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Virginia Hughes

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VIRGINIA HUGHES

“Let me turn on the light”; or someone else says “Call in a consultant”. Someone else says, “Refer this to committee”. Someone else says, “Let’s ask the boss to clarify this”. In another situation, a person says, “I have a film that explains this better”. Or the thief says, “I’ll hold the light while you work the combination”. Or, someone else says, “You open the champagne; I’ll go get the glasses”.

I would like for you to think about “I’ll call an interpreter”. We are all specialists at one thing or another. I’m sure you work at your skill. I’m sure you read all you can in your area, but you would like some time to do more reading. I’m sure you follow the rules, but there are times when you’d like to maybe do something about changing the rules, but you can’t find the time. You attend workshops, but maybe can’t stay for all the workshop, or maybe you can’t attend all the meetings. I’m sure a lot of you complain about your correspondence piling up on you, and you wish for time, so you could be more personal in your replies. Maybe you want to write; maybe you’d like to publish, but you need more time. I would like to offer to you one sure way of having additional time. Use a professional interpreter in your work with the deaf.

For communication to flow freely, you must master the first language of the people you are working with. If you think you can pick up the language of the deaf by attending a sign language class a week, or by studying one of the various sign language books published, what does that say for the people you work with and for? To experience success in your work with deaf people, you must have high expectations, and you must respect them. To respect a people, you must respect their language. I tell you, the mastery of sign language takes years.

I beseech you to put your efforts and time and energies into your profession and consider the use of a facilitator to assist you in communicating with the deaf.

The consensus has been that the third person in a consulting situation inhibits communication, but I know from personal experience that, if you accept the interpreter in such situations, the deaf will. It requires only a little explaining to a deaf client of the philosophy in using a facilitator to avoid misunderstanding, then have the deaf accept the interpreter. Situations that were once thought sacrosanct now do accept a third person. Consider the situation of a doctor examining a patient; where the nurse was once prohibited from being there, she is now a necessary component. Consider the lawyer and his secretary or the use of a tape recorder. It is a reflective attitude. If you feel the need for an interpreter and accept the need for the third person, the deaf will understand and will accept him, too.

Now, we interpreters are working diligently on professionalism. Our national organization, RID, is attempting certification of all interpreters. We interpreters have local, state and national workshops geared to improving our skills. The state

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organizations exchange sign vocabulary lists in attempting to utilize similar signs for frequently-used words. All of this effort is of no value if you don't recognize the need for a communication facilitator. We do all the preparing, and then you say you would rather do it yourself. And you risk misunderstanding. . . . you waste valuable time. Please give the deaf population and their language the dignity they both deserve. It's impractical and expensive to do the interpreting yourself when you could use the services of a professional interpreter. Is it really necessary for you to invest the time required to be able to distinguish, in signs: earn—/—use up—/—adopt—/—far out; or, know—/—don't know—/—fully aware of; or, ill—/—you make me sick—/—silly; or, polite—/—fine; or, big word—/—swear; or, through with something—/—I've had enough of something. Is it really necessary for you to invest the time required to know the signed variations for a single word; the many signs for early, the many signs for birthday, the many signs for sexual intercourse, the many signs for Halloween?

I'm sure you all know the scale applied to professionals of 1 to 5. The beginners in a profession, who are in fact numbers 1 and 2, almost always rate themselves a 5; they know it all. Those who are skilled in their profession, who are in fact number 5's, generally tend to downgrade themselves. They realize how much there is left to be learned. Don't settle for a 1 or a 2 in your very important contact with deaf. Use a professional interpreter.

Now, I ask you to reach out in love, learn the deaf's language — yes — it's necessary to show you care. But, when it gets down to the "nitty gritty", call in a professional.

Some general rules in the use of interpreter: Please make prior arrangements; request that the interpreter sit by you, the hearing person, so that the deaf and you will have maximum eye contact; request frequent feedback from the deaf client; clarify the role of the interpreter for your client and the interpreter. Please no third party talk; don't use "Tell him this" and "Tell him that", but speak directly to the deaf person. Request of your interpreter, when they reverse read the deaf client, if it is not simultaneous, to speak and sign at the same time. This will give the deaf client feedback to know that what he is signing is understood.