

The CPD that transformed me

Group practice: we continue our series on CPD that changes lives,
with a contribution from Dean Evans

The most transformational CPD for me has been Sarah Silva's Expedition Group. Back in 2019 I took ITI's Advancing Your Freelance Translation Career (AFT) course. While I got a lot out of it, I felt it was just the beginning. I wanted to keep going. And in particular I wanted more ways of putting the theory into practice.

I'd heard colleagues talking about Sarah Silva's Direct Marketing Live (DML) course, and had seen that Sarah had presented about it on several occasions. I happened to meet Sarah at the German Network's 2019 Christmas lunch and ended up signing up for the next iteration of DML. Sadly, that coincided with a little thing called Covid, which rather scuppered my plans and those of my fellow fledgling direct marketers. Nonetheless, I'd found Sarah to be a great teacher and guide and I'd learned a lot from her. So when DML was reincarnated as the Expedition Group in September 2021, I signed up for it.

Monthly marketing modules

Each month Sarah picks an aspect of marketing and prepares a module around it. Each module involves a challenge to help us market our business, with three levels of effort depending on, for example, how much time we have. Topics we've covered so far include creating a portfolio; increasing visibility; crafting persuasive content; getting super-specific; and attending trade shows. The content is always available online, so we can refer back to it whenever we want, or complete the tasks some other time if we're too busy that particular month.

Once a month we have a group Q&A call. We can submit questions in advance to give Sarah time to prepare a comprehensive answer, or just bring them up on the call and see what our colleagues think. We also have a monthly focus call where we come together for an hour on Zoom and we each concentrate on one task we want to get done. These never fail to help you get something ticked off the list!

For me, the 'extra value' that this particular CPD gives me is in the way it's taught. Sarah explains everything in such a clear, friendly and relatable manner that you just want to devour and absorb all the knowledge. And as someone who needs a bit of accountability to motivate me, I find the group dynamic really


helps keep me on track. In fact the biggest unexpected bonus of the Expedition Group has been developing a really strong network of supportive colleagues. We all work in different fields and different language combinations, so we all have different perspectives to bring to the table. We celebrate each other's wins but also support each other if we're struggling.

Challenges, changes and a critical eye

Having said that, looking at your business with a critical eye isn't easy; and seeing how previous marketing efforts could have been better can feel a bit embarrassing and disheartening. But learning new ways of doing things is the only way to improve and grow.

I'd say the biggest difference the course has made is a change of mindset. I know exactly the kind of work and clients I want and I feel confident enough not just to accept everything that comes my way. In the past I might have said yes to projects or rates that I wasn't entirely happy with, just to be busy. But not any more!

I have also added a blog to my website at last. Writing the posts doesn't necessarily come easy, but Sarah's content is always there for me to refer back to and use as a kind of checklist.

Business skills are often neglected in our profession, but they're absolutely indispensable for translators and interpreters nowadays. As I'm writing this, I've just learned that one of my favourite clients will no longer be working with me and the other freelancers in their team (through no fault of our own, might I add!). If that had happened a few years ago I'd have felt completely lost, but thanks to the Expedition Group I've got lots of things in place to help me to move on and find new favourites. 

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Dean Evans (MITI) is an English translator and editor based in Tunbridge Wells. Working from German, Spanish and French, he specialises in patents, with a particular focus on patent litigation and mechanical and electrical engineering. He is the coordinator of the ITI French Network and has been a member of the Professional Development Committee since July 2019.