



THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

CROSSING BORDERS...BRIDGING CULTURAL GAPS

How language arts education enhances communication and cross-border cultural relationships

by Deborah Lockhart

HOW LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION ENHANCE CROSS-BORDER RELATIONSHIPS

There is a need for tolerance and understanding in this world. People despise and fear what they do not understand.

Opportunities are lost because of cultural gaps. When people do not understand each other, they cease trying to communicate and cooperate with each other. There is often talk of the language of love.

When people love each other, they make every effort to try to understand each other. When misunderstanding takes place, there is a great deal of pain and efforts to communicate lessen. Once there is a small gap, it is easy to drive a wedge in a relationship. This is exactly how wars and strife start: by one small gap.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATION

The communication problem can be addressed very early in the development

of children. Efforts should be made to ensure that their language skills are being developed. Children should be made to understand the importance of language and communication so that when they go out into the world, they are able to communicate at all levels. Parents, schools and communities need to encourage children to learn about other peoples and cultures. The more comfortable people are when communicating with others, the better the world will be. One way of communicating effectively is obviously by learning language arts.

COMMUNICATION ENHANCES CONFIDENCE

The ability to communicate effectively with others enhances confidence. People trust you more in relationships when you make yourself understood. You put them at ease. No matter what measures are



Deborah Lockhart

used, whether verbal or non-verbal, once the receiver understands the intended stimulus, communication has taken place. This is why negotiation is so important. When the negotiation process comes to a successful close, the

parties feel a sense of relief. At times, the harder it is to reach the close of the negotiation, the more the pain of the process

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THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

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 zarosr@hotmail.com

EDITORIAL BOARD

Trudy Balch,
 Ellen Sowchek,
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DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Bahl Graphics
 kbahlmann@austin.rr.com

PRINTING

Mail Boxes, Etc. South Orange NJ
 mailboxso@verizon.net

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is remembered. If the process was too painful and difficult, one or more of the parties may decide never to negotiate with the other again. At times, people tend to avoid situations they do not understand or with which they are unfamiliar. They also tend to avoid situations that are too painful to remember.

On the other hand, if communication is achieved after a fair amount of effort, what is accomplished may very well be treasured. This is why people who work very hard at a friendship over time may remain friends for life. Similarly, some spouses will not separate even long after the sparkle has worn off their marriages because it took them so long to really know and understand each other and the effort it will take to develop intimacy on the same level with a new person is too difficult.

One of my former high school students who is currently studying International Relations at La Sorbonne was staying in the suburbs of France in the early summer at the end of the semester. He described to me the difficulty he experienced trying to explain his symptoms to a French doctor during an asthma attack. He felt horrible after his “ordeal.” I asked him if the doctor had been able to provide him with the necessary care to relieve his symptoms to which he replied in the affirmative. I told him, “then communication did take place.” He

expressed some relief after I had said this. However, I understood his angst at not being able to adequately articulate his symptoms to the French physician. I am sure the added stress exacerbated his symptoms.

**PRE-CONCEIVED NOTIONS/
IMPRESSIONS BASED ON THE
LANGUAGE SKILLS OF OTHERS**

A relative of mine, who has been an educator all her adult life, and I were having a debate about whether or not Caribbean dialects were an acceptable means of communication. I was arguing that they were acceptable if the intended stimulus could be clearly understood by the intended recipient of the information. She made the statement that “people judge where you are coming from by the way you speak” and reluctantly conceded that “how you speak does not always determine where you are going.” At the time, I was very vigorously arguing my point that it didn’t determine where you are going. Nevertheless, over the years, after seeing how much my knowledge of various languages has broadened my experience, I realize that had I only been proficient in my mother tongue, English, and certain Caribbean dialects, my experiences would have been more limited and I would not have functioned at the level at which I

have functioned over the years.

During the time I taught language arts in High School, I had many a debate with my young students who felt that learning foreign languages was irrelevant. While it is true that many of them went on to have many illustrious, glamorous and successful careers, I wager that if a survey were taken, the success and interesting nature of their professional lives would be proportionate to their knowledge of languages other than

English. In particular, one young student of mine who turned out to be an airline pilot comes to mind. I am sure in his travels, he thinks of the days when he used to be in my French class. I am sure he is either grateful he learned French or

regretful that he did not take it seriously, or a mixture of both.

TONE VS. WORDS

There is a saying that goes, “let your heart be without words, but do not let your words be without heart.” Many know how to speak words but their tone and attitude enhance neither the communication process in general nor the fostering of cross-border relationships in particular. Sarcasm, scorn, apathy and indifference are integral parts of cultural gaps. There are some groups that, in an

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effort to maintain their cultural identity, do so at the expense of learning to integrate with the general society by which they are surrounded. Hence, even though they may learn the prevailing language, their ability to communicate effectively with those outside of their cultural group is basically non-existent.

LANGUAGE AND ACCENTS

Every time I attend a networking event and introduce myself and my business, people say to me, "I hear an accent, where are you from?" It's usually the second sentence in our conversation. When I tell them that I am from the Caribbean, they say to me, "What is your mother tongue, Haitian Creole?" They usually find it hard to believe that my mother tongue is British English since I have an "accent". The conversation usually comes to an abrupt end when I point out that they, too, have an accent. I gather from these conversations, that having an accent other than an American or British accent is an indication that surely the speaker can not be a native English

speaker. An accent is simply the way in which words are intoned. There are various types of accents and people from the same geographic area might have different accents based on their family backgrounds and socialization. Every single member of my immediate family has a different accent because we all either come from or live in different geographic areas. Some accents and the way words are pronounced, make it difficult at times for other listeners to understand what is being said. There are some people who are well trained in the art of understanding almost any accent and even accurately identifying the geographic location from which the speakers originate or live.

RACE, GENETICS AND CULTURE

Because marriages and romantic relationships now take place more than ever between a cross-cultural mix of people, it is harder to "place" people because at times they are a product of two or more races. Despite political discussions and delineations, many of these people feel

more comfortable identifying themselves as multi-cultural rather than as having one particular race. This is not to say that they are ashamed or feel uncomfortable identifying with any

particular ethnic group from which they have ancestors. However, to place them in only one ethnic group is not a sufficient means of identifying them. This is especially so, depending on the family members to whom they were closest during their upbringing. Their culture, then, depends more on what goes on in the family and home than in the society at large. One's identity is a very sacred thing that can only be defined ultimately by the individual and his or her family and not by political groups with agendas.

BRIDGING THE GAP

In our profession, we encounter every single day, opportunities to cross borders and to bridge every imaginable gap, by the use of our language and communication skills. In order to do this effectively, we must be aware of the gaps when we encounter them and make sure that by our professionalism and dedication to the ethics of our trade we seek solutions in every situation to prevent the perpetration of misunderstanding, ignorance and prejudice. We can play a great and important part in making wars cease. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah Lockhart is President of *The Language Shop* and Founder of the *Networking Lunch*. She is currently the treasurer of the New York Circle of Translators and has been in the translation business since 1985.

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

by Rosene Zaros

November is fast approaching and many of us will be on our way to San Francisco for the annual ATA Conference. For many translators, it is the biggest event of the year – a flurry of workshops and networking. It is a time to meet with old friends and make new ones. But, for however wonderful all this may be, many translators will not be able to attend. San Francisco is far away. There is just too much work to do to take a week off at this time of year. Each translator has his/her own reasons for going or not going.



Now, let me remind you that our local group, the New York Circle of Translators, offers many of the same advantages at a much more reasonable price – our annual dues are only \$50.00 per year—and you don't have to cross the continent to attend meetings.

SO, WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

There isn't enough time, you say. There's too much to do. In truth, we are all beset by a myriad of demands on our time, but on the other hand, we have to take into account Parkinson's Law: *Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.* The "law"

derives from a satirical essay that we may want to contrast with a statement by Lucille Ball: "If you want something done, ask a busy person to do it. The more things you do, the more you can do." It's really a case of making time to do the things you want to do.

Each month, the Circle holds a meeting followed by a dinner, which offers attendees the opportunity to network and discuss problems of mutual concern. Additionally, there are many opportunities within the Circle to become involved in activities that are of importance to translators. So, why, with all the demands on your time, should you make an effort to attend meetings or to add to your already full schedule? In other words, what's in it for you?

The answer is quite simply: increased visibility and the opportunity to make a difference. Increased visibility that will expand your business in ways that you never imagined and the opportunity to make a difference that is rewarding in terms of personal satisfaction that cannot be measured in dollars and cents terms.

It's a win/win situation. The rewards are great. ■

SHARING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

by Lana Rachkovskaya,
NYCT Mentoring Committee

I once heard that everyone in this life is both a teacher and a student. Indeed, we all have teachers we learn from, and once we know enough, we share our knowledge with others.

The New York Circle of Translators' Mentoring Committee serves both beginners in the industry who are trying to understand where to start and seasoned professionals who are in need of an advice. I invite anyone who needs help or suggestions to contact our Mentoring Committee for advice: you can write to mentoring@capitaltranslations.net with your inquiries. We can help you with reviewing your resume, providing you with career suggestions, and just giving you the support you need.

I also would like to encourage all professional translators out there to share their knowledge with newcomers. You can do it by joining our Mentoring Committee; you can also go further by serving on the Board of Directors at the New York Circle of Translators. Sharing your knowledge, providing the support to the people who need it is essential to the development and continued growth of our industry. Also giving back is the most gratifying feeling you can experience.

Communicate, network, ask questions, provide support and grow your business! ■

CUSTOMER SERVICE IS YOUR KEY TO SUCCESS

by Lana Rachkovskaya, NYCT Mentoring Committee

Next to your professional qualifications, what is the second most important thing when you're dealing with clients? It's the level of customer service you are able to provide. In other words, it's how nice you are to your customers and how promptly you can respond to their requests. Here are some simple points that will help you attract new clients and keep the existing ones:

- Organize your space. We all have the office clutter that needs to be sorted out on a regular basis. The reason is very simple – when you are in an organized office environment, you feel good and it prompts you to act professionally. It also makes it easier to find any documentation your customers may ask for. This also applies to your computer: just keep your records and files organized. You will be able to function much faster, and time is money to your clients.
- When you answer the phone, always start speaking in a professional manner. Be prepared that any incoming phone call can be from a customer. Set up a separate business line and do not let your household members answer it. There are plenty of phone companies these days that provide unlimited calling at a fixed rate; some include international calls to certain countries for free (check out www.vonage.com). With this provider all you need is the high-speed Internet connection – it has many features that will let you run

your business professionally at a low cost.

- Have a capacity to fax or/and scan documents promptly. When you need to sign a Freelance Work Agreement or fill out a W-9 Form, it would help if you had the capacity to do it quickly. Set up an e-fax service (see www.myfax.com or www.e-fax.com) or buy an inexpensive scanner.
- Be reachable. Even if you travel a lot or are out of the office, figure out a way to be reachable - cell phone, e-mail, etc. When your customers know that you can be reached virtually all the time, it adds to the feeling of confidence. If your customer tries reaching you a few times and you are never there, eventually, they will stop trying.
- Be nice with your clients every time. Consistency in customer service means a lot.
- Treat your customers the way you would like to be treated. Would you want a moody or rude person answering the phone when you are purchasing goods or services? Probably not. If you are nice and professional with your customers, they most certainly will recommend your services to others.
- Smile. It always helps me when I deal with my clients on the phone – speak with a smile, people certainly feel that.
- Make each customer feel like they are

the most important. When you have two important phone calls at the same time, you can always ask the other person if you can call them back right away. Do not let the person on the other end of the line hold for more than a few seconds.

- Always exceed your clients' expectations. Never "sit" on a project if you can deliver it early. Try and deliver your projects slightly before the actual deadline. This will make your clients feel confident in your capacity to always deliver on time.
- Never raise your voice or argue with a customer. We all have to deal with a variety of situations. When you have a frustrated customer on the phone, take a deep breath (well, without them hearing it, of course) and try to listen to what your client's needs are. In a calm voice, offer a solution. And remember, most of the time the anger is not directed at you. If you are there to make your customer's life easier in the heat of the moment, they will certainly appreciate it.
- Be grateful for what you have! Always thank your customers for the business they provide to you – this will stimulate a positive relationship and will help you grow business.

If you need help or suggestions on managing you clients' expectations more effectively, please feel free to contact NYCT Mentoring Committee at mentoring@capitaltranslations.net ■

SEPTEMBER MEETING OF THE NEW YORK CIRCLE

by M. Heintz Montez

Victor Escamilla spoke to members about “Securing Your Financial Future”. Victor started off by describing the “typical” millionaire.

The typical American millionaire is 54 years old and has been married for 28 years. He did not receive his money from an inheritance; he earned it on his own merit. He lives in a house that he bought 12 years ago and it is not a new structure, in other words not a McMansion. The car he drives is a 4 year old SUV or Ford. Millionaires are educated and they plan and budget their time and money. They also invest 20% of their disposable income and live a lifestyle that is not considered high consumption. In other words they won't be profiled on the “lives of the rich and famous”.

Victor went on to explain the Six Steps to Financial Success:

Step 1 - Control the Cash Flow

This can be achieved by effective cash management. Where does your money go every month? Yes, the rent or mortgage takes a big chunk, but what about the incidentals? The Starbucks? The nail salon? That new grill or set of power tools you simply must get? Victor explained that you must assess your expenses in order to effectively manage

the cash flow. Know where every dollar goes. Keep a list for about a month and note down all purchases; at the end of the month you will know how much money goes to bills, daily necessities and routine pleasures.

Then you can build an emergency fund. Most people have emergency funds of 3-6 months living expenses; however since a freelancer's income varies, freelancers should try to have a year's worth of an emergency fund.

Pay down credit cards. If anything this is the single most effective way to control the flow. Interest eats up far too much of a translator's precious resources. Once the cards are paid off, the monthly check that used to go to VISA can now go to investing or building an emergency fund.

Step 2 - Protect What You Have

You need to protect what you currently claim. That means your home, your portfolio and you. If you can not work then you can not make money for anything including the daily bills. Disability insurance protects YOU. Depending on the individual situation not everyone qualifies for social security when they fall ill, and many families can not carry the burden for an extended period.

Life insurance protects your family. You

need to find out how much you need for your family's needs should you not be around. Remember to also think carefully of the beneficiary.

Step 3 - Invest Wisely

Once the cash flow is controlled and you have protected your current assets you can now begin to invest. Investing is very personal in the sense that you need to plan for your future needs and not everyone's needs are the same. Diversify your investments, so if one sector of the economy goes south you are still relatively financially solvent or, as the old saying goes don't put all your eggs in one basket. Assess your risk tolerance. Some people are daredevils, others like the slow but steady. Always remember to manage your portfolio on a regular basis. Yes, there is financial help available but you are responsible for the financial decisions on your portfolio. You should try to review it monthly. When you review regularly you can find any discrepancies and also revise any investments that seem unsuitable for your future needs.

Because of this many people opt for Mutual funds. These are good because the funds are professionally managed by someone. It makes it a convenient way to invest. *(continued on next page)*

Step 4 - Manage Your Taxes

Take a closer look at your taxes. For example, check your schedule B, there may be a way you can save on interest and dividends. Have your tax preparer as well as yourself check and see where savings can be made.

You can also look at tax-favored investments such as tax-exempt municipal bonds or tax-deferred IRAs and annuities. Victor highly recommended “The Richest Man in Babylon” if you wish to read up on investing.

Step 5 - Save for Retirement

You have 3 choices in retirement: social security, your own savings and investments and employers sponsored pension plans.

Many freelancers do not have an employer sponsored plan and social security is currently capped at \$2,000 per month no matter what your income or contribution was prior to retirement. This leaves your own personal savings and investments. Here Victor emphasized the importance of starting early: “the earlier you start the more you will have when you choose to retire”. If you haven’t started already, then start NOW. You can open a SEP (self-employed pension plan) you can contribute up to 25% of your income or \$44,000.00 per year.

Step 6 - Leave a Legacy

Remember there is probate, and there are estate taxes and maybe long-term care waiting at the end. Probate is quite time consuming and everyone will know your private details since it all becomes public record during the process. You can bypass probate by having a trust or joint ownership of property or funds.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, since many people are living longer there may come a time for long-term care. No one likes to think about it, but it can really tear a family apart not only financially but also emotionally as family members decide how to care for you and/or your spouse.

The average nursing home cost is \$54,200.00 per year and in the NYC metro area that cost is \$97,900.00 per year. I salute you and will send you my resume if you as a freelancer make \$97,900.00 or more per year, but most freelancers do not make that type of money on a yearly basis. There is a 43% chance that once you reach 65 years of age you will require long term care for the “golden years”, so it should at least be looked into.

Victor suggested that all the firms you decide to deal with, be screened carefully. “Make sure they are reputable, make sure they have assets, talk with others and find out how the firm is working for them”.

Members then asked Victor about certain financial aspects that affected them. Out of this discussion we moved into health-care insurance and one of our members suggested Freelancers Union. They offer health care in New York and now New Jersey.

We had a wonderful treat when Jon Ritzdorf asked to address the members about his Website Localization class.

Jon answered many questions about the course, which is held once a year at NYU. He also spoke about the changes in the industry. Jon pointed out that, in order not only to survive but thrive, translators need to do more than “just translate” or say they offer “quality translations”. In this day, a translator has to be able to offer a client more than just translation. If a client can have their entire project done by someone else then they will go to someone else. But if a translator can translate, do the translations in the Adobe Photoshop, and also perform some other related aspects of the project they have a better chance of having more work sent and work that commands a higher fee. As to quality translation, that is a very subjective term. Every client has a different idea as to quality, and, furthermore, when they hire a translator or contact a translator they already believe that the translator produces quality work. If the individual they contracted proves them wrong, that is

another issue entirely. Yes, quality is always important, however, Jon explained that while translators are always emphasizing “quality” in the end that is NOT what gets one the job. He also pointed out the recent trend in outsourcing. Just a couple of years ago work was going to countries with a lower cost not only in price charged by translators but also in the monetary exchange of the clients. At the current moment with the dollar dropping as it seems to be, as of this writing it is EQUAL with the Canadian dollar, something that has not happened in 30 years, translation projects are being sent over here to the States from Europe and other parts of the globe. It’s always a good thing to keep abreast of the new tools and skills needed in one’s profession. Since everything seems to be going over the internet, learning how it works is now crucial. Jon’s class is one way translators can add value to their services and thus command higher fees.

As someone who has taken Jon’s class I can attest to the fact that having those web skills on my resume had me called in for a project for which I wouldn’t ordinarily have been contacted. Now I can build on those skills with the recent work that I have obtained and take my services to the next level. ■

THE WAY TO A PROJECT MANAGER’S HEART

reviewed by Rosene Zaros

On Thursday, October 11, 2007, Lori Colman, who is a real-life project manager, gave those in attendance at the October meeting some insight into how to work successfully and happily with project managers. Much of what she had to say should be obvious. However, in the hectic rush of our daily existence, sometimes even common courtesy gets left by the wayside.

It is the goal of every translator to be called upon and used frequently by an agency. Lori stressed that this is not difficult to achieve. By exercising common courtesy and professionalism, you can win over a Project Manager.

She stressed the importance of keeping

the Project Manager sane by doing the following things:

- Confirm receipt and availability for a job. You should do this as soon as possible after receiving the inquiry. If you can’t do the job, politely decline and tell the PM that you look forward to working together in the future.
- Review all of the parameters of a job BEFORE accepting. If it is job that involves translating a PowerPoint

It is the goal of every translator to be called upon and used frequently by an agency. Lori stressed that this is not difficult to achieve.

presentation or something in Excel, be sure that you have the necessary software installed on your computer and are familiar with the program before accepting. From your standpoint, too, this reduces the chance of last-minute surprises. *(continued on next page)*



Lori Colman, who is a real-life project manager, gave those in attendance at the October meeting some insight into how to work successfully and happily with project managers.

- Do not make any assumptions. If the project isn't clear, ask questions now, not days, or even hours, later.
- Be honest about complying with the deadline. If you are not sure you can meet it, don't accept the job. Don't bite off more than you can chew.
- Be realistic about the subject matter you can handle. Don't take a medical job if you have no experience in the field. Even the best bilingual specialized dictionary will not enable you to do an adequate job.

The above suggestions/mandates deal primarily with the technical part of translation. The following deal more with the personal relationship that exists between translator and project manager.

- Be flexible. If the client requests that something be translated differently – unless it is wrong—comply with the request. If the client requests numerous changes, comply with the request. Do not take this as an affront to your ability as a translator. It's only complying with the preferences of the client, and you will be paid for making the requested changes.
- Mutual respect. This is vital in helping to educate the clients and ultimately fulfill their needs.
- The translator and the project manager must work together as a team and, in reality, the project manager shields the translator from much of the client's

capriciousness. A united front is what is needed in order not to lose sight of common goals.

Effective professional communication makes the relationship. It is essential that honest and open communication be constantly maintained. The project will not go smoothly without it.

You only get one chance to make a first impression, so you want it to be a good one.

- When working or attempting to work with an agency that has literally hundreds or maybe even thousands of people in its database, it is very important to show that you are someone who stands out – not just in the quality of work you do, but also in other important qualities.
- Even though the agency/linguist relationship is business, courtesy is of the utmost importance. For the sake of the business relationship, try to sometimes give discounts or a little price break for continued business to an agency that uses you regularly, especially if they ask for it.
- Always treat the Project Manager with respect and treat him or her the way you would want to be treated. Little

The translator and the project manager must work together as a team and, in reality, the project manager shields the translator from much of the client's capriciousness.

courtesies go a long way. How much time does it really take to add a little note when you submit the assignment?

Just a few words maintain human contact. "Here it is! Thanks!" Not a big deal when you're doing it, but it makes a big difference in how the project manager looks at you. You are two human beings working together. Project managers within the same agency talk to each other about their lin-

guists. They discuss which ones are easy or difficult to work with. In fact, some even keep a record of ones not to use again. This frequently has little to do with the translation skills of the linguist, but rather with other qualities that makes the association pleasant and rewarding for both, or a miserable experience. If you make a bad impression on one project manager, the word may spread and be detrimental to your business.

So, the bottom line is that, whether you are dealing with a project manager or a direct client, it is important always to follow professional standards of courtesy. If these elements become part and parcel of your way of conducting business, you will go far as a freelancer. ■

WORKING FROM HOME — A GUIDE TO INSPIRATION

by Lana Rachkovskaya

For most freelancers the commute means getting out of the bed in the morning, having a quick breakfast and launching yourself in front of the computer to check those e-mails. Sounds familiar? While not having to dress up for work and dealing with stressed-out commuters is a clear advantage, I wanted to share a few ideas on how to make your both working space, both mental and physical, more inspiring.

Create Your Day In Advance

I learned this technique a while ago and enjoy using it. When you wake up in the morning, think about what you have to do that day. Go through your schedule in your mind and envision how you want your day to be. It is much easier when you get up with this positive approach and are ready to go. If you have a huge project with a tight deadline, just tell yourself: “I have plenty of time for everything today! I will be done with this project in no time!”

Infuse Your Work Space with Inspiration

I have a picture of someone who inspires me on my desk, along with my husband's photo, of course. Every time I look at that person's picture, it somehow keeps me going. Admiring what he accom-

plished, I just can't allow myself to complain about any minor pitfalls. He inspires me. I'm sure there is a person in your life that inspires you. Have their picture on your desk to greet you in the morning. This will light up your day. Any objects that bring you positive energy, good memories or help you to calm down will work here. I have a few of those – gifts from around the world, motivational and inspiring quotes and pictures. Recently I went to the Delaware River just to relax and get away from it all. The scene was just breathtaking, which filled me with such a comfortable feeling of inner peace. My friend and I picked some rocks by the river and I placed mine on my desk, and it reminds me every day that there is a peaceful solution to any issue.

Your Schedule

When you get to your office in the morning, do you know what is waiting for you that day? If you do not have an agenda book yet, get one - it will make your life so much easier. I actually like organizing my schedule the day before so that I have my to-do list in the morning. I strongly suggest using some sort of a project management system for translation projects, and still there are so many things beyond the actual translation that

you need to do every day. Make it easier on yourself by organizing your time.

When Feeling Down

You know those days when you just feel like maybe you could be doing more to succeed or you are just feeling down? Just remind yourself that it always comes down to your thinking. Change your thoughts and the world around you will change. Any thoughts lead to actions, and actions lead to results.

Have a Vision of Your Success

Having a mental picture of what you want to achieve in life certainly keeps you focused. Try and look beyond your immediate situation. Want to get more clients? Make a list of what you want for yourself and keep it somewhere in your working space. Now that you are focused and know what you want, start making small steps towards achieving it.

Down Time

It's rare, but we all do experience a slow-down. When it is slow, dedicate your time to growing your business. Send out more of those e-mails or make phone calls, update your resume, work on your marketing material. Use this time to grow and get ahead. Down time can

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THE BUSINESS OF TRANSLATING

by Danilo Nogueira

The inevitable introduction...

Translation is a service business, not an industry or commerce. The basic difference between industry, commerce and services lies in *inventories*. Industrial establishments keep at least two kinds of inventory: raw materials and finished goods. Commercial establishments keep only finished goods inventories. Service establishments, however, keep no inventories.

An example will make this clear: a paint factory will keep inventories of raw materials (pigments, thinners, binding agents) and finished goods (paint); a hardware store will keep only inventories of finished goods (paint). A painter (service provider) will keep neither. Painters may keep inventories (brushes, for instance) but those are not for sale. What a painter sells is *painting services*, and services cannot be stacked in shelves because they are intangible.

Now, every product, tangible or intangible, can be compared with another product based on three parameters: delivery time, quality and price. Buying decisions are based on tradeoffs among those three parameters: Product A is very good, but too expensive. Product B is good and reasonably priced, but unfortunately they don't carry that brand at your local store and you do not have the time to look for it elsewhere. So you settle for Product C, which, in your opinion, offers the best balance of the three parameters at the time.

How does all that affect our business?

...time and tension...

Because we carry no inventories, clients who call us for a translation know they will find none. They also know they will find no "Product B" that will somehow meet their needs. Finally, they know that calling another translator will not help much, because nobody will have their translation ready for them.

So, they press for immediate service. Many translators complain that jobs go to the lowest bidder, but my experience is that the majority goes to lowest bidder *among those who offer the fastest turnaround*.

This creates a certain amount of tension between client and translator. Tension that is made worse by the fact that time devours itself: if a client needs a translation within 72 hours, each minute spent finding a translator reduces the time available to do the job. Once I was asked to translate five long annual reports within three days, a job I had to refuse. The desperate client called every agency in town and three of them called me - each of them with a shorter turnaround time: because deadlines are fixed, turnaround times must be flexible.

The problem seems to affect translators more strongly than other professionals. The other day I called my doctor for an appointment, and the first date available was a month later. Tell one of our clients it will have to wait a week and it will probably hang up on you. If I had an emergency, my doctor would tell me to look for help in a hospital: they all have

emergency rooms these days. We cannot do that: as far as our clients are concerned, we are the emergency room.

Faster means of communication have made the situation even worse. When Brazilian companies airmailed information to their parent companies, they gave me a week to translate their annual reports. Now they e-mail everything and want same-day translations.

Why is pressure for short turnarounds so heavy?

Pressure on translators is heavier than it is in other service businesses because the translator is often one of the last links in a very complex chain of events. For instance, we are the people who translate the specs required to bid for a government contract. We are the outsiders, called at the end of the process, when delays have been accumulating for months and everybody is on edge. Thus being, we cannot even fight for time: there isn't any time left to be fought for.

The people who prepare the specs *do their best* to prepare a great set of specs - but we must do what it takes to meet the delivery deadline. Therein lies the difference.

To make things worse, the average translation is getting bigger and bigger. A few months ago, I was offered a 1.4-million-word job. That is twice the size of the Bible. Turnaround 45 days, maximum. Of course, I declined.

Time pressures favor new entrants: sometimes the only person who can take

the job is someone who actually never did a professional translation before. Unfortunately, this also means that someone's *opera prima* often is a rush job done without the benefit of appropriate equipment.

...questions of quality...

The constant pressure for fast service created by the lack of inventories has a deplorable impact on quality - we all know that. Often clients say time matters more than quality. The guy who wanted five reports in three days said he did not care: he just wanted a heap of paper he could show a government official in connection with a public bid. Nobody would read it, said he. Well, perhaps. But, no matter what the client says, someone would have a look at the job sometime and say "Look at this mess! And we paid this guy a premium for the garbage." So, I said no to the job and goodbye to a very large fee. I do not regret it.

But the point I would like to make is different. Because we have no inventories, clients cannot possibly test our product for quality. When they contact us, they find not a *product*, but a *potential*. And potentials cannot be tested for quality.

Clients can ask for samples of past work or for tests - when there is time for that, which is not often. In any case, many translators refuse to do tests and, since most of our work is confidential, we often cannot provide samples. And, finally, tests and samples are so easily faked that some clients do not even bother to ask.

Quality has to be evaluated indirectly, based on what we have done for that

client or for someone he knows. This procedure favors experienced translators and is thus hated by new entrants, who would like to see clients giving a newcomer a deserved break. I deeply sympathize with newcomers and their plight, but let us remember that this is exactly the method we use when, for instance, we need a doctor: we prefer the experienced doctor who helped aunt Jane out of her illness to the young promising doctor just out of medical school.

...the problem of price...

A surprisingly large number of people claims that for every product there is a *fair price* based on its cost. In fact, prices result from the play between supply and demand and bear no relationship to costs. The difference between price and cost is often called *margin*. If your margin is high and your volume is also high, you make a good profit. Otherwise, you don't. No business bases its prices on costs. Everybody - including us - charges as much as they can and cuts costs to the absolute minimum in order to maximize margins. If they cannot make a profit, they will try some other business. That is the way the law of supply and demand works.

All this may seem outrageous, but it is borne out by the fact that translators, especially new entrants, are always eager to know *how much to charge* - not *how much it costs*. In addition, we must keep in mind that because translation is a labor-intensive activity, most of our fees cover labor and, because most of us are independent operators, labor means what we pay ourselves. Now, what we pay

ourselves is not a cost; a cost is what we pay to the other guy.

Prices are based on supply and demand, but buying decisions are based on a comparison between competing products, which, in turn, is based on delivery times, quality and price considerations. Because time is usually so pressing, it often weighs more than quality in translation purchase decisions.

In addition, many buyers see translation as a commodity - that is, as a standard product, such as 23-carat gold, which should have a standard price. The notion is reinforced by the fact that most translators will quote fees and delivery times on any job sight unseen. Many translators will even quote prices on their home pages: so much per word, no matter what. If we treat translations as a commodity, we can hardly condemn our clients for doing the same.

Small wonder clients base their purchasing decisions on the hallowed method of "get three quotes and award contract to lowest bidder." Of course, this should be construed as "lowest bidder among those offering short turnarounds," for if you cannot handle the job immediately, you are automatically excluded from the process.

No use trying to convince a client my translation offers better quality: all translators claim that. That brings us back to the no-inventory problem, the main thread underlying this article: quality only comes into consideration after the translation is received and examined. If those who bargained for the lowest prices and shortest turnaround times,

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CIRCLE NEWS

■ CHARLES M. STERN AUTONOMOUS AWARD

In 1997, Mr. Charles M. Stern left ten percent (10%) of his estate to the New York Circle of Translators to establish a discretionary grant to the one worthiest, needy male and to the one worthiest, needy female members of the Circle. In 2005, the NYCT Board decided to respect his wish and establish the Charles M. Stern Autonomous Award as he wanted us to do.

Candidates for this award must be members in good standing of the New York Circle of Translators. The recipient of the award will be announced at the January or February meeting. Five hundred dollars (\$500) is the maximum amount awarded annually. If two members are selected, then each will receive \$250.

Any member may nominate candidates for this award. Names of candidates, together with a brief biography and the candidate's specific need or proposed use for this award, should be submitted via e-mail to president@nyctranslators.org before November 30, 2007

In 2006, the award went to Melly Bartholomew, a long-time member who specializes in Spanish-to-English and English-to-Spanish financial and legal translation. We can all avouch for the truth of her sponsor's statement: "Dry spells and the feast or famine phenomenon are very common experiences in the translation business. However, when the dry spell continues for too long and in addition is compounded by health problems, it becomes a crisis, both physically and financially." It is the purpose of this award to help needy translators such as Melly.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

Now that we're well into the 21st century, we've become accustomed to doing everything by email to the point that we are not much concerned about our "snail mail" addresses. This is becoming a big problem for *The Gotham*. We are having an ever-increasing number of newsletters returned because they are unable to be forwarded. While you can always read the newsletter online (a little later than you would receive it in the mail), it's still nice to be able to curl up in an armchair and leisurely read the latest news about what is happening in the world of translation. So, if you have just moved, are planning a move, or have changed your email address, please be sure to go online and update your contact information and send an email to zarosr@hotmail.com so that you will not miss a single issue. The information that you post on the website is how we contact you. Please take a minute to make sure it's accurate and follows standard address format. Please check your information and then:

If you need to update your profile: change of address, change of apartment number, language pairs, etc. go to NYCT website <http://www.nyctranslators.org> and click on 'NYCT MEMBERS ONLY Update your profile here.' [click here] At the login screen, enter your member ID number and password. Be sure to update the information on your profile, clicking on the "update" button at the bottom of each screen that you change."

If you forgot your ID number please contact Gloria Barragán and she will provide that number for you.

■ CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR THE BOARD

As another year is fast drawing to a close and as terms expire, we need to elect two new board members:

1. President-elect
2. Secretary

Please send your nominations via email to Lori Colman at LColman@rennert.com

■ UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 31 – Nov. 3, 2007

American Translators Association 48th Annual Conference

San Francisco, California
www.atanet.org

November 8, 2007

NYCT Meeting

Panel discussion of ATA Conference
Please reply to mystymy@excite.com

November 7-11, 2007

American Literary Translators Association

30th Anniversary Conference
"Celebrating the Past,
Imagining the Future"
Richardson, Texas
www.librarytranslators.org

November 15-18, 2007

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

41st Annual Convention & Exposition
"Bridging Cultures Through Languages"
San Antonio, Texas
www.actfl.org

■ NYCT HOLIDAY PARTY

TBA: December 11, 12, or 13

Check "Events" section of webpage.

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complain at this point that the job was very poorly done, it is too late.

...and the inevitable Internet.

You cannot really write an article on the business of translation these days without mentioning the Internet. How does the Big Net affect our business?

Basically, the Net has made us omnipresent. Five years ago, a company in Guatemala that wanted a translation from Hungarian into Spanish might have a hard time finding a translator. Now, it can access the Internet and find a translator in a matter of minutes or hours, although not necessarily a good one. In addition, this translator may live in Argentina, if she prefers the pampas to the puszta.

The other side of this coin is that a translator can no longer hold sway over a number of clients just because she (most translators are female) is the only one in the area who can cope a given language.

This particular coin seems to have three sides, not two. For the omnipresence allowed by the Internet will also end with all dreams of restricting entry into the profession to a small number of “legally qualified” persons. This is known as “closed shop” and, although many of its advocates are honest people who see it as a form of “consumer protection,” it is often just a ploy to increase prices by restraining competition, very

much like the rules imposed by the medieval craft guilds. Because translations can move so fast over the Internet, if a closed shop environment is established in any country, translators who have been excluded could easily go on working through agencies in some other country and continue living where they have always lived.

Not that I believe closed shops would benefit translators in any way, mind you, but that is another long, long, story, which I may approach in a future article. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1942. After dropping out of high school, he taught English and moonlighted as a translator for several years. In 1970, Danilo suddenly landed a job as a translator with a major CPA firm in Brazil and decided he wanted to be a full-time translator. This job catapulted him into a free-lance career in translation as a specialist in accounting, finance, corporate law and taxation—areas he had no previous background in.

The Translation Journal asked Danilo where he had learned to write English. “Well,” he answered, “a professional translator has to pay close attention to the style of the original. You know, ‘why is it said this way and not that way?.’ Then you start memorizing the formulas you like best. The third step is just using those formulas to express what you want, just like in a substitution drill.”

Danilo can be reached at danilo.tradutor@uol.com.br

This article originally appeared in the October 1998 issue of the Translation Journal (<http://accurapid.com/journal>)

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also be used to catch up with things you haven't had a chance to get to like updating glossaries, cleaning up TMs and keeping track of your payments.

It Is Important To Get Out

Believe me, I know how tough it is to get out of the office for a lunch break. However, I do make an effort to get a breath of fresh air every now and then. Even if it is only a 5-10 minute walk, take advantage of it. Staring at the computer all day may be overwhelming and you will feel more productive after a short break. A friend of mine who is a freelancer taught me this technique when you are pulling an all-nighter or working for many hours straight. If you are working from home, go to your bedroom, lie down for 10 minutes, set an alarm and close your eyes. Taking a walk or going to a quiet place helps too, if you are in an office environment.

I am wishing you many productive days ahead and best of success!

If you need help or suggestions on organizing and managing your work space, please feel free to contact NYCT Mentoring Committee at mentoring@capitaltranslations.net ■



**THE GOTHAM
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The New York Circle of Translators (NYCT) is a New York State not-for-profit corporation grouping independent translators and interpreters as well as companies and organizations. It is a chapter of the American Translators Association (ATA) which is, in turn, an affiliate of the International Federation of Translators (FIT).

NYCT members work in a variety of languages and specialties. Our members are committed to the exchange of ideas and mutual support. One of our goals is to educate the general public about the professional nature of interpreting and translating.

NYCT members enjoy the following benefits:

- Free monthly meetings featuring speakers on all aspects of the translation profession
- Networking opportunities at monthly dinners and annual holiday party
- Professional development workshops and seminars
- Subscription to our newsletter, The Gotham Translator
- Listings in the NYCT Online Membership Directory and the annual NYCT printed Membership Directory
- Referrals (if you indicate that you accept them, existing members may direct work requests to you or clients may contact you directly)

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PO Box 4051
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163-4051