

WHO CARES IF ENGLISH ISN'T YOUR NATIVE TONGUE? WHO CARES IF IT IS?

I LOVE our diverse community of business writers! It's so inspiring to be part of an extraordinary group that spans the globe. We might be from different countries, but we're united in our determination to communicate powerfully in the world—and to support each other doing so.

I've heard from a lot of you for whom English is a second (or third or fourth) language. I know this can be an intimidating proposition. Well, guess what? I have another story for you.

My family and I lived in London for an incredible two years. One day, I was having coffee with a few British friends and one of my best friends, who's French. Everyone but me seemed so sophisticated. They all spoke French fluently. I do not, as you shall see. We were chatting about a trip I was planning to Provence, in the south of France.

"And where are you flying to, Quentin?" asked one of my friends in her lovely English voice.

We were flying to Lyon, which, I now know, is pronounced "Lee-ohn." Or something like that.

"Li-onz," I butchered, adding an extra letter and speaking in my Western United States twang.

The entire table sat in shocked silence. I realized I had committed a tremendous faux pas and revealed just how terribly an uneducated American I was. My French friend saved us. She smoothly interjected a comment about Provence and everyone, relieved, picked up the conversation as if nothing had happened.

Later, I thanked her for being so gracious. Her response? (Imagine this spoken in a gorgeous French accent):

"Oh, seriouzlee, Kwentin. 'Ave you 'eard their French? 'Onestly, it izz 'orrible! Besides, I 'ave an accent when I speak English! I make mistakes every day! Who cares?"

To our wonderful community of English and non-English learners, I say, "Who cares?" Carry on with your determination to improve and don't be afraid of mistakes! We all make them, especially in languages that we weren't born to. But, guess what? We make them in our native tongue, too. We can freeze, like we did over coffee that day, or we can just carry on, like my French friend (that's us in the picture. I'm in the American ball cap, of course).



By the way, when she calls me from across The Pond and says in her wonderful way, "'Allooooo, Kwentin," I always know it's her, and she's always upset that she still sounds French and can't fool me. It brings a smile to my face every time. Because, honestly, her accent is wonderful, and, at the end of the day, who cares if her English or my French isn't perfect?