

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) Case Studies

Volume 1 *Celebrating Leadership: Turning Passion into Action*

Article 8

2017

The Quiet Leader

Sandra L. Maloney

Western Oregon University, smaloney13@mail.wou.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wou.edu/maiscasestudies>

Recommended Citation

Maloney, Sandra L. (2017) "The Quiet Leader," *Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) Case Studies*: Vol. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wou.edu/maiscasestudies/vol1/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) Case Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu.

The Quiet Leader

Sandra L Maloney
Western Oregon University

Abstract

Leaders are thought to be the ones who are bold, do big things, and make big changes. We have made leaders into individuals who ‘change the world’ (Dudley, 2010). The reality is that there are leaders who do not live to have their names in the headlines or seek to do extraordinary, heroic acts. They are those who live in our community with humility. They impact the lives of others by being themselves, fulfilling the task at hand, and showing respect to others. In the field of sign language interpreting, Marian Lage is a leader.

Getting Started

I have observed that the most effective leaders are rarely public heroes. These men and women aren’t high profile champions of causes, and don’t want to be. They don’t spearhead ethical crusades. They move patiently, carefully, and incrementally. They do what is right—for their organizations, for the people around them, and for themselves—inconspicuously and without casualties. (Badaracco, 2011)

On a typical work day, Marian Lage appears to be a confident, competent interpreter. On the surface, she is no different than hundreds of other sign language interpreters in America. Her foray into the field of sign language interpreting is similar to that of many others and yet uniquely her own. She has experienced set-backs in her journey and moments when it has all come together. Her approach to learning, mentoring, and teaching is a product of her experiences. How she interacts with her colleagues, the Deaf community, and her students is why she is a leader in the field of interpreting. She is the daughter of Rita and Larry Lage of

Ann Arbor, Michigan. As a child of deaf adults (coda), American Sign Language is her first language. The common misperception is that interpreting would be the natural choice for most codas. To the contrary, Marian initially enrolled in Eastern Michigan University's Deaf Education Program. It was not long before she intuitively knew the program's philosophy of teaching deaf children orally with no inclusion of a manual or signed education was not what she believed to be optimal for educating young deaf and hard of hearing children. She transferred to Madonna University, also in Michigan, with the intent of becoming an interpreter due the University's robust sign language studies and Deaf Culture program. Again, she was met with obstacles and discouragement from the faculty and staff. According to her instructors, coda interpreters, such as herself, were 'not ethical' and did not make for good interpreters. With this advice, she changed majors and finally graduated with a dual major in social work and sign language studies. She worked for a few years in the social work field before learning of a mentoring opportunity at Arizona State University (ASU) for pre-certified sign language interpreters. Under the guidance of skilled interpreters and mentors, Marian obtained her Certificate of Interpretation (CI) and Certificate of Transliteration (CT) through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) within six months of starting the program. Her plan to move back to Michigan was postponed by a move to Los Angeles, CA instead. While there she had the good fortune to surround herself with exceptional language mentors and skilled teachers who influenced her work every day.

Mentoring and Teaching

Marian could have let the advice from her instructors at Madonna University detract her from pursuing a career as a sign language interpreter. Instead, she seized an opportunity across the country at ASU to participate in the mentoring program which provided a rich environment for developing the skills and confidence of a beginning interpreter. The program ensured she was teamed with qualified interpreters for all of her assignments and set the bar for effective teaming among interpreters that she emulates to this day. The positive approach to mentoring young interpreters and welcoming her as a part of the team gave her the skills and confidence to not only pass the RID CI/CT exams within six months of being in Arizona, the experience also set the standard for how she teams with and mentors others. Given her early experience, it could

have been all too easy for Marian to become jaded and skeptical of other interpreters. Instead, she has used that experience in her mentoring and teaching to be accepting of others, their diverse backgrounds, and to find ways to constructively criticize without destroying the spirit or drive to learn that is present within her students.

Marian vividly recalls her mentoring experience with Paula Browning while in Los Angeles. Paula would talk to her about everything and anything. At the time, she didn't understand why Paula was telling her so much as it did not seem relevant to interpreting and it certainly was not discussion about Marian's interpreting work. Years later, wisdom and experience led her to realize that Paula had given her invaluable insight into the L.A. interpreting and Deaf community. In her reflection of that time in her life, she recognizes that dialogue allowed her to become an active member of the community. It also enhanced her interpreting ability since she had more contextual information outside of only what was said or done in any one given interpreting environment.

Her time in Arizona and in California influenced how she values the humanity of the work she does. When working with a new student, especially in a mentoring situation, the underlying principle she works from is that effective interpreting cannot happen in a bubble. She acknowledges the importance of discussing current events and getting to know the person and what challenges they face in their daily life. That dialogue gives her a sense of where to start in their work together, builds trust and rapport, and provides the building blocks for her ability to scaffold their learning experience. It also builds a common language so that eventually they are able to discuss the work in a more diagnostic way. Marian does not shy away from having tough and honest conversations with her students and the work that is required to get them to their end goal. Throughout it all she still feels the scars left from being told she would never be ethical enough to be an interpreter based on her upbringing. She is mindful to not perpetuate this myth while enhancing the skills of her students. Her belief is that we must respect each other as individuals and respect the culture and communities we work in by immersing ourselves in them in order to incorporate the norms and ever changing language into our daily work.

Learn by Doing

Marian's approach to learning is organic and refreshing. She is driven by the value of life-long learning and she has always sought out challenging learning opportunities. Ironically, she still laments the fact that she has not pursued a Master's degree. She expresses envy and admiration for her friends and colleagues who have or are in the process of obtaining a higher degree. Marian probably has as much knowledge and information to share as those who have a diploma. Her passion for learning has taken many forms throughout her career and each continuing education opportunity is chosen with a purpose. You will not find her attending each and every conference available. In fact, she has never been to an RID National Conference even though she has been a member of the organization for years. She chooses her learning opportunities depending on how to improve her own work or what she needs to know in order to mentor and teach. She notes a few poignant learning experiences that are both based in the community around her. The first was an opportunity to work with Deaf West Theatre. She describes the opportunity to watch Deaf adults working with one another and debating language use and deliberate language choices. The other is to be around her sons, both Deaf and current students at the Indiana School for the Deaf. Their language at home and with their friends has given her a new perspective on the value of being a part of the community and the impact interpreters can have on the next generation of Deaf individuals.

Leader Qualifications

Today, she does not consider herself a leader, at least not in the big, heroic definition of leader our society has come to put on a pedestal and admire from afar. To hear her tell it, she is not a leader because she does not have a degree, is not a workshop presenter, and does not engage in formal research. Her actions tell a different story. Marian leads by example. In her own words she asserts, "I want to walk the walk and know what is current. If I will mentor or teach, my certification should be current (M. Lage, personal communication, July 29, 2014)." She holds an RID CI/CT, National Interpreter Certification-Advanced, Michigan-Board for Evaluation of Interpreters: Level III and next on her agenda is to take the Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment. She also feels the enormity of the responsibility that comes with interpreting and teaching interpreters. In the end, she does acknowledge that she is a leader amongst her

colleagues and in her local community because she has information to share and a passion for the work that is inspiring and infectious.

Conclusion

In the young history of the sign language interpreting profession, there are many unknown and unrecognized leaders, teachers, and mentors who impact the lives of many solely by being genuine and doing what they do day by day. Too often, leaders are identified as those who serve on the National or State level RID board, own or manage an interpreting agency, etc. The quiet leaders are overlooked yet have a greater impact on individuals and the entire profession. When good events happen, some look back and chalk it up to fate, good fortune, or being in the right place at the right time. Marian's path to becoming the leader and role model she is today is a testament to her tenacity and love of learning. She did not give up on her desire to become an interpreter even after being told it was not the career for her. Instead, she made the bold move to relocate across the country and was blessed to be surrounded by like-minded individuals who were committed to the development of the next generation of interpreters. She has learned the value of teamwork, leadership, and mentoring with a constructive and supportive approach from those she worked with along the way. Her name is known and honored amongst those who have worked beside her because she does "what is right—for [her] organizations, for the people around [her], and for [herself]—inconspicuously and without casualties" (Badaracco, 2011).

About the Author

Sandra L Maloney, MI-BEI III, CI, CT, SC:L

Sandra is a private practice interpreter in the Metro Detroit area. She serves on the Registry of Interpreters for Deaf Board of Directors as the Region III Representative. She received her Bachelor of Science in ASL-English Interpreting from Northeastern University in 2001 and is pursuing her Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies from Western Oregon University.

References

Badaracco, J. (2002). Introduction. In *Leading quietly: An unorthodox guide to doing the right thing* (pp. viii-ix). Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.

Dudley, D. (2010, September 30). Everyday leadership. Retrieved September 15, 2014, from http://www.ted.com/talks/drew_dudley_everyday_leadership?language=en