

RESPECT

By Terena Bell

The following is a commentary on the recent LinkedIn controversy. For those of you unfamiliar with the situation, here is a quote from the press release issued by ATA: “[The] controversy came to light after a ‘survey’ was circulated by LinkedIn to its members who identified themselves as translators. The survey turned out to be an attempt to find the lure that would identify translators willing to translate LinkedIn materials for free.” (See www.atanet.org/pressroom/linkedin_2009.php.)

If you Google the word “respect,” the first five links that come up are generally for Aretha Franklin’s lyrics. I must admit, each time I sat down to write this article, I heard that alto voice rolling “Re, re, re, respect” over and over again in my mind. When it comes to respect, I think we all have to acknowledge that Aretha has the market cornered. When it comes to talking about respect in a positive light, you just do not get any better.

But when you move from Motown to Downtown, respect starts to change. The song goes away and conversations about the subject start to shift toward the negative. The beat is gone and no matter how loudly you wail, you still might not get what you ask for.

If you have a group of freelance translators gathering, odds are likely someone will say something like this: “Companies don’t respect freelancers.” “Clients don’t respect any of us.” “Monolingual people think our job is easy.” In the translation world, respect is spoken of more often than theory, and this year it seems to be making its way out of everyday conversation and into the news. In March, it all started with an article by Gianni Davico entitled “Respect Versus Money in the Translation Business,” published in *Multilingual*.¹ In the article, respect is discussed as part of the old freelancer versus language services provider (LSP) debate. To Davico, the debate breaks down to what he thinks contractors and companies crave most: respect versus money, respectively.

Lately, though, both contractor and company have found themselves on the same side of our industry’s battleground

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for respect, with Twitter users from either camp Tweeting furiously against crowdsourcing efforts by LinkedIn. While most of these Tweets seem to come from freelancers, many LSP owners and employees have also spoken out against LinkedIn’s request for users to translate its site for free. Big names like Lionbridge are also joining in the Twitter storm. The uniting point behind this sudden burst of micro-blogging? Money and respect.

In this case, these efforts seem to be getting the message across. On June 29, *The New York Times* ran an article entitled “Translators Wanted at LinkedIn. The Pay? \$0 an Hour” by Andrew Adam Newman.² *Business Week* was not far behind with an article on July 1, “Mozilla’s Crowdsourcing Mystique” by Douglas MacMillan, which mentions what is now called “LinkedInFail.”³

ATA also issued a press release on the subject,⁴ and ATA President Jiri Stejskal addressed the subject in his column in the August issue of *The ATA Chronicle*.⁵ The above sources did not address the issue of respect, but I am pretty sure that somewhere in this world where two or more translators were gathered, respect was the topic, and they were not singing along with Aretha.

You can say that companies want more money and that contractors want more respect, but the two are intricately linked. LinkedInFail has proven that, if nothing else. If you listen to Renato Beninatto, chief executive officer of milengo, crowdsourcing, the term for the group translation technique LinkedIn wanted to employ, is the wave of the future. I, for one, agree with him. But crowdsourcing is not the issue here. Respect is. Listing reasons why LinkedInFail generated such an uproar, Common Sense Advisory researcher Nataly Kelly pegged it in her blog when she wrote, “Most people don’t value what translators do.” Kelly continues: “Freelancers are guarded, and understandably so. As individuals who are in business for themselves, freelancers have to watch out for their best interests, as they can be a particularly vulnerable group. Stories of freelancers who were not paid for their work—either by end clients or language services providers—are common in the industry. Any organization that approaches these once-bitten-twice-shy professionals is likely to raise suspicion if there is any implication that work will be carried out without pay.”⁶

To summarize, as an industry, we

feel underappreciated, misunderstood, and used. Three different feelings with one central issue, the pain we feel is like a prism: one polygon twisted to show different lights from different angles. The problem itself is every human's need for respect, and the angles are created when an impertinent world illuminates the core issues of money, fear, and self-worth.

My solution to this problem will most likely not be popular, and I am willing to bet you have never heard it spoken at a conference or circulated on Twitter. The lack of respect shown to our industry by those outside of our industry is our own fault. No one can fix it but us.

As a child, I was taught that everyone warranted respect. But like Aretha's, this song was sung before the shift to post-modernism was complete. A jaded adult would say I was gullible to think this, but as a child, I simply believed what I was taught. We can learn a lot from what a culture teaches its children. *In Search of Character*, a lesson plan series published by Live Wire Media, teaches middle-schoolers about respect, one of 10 virtues designed to mold children into better adults.⁷ The respect lesson provides the self-evaluation quiz in the box below encouraging young people to act respectfully as individuals:

True	False	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I treat other people the way I want to be treated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am considerate of other people.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I treat people with civility, courtesy, and dignity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I never intentionally ridicule, embarrass, or hurt other people.

If our industry were to take this test, how well do you think it would fair? Poorly, at times, I fear. Remember when I said that the lack of respect shown to our industry by those

Notes

1. Davico, Gianni. "Respect Versus Money in the Translation Business." *Multilingual* (MultiLingual Computing, Inc., March 2009), 26.
2. Newman, Andrew. "Translators Wanted at LinkedIn. The Pay? \$0 an Hour." *The New York Times* (June 28, 2009), www.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/technology/start-ups/29linkedin.html.
3. MacMillan, Douglas. "Mozilla's Crowdsourcing Mystique." *Business Week* (July 1, 2009), www.businessweek.com/technology/content/jul2009/tc2009071_384108.htm.
4. LinkedIn Translation Crowdsourcing Controversy, www.atanet.org/pressroom/linkedin_2009.php.
5. Stejskal, Jiri. "Ask Not What the Crowd Can Do for You, but What You Can Do for the Crowd." *The ATA Chronicle* (American Translators Association, August 2009), 8.
6. Kelly, Nataly. "Freelance Translators Clash with LinkedIn Over Crowdsourced Translation." *Global Watchtower* (Common Sense Advisory, June 19, 2009), www.globalwatchtower.com/2009/06/19/linkedin-ct3.
7. *In Search of Character*. (VHS or DVD video series, Live Wire Media), www.goodcharacter.com/lsoc.html.

on the outside is our own fault? Well, I meant it. In order to be treated with respect, translators and interpreters must first act respectfully.

While there are exceptions, Nataly Kelly's assessment of the U.S. freelance pool was on target when she wrote that many translators were "once-bitten-twice-shy." Many freelance translators are understandably weary after having to compete with nonprofessionals. The pain of being disrespected is not nearly as deep as the pain of having been wronged. Perhaps this pain has hardened our industry's heart. Perhaps we strike not at those who actually have wounded us, but at those who are simply unfortunate enough to be next in line. Instead of allowing our cumulative hearts to heal, we have created that prism of pain.

Do we as a profession treat others the way we want to be treated? When we joke about clients being cheap or stupid, is that acting in a respectful manner?

Would we want them to say the same of us? When we make fun of or speak poorly of clients who know less about our industry than we do, aren't we, as *In Search of Character* puts it, intentionally ridiculing, embarrassing, or hurting other people?

A well-meaning project manager I know once posted an open call for translators on ProZ, asking translators of particular language pairs to submit résumés with rates. As a result, one translator sent her a hate e-mail full of words we teach our children not to use. The translator accused her of being disrespectful by asking for rates sight unseen. When the project manager asked my advice, I asked her who had sent the e-mail. Turns out it was anonymous. A translator who had just accused someone of being disrespectful was not even respectful enough to give his or her name. Clearly, this individual is not the

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Member News

Send your news to Jeff Sanfacon at jeff@atanet.org or American Translators Association, 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590, Alexandria, VA 22314.

- The following language services providers have been named among the 5,000 fastest growing private companies in the U.S. by *Inc.* magazine.

CETRA, Inc.

Elkins Park, PA

CyraCom International, Inc.

Tucson, AZ

Dynamic Language Center

Seattle, WA

Eriksen Translations

Brooklyn, NY

Geneva Worldwide, Inc.

New York, NY

Language Services Associates

Willow Grove, PA

LinguaLinx, Inc.

Cohoes, NY

Sajan, Inc.

River Falls, WI

TransPerfect Translations Intl., Ltd.

New York, NY

The *Inc.* 5,000 list represents companies that have had significant revenue growth over three consecutive years, are independent and privately held, and are based in the United States.

- **Renato S. Beninatto** has been appointed chief executive officer of milengo.
- **Sandra L. Kingery** was among 16 translators to receive literature fellowships for translation projects from the National Endowment for the Arts. The fellowships support projects by literary translators to translate works written in other languages into English.
- **Rocío Txabbarriaga** has joined Common Sense Advisory as a language services strategist.

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cream of the translation crop. What if the project manager had been a client trying to find a translator for the first time? How much respect would she then have had for our industry upon receiving such an irate e-mail?

Unfortunately, the line between professional translators and nonprofessionals is not as clear to those outside our profession, and that is part of the problem. Remember, I said that the real problem was us. We do not agree amongst ourselves, and when we try to make a difference, egos and dividing opinions tend to get in the way more often than they should. In order for LinkedIn to think that it could get its site translated for free, there had to be registered users whom LinkedIn thought would agree to the task. LinkedInFail would not have hap-

pened if the division between those who would say yes and those who would say no did not exist.

We need greater standards, including a wider-spread national certification program. Organizations such as ATA have gone to outstanding lengths toward this goal, but the fact that certification is still not out there for certain languages or for interpreting allows nonprofessionals to pose as professionals, making it harder for us to project a positive image of our industry to the world. We will not gain respect from outsiders by having different standards for different languages or by creating division amongst ourselves.

We must unite. We must work to rid our industry of unprofessional behavior, to present a uniform front of

what is right and wrong. We must help ATA in its efforts to offer certification for more languages, and we must speak out against unprofessional business practices. Most importantly, we must let go of our grudges. We must realize that former errors might not be repeated by the next client in line. We must look at the respect we have already gained, and when we gather, we must discuss it positively.

The time has come for the prism to stop shining on its pain and to let the more beautiful colors through. The time is here and the time is now, be you in Motown or Downtown, to stand for change, no longer injured by what we do not have, but instead proudly singing about what we do—just as assertively as Aretha.

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