure that you do not take your job home with you. It is not constructive to lie awake at nights thinking about clients, assignment etc.

We should not take ourselves so seriously. After all we are just passing through the planet and stay here for a short time. The only thing that matters is to give and take love. Job is just a job, not who we are.

Interpreting is our job, beautiful, exhausting, but just a job. We have to know it otherwise we cannot be good interpreters.

*Do not panic.
Try to stay calm in every situation.*

Write a diary, or at least a little notebook where you can note funny stories from the interpreting, or the situations which made you cry. One day you will appreciate it, because our memory is full of holes.

It is good to have an experience with stress – you can recognize it next time.

Try to have straight back and not to lift your shoulders. Relax and stretch your muscles and joints.

Breathe! And try to think positive.

Work on yourself, try to be better, but do not try to be perfect.

Wear hip shoes so the client can be distracted to your shoes, instead of not so good interpretation as a result of too much stress and little or no prep :-)

It helps to feel confident about what you're doing. So prepare

Prepare, prepare! The more you know about the situation and the people who are in it, the easier it is. But the best way to avoid stress and relax at the same time is to go to a-deaf pub and chat all night :)

Browse Youtube:

Maybe look on the internet how to relax:

www.wikihow.com/Relax
helpguide.org/mental/anxiety_self_help.htm

Or perhaps a bit more facetious ways:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDN067_VWeI
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xErXNjfTSic

Related to "interpreting" (or not):

www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1vI21aV0h4&feature=related (in Portuguese)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tDvwrEHA1w&feature=related (Greek and English)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-g_iRFP3xk (French)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mVfn12wb2k (Italian spoken language interpreter)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIxKvKO94EU (Italian and "sign language interpreter" on the news)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BfFRlpqu4Y&feature=related (this is famous!)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=f03c6_BT3HM&feature=related
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zvul3DC4l4E&feature=related

Just funny about languages and translation/interpreting:

www.theinterpretersfriend.org/misc/humr/fun.html
www.translatorscafe.com/cafe/MegaBBS/thread-view.asp?threadid=2593
www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUGoxHalMjE
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtBa5Y5a_EE&feature=related