

KICK IT UP!

By Lesia Mervin, CSR, RMR, CRR, FAPR

There were two lumberjacks chopping trees in the forest. One man had been a lumberjack for years. He knew how to get the job done. The other lumberjack was young and energetic and had just started the profession. The young man is using an ax to chop his tree. He's just chopping away, over and over and over. He's not making much progress, but he's getting the job done. It may take him three days to chop down this tree, but he's going to get it done.

The old man comes up to him and says, "You know, if you sharpened that ax, you'd get the job done a lot easier."

The young guy says, "I don't have time to sharpen the ax, I'm too busy chopping down the tree."

I can't take credit for writing that story, but when I heard it, it struck me as so true for our profession. You may be getting the job done, but is it the most efficient way of doing it? Is there an easier way to do it? We get so busy sometimes with the "business" of reporting that we don't sharpen our skills because we're too busy "chopping down the tree." A simple word of advice from a more experienced professional can make all the difference in our day-to-day activities.

The landscape of reporting has changed dramatically. With technology today, many professionals work for people they've never personally met. In the good ol' days you knew everyone in the office. You actually personally knew the owner and had relationships with other reporters. You were able to interact with reporters on a daily basis, go to lunch together, socialize with them. It's not like that today. Unless you're an official, where you have other staff reporters in the workplace, you may rarely have personal, face-to-face interaction with other reporters in your firm. Reporters may work for many firms and aren't tied to one single firm.

You may receive your calendar assignment through text or email, then email your jobs in after completion, receive a payment for those services, and may have never met anyone face to face from the office. This lack of personal contact is really a disservice to our profession. There is so much we can learn from each other.

When my daughter, Bree, was four years old, she wanted to learn to ride her bike without the training wheels. I stood beside her, holding the back of the seat while she learned

to balance the bike. I would let go for a few seconds as I'm running beside her. The bike would wobble, and she would scream, "Don't let go, mom! Hold on!" I continued to run beside her but holding the seat less and less, still pretending I was holding on so she wouldn't falter until she mastered her balance. Then away she went without me.

Years later, I had the joy of teaching my daughter this profession. I had her come in every day for six weeks on my lunch hour and we'd go over another theory lesson until she was ready to begin speed building in a brick and mortar school. It was a lot of work, no denying that. It was just like teaching her to ride her bike. There was a lot of wobbling, but once the training wheels were off, still lots of running alongside, then she was off without me. What a joy to see her enjoy and love this profession as much as I do. That's a treasure. But a funny thing happened along the way: In teaching her, I became a better reporter. You see, she had a different take on things, a fresh look.

You know how kids are. "Why? Why? Why?"

"Because I'm the mom and I said so," takes on new meaning when you're teaching your adult child court reporting. She would question me. "Well, why do you write it that way? Wouldn't this way be better?"

Well, you know what? Sometimes it was better that way. I had just never thought of it. I tell you that story to show you that we can all learn from each other. We'll never know everything. I learn every day. I learn from the reporters in my courthouse that call me for computer questions. I may not know the answer, but it forces me to find the answer. I remember it next time. Without interaction with other reporters, you miss out on that.

Let's go back to the lumberjacks. *The young lumberjack goes into the hardware store to get his ax sharpened. He goes up to the salesman and says, "I'd like to get my ax sharpened." The salesman says, "Well, you know, you could buy a chainsaw and you wouldn't have to do any chopping at all."*

The young lumberjack says, "Are you kidding? I'll take it."

That salesman just saved him hours and hours of work. He's keeping up with technology. Have you kept up with technology? Technology is the key to our very survival.

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CROSS-BORDER COURT REPORTING— A BRAVE NEW WORLD

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As you would expect, our first week was a fairly stressful, intense one, with technology glitches – such as no audio feed, no internet access at times and therefore no streaming or uploading to our scopists, and the odd loss of videoconference feed. We decided ahead of time that if the witness was called in Delaware, then the Delaware team would be the “cert” reporter and prepare both the rough draft and final transcript; if the witness called in Toronto, we would reverse. We had days where each team performed both duties when multiple witnesses were called. Whichever team started the day as the cert reporter, however, would provide the entire day’s rough draft; there was no time to be piecing together bits of a rough draft; we saved our energy in that regard for the final certified.

We were very grateful to see that all questioning attorneys were present in the venue where the witness was called; that made life a little easier as the cert reporter. The “check” reporter would be available to provide any areas that couldn’t be heard, or where there was a technical difficulty, to assist the cert reporter. Lorraine had experienced tremendous audio difficulties when reporting at the pretrials when all audio was by teleconference. We didn’t know what to expect going in whether these issues would

continue, or would be resolved.

So the combination of high concerns about the ability to hear all parties in both courtrooms from one location, and the fact that both courts wished to have their own reporters present, it was agreed by all parties that each jurisdiction would have their own reporter, but only one transcript would be ultimately produced.

For the Canadian team, I can tell you it was a bit of an adjustment to see counsel addressing our court ungowned. Our attorneys are fully gowned (but no wigs, which I’m sure everyone is grateful for!) I also found some accents difficult to get a handle on, particularly one lawyer from Boston, although I think the London and Scotland (UK) experts gave all of us the most run for our money.

Court reporting on the Nortel trial was one of the most challenging jobs of our collective careers. But above all, it was a pleasure to work with such a talented, dedicated group of reporters who made our profession proud. No digital recording system could ever perform this work, and it is yet another reason why steno reporting combined with technology is a winning combination.

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Technology is what’s saving your jobs today. What does your equipment look like? Remember dictating? Notereaders? Typing all night? Giant computer systems with dictionaries the size of a spare tire? Now today’s laptops and tablets? We must keep up. What does your equipment look like today?

A couple days later, the lumberjack goes back to the store to talk to the salesman. He says, “I need to return this chainsaw. This didn’t make my job any easier. There’s something wrong with it.”

So the salesman says, “Let me check it out and see. He pulls the chord to start it up.” You hear loud VROOOOOM!

The lumberjack says, “What was that noise?”

What kind of reporter are you? Do you have the latest equipment and don’t know how to use it? Are you even pulling the chain of the chainsaw yourself? I challenge you to LEARN YOUR SOFTWARE. The technology is there, but the majority of people don’t utilize it to its full potential. There’s all kinds of artificial intelligence, shortcuts, macros, realtime shortcuts, all there for the asking. You just have to learn it. I challenge you to network with other reporters. Form a user group in your area. Have a brown-bag lunch every month with other reporters and teach each other things you’ve learned. Attend software training classes and webinars. Get involved in STAR and interact with the cream of the crop at a STAR convention.

Do you need a fresh look? Let’s kick it up!