

Team Interpreting: Shifting the Paradigm

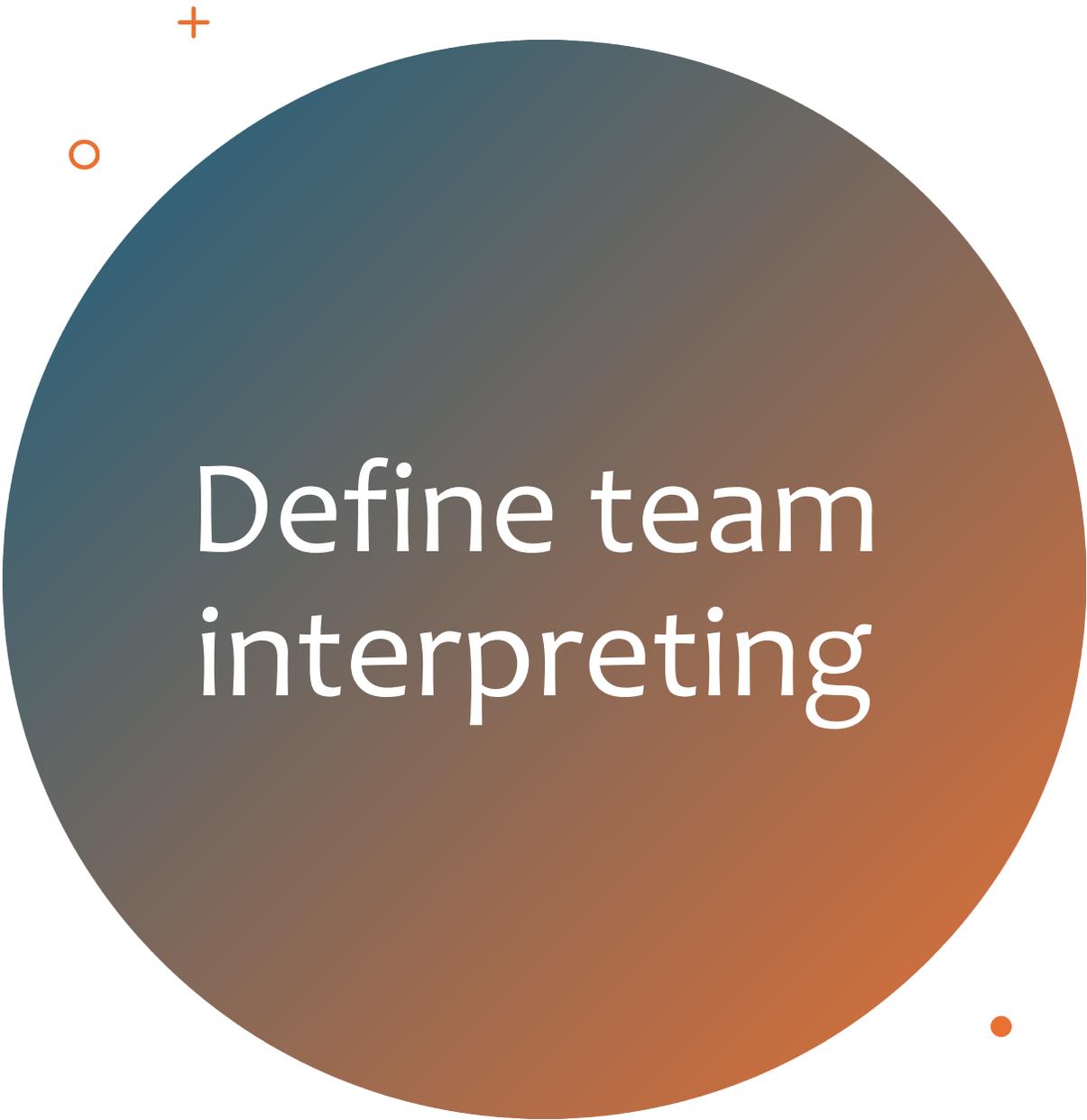
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And

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Define team interpreting

Take a couple of minutes to come up with your own definition for team interpreting. Include how you think it works best.

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Definitions of Team Interpreting

“Team interpreting refers to the practice of using two or more interpreters who share the responsibility of providing simultaneous or consecutive interpreting for one or more individuals with limited English proficiency.”

[NAJIT Position Paper, 2020, “Team Interpreting in Court-Related Proceedings”]

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Why Team Interpreting?

Interpreting is inherently complex and, consequently, multiple interpreters working together can:

- Catch errors or ambiguities one person might miss
- Ensure linguistic accuracy for the record
- Improve clarity and cohesion of the rendition
- Share cognitive load
- Provide checks and balances throughout the workflow

Team interpreting is not simply two people doing the same job at intervals. It is a structured, collaborative process.

What is required for successful team interpreting?

After reviewing the most recent research in this area we propose the following principles:

Composition of the Interpreting Team

- Active Interpreter
- Support Interpreter

These roles will alternate for the duration of the assignment

- Coordinator

(not part of the team per se, but has to provide information for interpreters to prepare and can assist with logistical or other issues)

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Team Member Attributes

Both team members need:

- Strong linguistic and cognitive skills
- Ability to maintain composure under pressure
- Familiarity with court procedures, protocol and decorum
- Capacity to collaborate seamlessly with team member and court personnel
- To be adept at anticipation, monitoring, and rapid problem-solving, especially when fulfilling the role of the support interpreter
- To be interdependent



Interdependence

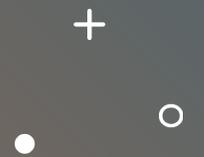
Effective team interpreting is achieved when team members recognize they are effectively working *independently* as well as believing they may *delegate* or *depend* on their team member to carry out a function that supports their team goal.

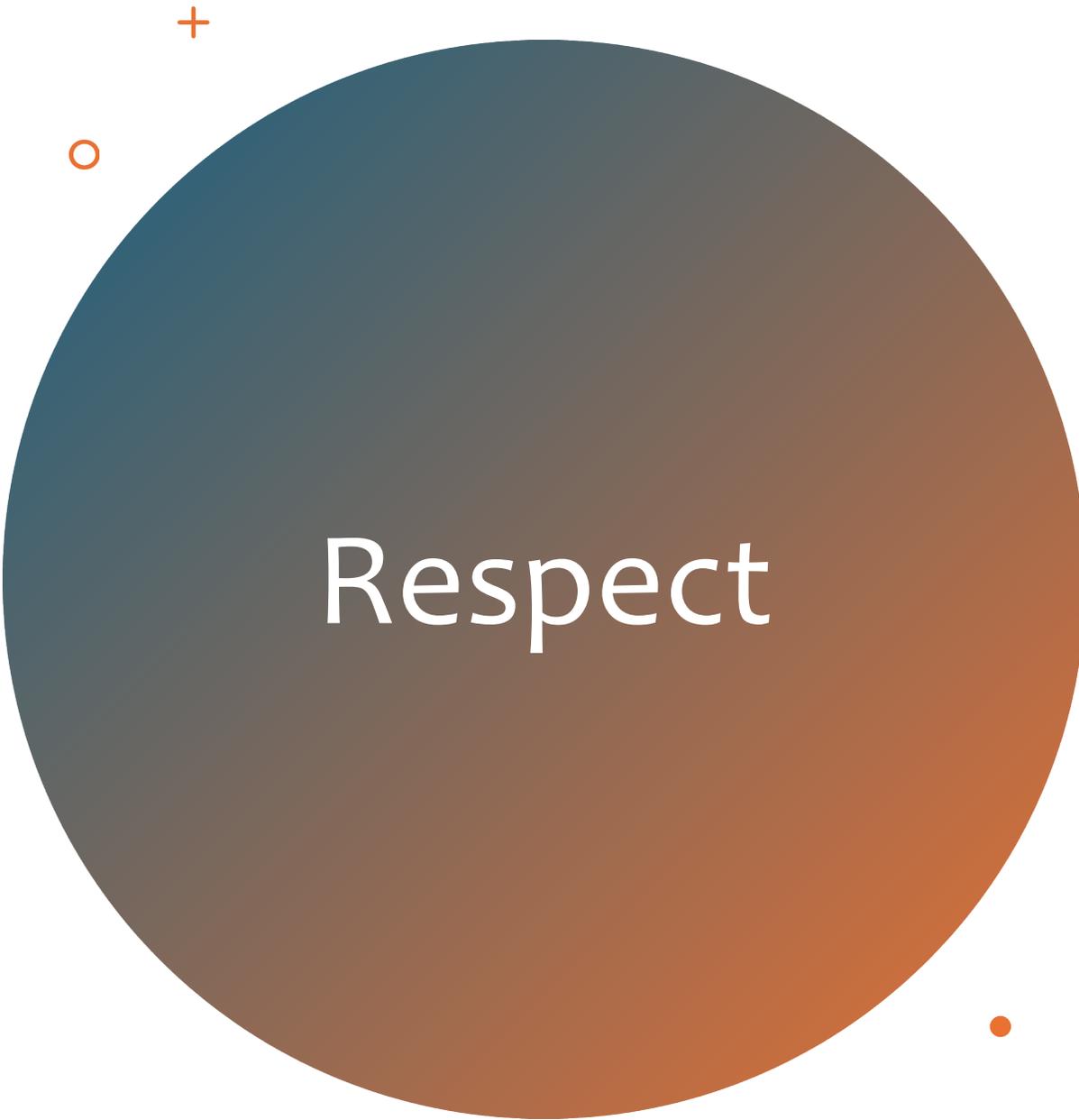
[Hoza 2010]

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How to achieve interdependence

By practicing the following...

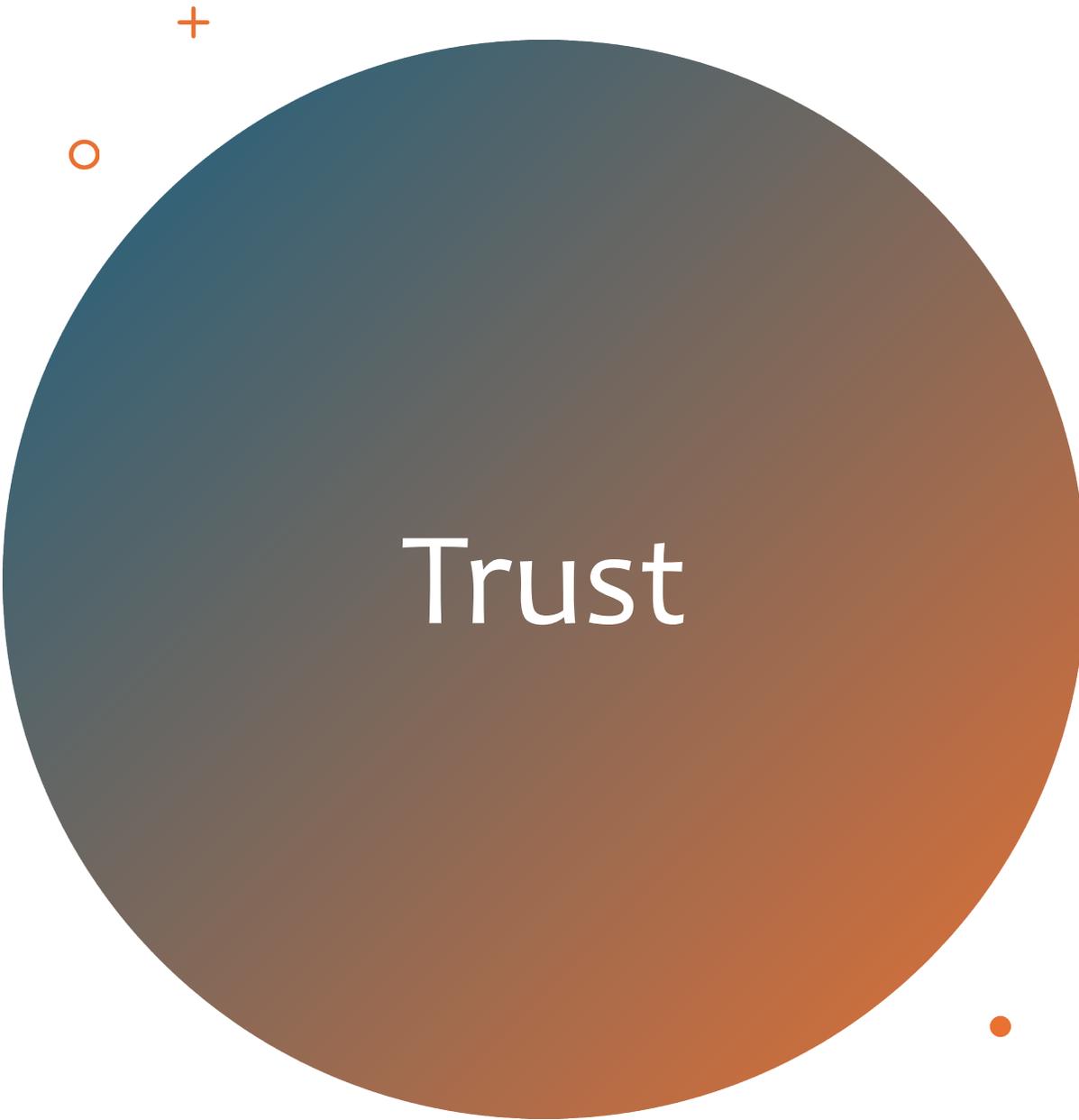




Respect

Value your teammate as a colleague, a fellow interpreter, as someone who is bringing a different skill set, perspective, and experience to the task.

- Be receptive to their contributions
 - Be considerate
 - Be fair
 - Be courteous
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Trust

Believe that your teammate is:

- competent
- knowledgeable
- reliable
- committed to producing a quality and accurate interpretation
- ready to come to your aid in case of a mistake and help correct the record

Think of your teammate as as a safety net.

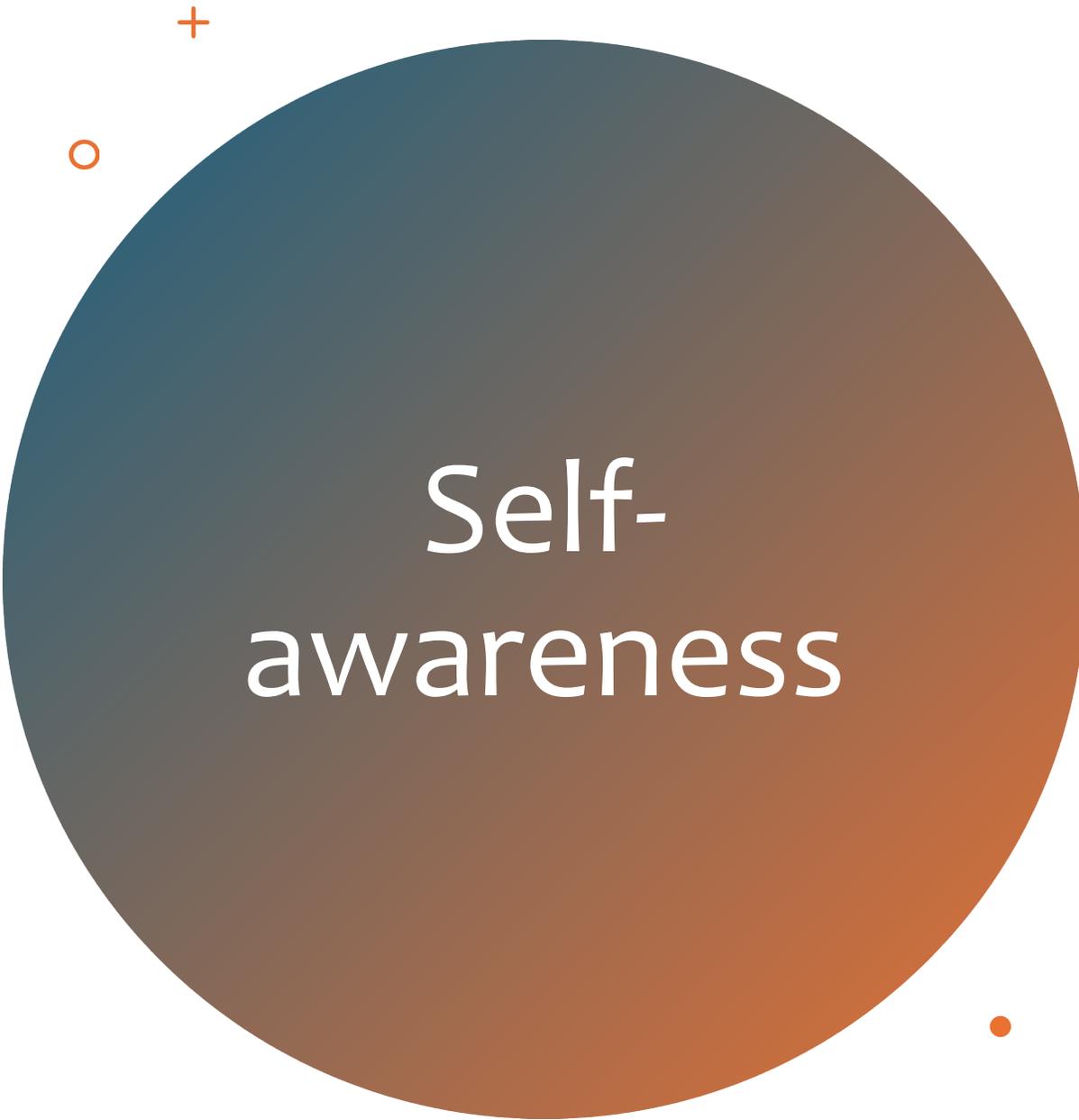


Professionalism

Always conduct yourself in a respectful manner towards your teammate and other court personnel.

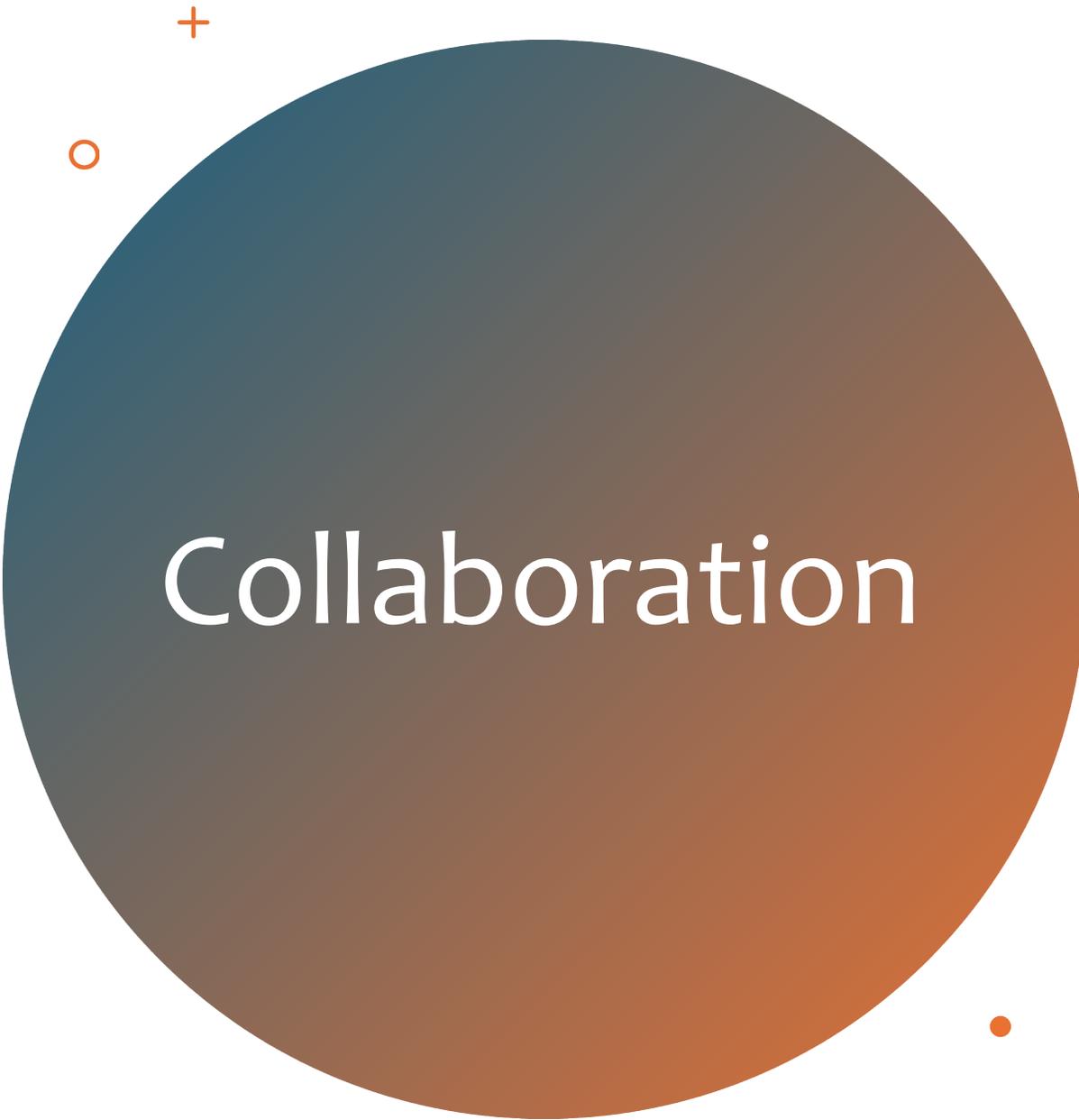
- Be reliable
- Be respectful
- Be punctual
- Be committed
- Be gracious
- Be discerning
- Be humble
- Be willing and cooperative

The Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated.



Self- awareness

- Be aware of your behavior
 - Be aware of your strengths
 - Be aware of your weaknesses
 - Be gracious
 - Be discerning
 - Be humble
 - Be aware of the baggage you bring
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Collaboration

- Be open to making and taking suggestions
 - Be committed to the interpretation
 - Be supportive of each other
 - Be attentive to each other's needs
 - Be willing to compromise
 - Be flexible
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Interpreting Phases

How can interpreters make teaming successful?

- Preparation phase
- Interpreting phase
- Debriefing phase



Preparation Phase

Teams work collaboratively to:

- Identify terminology, register, and any pertinent cultural references
- Determine target audience needs (equipment, LEP jurors, defendant, witnesses)
- Identify the regional variety of language
- Identify the number of LEPs
- Identify type of setting



Interpreting Phase



During the interpreting phase, teams should:

- Be engaged and ready to assist with terminology or other needs
 - Discuss linguistic choices
 - Resolve ambiguities
 - Ensure consistency in terminology usage (to the extent possible)
 - Monitor teammate's output (audibility and understandability)
 - Adjust to the setting
 - Ensure the equipment is working properly
 - Be committed to the end goal of the team producing an accurate and quality interpretation
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Debriefing

During the debriefing phase, teams should:

- Discuss challenges and how they might have been better resolved
 - Review linguistic choices used during session and try to reach a consensus on future terminology
 - Discuss more effective ways of teaming in the future
 - Prepare information to pass on to the next team of interpreters
 - Communicate any issues to coordinator
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Challenges and Considerations

- Coordinating schedules/ punctuality/
allocating time for meetings and review
- Managing differing opinions
- Ensuring clear communication
- Ego - Ego does not have a place in
teaming and both interpreters should
view each other as equals. One should
not be intimidated by the other. Nor
should one act in a manner that
intimidates the other.
- Balancing efficiency with thoroughness

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Challenges and Considerations

- Mismatched skills
- Conflicting styles (performance vs. function)
- Lack of preparation
- Power dynamics
- Lack of professionalism
- Disparity in familiarity with court/judge
- Structural/architectural issues

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Challenges Faced by the Team

- Limited preparation time
- Sudden topic shifts
- Technical failures
- High-stakes content
- Maintaining consistency across multiple interpreters in rotation

These challenges reaffirm the formal recognition of the support interpreter role.

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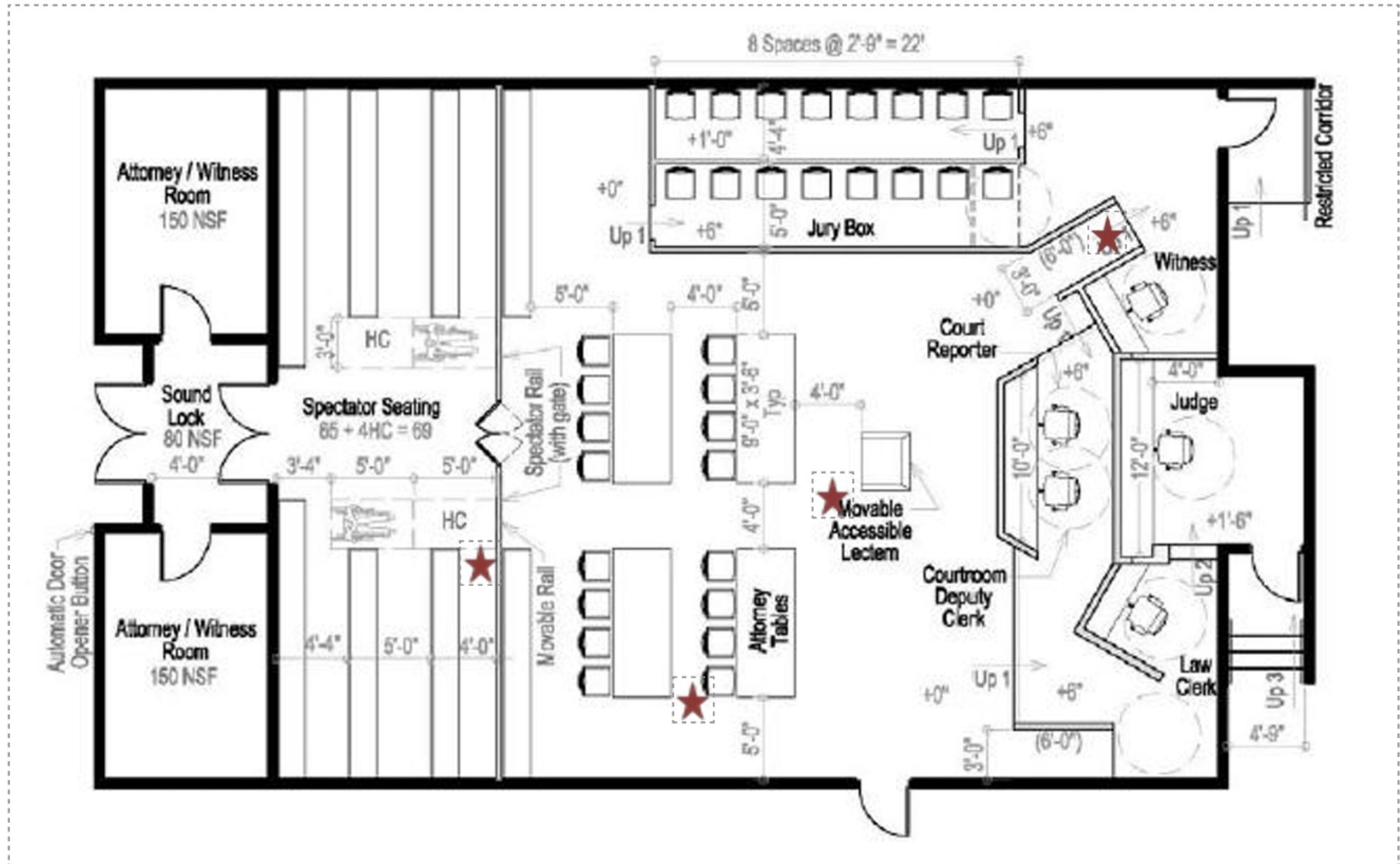
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Courtroom layout

- Not set up for effective team interpreting
- Courtroom design does not incorporate the practical and effective positioning of an interpreter workstation/equipment (audio/visual)

Federal District Judge Courtrooms



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Remote Interpreting

Not that much different...yet it is.

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Next steps?

- Buy in
- Formal training in team interpreting
- Recognition of the support interpreter as vital to the process
- Research on best practices for court environments and team interpreting
- Development of standards for team coordination in court settings
- Intentionality when scheduling interpreters



Rewards of Team Interpreting

- Higher interpretation quality
- Greater linguistic accuracy
- Reduced individual cognitive load
- Production of a more natural and idiomatic rendition
- Improved consistency across long or complex hearings/settings
- Enhanced professional development through peer learning



In order to be a good team member, you have to be willing to improve and learn.

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Parting thoughts...

A successful working team requires several qualities: sound communication abilities; trust and support; a shared frame of reference; the desire to improve; an ability to analyze the work; and, complementary skills and interest.

[Shaw, 1995, p. 265]

References

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