

Professionalism: Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, Commitment to Privacy & Confidentiality

(Authorized excerpts of full article dated December 19, 2012 by Claudia Brauer)

Lets talk about professionalism, from the standpoint of codes of ethics and standards of practice, to remind interpreters and translators about BEHAVIOR (as we tend to stress technical knowledge or abilities, but forget about the basics). Our professional behavior is founded on two pillars – Codes of Ethics and Standards of Practice.



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But what is Ethics?

Paraphrasing a recent study by the California Endowment, Ethics deals with the rules of conduct or expectations for what is considered appropriate or the right behavior with respect to oneself, others, and one's environment. Ethical behavior is a behavior that corresponds to the accepted and idealized principles expressing what is considered right and wrong, what we find acceptable or unacceptable.

Lets discuss some core concepts of virtually all codes of ethics and standards of practice anywhere in the world:

Best Behavior
Confidentiality
Accuracy
Impartiality
Integrity

BEST BEHAVIOR

Best behavior includes preparing for your assignments and respecting the laws or requirements under which you carry out the assignment. You must be even-tempered, polite, courteous, and discreet with the client as well as the patient.

Practice cultural competence at work, because almost everything we do as translators and interpreters has deep roots in our ability to understand the underpinnings of cultural differences that arise when individuals from different backgrounds try to form relationships or conduct business. Foster trust and mutual respect. Remember that many times the client's business or even his or her life is in your hands. In your ability to appropriately convey the message needed.

That trust and respect is quintessential to the role of the translator and interpreters. Just as with your doctor, if you do not trust your doctor, will you allow him or her to treat you?

CONFIDENTIALITY



Confidentiality is a term that indicates preserving the privacy of the persons with whom you come in contact or the companies with whom you have any business relationship. This includes information gained verbally, in writing, from encounters, or by observation.

All information is considered confidential when it pertains to medical care and client records, when it deals with most legal issues, and when it relates to financial data and business information. As a professional, at least 99% of anything you handle in life will fall into one of those categories and therefore you should treat it as confidential.

Client confidentiality is the conscious effort to keep private all information revealed from the client while rendering services. I would dare say that just like physicians have their Hippocratic oath, so translators and interpreters should have an oath to confidentiality and privacy. Such oath would say something like

I will do no cause harm and I will take no gain with or from any information obtained from or on behalf of my client.

ACCURACY



Accuracy means rendering your message in the target language with

- No additions and
- No omissions
- Favoring meaning over literalness
- Maintaining source Register + Style + Purpose + Spirit + Intention

It means that:

- You are expected to have a mastery of the target language equivalent to that of an educated native speaker,
- You are expected to have up-to-date knowledge of the subject material and its terminology in both languages
- You are expected to have access to information resources and reference materials, and knowledge of the tools of the profession,
- You must be able to carry out translating or interpreting tasks thoroughly and responsibly.
- You should only accept jobs for which you are able to guarantee a proper standard of quality to their clients.

IMPARTIALITY



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Codes of ethics also often talk about maintaining impartiality and keeping neutrality. Now then, Impartiality means treating all people and groups equally. So, regardless of what your personal beliefs are in regards to certain groups of people, as a translator or interpreter you should maintain impartiality when dealing with groups you would normally not engage in your daily activities. And that also entail avoiding discrimination and stereotyping. And if you are not able to do so because, for example, your personal religious beliefs, then you should withdraw from the assignment if you believe you might be biased in any way.

Impartiality also means the ability to exert no influence on parties and give no advice or insert no opinion. Interpreters sometimes step out of their role and become advocates, for example. But interpreter should NOT be advocates unless they are specifically requested to act as such or if not acting as an advocate would negatively impact the outcome of the encounter. In any other circumstance, the interpreter should hold their opinions to themselves and exert no influence on the parties.

INTEGRITY



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Honor your commitments and deadlines. Too often do hear of translators that do not deliver their assignments on time or interpreters that fail to arrive on time. This is totally unacceptable.

Avoid malicious statements. This includes malicious statements not only about our clients but also about our colleagues, about our associations and about the profession in general.

Avoid any conflicts of interest but if they appear, we should declare them to the client or withdraw from the assignment.

Ethics mandate that you do not provide any services that are unnecessary and that you do not charge any additional fees to those actually required. And:

- No false advertising or No self-promotion while on assignment.
- No referrals to third parties.
- And that you will accurately represent your qualifications.

And finally, you should be constantly pursuing your professional development by being aware of the developments in the field and constantly learning more in your areas of specialty