

**TEL Broadcast – Interpretive Coaching
Interpretive Development Program
April 4, 2007 12:00-4:00 PM EDT
Participant Guide**

(TEL POC's -- please make sure that participants at your site receive this information)

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Contents of this guide:

- **Links to resources and references**
(we will refer to several of these during the broadcast)
- **Session Goals**
- **Session Agenda** *(space is provided for taking notes)*

Your pre-session prep-time for this broadcast – approximately 30-60 minutes

Participant materials and references:

I. Pre-course readings and handouts for use during the TEL broadcast (attached below) -- please print these handouts, read them, and bring them with you to the broadcast:

- *Training and Coaching for Increased Effectiveness*
- *The Elements of Successful Interpretation*
- *The Effective Coaching Session*
- *Individual Program Elements*

****Please bring an example of an interpretive program coaching form or checklist that you use with your interpretive staff or that you have had applied to your programs by another interpretive coach.**

II. Links to pre-session reading assignments – please review these materials prior to attending the broadcast:

- Review the introductory page of “Leading Interpreters: Training and Coaching” on the IDP website, the content outline on the “Directing, Leading & Coaching” page and the competency “assessment.”
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/330/module.htm>

III. Links to other useful tools and references – explore on your own:

- Leading Interpreters: Training and Coaching
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/330/module.htm>
- Developmental Worksheet – “Using TIUs and the Interpretive ‘So What’”
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/sowhat.pdf>
- Developmental Worksheet – “Program Organization”
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/progorgwksheet.pdf>
- Interpretive Themes

- <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/themes.pdf>
- Developmental Worksheet – “Program Self-Assessment – Effective Interpretive Talk”
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/103/103worksheet.pdf>
- Development Worksheet – “Program Self-Assessment – Demonstration or Illustrated Program”
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/220/220worksheet.pdf>
- Development Worksheet – “Program Self –Assessment – Conducted Activity”
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/210/210selfassessment.pdf>
- Developmental Worksheet – “Opportunities for Intellectual and Emotional Connections”
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/ConnectionOps.doc>
- Interpreter’s Toolbox Worksheet
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/210/210worksheet.doc>
- Interpretive Process Model
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/processmodel.pdf>
- Interpretive Analysis Model
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/certifierresources/AnalysisMod0304.doc>
- Interpretive Analysis Model Worksheet
<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/certifierresources/AMworksheet.doc>

NOTE: For a review of foundational interpretive theory, you may wish to access the on-line course entitled “Foundations of Interpretation” at www.parktraining.org. Or you may wish to review this material in-depth in the workbook entitled “Meaningful Interpretation,” edited by David Larsen (see <http://www.easternnational.org/meaningful.htm>)

Session Goals

After this broadcast, participants will:

1. Learn about useful strategies and tools for interpretive coaching
2. Discuss examples of how to guide/coach others to improve interpretive effectiveness
3. Recognize the critical role of interpretive coaches in accomplishing park goals and facilitating the NPS mission

Session Agenda -- Notes

1. What is an interpretive coach & why we invest in coaching

2. Elements of success – What coaches should look for

3. Practice identifying & articulating success

4. Specific program elements

5. The Audit

6. The Coaching Session – The Positive Assessment

7. Practice Coaching

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5

8. Everything Else

9. The written feedback

10. Tools for the Coach

Conclusion

See pages 5-14 below for handouts and pre-session reading

Training and Coaching for Increased Effectiveness (From *Legacy Magazine*) Interpretive Coaching TEL 2007

Do you know, and if so how, that you and your staff are doing the best job possible? Training and coaching are the primary tools interpretive supervisors and managers use to increase the effectiveness of their staff's interpretive services. While training provides a conceptual understanding of the philosophies and skills needed to be successful in their interpretive efforts, program auditing and subsequent coaching provide the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of potential outcomes.

Training for Success

Training, whether for new or experienced interpreters, sets the stage for the delivery of effective interpretive services and impacts how successful future coaching sessions will be. Thus, the following questions should be addressed for any training session:

What suggests the need for training? Is there a need that has been determined through staff questionnaires, observation by coaches or to accomplish a new type of interpretive service? Trainers should get the staff's perspectives on what skills they think they could use additional training in and seek the input of coaches and supervisors who see the programs from different perspectives. Consider asking the audience that has received the interpretive service how the delivery might be made more effective. Refreshers and review sessions are always beneficial, but should recognize the skill of experienced staff participating in the training.

Who is the audience to be trained? Volunteers, seasonals, experienced interpreters – there is often a wide range of skills in the trainee audience. Attempt to devise training strategies that accommodate the developmental needs of a diverse staff. When possible, set up different training tracks for new versus experienced staff. Recognize skilled interpreters by encouraging them to present training sessions or perhaps consider assigning them as "mentors" to work with beginning interpreters. Concessionaires and tour guides often provide interpretive services, while cooperating association staff, fee collectors, administrative and maintenance staffs regularly interact with the public. Consider offering interpretive training to ANYONE who comes into contact with visitors and is speaking for your site.

What is the spirit and intent of the training session? Evaluate the purpose of the training and how well it meets both operational and developmental needs of those being trained. Continue to look for additional professional development opportunities for your staff to reinforce and build upon these concepts.

Have diverse learning styles and interpretive techniques been considered? Develop instructional objectives, then choose the appropriate methods and techniques that will be used to achieve these objectives. Select techniques that accommodate adult learning styles and model good interpretive skills.

Is the training session itself acting as a model of effective interpretation? Do not forget to incorporate the fundamental philosophy of interpretation throughout the training. The

desired outcomes of interpretation are to provide opportunities for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings inherent in the resource and to cohesively develop a relevant idea. Is your session modeling this same philosophy?

How do you know if your training was effective and how can you increase your effectiveness as a trainer? Actively seek feedback. Use written evaluations, get feedback from co-instructors and audit programs to see if those who were trained are demonstrating the desired outcome of the training.

Coaching for Effectiveness

As a coach of interpretive services, what should you look for? Traditional interpretive audit forms and checklists suggest a range of things: appearance of the interpreter, volume and rate of speaking, safety message and program logistics, organization, accuracy and an identifiable theme. Coaches also examine interpretive techniques: use of analogy, activities, props, organizational techniques, use of questions and more. All of these elements can directly impact the effectiveness of any interpretive effort.

However, there is an even more fundamental foundation that any interpretive service must provide to be successful. The National Park Service describes interpretation as “facilitating a connection between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor.” To this end, an interpretive service is effective if it is “successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings/significance inherent in the resource” and “provides a clear focus for their connection with the resource by demonstrating the cohesive development of a relevant idea or ideas.”

To provide effective feedback to interpreters, coaches must go beyond simply providing suggestions on improving the delivery of the program. Coaches should look for the very essence of interpretation by asking:

Does the interpretive service provide opportunities for members of the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings inherent in the resource? Individually, we relate to differently to different types of concepts. Some relate better to emotive concepts (art, music, love, tradition, etc.), while others might relate more closely to processes and systems (geology, economics, cycles, government, etc.) Effective interpretation offers something for everyone and provides opportunities for the audience to explore a range of concepts related to the resource.

Does the presentation reveal a variety of meanings and multiple points of view associated with the resource? Our resources possess different meanings for different audiences. Wolves might mean a successful predator to the scientist, economic failure to the rancher, beauty to the photographer or family to the Native American. A wide range of meanings should be explored to reach the broadest audiences possible.

Is there something in the program for everyone in the audience, no matter what their background or understanding? While it is difficult to make interpretive media effective for all audiences, an overall non-personal services interpretive program should include media for a range of audiences (children, adults, novices, experts and the range of learning styles.) Ideally, personal services programs (walks, talks, demonstrations, etc.) should be flexible

enough to change to meet a specific audience's needs on a moment's notice. Interpretation should strive to be inclusive.

Does the program encourage thinking or does it tell people how to think? Effective interpretive services encourage dialogue by exposing members of the audience to a variety of perspectives, some different from their own, in a balanced, non-judgmental way.

Does the interpretive service develop a meaningful, relevant idea (relevant to both the resource and the audience) in a cohesive and understandable way? Is the, "So what?!" question answered?

Are there Universal Concepts (concepts and ideas included in the program that are so broadly relevant that almost everyone will be able to relate to them) that are fully developed? If the audience cannot relate to the presentation, or form a personal connection with a powerful concept, then the effort will not achieve its full potential.

Providing Constructive Feedback

After viewing the interpretive service, the auditor should meet with the interpreter as soon as possible, while the presentation is fresh in everyone's mind. Remember that the goal of the audit is to validate what is present in the program – what works, as well as what is in the program that might be built and improved upon. While it is easy to point out what is missing, we all respond better to and learn more from a positive assessment of our work.

Focus on the elements of what makes the interpretive product effective and what the presentation includes, not what is missing. This keeps the interaction positive and forward thinking. All interpretive efforts have some "glimmers" or potential elements of success to build upon.

Discuss the interpretive program and not the interpreter. Make your conversation focused on the product and not the individual who presented the product. Try to refer to the interpretive service in the third person, rather than the interpreter in the first. This is subtle and takes practice, but can help to make suggestions for improvement be taken less personally by the interpreter.

Be provisional instead of directive. Use phrases like, "Consider trying...", "What do you think would happen if...?", "That idea might be even more powerful if...". No one knows the intent of the product better than the interpreter. This can allow for suggestions to strengthen a particular component of an interpretive effort, but still allow the interpreter control to do what they think will be most effective.

Encourage the interpreter to share what s/he thinks. Again, no one knows the spirit and intent of the product as well as the interpreter. However, be certain to ask directed questions that will encourage the interpreter to share specific, concrete elements regarding the interpretive effort in a positive manner. Ask questions such as, "What do you like about the program?" and "What do you think could be made stronger?"

Recognize and acknowledge improvement. Be specific about where you see improvement, whether it is improvement in a specific program or overall improvement in performance.

Provide concrete examples. Give specifics as to what worked and why, and what might be made even more effective. Be sure to include possible ideas on how to strengthen the product. However, when providing feedback it is also important to know when to stop. At times, too much advice might function to be detrimental to self-esteem.

Provide written feedback. Written feedback provides a record of the discussion and a reference for the interpreter for later use. It should include no surprises.

Even the outstanding program can improve. Recognize excellence, while encouraging continued refinements and improvements. An interpretive service can always reach more audiences.

Conclusion

Trainers and coaches should evaluate their training agendas and auditing tools to make sure they reflect the foundational elements of interpretation. Focusing on the very essence of what makes interpretation effective, and providing a positive assessment, will help interpreters improve in a positive and constructive manner. Truly effective training and coaching provides “opportunities that enable other interpreters to help visitors make intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings and significance of the resource being interpreted.” Once visitors form connections to our special places and find relevance in our resources, one can hope that preservation and stewardship are not far behind.

References

- Dahlen, David, Sandy Weber, David Larsen, and Robert Fudge. 1995. *Module 101: Fulfilling the National Park Service Mission: The Process of Interpretation*. Harpers Ferry, WV: National Park Service.
- Lewis, Bill. 1991. *The Process of Interpretive Critiquing*. Harpers Ferry, WV: National Park Service.
- National Park Service. 1999. *Module 330: Leading and Coaching Interpreters*. Harpers Ferry, WV: National Park Service.

The Elements of Successful Interpretation

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To be at its best auditing and coaching for increased interpretive effectiveness should identify and discuss the following elements in interpretive products:

- **Are there opportunities for intellectual connection to the meanings of the resource?** Do the connections seem to provoke or inspire: awareness, comprehension, discernment, discovery, enlightenment, insight, reasoning, mindfulness, perceptiveness, perspicacity, recognition, revelation, understanding of concepts, cause and effect, relationships, unearthing, unfolding, wisdom...
- **Are there opportunities for emotional connection to the meanings of the resource?** Do the connections seem to provoke, evoke or inspire: admiration, aggravation, amazement, anger, anguish, apprehension, astonishment, aversion, awe, bewilderment, bliss, comfort, commiseration, compassion, concern, consternation, contentedness, contrition, curiosity, delight, despair, devotion, disappointment, disgust, dismay, distress, dread, elation, empathy, esteem, exasperation, exhilaration, fright, frustration, gladness, gratitude, grief, happiness, horror, joy, loyalty, nostalgia, passion, pity pride, regret, relief, remorse, respect, reverence, sadness, satisfaction, sentiment, shame, sorrow, surprise, sympathy, tranquility, veneration, vexation, woe, wonder, worry, yearning...
- **Does the product present multiple points of view on the subject?** Park resources mean different things to different audiences and there are multiple truths associated with our places. To be most relevant, interpretive products present multiple points of view.
- **Does it include something for everyone in the audience?** We're interpreting to EVERYONE in the audience, so the best interpretive products address the learning styles, developmental level and physical abilities of everyone in the audience
- **Does the program encourage dialogue?** Encouraging dialogue allows the audience to retain, yet express, their own values, beliefs and opinions. Dialogue is especially effective when interpreting controversial or contentious issues.
- **Is a relevant idea (or ideas) cohesively developed?** The most effective programs are thematic and along with the audiences' knowledge, experience and understanding of the resource, cohesively develop one or more ideas that are relevant to both the audience and the resource.
- **Does the program include a Universal Concept(s)?** Universal Concepts provide the broadest amount of relevance to the widest range of audience members.
- **Are interpretive techniques and methods effectively and appropriately used?** Techniques and methods should be selected that best develop opportunities for intellectual and emotional connection to resource meanings. If the technique and/or method doesn't support development of an opportunity or is distracting, then it should not be used.

- **Is the program appropriate for the audience?** Not all subjects are appropriate for all audiences, nor are all interpretive techniques and methods suitable for all audiences. Keep in mind who will be on the receiving end of the interpretive effort.

Auditing and subsequent coaching that addresses the foundational elements of successful interpretation helps keep the auditor focused and keeps the coaching directed towards the professional development of the interpreter.

The Effective Coaching Session

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2007

What goes into an effective coaching session?

“The Set Up”

How do you best prepare your staff for personal professional development...in other words, “The Audit”?

- Hiring process.
- Discuss personal style.
- Group input/development of auditing tool – Do what Matt did regarding “elements of successful interpretation” with your staff. “Teach to the test”. Don’t make it a mystery.
- Model process during seasonal training.

“The Audit”

Basic considerations....

- ‘Fess up or show up?
- Incognito or all decked out?
- Clam up or hands up?
- Write a novel, a note or commit to memory?

“The Feedback”

Basic considerations...

Set the appropriate stage for the audit review/coaching session:

- Meet ASAP, while things are still fresh in the mind.
- Choose a quiet, comfortable, private place.
- Give interpreter time to reflect and share.
- Provide written feedback that reflects oral feedback, no surprises.
- Keep it positive, it’s a growth experience - "positive assessment".

The Positive Assessment

- Focus on what is **present** in the program/service:
 - *If you’ve been involved since the beginning, there should at least be some good stuff there.*
 - *There are always components that can be built upon. (We hope.)*
- Discuss the **interpretation**, not the interpreter:
 - *Subtle.*
 - *Takes practice.*
 - *Keeps the interaction professional, not personal.*
- Be **provisional** and not directive:
 - *Just because you audited, doesn’t mean you know it all.*
 - *Might not know spirit and intent of the program/service.*
 - *Might not know what has been considered or tried.*
 - *Continues to allow creativity, ownership and validation of program/service.*

- *Can be especially challenging if you have worked there in the past!*
- Tailor the coaching event to the **individual**:
 - *Consider adult learning styles and preferences.*
- Encourage interpreter to **share**:
 - *What do they think worked and what could improve? Why?*
 - *Be specific. Ask directed questions such as, "What worked well?" or "What could be strengthened?"*
- Provide **concrete and specific examples** of both what worked and what could be even better.
- Recognize and **acknowledge** improvement:
 - *Program/service, season or skill?*
- Even the outstanding can improve:
 - *Ask the interpreter what they might change/strengthen/improve.*
 - *How can the program/service reach an even broader audience?*
- Provide **written feedback** for review:
 - *Record for supervisor and staff for future reference.*
 - *Should contain no surprises.*

Individual Program Elements

Interpretive Coaching TEL 2007

Interpretive Talks

- **Is successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own connections to the meanings of the resource**
- **Opportunities for connection to resource meanings include both intellectual and emotional opportunity to reach everyone in the audience**
- **Program is appropriate for the audience – cognitively, kinesthetically and developmentally**
- **The arrangement of the opportunities for connection cohesively develops a relevant idea or ideas**
- Provides a balance of facts and acknowledges multiple points of view
- Communicates an appropriate depth and amount of relevant information
- Presented in an engaging manner appropriate to the audience

Interpretive Writing

- **Is successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own connections to the meanings of the resource**
- **Opportunities for connection to resource meanings include both intellectual and emotional opportunity to reach everyone in the audience**
- **Program is appropriate for the audience – cognitively, kinesthetically and developmentally**
- **The arrangement of the opportunities for connection cohesively develops a relevant idea or ideas**
- Presented in an engaging style appropriate to the audience and medium
- Demonstrates creativity
- Incorporates thematic structure and organization
- Avoids spelling, grammatical, typographical, and stylistic errors which impede understanding and interpretive effectiveness

Conducted Activities

- **Is successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own connections to the meanings of the resource**
- **Opportunities for connection to resource meanings include both intellectual and emotional opportunity to reach everyone in the audience**
- **Program is appropriate for the audience – cognitively, kinesthetically and developmentally**
- **The arrangement of the opportunities for connection cohesively develops a relevant idea or ideas**
- Provides a sequence of opportunities as the program moves through the resource
- Provides a series of experiences with the resource itself – resource immersion
- Physical and mental transitions between stops
- Involve resource and sensory in nature – resource immersion
- Capitalizes on spontaneous situations to provide meaningful moments supporting continuity of thought
- Other considerations – safety, resource protection, environmental concerns, distractions, spontaneous interpretive moments, less formal but still structured

Illustrated Programs & Demonstrations

- **Is successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own connections to the meanings of the resource**
- **Opportunities for connection to resource meanings include both intellectual and emotional opportunity to reach everyone in the audience**
- **Program is appropriate for the audience – cognitively, kinesthetically and developmentally**
- **The arrangement of the opportunities for connection cohesively develops a relevant idea or ideas**
- Integration of media, activity or demonstration with interpretive narration to encourage or move audience toward higher-level concepts such as resource protection, stewardship, and global issues
- Media, activity or demonstration provides opportunities for I&E connections on its own
- Participatory in nature (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, cognitive, etc.)
- Vivid and rich due to the media and narration combined

Curriculum-based Education Programs

- **Is successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own connections to the meanings of the resource**
- **Opportunities for connection to resource meanings include both intellectual and emotional opportunity to reach everyone in the audience**
- **Program is appropriate for the audience – cognitively, kinesthetically and developmentally**
- **The arrangement of the opportunities for connection cohesively develops a relevant idea or ideas**
- Group's educational objectives are connected with resource meanings
- Age/developmental level appropriate
- Participatory in nature (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, cognitive, etc.)
- Demonstrates knowledge of sequence of learning
- Engages learners in a variety of experiences and activities to reach multiple learning styles
- Demonstrates techniques and content which are inclusive

Informal Interpretation

- **Requires an understanding of when, why and how to provide basic and/or in-depth information**
- **Requires an understanding of when, why and how to go beyond orientation/information and provide opportunities for the audience to form their own I/E connections to the meanings of the resource based on the visitors' needs and interests.**
- Requires interpreter to determine the needs of the visitor and addresses these needs
- Uses cues from audience to read each situation accurately and evaluates response options carefully
- Spontaneous and diverse; requires a depth and breadth of knowledge and skill