

Gaining the Confidence to Succeed.



By Martine A. Thomas

In a home in Winchester, a child turns on the water and watches as the tub overflows. He screams for his nanny, Grazziela Amaral. She comes running into the bathroom, befuddled at the puddle of water that surrounded her. Grazziela, a Brazilian newcomer, grabs the phone and frantically dials the telephone number of the man of the house. First, she hears, “hello,” and then other foreign words. She is frustrated. She wants to explain the soggy situation in his house but she only speaks Portuguese. She feels powerless and hands the phone to the little boy so he can explain the problem to his father.

Grazziela, an Everett resident, worked 10 hours a day and hardly had time for her new husband and baby girl. She handled all her responsibilities efficiently, and the family was pleased with her work. So, she felt that it was time for a raise but how could she ask for a raise when she didn’t speak English, she wondered many times. As the calendar days flipped by, Grazziela was seeing her family less and her need for a raise was getting stronger.

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“I wanted to say something about getting more money but I was afraid that I might not have the right words or that my bosses would say, ‘your English is not good enough for a raise.’” One thing for sure, says Grazziela, the incident in the bathroom didn’t drown her confidence, it helped build it. Learning English would bring the change she desired. In winter 2008, change arrived; her name was Catherine “Cathy” De Maggio.

Cathy is a tutor with North Shore Assembly of God’s Compassion Immigration Ministry located in Malden. The Ministry works with English At Large to help learners find tutors. Through the partnership, tutors are trained by English At Large and later matched with learners, who work in the communities that English At Large serves. The thought of tutoring non-native English learners has always entertained Cathy so when she learned that her church was sponsoring an ESL tutoring program, she quickly got involved.

For the first meeting, an uneasy Cathy walked into the church with her ESL textbooks ready to tackle English grammar; however Grazziela had her own agenda. She handed Cathy a list of things she had to master; the first item on her list: learn English to get a raise.

“At first we didn’t understand each other,” shared Cathy. “But, it all fell into place. We got to know each other and the more we talked, the more we understood each other.”

They talked about her job responsibilities, researched nanny salaries in the area, created dialogues, role played and listed all the good work Grazziela has done for the family.

By spring, Grazziela was ready to approach her boss for a raise. “At first I was nervous when I started to asked him,” describes the college graduate. “But, then, I remembered I knew English words. I knew what I wanted to say. I practiced with Cathy. He can only say no or he can only say yes.”

He said he would ask his wife. At the end, Grazziela didn’t get her raise, but her bosses did decrease her work hours for the same pay.

“Now, it is not dark when I get home, says Grazziela. I can spend more time with my family and I am happy that Kathy is my tutor. She is a good tutor and she helped me a lot.”