



Photo by Ulf Buchholz

## The Entrepreneurial Linguist

### My Lucky Break

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**Many say that** success in business depends on hard work, finding the right opportunities, being prepared when those opportunities arise, persistence, and a bit of luck. Of course, the harder we work and the more diligent we are, the luckier we tend to get, but I do not want to underestimate the importance of luck or of getting a lucky break. I remember my own lucky break very well.

In 1998, I was a starving international college student looking for the only job I was legally allowed to get: a part-time on-campus position. I heard about a Spanish translation position at *CLASS! Magazine*, a monthly bilingual newspaper for students in Clark County (where Las Vegas is located) with a circulation of around 30,000. It sounded very enticing, particularly the pay (\$10/hour), which was more than double most other jobs on campus. I had done a small amount of translation work in high school and had some samples, so I applied. Several dozen applicants interviewed with the

paper's editor, Sari Aizley, who had an office at the university, which allowed her to hire several work-study students to staff her successful but vastly underfunded paper. When I first met Sari, I knew we would be friends for life, and I was right. Getting that coveted position was my lucky break, and I was in for a treat.

The job entailed many more responsibilities than any 22-year-old college senior could dream of having, including doing high-level interviews. During my time at the paper, I wrote, translated, and edited articles and became the head judge for the newly created Spanish poetry contest. I was given free rein to create new ideas, challenge existing ones, and leave my mark on the paper's Spanish section, which had been named *Diganos*. I learned the importance of sticking to deadlines, purchased my first top-notch dictionaries, learned a thing or two about layout, and realized how much you can accomplish with a skeleton staff. I also picked up invaluable skills from Sari, who gently corrected my fledgling errors. There is no doubt that Sari is the best boss I ever had, and she became a true mentor throughout my tenure at the paper. I was only allowed to work there as a work-study student, and when I graduated the following year I had to tearfully part ways with *CLASS!* as an employee. However, I was elected to

the board in 1999, where I continued to serve proudly until 2011, when I had the unhappy task of signing the papers that dissolved the organization. Our beloved nonprofit, which at the height of its success raised upwards of \$250,000 each year at its black-tie events, did not survive the recession.

When I met Sari, I knew my future would be in translation. It was that very first position and that amazing boss who showed me that this would be a profession in which I could succeed. Following graduation, I was away from the industry for a few years as I secured a green card (which were not available for translators), but I knew I would be back. Sari was right there with me, writing letters of recommendation and, later, graciously serving as a reference whenever I needed it.

My lucky break was meeting Sari Aizley. What is yours? Be sure to keep your eyes and ears open. Your lucky break might not be as obvious as mine. Perhaps it will be the timid customer who calls about a birth certificate translation who ends up working at a Fortune 500 company and hires you as the exclusive translator. Or it might be a friend you have not thought of in a while. Or it might be the stranger in the supermarket whom you let ahead of you in line. Luck happens in mysterious ways, so be ready!

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