

Jan Nishimura Presentation Parts 1 & 2

Translation provided by Kathryn Bennett, M.A., CI

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

1. Introduction

Hello, my name is Jan Nishimura. I have been involved in the interpreting field for 30 years now. I got involved in 1972 during my senior year in college. I took one course called Manual Communication. Then, I got involved in the deaf world working with high school students. At the same time, I became involved with the Illinois RID, which had just been established, as well as the Illinois Association of the Deaf.

I learned sign from deaf people, seeing them converse with each other. It was interesting, because most my exposure to the language had been through my interactions with high school students. They would show me the sign, but there were no words given to me for the signs. So, I was really on my own in terms of observing and figuring out what that sign meant through the conversation. Then, when I came to interact with deaf adults who had been to Gallaudet and would use their voice... Remember this was the 1970s... The communication was much easier. But their signing was much different from those high school students'. When I started interpreting around that time, I guess the prevailing philosophy regarding interpreting was "Oh, you're hearing? You know sign? Here, tell me what he's saying." And that was sort of the gradual progression of interpreting.

At that time it was just barely beginning, and I felt my developments in many ways paralleled that of the field itself. The field was trying to make progress in terms of becoming a profession. As for myself, I was trying to figure out what I was supposed to be doing. So, who taught me? Well, deaf people did. I would receive subtle feedback from them about what to do and what not to do. I myself would describe a situation to deaf friends and ask them what would be the right thing to do. From their responses, I was able to discover and make my way as an interpreter. Sometimes, situations would come up and I would seek advice from various deaf friends about what would be the right thing to do or what they would want me to do. I started collecting their feelings and responses and putting all that together in the back of my mind. That is what guided me in my way of becoming an interpreter.

I've been involved in mentoring for perhaps 20 years. About 19 years ago, I set up a formal mentoring program. At that time, there were Interpreter Training Programs set up throughout the US. I was working as a full-time freelance interpreter in Washington D.C. and had been able to achieve a level of success. I noticed, however, there were many new interpreters for which there seemed to be something missing. At the same time, I recognized the field needed more interpreters. And it became a process of prompting a new interpreter to inquire if they wanted to work with me for a while, or if they needed help, or if I could provide some tips. I began to see that their development was so much more rapid in learning the lessons that I myself had already learned. It was possible to save them a lot of those frustrations and obstacles they would be apt to encounter. I call myself a student of the "School of Hard Knocks and Soul Searching." I learned interpreting through experience and sometimes I would never know if I was right or wrong. It required a lot of self analysis. And sometimes it was a matter of just taking the leap and going ahead in doing it.

I'd like to talk about the topic of mentoring across cultures. In the time that I've been an interpreter, I've been able to see mentoring done as an informal relationship or set up as a formal relationship. I think what I have been able to ascertain in that time is that there is no specific formula. There is no one right way. But from what I have seen from my own experiences, and from what I have heard from others, I know that when I look at a mentor and an interpreter I can see that they are each working with the same set of variables. Basically, mentoring itself is a relationship between two people. That means, those two people each have their own identity and culture. Now, first I think we have to clarify a few ideas.

The first idea to address is what exactly is meant by mentoring and mentor. The first time that I heard about mentoring or becoming a mentor was in relation to the business world. In the past, white collar businesses were typically a group of men. We saw them use the term mentor in several different ways. Businesses or organizations would say they wanted to establish a mentoring climate. That was in a period of time when there was much downsizing and competitiveness in the business world. So, it was a matter of businesses recognizing they needed a group of people who would support each other, help each other, and provide growth for each other. In addition, we saw mentoring being used with children. In the past it might have been called Big Brother or Big Sister. It seems the idea behind all of those situations of mentoring involved help. That is, they are about someone watching over and taking care of another person.

In the popular world, we see figures and characters who take on a mentoring role. For example, in the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the tin horse was wise, providing counsel and advice to the toys. Also, we see in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* the wisdom of Gandolf. Charlotte, from the well-known children's book *Charlotte's Web* is another. My favorite mentor of all is Yoda from *Star Wars*.

All of those characters, those mentors, what are they doing? When we are talking about mentoring, I think there are several different ways we can describe it and explain what we mean by mentoring. Sometimes, we say mentor, but what we really mean is a coach. In sports, the coach makes sure the team is together, they are all working together as one and pulling up players by correcting them or recognizing their skills. So, in critiquing those skills, he is helping them to become more polished. And that is what I would want as a mentor.

Sometimes, mentor can mean sponsor. It's sort of like knowing you want to enter an area or field, but know you can't do it alone. The person who would be the mentor may have authority or power or status so that they can help me by providing access, the result of which is to get me into the new situation to work with those individuals. Also, a mentor can sometimes be a guide. That person can help me along the path, having several different functions.

When we talk about mentoring, there is something else we need to think about. It's fine to have mentor roles and functions, but it's important to look at how the people involved may view mentoring. How does the mentor feel? How does the interpreter feel? One view of mentoring may be that of the interpreter being empty, without any knowledge at all. And the mentor's duty is to teach and provide and impart knowledge to the interpreter. Sometimes, they may view mentoring as the interpreter having potential and the mentor plants a seed that will grow, almost like a mentor is a gardener. One plants the seed, provides the right environment, exposure, and that in and of itself will create development and growth. Sometimes, an interpreter might look at it as something is wrong with them that needs to be fixed. Their expectation in this case is that the mentor will "fix" them. That's akin to a doctor/patient role. Another view of mentoring is that it is a ladder. An interpreter is building up their skills and going up rung after rung, seeing the mentor as being way up at the top. In this view, the mentor is there to help pull them up the ladder. The desire is to have the mentor help them through all these experiences and in doing so, guide them along a path. So, there are several different ways of viewing what mentoring is all about.

2. Mentor Qualities

Previously, I mentioned several different characters that can be viewed as being mentors. For instance, Yoda, Gandolf, etc. Even comic books have such characters. Remember Shazam in the *Captain Marvel* series? Those characters have something in common: [experience](#), [wisdom](#), [knowledge](#). They all have insights and a good intuition, and they have good relationships with others.

When we think about mentoring, we can ask what the purpose of mentoring is and what its benefits are. There are two discrete benefits. One is psychological, a feeling of acceptance. As a mentee, the mentor accepts me, supports me, and confirms who I am. And I feel the two of us have a friendship, bond and connection. There's even a little bit of counseling and dialogue involved. The other benefit to mentoring is in the function of the mentor in how they improve a mentee's skills. Perhaps, the mentor helps me improve in my skills. Also, if I am the mentee, the mentor acts as my sponsor. A mentor might know when an assignment is well suited for me and can mention my name, thereby creating new challenges for me. Or, the mentor might invite me along with them to benefit from the mentor's own experiences. If I accompany that person to a meeting, or an event or the like, and other people see that I am with the mentor, it increases my

own status. I share in their reputation. Protection is another function. If the mentor is watching over me, and I'm getting ready to do something dangerous, or unwise, or that I am not prepared for, the mentor can protect me because their intention is that they don't want me to fail. They don't want to see me embarrassed or lose face and so they provide a certain amount of protection. In addition, if other people are criticizing me or are derisive, then the mentor can quash that criticism, engage in discussions about it and in the end, protect my name and reputation.

Something else a mentor can do is to help me analyze and think about things in a different way. I may have one way of looking at things, but my mentor may have a broader understanding and a broader view of the world. Therefore, the mentor can challenge me to think about what I feel, what I think, and what other possibilities there might be. Thus, the mentor may influence my thinking, creating change so that I have a new way of thinking about things. Another thing to consider is that during a mentorship there are factors in the relationship between the mentor and the interpreter. For instance, how are those two people coming together in their mentorship? Are they simply placed with each other, or does the mentor choose who they want to work with? Or does the interpreter choose who they would prefer to have as a mentor? All of those things related to how the mentorship happens will make a difference. Also, what are the motivations behind the individuals involved? We can ask what the motivations and goals of the interpreter are and why they want to have a mentor. Along the same lines, what are the motivations and goals of the mentor? Why might they be willing to accept an interpreter? Is it because they are getting paid more, or simply because they are kindhearted? Perhaps, they are earning more CEU credits. Those are all factors to consider. In addition, we need to ask how much time the two people involved will be investing. This includes determining if it will be ongoing, for an extended period of time, for months or a year, etc. Also, how much time are they spending together during the week? Do they meet for feedback sessions daily, or weekly? These are all considerations in determining what exactly happens during the mentoring relationship.

Alright, now...mentoring itself has goals. For example, let's suppose that a hospital has a mental health program and they have set up mentoring for deaf patients there. They have a full time interpreter, plus there is mentoring with a new interpreter. So, that mentoring relationship itself will have specific goals. That is, to help the new interpreter learn how to work in mental health situations. Something else to consider about mentoring is the environment that surrounds it. The mentorship could be occurring in a large city, a rural area, or a small town. It could be happening somewhere where there is a very large deaf community or, quite the opposite, where there is a very small deaf community. In considering the environment, we might question how a mentorship occurring in a big city with a seasoned interpreter is different from a mentorship in a rural area, or how it compares to a university setting. How might it be different to be mentoring and interpreting for a deaf student who is proficient in ASL compared to interpreting for a student whose experiences have been in a mainstream program? All of these factors will change things in ways that will create very different mentoring experiences.

The mentor and the interpreter have a relationship that may parallel or seem like other relationships in your life. For instance, with several young women that I have worked with, I have had to exercise care because I am about the same age as their mother. Their reaction to me in some instances was in actuality the reaction they might have toward their mother. Another woman that I worked with was sometimes very easygoing, and yet also sometimes very resistant. I had a difficult time understanding that until I realized that she had an older sister the same age that I was. At the times when she was really obstinate, that is when I recognized she was treating me as if I was her older sister. So, this is one thing we do have to keep in mind.

Another is if the mentor and the interpreter are from the same culture. As for myself, I am third generation Japanese-American. Perhaps the other person I am working with is also third generation Japanese-American. What about if the mentor is a CODA and is working with an interpreter who is also a CODA? What are the pros and cons of that situation, that is having those things in common? How might it impact the relationship? The similarity can be positive in that we have had the same experiences; we know what it feels like to be of our culture. Having had similar life experiences, I can validate the other person's feelings. I know exactly what that person might be feeling. At the same time, having that kinship may be simply perpetuating the same things.

Maybe we should not support the same things; maybe we should encourage that person to broaden their horizons and in learning about new things, learn about the world in a different way. If we are the same, as the mentor, I might not be encouraged to engage in dialogue and discussions and feedback that will be in a new and enlightening way. I might be tempted to just reinforce the same things that are familiar. When the mentor and interpreter are from different cultures, that is a good opportunity for each person to learn about one another's cultures. Now, that comes with the understanding that at the beginning we may not understand where the other person is coming from, what they mean, and who they are. That might not be there right away. But during the relationship, that is something that as we begin to understand each other, there is an opportunity for growth and development for both people.

How I define mentoring is that the responsibility of mentoring is to have structure, goals, and have focus on one person and helping that person to realize their dreams, potentials and goals for the future. In essence, it is to focus solely on that one individual and to help them grow into the person who they are to become.

3. Cultural Competence

My own feeling about communication is that it is extremely complex. Even just within one culture, you have a variety of communication styles. Even within one family, between siblings and parents, there are differences in our communication. As sisters and brothers, our experiences will not be the same. It's funny...several years ago, my brother commented to me, "Did you know that our mother grew up on a farm?" And my response to that was, "Well, yeah! Where have you been??" Because for 45 years, I have known my mother's background. But, it seemed as if maybe this is the first time he had realized this fact about my mother. So, even though you are contained within a family, there is no way that you can have the same experiences. My sister, my brother and myself have different communication styles. Therefore, there has to be some exploration to discover what we mean and how we communicate.

When any two people come together, you have to assume that communication and interactions between the two are going to be complicated. There are many different purposes behind communication, many different layers to it. Communication is not simple. Now, talking about cultures...

These days we hear a lot about cultural diversity. What exactly is meant by diversity? It is essentially how people differ from each other. When we look at a person there are some things we can see right off just by looking at them. For instance, we can know gender, race, height, age, and the like. We get an idea about their physical abilities, as well. Do they use a wheelchair, a walker of some kind? It's important to understand there are many things, though, that are not visibly apparent. For example, their background or whether they grew up in a big city or on a farm. We also can't know their socio-economic experiences and whether they grew up in poverty, or comfortably, or if they won the lottery. We don't know if they went to private school, or if their father was a janitor. All of these things are not visibly apparent. Just as we don't see what their education has been. We cannot look and see what their experiences in life have been. We don't see their family, whether they came from a large or small family, for instance. We can't see any of that just by looking. And each one of those characteristics have an experience that relates to that characteristic.

Before, I mentioned that I could see their height, or their physical nature, or gender, and in the back of my mind maybe I am making assumptions about tendencies based on what I am seeing. There could be an assumption based on height, for instance. I'll use the example of short people. You could make the assumption that short people tend to have difficulties getting things from cabinets that are high up, or always have problems with skirts being too long. Things like that. Given those characteristics, you can identify what some common experiences are likely to have been.

For the last twenty years, I have been serving as a mentor to different interpreters. Sometimes I mentor to people who are not interpreters. But in mentoring with interpreters, I feel that every time I serve as a mentor, I am a different person. During the year of mentoring, I change. I've worked with maybe fifty interpreters and each one of them has had their own individual experience in who I was at that moment in time, and who they were in that moment in time. As time progresses, people would come in and out of my life, and how I mentored someone one year ago might be

very different from how I mentor someone else. I would like to think the last twenty years have given me more wisdom and knowledge, and more gray hairs. But definitely each experience has influenced me and taught me something. It has also taught me something new to be aware of and be sensitive to.

Now, how can I become a mentor who is sensitive to people from other cultures? How can I focus on the person themselves? To summarize, it is a concept called **cultural competence**. Which means the ability to talk with people from different backgrounds and cultures and to get a sense of how we can fit together and be successful in our communication. We know that it is impossible to know everything about every culture. But it is possible to learn cultural competence. It is possible to learn how to interact so that I am learning and growing as a mentor at the same time. When I was mentored, part of what I focused on was to develop my own cultural competence. I wanted to look at how I communicated with people and determining how I could learn from there. How could I treat other people equally and with respect so that our communication with each other could be successful? Cultural competence is not limited to mentoring situations. Really cultural competence relates more to philosophy in a general sense and how we interact with people in everyday life. We also see cultural competence being very important in the medical field. It is applicable to people from other countries who have moved to the United States and are encountering Western medicine. Maybe their medical philosophy is very different from Western medicine. So, cultural competence comes into play in determining how the US medical field can give them appropriate treatment, while at the same time respecting their individual philosophies.

The concept of cultural competence has spread out to many other fields and professions. Cultural competence means that when I meet a person, I have several different ways in which I can impart information to them. It's both spoken and non-verbally through body language. If they are talking to me, in my mind I am thinking to myself as I am receiving their message that there are several different meanings behind that message. Or I might be interpreting all the possible meanings of their body language. Silence is a good example. In American culture, if the boss is talking and the employee is sitting quietly and passively, most people would say that generally that silence means acceptance or approval of what the boss is saying. In other cultures, given the same situation between boss and employee, it might mean that while the employee is listening, it does not necessarily mean tacit agreement. If a teacher makes statements during a lesson and the students are all silent, does that mean there is agreement? Sometimes, maybe the students disagree, but their culture says that you never challenge a teacher and never disagree with them in public.

With cultural competence, there is an ability to recognize and understand behavior and what it might mean. It also entails questioning what we believe it might mean and determining if that is in fact the case. A person who has cultural competence knows themselves and knows about others as well. They know about their own beliefs, and heritage, and history, and essentially who they are as a person. They feel comfortable about themselves and respect themselves. That in turn, means they can respect others, who may be different from them. If there is a feeling of low self esteem or of not feeling comfortable about themselves as a person, then they will feel threatened by others who are different. But, if they have strong sense of self, accepting themselves and who they are, then they are able to accept another person and who they might be.

Jan Nishimura Presentation Part 2

Translation: Kathy Bennett

4. Increasing Cultural Competence, cont.

When we engage in self-analysis, we need to know why we are doing it and what the purpose is behind it. We know that people have many different identities, cultures, and characteristics that are a part of one person. If I examine myself, for example, one of my identities is as a woman; I'm also short and third generation Japanese-American. I grew up in Chicago, so I'm from a large city. I have four brothers and sisters, so I come from a large family. Each one of those characteristics has experiences related to it. Who I am is a collection of each one of those characteristics. In

addition, I am married. I am now living in Washington, DC. All of that gives me a collection of experiences and as a totality it becomes who I am. For every part of who I am, there is another alternative characteristic. I am female, and the counterpart to that is being male. That's an easy example. When I analyze myself and identify that part of my identity as female, I have to ask myself how I feel about that. Well, OK...I feel fine about it.

When I analyze who I am and therefore identify what the counterpart identities or characteristics are, I have to analyze those alternate identities as well. For instance, when I look at myself as a short person, the alternative to that is being tall. I might look at them and think that their life would be so easy because they could take things off of really high shelves with ease or they don't have to worry about so many of the things that short people worry about. But as time goes on, and I really observe and think about what it might be like to be tall, I can recognize that being tall might have it's own set of problems. For instance, always having to worry about the length of one's shirtsleeves; or that if they do the laundry incorrectly they have shrunk a shirt so that it is no longer wearable; or walking through doorways that are too short and hitting their head. They have to worry about their height being intimidating to other people. They are always getting teased about how good they must be at basketball, or being asked, "how's the air up there?" I can understand what it's like to be me and the positives and negatives that come with it. But when I also look at what the alternative identity would be, I can recognize that there would be positives and good fortune from it, but it would also have negatives, too. I can understand fully what it means to be a part of that identity group and what their experiences would be and that's important.

Now I know that I want to learn more about another culture, but how do I go about doing that? Where do I start? I can begin by reading books and articles, watching documentaries, television programs...some of them are actually really good. I can begin talking with other people who are from that culture, inquiring about their experiences and what they think about things. I can talk with people who have gone into that culture and have vicariously experienced the culture, even if someone is not from a culture, when they enter it, they have to go through a process of learning lessons and the way that things are done in that culture. Sometimes, if I ask a person, for instance, what Chinese culture is like, that person may know Chinese culture but they can't explain it or articulate it because they live in it everyday. It's just the norm for them. If I ask a husband or wife of that person, who themselves is not Chinese, how their own cultural experiences are different from Chinese culture, they will be able to give me a multitude of responses. This is because they have noticed those things as being different from their own culture. So, you can get both perspectives.

I can also go to their cultural events. I can experience it firsthand and see what the colors, dress, food, etc. are like. I can see how they act and how the culture celebrates things. I can also begin to learn the language of that culture, because the language is the key, or what bonds people to the culture. By reflecting how people think and how they communicate, language is the essential link to the culture. One example I've given often is that Asians tend to be indirect communicators. You don't have to say no; actually, you are not supposed to say no. One story I remember involves my sister when we were in our teens. The two of us were out shopping and I saw a dress that I liked. Grabbing it, I asked my sister what she thought of it. And she just turned and walked away, saying absolutely nothing. Well, I was a little perplexed, but I pursued her and once again asked her what she thought of the dress. Again, she just turned and walked away. Well, I liked that dress so much, I was going to pursue this and get an answer! Once again, I asked her opinion and if she thought I should buy the dress. Finally, my sister said, "Jan, that dress over there is the same as the dress you are holding. That dress over there is ugly." When she said this, my sister spoke in a very flat, even, and deliberate way. How she phrased it was very indirect. She did not tell me my dress was ugly, but rather she said "that dress over there" is ugly. So, language gives you insight into how people within a culture interact with others.

5. Increasing Cultural Competence, cont.

If I am not adept at interacting with a particular culture, what can I do about that? One thing I can do is to always be aware and have at the ready a list of resources, of who I know that can help me. For instance, if someone invites me to interpret a Muslim wedding, my first thought would be to identify who I could talk to and seek out that might be able to explain to me about Muslim

rituals and traditions and so forth. In this way, I could get some ideas about what to expect. In addition, of course I would talk to the people involved, but I can also use... [Clip is spliced and speaker begins again.]

Suppose that I don't know very much about a culture and I am uncertain about what I should do, what can I do about that? Well, I can be aware of what available resources I have. Let's suppose I am working with a young woman who is Muslim. I can ask that she talk with me and we can engage in some dialogue. But if there are some things that I am still not sure about, I can seek out my friends who are Muslim and have them explain things to me. Or, I can access research materials. If perhaps there is someone we both trust, that person can act as a go-between, depending on what kind of issues and concerns the two of face. Maybe in mentoring, I am looking for my own kind of mentor, for a "cultural mentor." I could be looking for a mentor who can teach me specifics about a particular culture, something that speaks to a specific group of people and their experiences.

Often, when interacting and working with an interpreter, we have to remember not just who we are and who they are, but also the cumulative history and experiences that may have influenced a person. One example I can think of involved a young, black female interpreter. The mentor told her that she was to go interpret for the DAR, the Daughters of the American Revolution. The black interpreter just held everything in and said nothing. Now, when I heard that story, my first reaction was, "Oh, my goodness." The mentor interpreter was a young, white female and really just did not think anything of the situation. She pretty much shrugged it off. When she inquired if the black interpreter was all right going to interpret for the DAR, the black interpreter of course did not say no. It was her mentor, who is much like a boss. So, of course she agreed to it and went along and interpreted it. The mentor interpreter did not have an understanding of the history of the 1940's and Marian Anderson. She did not understand that even though the actions didn't happen directly to the black interpreter or to the mentor, it was something that happened as a part of history. An historical experience can have a huge impact as it is passed down through generation upon generation. It has to do with a legacy, an experience, a feeling in that culture.

Later, I was talking with the black interpreter and she said that the assignment was very difficult. She felt so uncomfortable. The guide at the event only talked to the white interpreter, ignoring the black interpreter. That to me was really disheartening, so sad. With that kind of situation, my first question would be to ask if there was an issue or a problem. If the answer is yes, then what is it? Is it solved? What are the different ways to solve it or does it come up again? And if so, how can it be managed? For myself, in taking stock of that situation... Many times, going into situations might feel uncomfortable for an interpreter... actually, for everyday life. When we are driving and it's raining cats and dogs, that's not comfortable. If we say we'll never drive when it is raining that heavily, then we'll never have that experience. When you go experience it for the first time and get through it safe and sound, the second time that it happens you can feel confidence because of the first time. And the more that happens, the more you build up confidence. If it's something that you avoid, you'll never learn how to deal with that situation.

Sometimes, we see in a relationship, two different approaches from the people involved based on their respective cultures. In that relationship, who makes the concession? That is, the cultural concession of accepting the other person's cultural practice over their own way. One example I can think of involves a very dear friend. The two of us were working together and if a hot issue or something came up, it was always a matter of her wanting to discuss it immediately, right that very second! It always came across as very emotional. I would have to try to put off by saying that we'd talk about it later when things were calmer. She would always demand to discuss it right then. She explained to me the reason she talked so fast and was so aggressive in demanding and challenging people was because she was Jewish. She explained that Jewish people value creating challenges. My response to her was that my culture values harmony and that her challenges are in conflict with my harmony!

So, in our relationship, cultural concessions were made by both of us. It's fortunate that we were such good friends, because it came down to both of us needing to be willing to make some accommodations. We've been friends for 25 years. In the beginning, I made the cultural

concessions, but after awhile we came to an understanding. Sometimes it would be my way, sometimes her way. The two of us realized from past experiences and misunderstandings how to proceed smoothly. In mentoring, it seems now that our profession talks about mentoring in a short-term context. For example, mentorship programs last for a set amount of time, say for 10 weeks to maybe up to a year. When I hear people telling stories about their mentors, sometimes they don't know exactly who that person is. They look up to them as a role model, though. In the instance where a relationship continues for a very long time where that is periodic contact between the mentor and mentee, it is because the mentor has come into their life at the right time and in the right place so that everything gels together.

6. Applications to Mentoring

My view of mentoring is that it is a relationship between two people. If I am someone's mentor, that means in our exchanges I see the person as a whole. Their goal might be to work on a particular type of sign skill, and perhaps that skill is the reason we are together. But, at the same time, while I look at that particular skill, I recognize everything about who that person is. While there is a skill that I am trying to help them along with, that does not necessarily mean that there is an inequality to everything between us. Perhaps the mentee is fluent in three or four languages. They might have grown up as a world traveler, or have a lot of experience in particular areas, or are very adept at getting along with other people. So, in those areas they are at a more advanced level than I am in terms of having more experience and skill. But for other things, maybe I am more advanced than they? But for those particular skills that they are working on in the mentorship, I am there to help pull them up and guide them along. So, hopefully, they will continue to advance until we are at the same level, and perhaps even surpass me.

For me, I know that in the process of mentoring there will be times that the mentee feels that they are not good enough and experiences frustration. As a mentor, I feel it is my duty to recognize who that individual is as a whole and what their strengths are. It is my duty to provide support where needed and for what we are focused on, so that the mentee feels a sense of pride in who they already are. In addition, they can start to feel confidence in building up and improving their skills.

One time I was working with a young man who was trilingual in Spanish, English and sign. He came to work with me to focus on expressive sign skills. I decided on an assignment that was related to a Spanish celebration program, a Spanish heritage program, that while we would be working together, he would be the lead interpreter. This was because the program's coordinator and all the speakers would be using English and Spanish. He spoke those languages. I, on the other hand, only spoke English and didn't know any Spanish. So, for that situation, he was better suited to be the lead interpreter than I was. However, the two of us would be going together and focusing on those skills that he was targeting. But, he had a knowledge of the cultural information: the right way to introduce us, the right way to explain our roles there, and how to function within that culture. So, I was there to follow him. When his session was over, I asked him out of curiosity what was the most valuable lesson he had learned. His response was that he felt pride in who he was. In his home, everyone spoke Spanish and English. However, where we were working, there were only a few people who spoke Spanish and English. So, through this experience, he came to the realization that he was really special, and took pride in that. When he went home, his identity was much stronger.

Something else that I think is important is for mentors to show a mentee why they are involved in the mentorship and why they are willing to serve as that person's mentor. That can be expressed with several reasons, including that it is a learning experience that will be shared that the mentor will benefit from as well. It's important to realize that from the very beginning, a mentor needs to show that they are vulnerable. Sometimes an interpreter can feel very vulnerable in a mentorship, seeing the mentor as being so much more advanced than they are. In those situations, the mentee doesn't want to hear their mentor say that they know all the answers, that they have an answer for everything. Instead, it should be a matter of explaining that we will work together. Maybe I can start that off by telling stories about how in the past I had messed everything up. And the lesson behind that might be that we all make mistakes. Maybe it's a matter of learning how to apologize gracefully, or that we should learn how to prepare in order to avoid making those mistakes.

Sometimes it's a matter of learning how to change our way of thinking so that we don't always look at something in a negative, complaining way. Instead, we can change our perspective so that we look at whatever has happened in a way that it becomes a positive experience. I'm thinking of something funny that happened to my nephew. He was thirteen and had just started high school. He was living in Chicago and I was on the phone with him. He was telling me about how huge their high school was and that it had all these different wings. One wing was for odd numbered rooms and even numbered rooms were in the other wing on the opposite side. So that if the first room was 212, and the next class was in room 213 he had to run all the way across the building to get to the other side. He said he had never heard of that before because most room numbers followed a consecutive order like 212, 213, 214..etc. I told him that it sounded like he had a lot of running to do. But, he responded that it was okay and was just a matter of getting used to a new way of thinking to remember where the rooms were located. And I thought how cool it was that instead of complaining, he accepted it as a new way of learning, a new way of remembering where the rooms were located. I thought what a healthy attitude that was. Maybe that's the lesson. In a mentorship, maybe that's something we could work on. That is, we could change our way of thinking and open up our minds to changing our paradigms, challenging how we think.

If I am thinking about mentoring, I don't look at it as being just means of honing in and improving on one discrete skill. It's not limited to that. My view of mentoring instead is that you see the person as a whole. So, my view of mentoring is that we are starting a relationship now that will continue for ten or twenty years. If I am going to advise people who are ready to become mentors, it is really a basic philosophy of learning, and cherishing, and appreciation. The person must be motivated and eager to learn. They must be understanding and accepting of what the person is doing. If the mentee is really excited about something, I may not understand why they are excited, but I feel happy for them.

That relates to companionability. The mentor must be non-judgmental, which can be anything from rolling my eyes to being careful of what I say. If I were to say, "Who in the world takes their shoes off before going into the house?! Gosh, that's stupid!" In many homes, you take your shoes off before going into the house. So, if I were to make that statement, it means I have just insulted that group of people. Really, I have to analyze how I talk. My favorite example is "duh!" You know, the sign for "duh" or "whatever?" When people sign that, it's almost like an insult; they are brushing off whatever is said as if it doesn't matter. I try to make sure that whatever my comments are that they are free of insults.

A mentor must also be open and respectful. They must be willing to be patient and wait. It's interesting that in the U.S. there is such a value on immediate gratification, on wanting everything instantly. But things don't happen overnight or right this minute. We have to be willing to wait, particularly in a mentoring relationship, because it takes time to develop trust. As a mentor, we have to be willing to give things time so that in those experiences we can build up that trust.

We also must be willing to laugh at ourselves. Those moments when we say to ourselves, "I can't believe I did that!" and suffer the most utter embarrassment. Sometimes, we are involved in really embarrassing situations and we just have to make the best of it. Later I can imagine myself telling the incident as a funny story and it helps me get through it. It also helps me learn a lesson and shows people that I'm not perfect.

Finally, a mentor needs to expect to be surprised. If I think that in twenty or twenty-five years of experiences that I've seen and done it all, that's not the case. Something will come up again and again that will surprise me because people are never what they seem. I was working with one young woman who had really great signing skills and I told her what a great interpreter she was. And I really wanted her to stay on. She apologized to me and told me she couldn't because she had to leave town. When I asked it if it was because of another job, she explained that it wasn't. In fact, she had to spend some time in jail. I was so shocked by that. She explained that something like a year ago she'd been involved in a sit-in, been arrested and now had to go serve her time. It wasn't a horrible crime or anything, but to her it was about the principle. So, she apologized and said that after she got out of jail, she would be back. She mentioned, too, that on

many job applications it asks the question about whether you've ever been convicted of a crime and how important that question was. She was right in saying that many places are very strict in terms of their security. She said, "I'm sorry, but I do have a record." And I thanked her for the feedback and the immediately went to someone else at work and told them we really need to examine our personnel procedures and everything. I'd never thought of that because I had always thought of interpreters as such kind-hearted people.

I hope that you have a wonderful adventure with your interpreting experiences.

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