

Reflective Writing #5- Professional Business Practices

Although the work they do is imperative for connecting many Deaf and hearing professionals in their communities, interpreters have long fought to be considered professionals in their own right. For this reason, emphasis has been placed throughout the field on interpreters maintaining ethical business practices and making decisions that present themselves in a professional light to others outside the interpreting field. The sixth tenet of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD)-Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) requires interpreters to maintain ethical business practices and conduct themselves professionally.

Additionally, Witter-Merithew and Johnson's (2005) *34 Entry-to-Practice Competencies for American Sign Language (ASL)-English Interpreters* emphasize the importance of ethical business practices within the interpreting profession. Competency 5.4 requires interpreters to demonstrate professional integrity in their behavior, including billing and invoicing practices, as well as proper bookkeeping. This clusters with Competency 1.6, which requires interpreters to demonstrate that they can support their decision-making with ethical frameworks and professional theories. Finally, Competency 2.6 emphasizes the interpreter's responsibility to establish professional boundaries in accordance with accepted best practices in the field and the CPC (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). Through the exploration of provided case studies, I will demonstrate my current decision-making approaches and my ability to apply ethical principles in business decisions.

Scenario #1: “Billing for Cancellations”

An interpreter, Julie, was contracted a month in advance to interpret a training from 9:00 a.m. on Thursday through Saturday evening. On the Wednesday before the training was scheduled to begin, at approximately 10 AM, Julie was called and notified that her services for the entire training period were no longer required. Julie’s policy requires a 48-hour notice of cancellation. Since this cancellation occurred within 24 hours of the training's start time, Julie is within her rights to bill for the cancelled services, even though she didn’t perform the work (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Later that afternoon, around 3:00 p.m., the referral agency called to ask Julie if she would interpret a conference that same weekend, from Thursday through Sunday. The compensation for this new assignment would fully offset the wages she would have lost from the canceled training. Technically, Julie could still bill for the cancelled work *and* the accepted assignment. However, Julie has a policy in place to protect her income if the hiring party cancels at the last minute, as the odds of her finding alternative employment opportunities are low. In this instance, Julie is conflicted because she was offered replacement work that is comparable to the wages she would have had with the first assignment (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Analyze the Dilemma

Julie, as the interpreter in this situation, is the primary decision-maker. Ultimately, the decision she makes will impact her the most, as it affects her professional reputation and moral integrity. From Julie’s perspective, she has established a 48-hour cancellation policy to protect her professional interests. When considering the sixth tenet of the CPC, Julie’s actions align with the guiding principle because she is conducting herself in a professional manner, as is expected by practitioners in the field. If she were to issue the invoice, it wouldn’t technically be a direct

violation of the CPC (RID, 2005). Julie is truly facing a “right versus right” dilemma, as it centers on her own professional judgment, ethical priorities, and moral code (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Although Julie is the only named player in the scenario, her actions have broader implications that go beyond her own professional standing. It is not entirely clear which agency or organization initially contracted Julie for the canceled assignment; however, it is reasonable to assume that the hiring party would be less than enthused about paying for services that were not rendered. Because many individuals and organizations have limited experience working with interpreters, the actions of one interpreter can significantly influence their opinion of the field. If the hiring organization felt Julie was being selfish, greedy, or profit-driven by still invoicing for the canceled work, those negative impressions could easily be generalized to other interpreters they engage with in the future. Conversely, if Julie were to waive the fee, it could create a positive experience for the agency, and those positive feelings could spread to become a more favorable impression of the field as a whole (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Through the lens of Kidder (2009), this could be viewed as a truth versus loyalty dilemma. Julie could remain loyal to her original contract and charge the fee even though the work was cancelled, or she could act with more honesty and lead with the intention of the policy, which was only to be enacted if she was unable to find work to replace the cancelled work. The truth of the matter is that she was able to replace the job and therefore would not need to charge for the cancelled services. It appears that there was no stipulation written into the contract language requiring Julie to charge only the cancellation fee if her work was not replaced; however, it seems clear that consumers are aware of her reasoning behind the policy. This could

make Julie more likely to want to take the action that aligns with the truth (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Kidder's (2009) approach could also be applied through the lens of a short-term versus long-term dilemma. If Julie were to accept the conference job and still charge for the cancelled services, it would clearly be financially advantageous to her in the short term. However, doing so could negatively impact her professional reputation in the long term. The agency could become frustrated if it is double-billed, which could affect its willingness to work with Julie again. That said, if Julie does decide to double-bill, it would at least reinforce her policy and help mitigate any potential confusion that may arise in the future. For example, if she were to decide not to double-bill now, but later needs to implement the policy for some reason, there could be pushback from the company. Consistency is one way to be sure that professional boundaries are maintained. Alternatively, if Julie were to decide to waive the cancellation fee and only charge for the services she actually provides at the conference, she would not be receiving double the income in the short term. However, in the long term, it could create more goodwill with the agency. If the agency recognizes that Julie is not taking advantage of the cancellation clause in her contract, they may view her as an ethical practitioner and be more willing to work with her again in the future (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Finally, when examining the different types of conflict discussed in Stewart and Witter-Merithew's 2006 work, this can be categorized as a values conflict. The scenario doesn't explicitly state what values Julie prioritizes, but depending on what ones she decides are more important in the moment, her decision could change. If she values building professional relationships long-term and fairness, she would not follow the policy. If she prioritizes the values of consistency and following the rules exactly as they are, then she would likely choose to

enforce the policy she established and charge the client for both the canceled services and the services she provides at the conference.

Identify the Possible Solutions

One possible solution would be for Julie to bill for both the cancelled services and the new conference assignment. In doing so, she would be following the policy she put in place before accepting the first job interpreting for the training. Since she is no longer scheduled for the training job and has the time to work at the conference, it is ethical for her to accept the work. This could be seen as the “best of both worlds” for Julie, as she can receive compensation for both opportunities; however, it may have negative implications for how the hiring agency perceives the profession of interpreting. People involved in the interaction may perceive Julie’s actions as unfair and could reinforce stereotypes that interpreters are greedy or opportunistic (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Another possible course of action would be for Julie to accept the job at the conference and choose not to bill for the canceled training. As previously discussed, this would likely foster goodwill between Julie and the organization hiring her, demonstrating her professionalism and integrity. She would also be following the spirit of the billing policy, which was put in place to safeguard her income in the case of an unfilled cancellation. Because she has secured an assignment that compensates for the training that was canceled, billing for the canceled services would no longer serve the original purpose of the policy. However, if Julie waives the policy, it is important to note that it could set a precedent, and the hiring party may expect the fee to be waived in the future even if the situation is different (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Finally, Julie could accept the job at the conference and choose not to bill for the canceled training, just as previously proposed. Taking this approach further, she could

communicate directly with the hiring party to explain why she is waiving the fee. Not only could this foster trust and build a better working relationship, but it could also mitigate the chances of pushback on her cancellation policy in the future. Additionally, she could consider revisiting the language in her contract to clarify that she will only bill for cancelled work for which she is unable to find an adequate replacement. This adjustment would more accurately reflect the policy's intent while also demonstrating the fairness she aims to promote (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Make a Decision

If I were Julie, I would choose the third option. It doesn't feel right ethically to charge for the cancelled work when it was able to get replaced with a comparable assignment. I support the cancellation policy being in place because it protects the interpreter's income and also reiterates to others that interpreters are professionals whose time deserves the same respect as that of any other service provider. That said, being flexible and fair goes a long way in the professional world, so showing fairness in this situation would be reasonable. I appreciate the added precaution of clearly communicating the reason why the fee is being waived and potentially reviewing the contract to clarify future expectations. These measures strengthen Julie's credibility as a professional and further reflect the kind of ethical practitioner she wants to be (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Consider the Impact

If Julie were to take the above approach to the scenario, the impacts would likely be positive. She would be extending professional courtesy to other professionals associated with the hiring agency while also making sure that her boundaries for the future are clear. Although this action would mean she would be releasing her right to bill for both assignments, it aligns with

Tenet 6.8 of the CPC, which requires interpreters to charge reasonable fees for their services. Having only one income from one job is sensible and fair, and it demonstrates Julie's adherence to the ethical standards of the interpreting profession. By acting in a respectful and ethical manner, Julie serves as a moral representative of the interpreting profession, modeling integrity and professionalism for both colleagues and consumers. (RID, 2005; Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Scenario #2- “A Scheduling Conflict”

An interpreter is offered a well-paying interpreting job that requires a full-day commitment. She is ready to accept the work, but upon checking her schedule, she realizes that she has a 1-hour appointment in the middle of the day. This appointment is a regularly scheduled job with a D/deaf couple, and everyone involved in the appointment expects the interpreter to be there, as it is a regular commitment. Other than this assignment, she has no other work scheduled that day. The interpreter must decide whether to take the full-day job and find another interpreter to sub for her in the regularly scheduled job or to pass on the opportunity to work all day and stick with the job she has already committed to (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Analyze the Dilemma

The interpreter, who appears to be working as a freelancer, finds herself at a crossroads: she has been offered the opportunity to fill an entire day with a single, well-paying assignment rather than needing to fit together shorter jobs and factor in the time it takes to travel between them. The appeal of this offer, which promises steady, lucrative work for the day, is obvious, as it offers both financial and logistical advantages. However, the interpreter already has a standing job with the D/deaf couple. While this appointment is only an hour long, it is recurring, which creates the opportunity for the interpreter to establish not only relationships with the consumers

but also gather background information and context that will help her better serve the situation as an interpreter. The interpreter has made this commitment, and the Deaf consumers and other involved consumers are expecting her to be there (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Another key party involved in the decision is the D/deaf couple with whom the interpreter is already scheduled to work. If the interpreter were to choose to take the other job and send someone else to their appointment, it could have negative implications. While the exact nature of this appointment is unclear, the interpreter's familiarity with the couple and knowledge gained from prior sessions would inform her approach and enhance the overall flow of communication. If another interpreter had to go in her place, they would not have the same level of context, and this would not be possible. It could slow down the overall process for that week and cause frustration. Additionally, if the interpreter cancels on the couple, it could damage the working relationship between the three of them and break trust. Trust is vital in any interpreter/consumer relationship, but especially in those where they will be working together long-term and have the opportunity to get to know each other more intimately (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Lastly, the interpreter should consider the consumers at the other assignment. Although she has not yet made a commitment to them, it is essential for her to consider whether another interpreter could adequately meet their communication needs. For example, if that assignment required an interpreter to be proficient in a certain subject matter or to have special certifications that the interpreter knew fell within her expertise, she might need to put further consideration into whether or not she should decline the assignment. In that case, the question then becomes whether there is another person qualified to fill the job's needs. This doesn't seem to be the case in this specific scenario, as the emphasis seems to be on the financial benefit of taking the full

day of work. However, it could add an additional ethical layer to consider (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

This scenario aligns with a number of Kidder's (2009) paradigms of ethical dilemmas. First, it could be considered a short-term versus long-term conflict. In the short term, it is likely a better choice for the interpreter to take the full-day job. It would be better for her logistically and financially. However, in the long term, cancelling on the D/deaf couple could create strain in their relationship, and it could make it more difficult to collaborate in the future. It could also be seen as an individual versus community conflict for similar reasons. The interpreter could prioritize what is best for her as an individual, which is likely taking the job that fills the most hours in the day. Alternatively, the interpreter could prioritize the community that has been coming together for the weekly appointments for the D/deaf couple and choose to keep that job. Finally, depending on the interpreter's true feelings about the situation, it could be considered a truth versus loyalty conflict. The interpreter could truly feel that taking the longer job was what she wanted or what was best for her. She could decide that her loyalty to the weekly job and the consumers there overrides what she wants or what could be considered better for her (Kidder, 2009; Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

When making the decision, the interpreter must consider the CPC's guidance on professional conduct and ethics. The sixth tenet, Business Practices, provides interpreters with the right to withdraw from assignments, but only when it is fair and justified. The sixth tenet also says that interpreters reserve the right to decline or discontinue assignments when conditions are not safe, healthy, or supportive of effective interpreting. In this case, cancelling one assignment to take a higher-paying assignment would not align with one of the reasons the CPC states is valid for withdrawing from an assignment. This would indicate that cancelling on the D/deaf

couple to take the other assignment, at least in the eyes of the CPC, would not meet professional conduct standards (RID, 2005).

Identify the Possible Solutions

The first possible solution would be for the interpreter to take the full day of work and cancel the appointment with the D/deaf couple for that week. The interpreter could accept the job when the agency calls and then notify the D/deaf couple (or the agency that schedules the interpreting services) that she will not be able to keep the appointment. If the interpreter wanted to mitigate the difficulty for all consumers involved, she could try to find her own replacement or provide referrals. This would allow the interpreter to take on a job that better fills her schedule and provides more income. By offering to help find someone to take her regular job with the D/deaf couple, she would be doing her best to lessen the impact of her absence (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Another route the interpreter could take is to keep her prior commitment with the D/deaf couple and decline the new assignment. She would forfeit the compensation tied to a full day of work, but she would be preserving the working relationship she has with the couple. She would also prioritize the work they are doing during the appointment, whatever it may be, by understanding the schema she has built over the previous weeks of working with the couple. This is incredibly beneficial for overall communication facilitation. The more an interpreter knows about the context of a situation, the better equipped they are to faithfully render messages between consumers (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Lastly, the interpreter could try to make both assignments work. She could inform the hiring agency for the full-day assignment that the appointment with the D/deaf couple is a priority that she can't cancel, but if they could accommodate another part of the day, she would

be available. This could be a situation where she works a half-day on one assignment and then leaves to attend the appointment with the couple, or she works the appointment with the couple and then arrives at the other assignment to work in the afternoon. It is possible that the hiring agency may not opt for this approach, instead preferring to hire one interpreter for the entire day. However, at least the interpreter has notified them of her availability. If they were able to make this work, the interpreter would be able to fill more time in her day while still honoring her prior commitments. It would be the best of both worlds for her (Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Make a Decision

If I were the interpreter, I would choose the last option. I would prioritize the appointment that I have already committed to. As a future practitioner, I want to be reliable and prioritize the quality of services I provide to consumers over the hours I work in a day and the pay differences between jobs. It doesn't feel right to me, or in alignment with the CPC, if I were to cancel my standing job for a better-paying one. That said, I wouldn't want to completely disqualify myself from the opportunity for the rest of the day. By clearly communicating my availability, I can both prioritize my prior commitment and offer my services for the rest of the time I have available that day. If the agency were to say they only want an interpreter who can work the entire day, I would then decline the assignment (RID, 2005; Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

Consider the Impact

As previously mentioned, this course of action has the potential to be the best of both worlds for the interpreter. Ethically, she is following the CPC by maintaining prior commitments, but she can also offer to pick up some of the hours in the time blocks she has open during the day. The interpreter can maintain her working relationship with the D/deaf couple and keep the

door open for more work either before or after the appointment. The consumers at the appointment with the D/deaf couple have their needs met, and the hiring agency may have its needs met if it is willing to work something out. If the hiring agency is unwilling to work with the interpreter around the scheduling conflict, the interpreter may miss out on some income. However, from my perspective, prioritizing the recurring appointment is more important (RID, 2005; Stewart & Witter-Merithew, 2006).

As a student, case studies provide the opportunity to think through ethical dilemmas and how I might respond to them in the moment. Since I'm not already a working interpreter, I don't have experience with the kinds of situations I may encounter in everyday work. Analyzing case studies helps me determine what type of practitioner I want to be. I can reflect on the values I want to prioritize and the solutions I can bring to different situations. I appreciate the opportunity to develop my professional decision-making skills, and I look forward to more reflection opportunities in the future as I continue to grow as a practitioner and prepare to enter the field.

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