

## Administrative professionals event recognizes heavy lifters behind the scenes

By Eddy Ball

NIEHS continued its long-standing annual tradition of celebrating the contributions of its administrative professionals May 22 with a special presentation and ice cream social.

The star of the high-energy event was motivational speaker [Earl \(Dr. Earl\) Suttle, Ph.D.](http://earlsuttle.com/), who was so well received two years earlier (see [story](#)) that organizers invited him back for an encore.

### Linked Video

#### [Watch a video of Dr. Earl wowing the crowd at a 2014 inspiration talk in Atlanta \(02:14\)](#)

Showing their support for administrative professionals were NIEHS leaders Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., NIEHS and National Toxicology Program director; Deputy Director Rick Woychik, Ph.D.; and Associate Director of Management Joellen Austin. They were later joined by other members of leadership to serve ice cream and cake at the social.

### Dealing with sources of stress to improve quality of life

Suttle told the audience, “If you don’t laugh 14 times a day, you’re under-laughed.” As he punned his way through messages about self-worth and the importance of dealing constructively with stress, Suttle made sure those in the room got at least their daily dose of mirth during the two hours they spent together.

What Suttle had to say wasn’t new, but the way he presented his messages kept his listeners hanging on every word. “Your chance of dying is 100 percent,” he said, “and probably stress is going to do it.” With his candid discussion of stressors in his own life, Suttle helped others open up about their own challenges.

If the administrative professionals in the audience thought this talk would end in a conventional way, they were very wrong. In the last of many hands-on exercises, Suttle asked them to write a letter of love and commitment to themselves that included at least five ideas from a 20-point wellness and growth plan he had distributed.

Five volunteers shared their letters, which were addressed to themselves and signed with love. Participants left the workshop reenergized, holding a tangible reminder of their commitment to insights for making life, love, and work more rewarding.

(Eddy Ball is a contract writer for the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison)



*Central to Earl’s message is the idea that people need to trust in themselves and commit to working to make their lives at home and on the job more satisfying. His running conversation engaged the audience with rhythms borrowed from the evangelical church and the rapid-fire repartee of hip-hop. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

### Word play to surprise listeners and refresh basic truths

Suttle made sure he kept the audience engaged every step of the way, as he worked the floor and addressed individuals by their given names. He put familiar words, such as under and laughed, together in new ways, and inverted well-known sayings to make obvious truths refreshingly new again.

“Dress the way you want to be addressed,” he said of grooming for success. “You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression.”

Suttle used the same number play in his rule of four for first impressions. He told the group that it takes four seconds to make a first impression, four minutes for others to confirm it, and four years to undo a bad one.

“Learn to work harder on you than you do on your job,” Suttle said of an enlightened, self-interested approach to life and work. “Give yourselves to yourselves, before you give yourselves away.”



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Birnbaum opened the celebration by reminding participants that their contributions should never be taken for granted. "The scientists here at NIEHS could not do their work without the work that you do." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



2/7

Suttle's winning formula kept people moving, laughing, and interacting, often in team exercises. Above, left to right, Mary Jacobson, Benny Encarnacion, and Barbara Dietz worked as a group to brainstorm different working styles for team efforts. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



3/7

*Suttle helped people look at the strengths and weaknesses of their work styles. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



4/7

*Like many of her colleagues, Jenn Evans, center, managed to build up her reserve of daily smiles, as Suttle entertained while he taught. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



5/7

As the workshop progressed, Suttle created an accepting environment that encouraged Tonya Stonham, left, and Marva Wood to share details of their love and commitment letters. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



6/7

One of Suttle's tactics for empowering the audience involved showing them how they could do what seemed to be completely impossible. In this example, volunteers, from left, Peggy Mooring, Diana Callender, and Michelle Owens learned they could drive a plastic straw through a raw potato. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



7/7

*Birbaum, second from left, joined other members of leadership to cut cake and scoop ice cream for the administrative professionals. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

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([bruskec@niehs.nih.gov](mailto:bruskec@niehs.nih.gov))

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