

# Who Needs a Deaf Interpreter? I Do!

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Suppose I was fluent in German and travelling through Europe. I decide to spend the night in a remote village of the Swiss Alps. While trying to negotiate a price for the room, I find that the innkeeper speaks a different dialect of Swiss-German that I've never heard before. Sure, I can pick out a few words here and there from the German I learned in high school or college. But, I just can't quite understand what the innkeeper is saying. Is he telling me there are no vacancies? Is he quoting me a price? For all I know, he is telling me I must bathe out back with the sheep! In order to get a decent price for the room (or a room at all) it would behoove me to find a native German speaker to explain to me exactly what the innkeeper is saying. hearing interpreters often encounter a variety of similar situations that could best be served through the use of a Deaf interpreter. It is important to acknowledge from the onset that it is the hearing interpreter who needs the services of a Deaf interpreter.

Knowing this, there is some debate over whose responsibility it is to ask for a Deaf interpreter. Ultimately, as in any situation, the choice of the Deaf consumer must always take precedence. That aside, the hearing interpreter must establish clear and effective communication with the Deaf consumer prior to proceeding to interpret between the two parties. If the hearing interpreter is unable to do this for whatever reason, it is that interpreter's responsibility and ethical obligation to either ask for a Deaf interpreter or not continue with the assignment. The sign of a true professional is an interpreter who recognizes their strengths and weaknesses and chooses work accordingly.

I have noticed paranoia among many hearing interpreters, that in asking for a Deaf interpreter, they will appear unqualified or incompetent. I cannot stress enough what a miscon-

ception that is. When I see a hearing interpreter request a Deaf interpreter, I admire their self-awareness. As far as I am concerned, it is the responsible course of action to take when an interpreter feels in over their head. I would say that not asking for help when appropriate probably accounts for the majority of miscommunication occurring on an assignment, thus leading to the rendering of an inaccurate interpretation or message.

When teaming with a competent Deaf interpreter, I welcome the opportunity to learn new communication approaches. It becomes a shared liability. If there is a Deaf interpreter there, and we both agree on the message output, I have more confidence in the process and am less likely to second guess myself. I believe that we share an equal responsibility to inform parties if there is a misunderstanding on the part of the hearing interpreter or Deaf interpreter. There also seems to be an added dimension to the art of cultural mediation. The hearing interpreter becomes responsible for explaining the "hearing perspective" to the Deaf parties involved, including the Deaf interpreter. By the same token, the Deaf interpreter has a duty to educate the hearing parties, including the hearing interpreter, to the Deaf Experience. It is imperative during all this cultural mediation that the team works as a team, presenting a united front in which they clearly show their support for each other. This is where a "chemistry" between interpreters becomes crucial. Many will agree that this "chemistry" applies to all interpreting teams, hearing or Deaf. It is important the interpreters have a mutual understanding in which they can both provide and accept feedback and assistance in a non-defensive manner.

In my experience, the "perfect" Deaf interpreter is adept in many areas, often the same as me. They have training, not necessarily through a formal training program (although

desirable), through attending workshops and mentoring with other interpreters. They are articulate in both English and ASL. They have a strong sense of cultural awareness, both in the hearing and Deaf worlds, and can navigate those worlds smoothly, so as not to offend anyone. They are aware of their ethical boundaries. I was most impressed when a Deaf person who could have been an excellent Deaf interpreter told me that he had tried, but could not due to a gut instinct to advocate during the situation. He realized he was more effective in his role as a consumer advocate than making ethical compromises as a Deaf interpreter. Self-policing on that level is commendable and should be the norm.

Deaf/hearing team interpreting provides yet another opportunity to level the playing field between our cultures and languages. I am very excited to see the CDI certification process being revamped. It is as important to me that I work with skilled, trained Deaf interpreters as it is for Deaf consumers to expect the same qualities from their hearing interpreters. It is well known that unqualified hearing interpreters lacking credentials can be very dangerous, and I believe the same applies to Deaf interpreters as well. Deaf interpreting is a phenomenon that has been occurring long before it received its due recognition from the field at large. I see Deaf/hearing team interpreting as an up and coming trend in the field. In the future I hope to see hearing interpreters "roll up their sleeves" and become more educated about the Deaf/hearing team interpreting process. I would encourage any hearing interpreter to learn more about not only the teamwork process, but also what makes a qualified Deaf interpreter just as we urge consumers to become knowledgeable about what constitutes a qualified hearing interpreter. ■