

# Professional English, Inc.

*Speaking, Writing, and Cultural Training*

**Spring/Summer 2005**

## **Communicating with Stressed Employees**

By Dr. Maureen Archer

As if times of change within an organization aren't difficult enough, communication becomes increasingly challenging during these times. When employees become stressed, their ability to receive information and process it effectively is greatly diminished.

Stress produces the hormone *cortisol*, which causes many negative effects within an individual's brain. Essentially, cortisol

- shuts down neurons in the brain
- reduces the ability to store new information
- causes trouble in concentration
- triggers defensiveness
- increases short-term forgetfulness.

Notice that each of cortisol's effects hinders communication. Just when clear communication is vital for smooth transitions within an organization, stressed employees and managers must struggle through the effects of cortisol in order to convey information.

Here are a few actions to help stressed employees understand you more clearly:

1. Keep messages concise (focus on key words)
2. Write down important information
3. Follow up conversations with email messages
4. Be an active, empathic listener

Above all, please remain patient. Your employees and coworkers may need you to repeat information periodically as they work through the effects of cortisol.

**News Flash--** We are excited to announce that Professional English has been approved to be on the **GSA Schedule**. As a small, woman-owned business, we are looking forward to providing additional training to government organizations.

## **Spotlight On... Michelle Nolley**



In May, Michelle Nolley celebrated her three year anniversary with Professional English as our Office Manager and Executive Assistant.

Retiring after 21.5 years as a Supply Management Specialist for the Air Force, Michelle now uses her many talents to assist our clients and staff. Michelle oversees our day-to-day operations, coordinates financial transactions, updates and organizes databases and files, and maintains the office's various supplies and equipment.

Michelle has remained pleasant and highly efficient during these last few years of dramatic growth. When she started, we had only two trainers on staff. Now we have ten trainers, with the increased workload to match.

All of us at Professional English hope Michelle continues with us for at least 21.5 years.

## Making Your Message Stick

Whenever possible, use objects, charts, handouts or pictures to visually illustrate what you say. Research from the U.S. Public Health Service Audio Visual Facility found that when words alone are used, the immediate recall of the material is 70%. Three days later, the recall of an only-words message is just 10%.

However, when visuals are connected with the verbal, immediate recall is 85% and three days later, recall is still at 65%. So, be sure to “show” as well as “tell.”



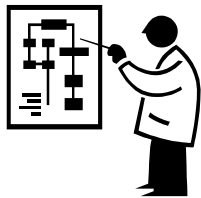
## Booth #3

Are you planning to attend the **Virginia SHRM Conference** on September 25-27? If you are, please stop by our booth and say hello. We would love to meet you!

## No More “Death By PowerPoint”

Your organization’s PowerPoint presentations do not have to be endless lists of boring data delivered in a droning monotone. Our two-day **Successful Presentation Skills** workshop explains how to create and deliver presentations that focus on the audience’s needs.

Research has shown that the standard PowerPoint condensed “data dump” format is often confusing to the audience. Our workshop explains the dangers of this format and reveals strategies for avoiding them.



Participants learn how to effectively create and deliver presentations, then they give a short presentation and receive individualized feedback.

Please contact Dr. Maureen Archer for more information about this customized workshop.

## Dear Dr. A:

“How can I tell employees to make small but important corrections without having them get really angry?”

**Deb Bruewel**  
Newport News, VA



Dear Deb:

Yes, giving constructive feedback to employees is a delicate matter. Done well, it can foster open communication and a more positive work environment. Done poorly, it can damage your ability to offer and receive information from coworkers, thus impacting workplace efficiency and quality.

Here are a few steps to follow when you need to modify an employee’s actions:

1. Speak with them in private. Even the smallest corrections made in front of peers may embarrass the employee.
2. Begin with genuine and specific praise about a different action. This shows the employee not only that you noticed the action but also that you are willing and able to give positive feedback.
3. Transition into discussing the action you need corrected by asking the employee about it. For example, “By the way, how has it been going with...?” If the employee only says “fine,” use I statements to make your point: “I’ve noticed that...”
4. Explain the specific actions the employee should take. Offering generalities often leads to frustration and incorrect assumptions.
5. Emphasize the benefits the corrected action will have for the employee, and offer to help the employee throughout the process.
7. Send an email message that restates the specifics of your discussion. Be sure to emphasize the benefits of the corrected action and to end the message with your offer to assist the employee .

Please send your communication questions to Dr. Maureen Archer ([archer@allenglishtraining.com](mailto:archer@allenglishtraining.com)).