

LEADERSHIP

Consider how individuals new to the field learn what behavior is appropriate, what perspectives are accepted, how to be successful, what “success” in interpreting means and so on. Return to the family analogy; children observe the physical and emotional environment and behavior in their family of origin. Their subconscious minds record what they observe. These observations then become the program that impacts how they think, and later how they behave.

Individuals entering the field “learn” about the profession in much the same way. They observe the physical, emotional and attitudinal environment and subconsciously adopt the beliefs and attitudes of those around them. This is what Schein is referring to when he states that assumptions, attitudes and beliefs become taken-for-granted assumptions. The implication for leaders in terms of setting the tone of the organization is that we are always teaching others how to be through our own behavior, which can be largely based on our own programming.

Consider this...

One of the exercises I have done in workshops over the past few years pertains to the concept of an unspoken hierarchy of interpreting. Imagine the flow chart, or hierarchy, of a business. At the top you have those who presumably have more influence than those who are located further down in the hierarchy. While the field of interpreting is not a “business” per se, we have unknowingly created a hierarchy defined by professional characteristics such as cultural background, years of experience, educational achievements, level of certification or credential, current work environment, leadership involvement, etc. In this exercise, I introduce the concept of a hierarchy then ask the group where someone who has attained, for example, an NIC Master certification and who works primarily in legal settings might be viewed as falling on the hierarchy. I offer several different examples of combinations of professional characteristics and ask where individuals who embody those characteristics might be placed if we were to map out the hierarchy. While there are typically some minor variations in perspective, by and large we seem to share a collective consciousness about how this hierarchy looks. We also seem to share a collective consciousness around the fact that those at the top of the hierarchy have more individual “value.” While I know very few who would agree with this logically, the subconscious minds of many have come to believe this is true.

When I ask participants where they learned this from, their first response is akin to a deer in the headlights. However, after a moment or two, they are able to identify a specific experience or observation early on in their career that planted the seed of that perspective. Further observations during their education and apprenticeship water that seed until it grew into a fully developed, albeit subconscious, belief.

When subconscious beliefs are brought to the conscious mind, many people realize that they disagree with the perspectives that have been driving their thoughts and subsequently their behavior. Bruce Lipton, in *The Biology of Belief*, states that the less evolved (which can also be thought of as the less conscious) we are, the more we rely on preprogrammed behav-

ior. Conversely, the more conscious we are, the more we are able to acquire behavioral patterns through experiential learning – in other words, the better equipped we are to make choices about what to believe.

In light of this, there are two main ethical considerations for leaders in regards to setting the tone (which can now be thought of as contributing to the culture of the organization/occupation). The first is that we must look at the beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that we acquired as we entered the field. What seeds of perception were planted as we were observing how to be in this profession or in our organization? Have those seeds developed into beliefs? Are those beliefs in line with what I truly believe and how I wish to consciously interact with others? Have I adopted a belief that is detrimental to my own health and well-being, or have I adopted beliefs which uplift me and those around me? For example, if I adopted the belief that those who work in one venue have less value than those who work in another, how does that affect my current behavior toward people who work in either?

The second consideration is the importance of monitoring our current behavior. Since behavior is predicated first on our thoughts, which in turn inform our perspectives, in order to be conscious leaders we need to monitor our thoughts carefully! Thoughts can lead to a simple raise of an eyebrow in response to a comment, a roll of the eyes when someone’s name is mentioned or a snicker at another’s mistake. All of these communicate a message about how to “be” to the subconscious minds of observers and contribute to setting the tone of the organization!

One final thought...now consider the fact that we are all leaders, to someone. This means that each of us, in some way, is contributing to the tone of the organization or the occupation. Thought of in this way, leadership truly is a shared function. With every thought, behavior and action, we contribute to the tone of the field and plant the seeds of our organizational and occupational culture. To create the future we truly envision, we must adhere to the same high standard of awareness we desire from our leaders. Let us therefore have the courage and the wisdom to live and work in a more conscious manner. ■

References

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Amy Seiberlich is the Founder of the Leadership Institute, a company dedicated to the personal and professional growth and development of those in the field of interpreting. She formerly served as an RID state affiliate chapter president and national board member and currently resides outside of Boulder, CO. Amy can be reached for comment at amy.leadershipinstitute@gmail.com or 720-341-9868.

WORKGROUP MEMBER INTERVIEW

Interpreting in Emergency Situations: This is not business as usual.

The RID Emergency Management Workgroup
Interview with Tomina Schwenke, CI and CT and Rick Pope, CI and CT, Georgia

At the 2009 RID National Conference Business Meeting, motion C2009.05 was passed by the membership. It states, “That RID establish an ad hoc committee to develop a position paper to address the issues Interpreters face during emergencies/disasters and non-declared local emergencies/disasters.”

In July 2010, an RID workgroup was initiated to explore interpreting in the emergency management field and to develop a standard practice paper (SPP) on interpreting in emergency/disaster situations. Members of the workgroup include Angela Kaufman - Chair (CA), Kathleen Alexander (MO), Rick Pope (GA), Tomina Schwenke (GA), Tina Schultz (RID Director of Communications) and Janet Bailey (RID Government Affairs Representative).

By the end of 2010, the workgroup had developed and disseminated an online survey for RID members in order to ascertain experiences and any “best practices” that may exist in the nation as well as to compile data and gather information to help with the drafting of the SPP. Results from the survey have been compiled and findings will be provided during a session facilitated by the workgroup at the 2011 RID National Conference in Atlanta, GA, in addition to sharing the status of the SPP.

The primary task of the group, as directed by motion C2009.05, has been to focus on the development of the SPP. To

that end, Angela Kaufman took the lead in developing an introduction to what will become the framework for the document. *Emergency management* is described within a national framework which encompasses preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation efforts by federal, state and local government in addition to the private sector organizations. All emergencies begin at the local level. Inclusion of sign language interpreters in preparedness, response and recovery activities varies state by state, operational area by operational area and city by city. It is dependent on how the Deaf and hard of hearing community, disability service agencies/organizations and sign language interpreters/agencies are integrated into the structure and incident command system within the local area. Emergency management interpreting requires interpreters to be self-prepared, have an understanding of the incident command system and the national incident management system, understand the risks involved both personally, for the Deaf and hard of hearing community as well as first responders and local government, in addition to having a strong background and exposure to medical, law enforcement and mental health interpreting. In addition to interpreter skills, it is important to bear in mind that strenuous activity and exposure to traumatic incidents and images or situations must be considered by any sign language interpreter accepting assignments in this field.

WORKGROUP MEMBER INTERVIEW

An interview, by Tomina Schwenke, with workgroup member Rick Pope who highlights the current challenges and progress in this emerging area of specialization.

Tomina: Rick, why did you want to be involved in this workgroup?

Rick: Well, it's kind of a natural fit. I'm actually leading an effort in Georgia to get interpreters deployed in emergency situations. I'm a Military Emergency Management Specialist, a Search and Rescue Specialist; a former Army combat medic and an RID certified (CI and CT) interpreter. I should add, I'm a child of a deaf adult and a second-generation interpreter too. I belong to the Georgia State Defense Force, and we perform all sorts of missions in emergency management situations. I wanted to help "close the circle" between the communities we serve and emergency management agencies.

Tomina: Can you tell me about the history of the emergency management movement?

Rick: The recent movement started with September 11, 2001, in New York City and gained momentum during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The challenge has been developing something comprehensive. There is no cohesive standard at this time, and efforts have been made to think about local issues when developing state and federal strategies and plans. In terms of incident command, all solutions are local. Addressing the needs of the disability community at large is currently evolving. My concern is that the Deaf community will be the last to be considered, which is what has happened in the past. This is how I got involved, because I didn't want to sit behind a desk and watch this happen. I wanted to apply my skill-set and contribute to the field.

Tomina: Can you tell me more about your work with GEMINI in Georgia?

Rick: The Georgia Emergency Management Interpreting Initiative (GEMINI) started in 2009 and is a local effort. We have collaborated with a variety of stakeholders including the Georgia Council for the Hearing Impaired (GACHI), Georgia Department of Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Governor's Coalition, emergency management agencies, Urban Area Security Initiative and Georgia RID. Local investment is the key. Most recently we were involved in a Red Cross simulation drill. The shelter training was a hands-on exercise with a follow-up discussion and after-action report that was disseminated to the people and organizations involved. Deaf individuals, interpreters and hearing individuals talked about planning with a deaf focus. We're working on improving planning, response and recovery in counties with high concentrations of deaf individuals, especially those that are home to schools for the deaf. I have seen collaboration between deaf and hearing people throughout. People have put politics aside and have gone back to grass-roots activism. That sort of collaboration and activism is going to be crucial. It's slow going but, it's going.

Tomina: How does participation with the national RID workgroup on Emergency Management influence the work you do with GEMINI?

Rick: As part of the national RID workgroup, I see efforts to coordinate. National efforts bring GEMINI to the forefront as we try to develop a national template. We don't have that yet, but there is excitement about the work. The workgroup also serves as a medium where I can gather information about what is being done in other parts of the country and see if it fits in Georgia.

Tomina: What do you see as the necessary next steps?

Rick: Interdisciplinary collaboration between interpreters and fire, police, emergency management and military personnel needs to continue. Planning for our communities, however they're defined, needs to continue to evolve.

Grants are needed to form local non-profit agencies with an emphasis on the Deaf community. This will help with planning, training and administration.

Tomina: What are some of the challenges you face?

Rick: There are different dangers, different responses and different resources depending upon your location. Therefore, there can be no one response. You can't take a mechanism from one part of the country and expect it to be successful in another part of the country. Developing national best practices is full of challenge and struggle because of the emergency management mantra, "All solutions are local." Also, it's hard to take still-developing hearing metrics and consider deaf individuals and interpreters within the solution.

Tomina: Do you have any advice for interpreters interested in working in emergency management?

Rick: We need to organize. Practitioners will have to bump up their game. This is not business as usual. We need to all put on our boots (not the heels). We need to drill together. We need to realize this may be a definition of our profession and that adversarial relationships will not work. We also need to be prepared for the intensity of emergency management situations.

Tomina: What is your vision for RID?

Rick: Through the leadership of Janet Bailey and the Governmental Affairs Program, I see a need for local chapters to have similar representation. I would like to see each state chapter establish a governmental affairs liaison that helps to coordinate these efforts. ■



Rick has been interpreting professionally more than 20 years after being born to a deaf father and an interpreter mother. His career has taken him from the southern-most point in the continental United States to the Arctic Circle. He lives in Alpharetta, GA, with his partner Megan, their two boys and an insane cat. He can be reached at rrpope@rrpope.com.

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