

The Entrepreneurial Linguist

Judy Jenner



The One Thing You Can Change

I frequently have the pleasure of giving workshops both in the U.S. and abroad, and it's absolutely fantastic to meet new colleagues and future friends. I leave these workshops reenergized by our collective passion for the industry and the knowledge we share.

When I think about the questions and comments I get the most during these workshops, one thing often stands out: complaints about clients, colleagues, and everything in between. While I think venting about issues in moderation is important and healthy, in my humble opinion, there is only one catch with that strategy: the only behavior you can control is your own. Allow me to elaborate.

There will always be people who are less than professional and have a detrimental effect on the industry. Just like with any unregulated industry that has no barriers to entry, our industry attracts people who are either not qualified or not professional. Is there anything we can do about it? Rarely, but if the person happens to be in your area, it might be time for an invitation to coffee to

chat and see if you can talk him or her into adopting a more professional approach. It's surprising that many times people are willing to listen if you just reach out to them. Who knows, maybe the person is completely unaware of what she or he is doing, or is in dire financial straits. Colleagues, professional or not, may face difficult situations, and sometimes they need a sympathetic ear. Try to educate them without wagging your finger and see what happens. Sometimes acts of kindness like this go a long way. Oftentimes they don't, and then you just have to congratulate yourself for having tried.

The perfect client doesn't exist. We're all human, and humans have faults. Clients aren't perfect, and neither are we. You can't change how the client reacts or behaves because you have absolutely no control over others' behavior, but you can control your own reaction. If the client is just too aggravating, perhaps it's time to look for better clients. It's tough to walk away from business, but if you're not happy with the situation,

you might have to change something, even if it's initially quite painful.

Get involved. The best way to change things in our industry, and in any industry, is to get involved and do it yourself. Many national non-profit associations like ATA are usually largely volunteer-driven, with local chapters and affiliated groups made up exclusively of volunteers. So, if you don't like your state court's decision to lower the rate for certified court interpreters, reach out to your local chapter to form an advocacy committee and do some lobbying, even if it's scary. If you feel that local businesses don't understand the value of using professional translators and interpreters, form an outreach committee, use the fantastic ATA client education material available on its website, and volunteer your time to give presentations and workshops to educate and inform. It all sounds time-consuming, and it is, but there is strength in numbers and you can always ask your friends to join you in your efforts.

Finally, I like to keep in mind anthropologist Margaret Mead's famous quote: "Never believe that a few caring people cannot change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have." We don't need to change the world, but by working together to make small changes, we can all contribute to an even better industry in the long run. Are you ready to join me? ■

Information and Contacts

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