

Transcription - MultiLingual Communication Challenges Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie and this is Inside Exec. I'm actually doing a replacement podcast today. We interviewed someone that we can't name at the moment and those of you who are very fast last week might have actually seen and listened to the first part of that podcast, but we've now been advised by the organization that employs our guest that they would like to review all of the audio as well as read the transcripts and they're a little bit concerned about the guest that we spoke to being identifiable.

It's disappointing for us, it is absolutely the first time that this has happened in the seven, eight years of us making these podcasts, but we respect the organization's right to review that content and let us know whether they are happy for it to go ahead. In the event that they do give us approval for the podcast, we will link those podcasts to this one that I'm making today, but I thought it was important in terms of the topic to give you a summary without being too identifiable so that you can get an idea of why we thought it was interesting to talk to this particular person.

So as background, this is someone that I have known for over 40 years and it is a person that I've watched develop their career throughout that time. I started knowing this person when they were at university and then have seen that career progress through a particular area of interest, staying the same environment, stayed pretty much with the same types of employers. In fact, I understand that she's been with her current employer for 15 of those years and the earlier employers were both 10 years. What's interesting about it is that she works in a multi-cultural environment and a multi-lingual environment and I think the multi-lingual part is the part that I found most interesting in the discussion with her. We looked at the value of it in terms of how it is seen in the broader community as well as how it is used within the profession that she's in.

She started by telling us some stories about her early days and how she was born in Australia but travelled back and forth to her parents' home country five or six times before she had finished the schooling system. What that meant, in terms of education, was that every time she went from one country to another she changed the home language and so she was learning and being educated in a different language, very disjointed in terms of learning things and of being confident in one language or another. But she very much valued the idea that she was bilingual at that stage and wanted to be able to use that in her work because she saw there was a need for it in the area that she's in.

Interestingly she talked to us about it in an episode when she was being tested while she was at university and she was very brave, this was back in 1988 and she was very brave about using both languages in the room that she was in, in terms of the education that she was providing, and that allowed her to see that there was value in it and she believed there was value in it and so she pursued the idea that using both languages was important and it was important in terms of not just her own worth in the profession that she had chosen, but also that in a broader community sense she could see where there were issues that needed to be addressed, that weren't being addressed by the system as it stands.

Now we're talking about education so I will be a little bit more specific about the areas that concerned her and it's about the idea, particularly in this country I will say, that there is a groundswell of movement that says if you come from somewhere else and English is not your home language then you should learn to speak it and yes that's very valid because all of the services that are provided are predominantly going to be English first. Yes they have lots of other translations and yes you can access translators to access those services but if you're running day to day, trying to do a job, save some money and you're faced with a situation where you might have to have an intervention of some kind, in terms of education, then those services are going to be provided English and if, as the home provider, you can't access or you don't understand what they're saying then it makes it that much more difficult for you to be part of that process of education.

I've been very careful about my words because, as I said, the employer is very concerned about them and this person being identifiable.

The other thing that I found was interesting was that in those early years the very first teacher that she had at school recognised that her parents were not educated in the home language and there were no books at home and so this educator actually went to the home, took a book, took a fairy tale book and that became the most beloved book in the house. She convinced the mother in the household that access to that needed to happen every day and it was that care and that inclusion of the two generations that forged the path for this person to think about educating and educating across cultures.

What we talked about towards the end of the first session was that if we looked at communication generally, communicating whether it's in the home language, whether it's in another more common language that's used around them, wherever you are, if we transpose that into a work environment and you look at the staff that you're working with, the behaviours that you see might be a result of the fact that they don't have a way of expressing themselves, they're thinking in two languages and so they can't work out what the right words are for the language that they're using. So we need to be aware of the fact always, that in their heads, they might be working through things in two languages before they actually give you an answer. So we mustn't rush them for answers, we mustn't jump down their throat when we think that they're saying things the wrong way or they're not expressing themselves well. We must give them the time and the opportunity to express themselves clearly and if you don't understand, as a supervisor or a team leader, if you don't understand what they've said or you're concerned about the way they've expressed it, then you address it by saying would it be easier if you wrote it down, would it be easier if you said it in your home language? We've got Google translate, or whatever else it is, you know we've got so much technology in our hands now that it might be easier and I know that often with this couple, if we see them socially, they will say to one another what's the word for such and such and how do you say this in English and they bounce off one another so that they get their communication right.

Once again, it is about communication but it's about communication in the workplace with multi-lingual and multi-discipline teams. Now I'm going to end that summary of the first part of the conversation here. We did go on to talk about a whole range of management issues in terms of managing the staff within that environment and I will do a summary of that, the next

two parts, but I'll just do it as one summary for you. For now I'm Kim Baillie and this is Inside Exec