



# Quick E-Tips



INTERNATIONAL  
ADVANTAGE

April-May 2004

## **WELCOME! Bienvenu! Bienvenido!**

Enjoy these 2 tips on *business culture and language learning*...

### **Culture/Communication Tip:**

*(This month I combine the culture and language tip, since this story addresses both aspects at once.)*

This month I worked with a client in the construction industry in Las Vegas who described a follow-through issue. Imagine the following situation:

Tom asks Miguel for some help. Tom explains that he needs Miguel to dig a hole in the front yard, bring the tree from the back yard and plant it in the hole. The hole should be big enough for the 24-inch box. Miguel nods in agreement.

Later, Tom comes back and is frustrated to find that the hole has been dug, but nothing more has been completed.

### **The question: What is the cause of this lack of follow-through?**

As I interviewed different Spanish speakers who work with this client, one contributing reason became clear: the language skills of many Spanish speakers were being overestimated.

English speakers were assuming that the worker did not choose to follow-through when a task was not completed. Instead, many times it was a question of language ability. In other words, English speakers spoke too quickly and Spanish speakers did not understand all of the directives. In the case above, Miguel understood the first directive and then could not understand the other directives and/or keep up with the list of steps when listening in English. Remember, the listeners must translate using one part of their brain, and then comprehend and remember using other parts of the brain!

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Why doesn't the Spanish speaker just ask you to repeat, if they don't understand? It's often a question of hierarchy (and a topic for another month).

Tips for communicating with speakers in their second (or third) language:

1. Cut your normal rate of speech in half.
2. Avoid slang.
3. Repeat yourself two or three times.
4. Use gestures as you speak to "show" what you mean. (If you want a hole dug, act it out as you say it.)
5. Ask the worker to repeat back what they understood (and then patiently listen).

6. Consider writing the steps down for him/her. Even if s/he cannot read it, s/he can ask someone who can, after you leave.
7. Be patient and kind. This builds your relationship that improves results.

Modifying your language as suggested above can improve your efficiency, as well as help you show respect to the people who are working with you and learning your language.

For those of you communicating in a weaker, second or third language:

- Assert your needs when speaking in someone else's language! Don't be afraid to interrupt the speaker and ask for slower speech or an explanation.
- Interrupting more than once (to request slower speaking) is also appropriate, if the speaking speed becomes difficult again. Being at the mercy of someone else's inattention requires assertiveness -- for the good of the relationship and the task at hand.

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To your continued success around the globe,  
*Lisa*

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