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The Five Most Costly Mistakes Coordinators Make When Procuring TypeWell Services

Cal Hutson, President - Quality Transcription Specialists LLC

Cal: Are we ready? Transcriber, you ready? I'm Cal Hutson, owner of Quality Transcription Specialists.

Working with coordinators is a topic I'm very familiar with. How many coordinators are here? How many have more than 10 years experience? More than 5? Less than 5? We'll talk about common issues that are experienced. We'll walk through some pretty basic things.

When hiring, I always recommend a contract. It usually comes from a procurement division. You should read through this. I always send my own 2-page contract. It's between the school and myself. You want to outline what is being provided and how you'll provide it. Know what you are responsible to pay for and what the school is responsible to pay for. Outline the hourly costs. It can be simple. Use the KISS method. [**Keep It Simple Stupid**] Cost is usually the first thing the coordinator asks you. Outline cancellation policies and how long to wait for a late student. Are you locked in to the contract? Make sure that you are not locked in for a semester if you don't want to be. If you have a student that's coming in needing services for a year, will you sign a year contract? What if they drop out...are you on the hook to complete the contract?

When you go through the hourly cost, does it include the teamer? Make sure you outline the cost per transcriber so there's no confusion. Has anyone had issues with contracts?

Participant: Any contracts? [Group Laughing]

Cal: Let's talk about mortgages. [Group Laughing]

In an economy in a state of flux, you can provide remote services, but if you cut corners, and a transcriber is transcribing 2-3 hours at a time, your client is not really getting equal access. Will you provide a teamer for a 30 minute assignment? That's usually not necessary, but teaming has to be outlined in the contract.

In April 2011, I got a phone call from campus police. One of the students that I provided services for had their car broken into and the equipment for TypeWell was stolen. It wasn't a

huge expense, but it had to be replaced. The more clients that providers get, the more this can happen. I make it a rule that there has to be an equipment liability policy so everyone knows who is liable.

When the student walks in and says they need services, you have to make sure they are competent to have the equipment. Do they house it for the semester or the entire year? Do they check the equipment out daily? Some coordinators make them check it out daily. Students vary in personality and reliability. If you fill out an agreement with a provider, I recommend you fill out your own agreement with the student. Let them know they're liable if they break the equipment. This works as a failsafe. I've had students drop computers. I gave an I-PAD to a transcriber and it was stolen within 48 hours. Technology is easy to steal.

Has anyone had equipment stolen?

Participant: The school I work for had equipment stolen out of a locked storage room.

Cal: Was there an agreement set up?

Participant: It was the school's policy, so I'm not sure. It had to be an inside job as you had to have a key.

Cal: That's disconcerting.

Make sure, as a coordinator, that you know if the equipment is ready to go by the provider. If they still have to purchase it, you could lose time and the provider could lose money and time.

Coordinators sometimes don't know what they are getting. There are a lot of agencies out there. You really need to understand what you're getting. Cost criteria is usually number one. I'm like that as a consumer. Tell me what it costs first then we'll go from there. I understand buying criteria. We get a lot of coordinators that haven't had a student in 10 years. They just want to know pricing. They base their decision on the price. It's up to the provider to educate you if you are in this boat. You have to understand what it is you're getting and for what price.

When you distinguish between a high and low quality provider, you realize a couple of more dollars per hour doesn't mean you are saving money. How competent is the agency you're going with? Are you going with an independent contractor? If they are sick, do they call their own backup? Most often, the agency supplies the back-up.

Microphones give us a lot of problems. If you have a mic that dies, what do you do? Do you use the internal mic? I'm talking about the mics used on lapels. What if the computer doesn't turn on? Does the student have Skype on their computer? Let's go with web browsing if they do.

Google Talk can help too. TypeWell is pretty reliable but consider what back-ups are available. The provider you're looking for needs to exhaust every option to support the student.

If the back-up doesn't work, look to IT support and turnaround. Who do you call when technology breaks down? Does the provider have a back-up set of computers? A mic is fairly easy to ship so you could get an extra one in the beginning to have as a back-up. Do you have the IT support person's name? Will they have the intelligence to troubleshoot the problems? How fast can you expect them to be? Can you text them? Can you call them? I like it when coordinators can get a hold of me instantly through text. You want people who save you time and save the student the transcript. Losing 15 minutes is better than a whole class.

Last minute requests are becoming more common, like outside guest speakers. How does your provider handle this? I would inquire about that.

Transcript refinement is a necessary topic for coordinators as they are not sure what to expect. Talk about how fast the student will get a copy of the notes and ask whether the coordinator wants a copy. What are the shipping habits of your provider? How fast can they get things to you? Has anyone had problems with shipping?

Participant: Is it common for providers to provide the equipment? For us, we provide it.

Cal: I don't see the need for schools to provide equipment. Some like to do this as they want every piece of information that goes through their firewall on their equipment. They can provide equipment. It's not common in our experience. Does anyone know of other schools that provide their own equipment? No?

Participant: When you are talking about shipping, are you worried about the condition the equipment is shipped back in?

Cal: You want it updated and ready to go for the following semester. You don't want it stolen over the holidays. I can do the updates and prepare the equipment if they ship it back to me.

TypeWell coordinating is not plug and play. Realize that you have a role in this as does the student. The IT person does not want to help your student every single day. You have to have training sessions for the student. Think about what that meeting will entail and how long it should be. I suggest 30-40 minutes to have them walk you through everything.

Train the students to use the TypeWell program. Make sure they understand Skype. Providers need to set this time up with the student so they know the critical stuff. It depends on the aptitude of the student. I had a student the other day whose aptitude blew me away. Adapt to the learning level of the student.

See if the provider will send you screenshots. They can email them to you. Screen shots can show the link menu, etc. Set up the mode of contact between you and the provider. Those who do remote services or procure them from a provider, do you know how to fix the issues? How does that work?

Participant: I fix them as our IT people don't know what we do. We have to figure out our own systems.

Cal: That's fun. [sarcastic] OK. The last thing you want to be left with is no services with no way to fix them. There's a free app that takes a one hour problem and makes it a five minute problem. Remote log-in capability can save a lot of time.

There are good reasons to train transcribers. There are also bad reasons. You can make costly mistakes. Consider initial training and equipment. Is training still \$400?

Kate: It's closer to \$500.

Cal: If they stick with you, that's a good investment. You have to maintain the equipment or have IT maintain it. If you're going to train a transcriber, what kind of classes are students wanting to take? Are they heavy load classes? Do you need a team of transcribers? You want to make sure that you are supporting the student with competent people. We've worked with a university that doesn't handle this well.

There are a lot of people that drop out of the TypeWell course. If you hire somebody, they may feel the intensive training isn't worth the \$12/hour. Realize this is a reality when you interview students to work. I've seen grown people cry when going through training. Please consider who is going through and what you are about to put them through.

Participant: Did you say you pay your trainees while they are in training?

Cal: Yes.

What if you get somebody who exceeds your expectations? Your intentions were good. You trained them and you planned on paying them \$10/hour. If XYZ pays \$30/hour, they will not stay with you. If I asked you to sweep the floor for \$8/hour but somebody wants a master floor sweeper and pays \$25/hour, the decision of who to work for is a matter of economics.

One last thing. How many students are you hiring for? If you have a student that comes in every 10 years and you want to save costs, what will be reasonable? What if the student drops out and you've paid for a team of transcribers? That could be a serious issue. I've seen this happen. Sometimes, a school trains a person but either the student drops out or the transcriber doesn't work out. Consider these things.

Any questions? Input? Output? Does it seem basic? Does anyone disagree with anything? Anything on your radar now that wasn't before?

Participant: With reference to who does the set-up of the equipment, where I work, the student comes to class and a student worker sets up and supports TypeWell. It works well.

Cal: That's a good idea.

Participant: It depends on how comfortable the student is setting up the equipment. When I have students, I give them my text and email to support them.

Cal: The IT people we work with are excellent. They always support us. They are great to work with and it helps to have this support. You can have someone there to help the student also as was mentioned. The log-in software simplifies things for them too. If someone isn't available to run over and help the student, the student needs to feel comfortable troubleshooting on their own.

It's like setting up a conference, so much goes into planning and coordinating it. You want it to be seamless, but it takes a lot of work and forethought.

Any other questions or comments? Questions about technology?

Participant: Have you heard of Team Viewer? It allows the IT person to see the student's computer. You install it on the student's laptop. The IT person types in the password for the student and it gives them control of their computer and they can fix it without being in the classroom. There's a fee for it.

Participant: Is it a fee per time?

Participant: I think you pay for the license.

Cal: Anybody have issues with computers or anything else?

Participant: There's a problem staying linked in certain rooms where I work.

Cal: Also, some students are very particular about how they want to be linked. Other questions or comments? No? I appreciate you coming in and listening. [Clapping.]

[End of session]