

DECISION-MAKING WHILE INTERPRETING IN SOCIAL SETTINGS



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PLEASE DON'T KILL MY VIBE

Many interpreters overlook the importance of social settings, treating them differently than 'professional' situations. Maybe it's because they don't grasp the potential networking and opportunities these social moments hold for future collaborations and professional opportunities. - Deaf Professional



Our work as interpreters comes embedded with layers of demands. We tend to look at the work of an interpreter through a myopic lens of hard skills. This can often become a challenge when our work goes from daytime to evening, formal to intimate, and/or concrete to abstract. When this occurs in social interpreting environments, we have to embody and employ more than just our language skills. An interpreter who takes on the dynamic, yet nuanced role of interpreting in social spaces has to think beyond linear linguistic transactions and toward the utilization and practice of interpersonal skills, aka soft skills. Networking, socializing, and building collegial rapport often takes place after office hours. Interpreters should have a working understanding of how this applies to the business culture in which we find ourselves while using discernment and observation in order to traverse the arena successfully. This conversation starter will address considerations for our decision-making, the impact it can have on the Deaf professional and their image, as well as the precedents our actions might establish, shaping the course of future interactions.



WHEN DO I EAT?

“ Interpreters tend to prioritize themselves like the Deaf person needs to wait on them to eat or whatever rather than splitting the interpreting team and one eats while the other works.

- Deaf Professional ”

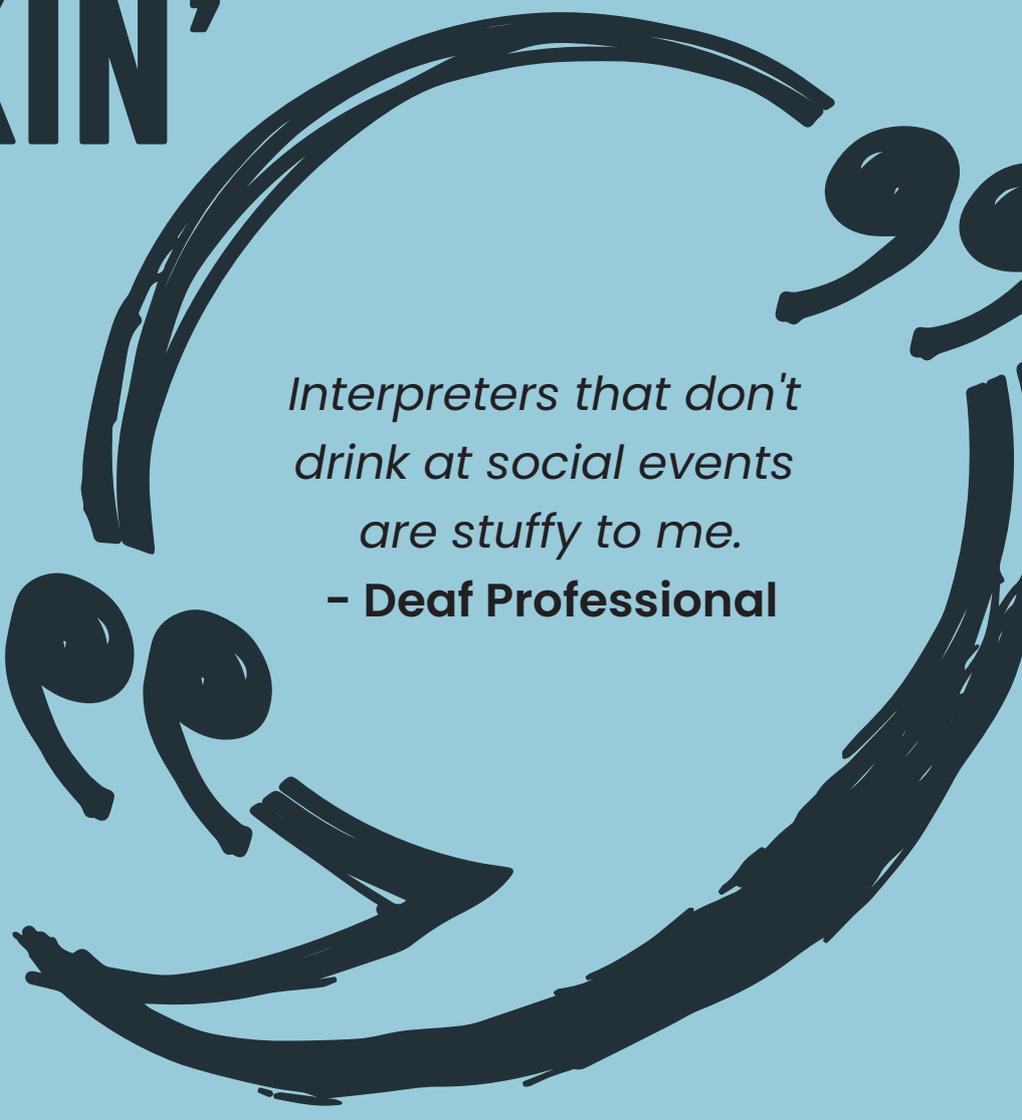
No two social settings are exactly the same, rendering the creation of a one-size-fits-all list of do's and don'ts futile. Nevertheless, amidst this variability, there are standards, strategies, and guidelines we can apply to help us preemptively think before accepting jobs intertwined with social interactions. If not an innate skill, it can be a very complex and unpredictable terrain to negotiate for many interpreters. Therefore, if and/or when we are spontaneously sprung into these situations, it's good to have a running repertoire of thoughtful consideration to reference.

As interpreters assigned to all-day events, the prospect of a "working lunch" often fills us with apprehension. Frequently, such decisions are made on the spot during the course of an event and can disrupt the pre-established break schedule for the interpreting team. Even in the absence of an agreed-upon working lunch (i.e. "lunch on your own"), interpreters are constantly maneuvering around the uncertainty of whether a Deaf professional might choose to utilize scheduled breaks for networking or interacting with peers, unburdened from the distractions of a crowded environment. This necessitates ongoing consideration, flexibility, and careful planning amongst the interpreting team. Our soft skills become crucial in this moment of on-the-fly coordination and teamwork with the overarching objective of tending to our physiological needs while ensuring a smooth uninterrupted facilitation of access for the Deaf professional.

Tips to avoid hunger:

- Inquire about meal logistics prior to the event
- Eat a little before the engagement
- If food is offered to everyone, get there early and partake so you aren't starving
- Keep discreet snacks in your bag for sustained energy
- Implement a turn-taking system to ensure everyone has the chance to eat

WE DRINKIN' OR NAH?



*Interpreters that don't
drink at social events
are stuffy to me.*
- Deaf Professional

As if operating in social engagements isn't challenging enough, it always gets trickier when there's an open bar. There are a number of factors to consider when deciding whether or not to partake in social drinking while working. Whether the offer is extended or not, it's crucial to acknowledge that, given the cognitive demands of our work and the associated physical and mental challenges—such as navigating prolonged social interactions in noisy environments, managing drinks while conversing, and the balancing act between work and play—interpreters may choose to decline alcoholic beverages. This decision aims to uphold the precision of conveyed messages and conserve energy, a choice that may not always be entirely appreciated despite possible encouragement. In these instances, preparing a running script to wield on command in defending your choice to partake or not is always a good idea. It also serves to provide notice to attendees that while no two interpreters are the same, our intentions are: to provide equitable and effective access.

WE DRINKIN' OR NAH?

Factors for reflection:

- How might my decision to partake be perceived, considering not only the perspective of the Deaf consumer(s) but also that of the hiring entity?
- Will drinking impair my judgment, production, or quality of interpretation?
- Does alcohol tend to have physiological impacts on me (sleepiness, shorter stamina, etc.)
- How will my decision impact my team?



OH YOU FANCY, HUH?

Our need to show up as our authentic selves should never outweigh or overshadow the needs of the Deaf professional to whom we are providing access. When choosing how to present, it's always important to read the job notes thoroughly, and assess the nature of the event, location, and participants. While there is no universal rule, our decisions should not be driven solely by personal preferences. Instead, they should align with what is most appropriate and acceptable for each work environment. If ever we are in doubt, we should ask.

I view the interpreter as an extension of myself. So, if they look, dress, or behave unprofessionally, I take it as a reflection of how people might view me.

- Deaf Professional



Factors for fashion:

- What kind of event is it?
- Have I read the job notes thoroughly?
- Do I know the expected dress code of all attendees?
- If I don't match the dress code will this negatively impact the Deaf professional?

YO! YOU BLOCKING

I get wanting to be 'human,' make connections, be friendly, but let's face it, when that happens, Deaf people are the ones getting the short end of the stick.

- Deaf Professional



We never want to be the reason a Deaf person is reticent or uncomfortable interacting with their Hearing colleagues and counterparts. However, this could present a challenge for us when our day job moves beyond the didactic space and into a more social one especially if we are unfamiliar working with the participating clients and consumers. An interpreter's interpersonal awareness, or lack thereof, will undoubtedly have an impact on a Deaf professional's ability to network, mingle, and engage effortlessly. The use of soft skills can be the make or break of a successful social interaction. If we are seemingly unapproachable, or conversely, overly familiar with no sense of boundaries, this could present a deterrent or send a message to would-be-chatters that we are closed for business and discourage attempts to approach the Deaf professional. How we show up and navigate these spaces could ultimately lead to undesired outcomes if not handled appropriately or with the right amount of finesse.

Factors for consideration:

- What is my body language communicating?
- Am I actively present or do I seem disinterested?
- Am I doing the most/taking up too much space?
- Am I having a lot of incidental conversations independent of the Deaf Professional?

The call to action is clear: As interpreters, we must embrace a broader perspective, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of our role and function in professional and social spaces. Let's learn how to integrate soft skills seamlessly into our repertoire, recognizing that our decisions are not just personal choices, but rather crucial components of fostering inclusive, equitable, and effective access for Deaf professionals. It's time to enrich our practice, wholly aware of the impact we can have beyond the bounds of language, and in the realm of social interactions, where networking and professional opportunities unfold. Our hope, with this conversation starter, is to prompt self-reflection when considering accepting jobs of the social nature and/or if our job unwittingly shifts in that direction. May we all look to improve the framing of equitable access by ongoing and intentional decision making.