Progressive Relaxation is a skill that teaches your body to relax. If you can relax your body during stressful times, then you remain calm, think clearly about the problem, and respond in a positive manner. These skills are expected in effective leaders in today’s workplace. When you can keep your body in a relaxed state by using progressive relaxation, then you will become angry less often and be able to let go of your anger very quickly when you do let stress get to you. The goal is to be able to let go of tension any time you feel it, anywhere in 30 seconds or less (Matthew McKay and Peter Rogers, The Anger Control Workbook, 2000). Progressive Relaxation is also a very helpful tool when you have sleep challenges.

Developing Your Progressive Relaxation Skills
In order to develop the habit of progressive relaxation and be able to relax at any time, anywhere, you will have to practice the progressive relaxation skills every day for a month. Pick a time of day to practice these skills where nothing (almost nothing) will interfere with your commitment to practice progressive relaxation. Remember these skills are essential to keeping yourself calm in the midst of challenging situations or to learning how to let go of your anger. So select one of the tools below to assist you in learning these skills. Eventually, you will be able to do it on your own without any aids.

A free Tape…Download To Your Computer
Austin Counseling and Mental Health Center at University of Texas produced a progressive relaxation program developed by Maria Craig and Lana Harder, Program Development Staff. This program includes instructions on how to tense and relax your muscles and visualizations to assist you in visualizing a relaxing place. To download to your computer use this link: http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html

Additional Progressive Relaxation Links
www.umm.edu/sleep/relax-tech.htm is product of the University of Maryland Medical Center and focuses on using progressive relaxation for people who are having difficulty sleeping. This site has text describing progressive relaxation that you could read into a tape and have your voice be the voice you listen to. This could be helpful as you will eventually need to listen to your own voice tell you to let go and relax in the midst of difficult situations.

www.guidetopsychology.com/pmr.htm is produced by the University of Chicago Press and provides some good descriptions of progressive relaxation and also connects the need to deep breathe as you tense a muscle group and exhale as you let go of the muscle group.

Written Description
The process of relaxation is the same for each muscle group. First you focus in your mind the muscle group you will tense, then inhale deeply and squeeze the muscle group as hard as you can for 5-8 seconds and exhale slowly as you release the tension in your muscle group. Starting from your toes or your head, you will move progressively through each muscle group using the process described above. Do not tense areas of physical pain, injury, or recent surgery. Remove contact lenses.

The description of progressive relaxation below is taken directly from McKay and Roger’s The Anger Control Workbook pages 27-28.
1. Get into a comfortable seated position and give your body a chance to relax. Allow yourself to experience a comfortable feeling of heaviness. Now, start at the bottom and, stretching your legs out, point your toes (like a ballerina) away from your body, noting the tension in your ankles. Now point your toes to head, creating tension in your calves. Let your feet fall to the floor, take a deep breath, and relax.

2. Now tighten your buttocks (remember tight bottom), and then your thighs by pressing down on your heels as hard as you can. Hold the tension (five to seven seconds), then let go, take a deep breath, and relax.

3. Take a deep breath, filling up your lungs completely, and flex your chest muscles. Now tighten your stomach muscles, creating, in effect, a coat of armor. Hold, then exhale, and relax.

4. Now arch your back, as though it were a bow (remember bow and arrow). Avoid straining and keep the rest of your body as relaxed as possible. Notice the tension beginning down at your coccyx (tailbone), and moving all the way up your spine to your neck. Hold as long as possible, then slump forward, take a deep breath, and relax.

5. Bend your elbows and tense your forearms and biceps in the classic Charles Atlas pose. Clench your fists at the same time. Tense these muscles until they feel taut. Then, straighten out your arms, shake out your hands, take a deep breath, and relax.

6. Now hunch your shoulders and pull your head in like a turtle. Press your chin against your chest, tightening your throat. Experience this uncomfortable sensation, then drop your shoulders and allow your head to fall forward. Now, slowly and carefully, roll your head to the side and back of your neck. Reverse direction and roll your head the other way. Take a deep breath, and allow your neck and shoulders to relax.

7. Continue to move your attention upwards toward your head and face. First, make a frown by wrinkling up your forehead (like a walnut) as tightly as you can. Next, scrunch up your eyes, flare your nostrils, clench your jaw (not so hard that you’ll crack a tooth). Finally, compress your lips into a tight 0. Pull your lips as tight as a miser’s purse strings. In short, make an ugly face. Hold it, tighter and tighter. Then relax and let go. Now, take a deep breath, relax your lips, and blow out forcefully.

8. Now go back mentally over the entire procedure, and feel the relaxation in your feet, ankles, calves, back, and chest. As you let go, more and more, the relaxation deepens in your neck, shoulders, arms, and hands. Go deeper and deeper into being relaxed. Finally, feel the relaxation extend to your head and face, your jaw hanging loose and your lips slightly parted.

9. If some tension persists in a specific part of your body, simply return your focus to that spot. Increase the tension, hold it, take a deep breath, and then relax. And let go.

In order to achieve deep muscle relaxation quickly, remember key words in the list below. Tense muscle groups for five to seven seconds, then relax for fifteen seconds.

- Toes like a ballerina
- Toes to head
- Tight bottom
- Coat of armor
- Bow and arrow
- Charles Atlas
- Turtle
- Walnut
- Miser’s purse
- Ugly face