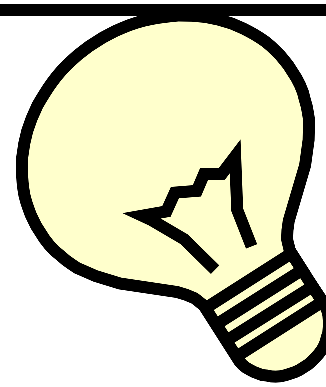

The Illuminator

Shedding Light on the HR World

4-2011 Article Directory

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This publication is issued to ensure the Fort Benning commanders, managers, supervisors, and employees are kept informed of employment and staffing issues. Monthly issuances will contain updated information on specific employment topics (i.e., compensation, recruiting procedures, travel entitlements, classification issues, the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE) civilian transition, etc.).

This newsletter is an apercu of articles written by CPAC staff [members] as well as information excerpted from various sources which include, but is not limited to, the Government Executive Newsletter, FedWEEK, the Federal Manager's Daily Report, FEDSmith, and the ABC-C Newsletter.

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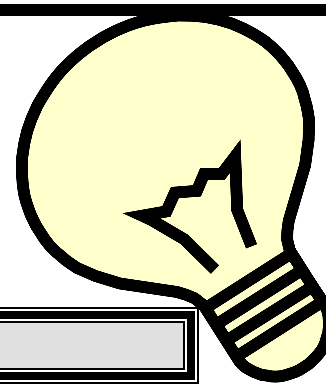

Retirement, Life/Health Insurance, TSP, Social Security and Such

Investing in the TSP: Which Strategy will you Follow? The Thrift Saving Plan (TSP) is meant for government employees, including civil service employees and those serving in the uniformed services, to have a retirement saving plan set into motion. A TSP account acts much like a 401(k) does in the private sector. It offers tax deferment as well as a chance to have your employer match your contributions for many federal employees.

There are different TSP investment strategies that you could consider, but before you decide exactly what you want to do with the contributions you make, you should know about the available options that you have for investing. TSP offers five different types of funds that you can invest in and each is signified with a different letter. Here is what the letters are and what they mean:

G Fund: This fund is a government securities fund and it is comprised of securities that are not available to the general public. Considered the least risky of all the available TSP funds, the G Fund is also the default fund that your money will be invested into if you make no election at all.

F Fund: This fund is a fixed income fund. It is also considered to be one of the less risky funds available and it invested in BlackRock’s US Debt Index Fund, which tracks the Barclays Capital Aggregate Bond Index.

C Fund: This fund is the common stock fund. This fund invests in BlackRock’s Equity Index Fund, which tracks the S&P 500 Index Fund.

S Fund: This fund is the small capitalization stock fund. This fund invests in BlackRock’s Extended Market Index Fund, which tracks the Dow Jones US Completion TSP Index.

I Fund: This fund is the international stock fund. This fund invests in BlackRock’s EAFE index fund, which tracks the MSCI EAFE Index.

Obviously, the three stock funds will have more risk than the other two will, but where there is more potential for risk, there is also more potential for reward. So, you have to decide what is best for your particular circumstances.

Again, if you do not elect to do anything specific with your TSP contributions, then they will automatically be placed in the G-Fund and all your contributions will go in. So, you do need to have some sort of investment strategy if you wish to make the most of your savings.

The first thing to consider when coming up with your TSP investment strategy is how tolerable are you to risk? If you are on the younger side, then you have more time in which you can take more of a risk. However, if you are closer to retirement age, then you may not wish to take a tremendous amount of risk. So, it has to be a good blend.

What you can always do is lend a little more of your contributions to the risk side or safe side depending on what you want to accomplish and how close to retirement you are. If you are looking for large returns, then you have to be willing to take on some risk. If you have a lot of time before retirement and you don’t mind a little risk then go 60 percent in one or more of the stock funds and then put the other 40 percent in tone of the two ‘safe’ funds. If you want more safety and you are close to retirement, then reverse the percentages.

Keep in mind that you can adjust your percentages whenever you want to so if you feel that the stock market will do better in the near term, you can shift more of your savings into the funds that will be stock heavy. If you feel the stock market will suffer in the short term then you may want to shift to the funds that do not include stocks.

Another strategy you can employ is the equal contribution strategy. This will be where you take your total contribution and chop it up into five equal parts and then invest equally in each available fund. This will give you the most amount of asset allocation possible and give you a level of safety as well as a level of potential risk/reward. It is important to note, that with this strategy you will be invested slightly more towards the side of risk as 60 percent of your money will be going into the stock funds as opposed to only 40 percent going into the non-stock funds.

If all of this sounds like it may be too much for you to handle, then you can always elect to participate in the Lifecycle Fund series. This was introduced in 2005 to aid those who simply didn’t have the time or the interest to keep up with their TSP.

Basically, the Lifecycle Fund is where your money gets invested for you by a professional according to how close you are to retirement. The further away from retirement you are, the more your money is put in funds that will have a better chance of great appreciation, but will also carry a greater risk. As you get closer to your retirement age, your money will then be shifted and invested into the funds that offer far less of a return, but also, far less of a risk. So, the idea is, you retire with the most amount of money possible, all without having to watch your TSP day in and day out.

Of course the worst possible TSP investment strategy that you can have is none at all.

This is your money and you have to make it work hard for you. Your nest egg will not grow itself, but rather needs to be built up by you over a long period of time.

If you are not willing to take the time to come up with your own TSP investment strategy then take advantage of the fact that you have a system in place that will do the hard work for you. Whatever you do, take action now.

Women, Take Control of Your Financial Future. This article was written by Sherri Goss, CFP®, author of Women and Money, Building Confidence ~ Creating Security. Any references to "I" or "me" pertain to her as the author.

Do you know that only 91 years ago, women gained the right to vote? And, only 48 years ago in 1963, the Equal Pay Act was passed? At that time, full-time working women were paid 59 cents on average for every dollar paid to men.

It is amazing to me that women have made such great progress in so many areas, yet they come to me and confess they feel "stupid" when it comes to money. Of course they are not stupid, but that is how they feel. I believe this is simply a result of lack of experience, and dependence on others when it comes to making financial decisions.

I believe this lack of financial confidence is a big problem because women live, on average, seven years longer than men, and the average age of most widows is 56. Plus, women are the primary caregivers in most households, meaning they spend less time working, saving, and earning pensions and Social Security benefits. Women truly do face unique financial issues.

I meet a lot of widows who depended on their husbands to make all the financial decisions in the household. Now, they are suddenly responsible for everything from paying the bills, to making investment decisions, to filing tax returns. Many are completely overwhelmed by the learning curve they face.

Based on the women I meet, I see five key areas where women need to become more involved when it comes to money:

Women need to build financial confidence. I recommend tracking spending (all spending, no matter how it is done) for 30 days, then evaluating where your money is going. Not only will this help you understand what it takes to you're your household, but you will gain a new sense of awareness when it comes to spending. Next, I suggest having a plan to be debt free before retirement. Once you've tracked your spending for 30 days, you can determine whether spending should be decreased in one area to pay off debt faster or to increase savings.

Women need the knowledge about how to make smart financial decisions. This involves understanding you credit score, knowing what your credit reports look like, and learning how to make good decisions whether you're buying a house or using a credit card. The only website to visit for free credit reports is www.annualcreditreport.com. From this site you can download your credit reports from each of the three major credit bureaus. You can learn about credit scores at www.myfico.com, and you can evaluate current of future debt obligations via the free financial calculators at www.bankrate.com.

Women need to understand how relationships are impacted by money. I consistently see women putting everyone else ahead of themselves financially (helping the kids or the grandkids) at the detriment of their own retirement. Think about how you make financial decisions when if comes to friends and family, and evaluate whether you need to make some changes. Are there any situations where others are more dependent on you, financially, than they should be? Is your "help" keeping them from taking responsibility, or allowing them to avoid a problem?

Women need a plan for retirement, and need to know what sources of income they will have, how long this income will last, and whether this income can sustain their lifestyle for the long run. Project out into the future what your income will look like, considering all sources. Compare this to the number you reached after tracking your spending for 30 days. Is your projected income enough to meet your cash flow needs? Next, consider the fact that inflation will increase future expenses. For example, if you retire at age 60 and need $3,000 per month to fund your lifestyle, and inflation grows at 5% annually, you will need about $6,000 per month by age 75. Will your income increase with inflation, or do you need to spend less in retirement to plan for inflation?

Women need to be prepared for the unknown. If you are dependent on a partner for income, what will happen if they lose their job, are disabled, need long-term care, or die? Planning from a "worst case scenario" perspective can assure that you can handle what life brings. If your spouse will have a pension, you may need to consider the survivor options. If your spouse will receive Social Security benefits and you will not, you need to consider what would happen if you lost this income to your household. None of us likes to think about these types of scenarios, but I find that the more we do think through them, and discuss them, and plan for them, the easier they get to deal with.

If you need to do some work in any of these five areas, I encourage you to pick the most critical area and take action within the next couple of days. It is very easy to put this work off until "later," but all of these issues are critical to your future financial health. The time to act is now.

Your Aging Parents and the Tax Season: A Getting-Started Guide. With the first baby boomers reaching retirement age, many adult children are now or will soon be caring for elderly parents and family members. The U.S. Census Bureau tells us that the retired and retiring populations are growing and those born between 1945 and 1964 are now tasked with the care of the previous generation.

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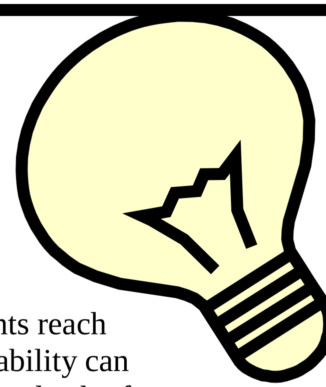

From managing healthcare costs to determining a final resting place, as parents reach their twilight years responsibility for their well-being, health and financial stability can increase on their children. All too often, these concerns are exacerbated by the death of one parent, leaving the surviving spouse in a state of confusion or despair.

Tax season is an ideal time of year to help your parents assess their financials. With the right preparation, what might seem an overwhelming process of collecting paperwork and scouring for deductions can become relatively pain-free.

Here, a getting-started guide to helping your elderly parents in tax prep:

“Do My Parents Even Need to File?”

According to the Tax Policy Center, more than half of all seniors in the U.S. won’t have to file income tax returns this year because their incomes are under the IRS filing requirements. To help your parent decide, the first step is taking a look at their gross income. If their “gross income” is below the IRS filing limits, they do not have to file a federal tax return. Gross income includes all the income received that is not exempt from tax, but does include Social Security benefits.

For a single person over the age of 65, the ceiling for gross income is $10,750. For a married couple, $20,900.

However, in helping your parents make the decision of whether or not to file, be aware that special financial situations make filing a requirement, even if the gross income falls below the IRS threshhold. For example, net earnings from self-employment of $400 or more or any special taxes owed to the IRS such as IRA tax penalties might make filing necessary. At www.doyouneedtofile.info, the IRS offers a list of likely financial situations and a series of questions that will help you determine whether your parent is required to file, or, if they’re not required, when filing might be beneficial.

Once your parent has decided to file, choosing how can be just as critical—and potentially as confusing. Single? Married filing jointly or separately? Particularly in the case of a newly widowed parent, the lines can be blurry. But Tariq Shafi, a CPA and professor of accounting at Stratford University, says it’s important to know that in the year of the death of one spouse, the surviving parent can file a joint return to receive all deductions for the deceased spouse, provided they have not remarried. This can be critical, he says, for elderly parents who are faced with financial strain after the loss of their partner.

Where to Begin

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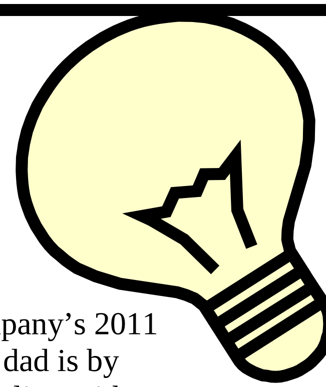


Greg Rosica, tax partner at Ernst & Young and one of the authors of the company's 2011 tax guide, says that the best place to start when preparing taxes for mom and dad is by looking at a copy of last year's tax filing. "Often children find themselves dealing with elderly parents who may not recall everything that went on in the year so it falls on the child to gather up the pieces," he says. Last year's filing will help to paint the picture of their taxable and untaxable income as well as what forms need to be located prior to filing.

Be on the lookout for: Social Security income paperwork and investment or retirement accounts. Most of these filings take the form of IRS 1099 and should arrive in the mail, although Rosica notes that some people elect to receive them electronically. If that is the case, locating passwords to email accounts can be critical, especially in the event of the parent who was previously responsible for tax prep passing away.

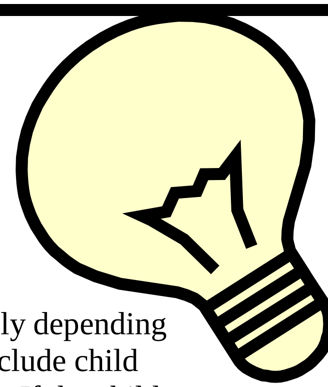
Two additional resources to seek out are IRS 2120 and IRS publication 501—which explains exemptions, standard deductions and filing information in what CPA Jim Schnell, a partner at Mengel, Metzger Barr & Co. in Rochester, describes as layman's terms. "It's not a tax-based manual," he says, "but it is an excellent resource for common tax issues surrounding senior citizens."

In addition to helping seniors and their adult children evaluate their tax situations, publication 501 also includes information regarding support and declarations of dependency. One often-overlooked but growing trend in senior and taxes is the role-reversal that is taking place as the baby boom generation increasingly becomes responsible for the financial support of their elderly parents. Publication 501 includes a worksheet for determining support that can help families decide if this is the most beneficial tax route for both children and parents.

Deductions and Exemptions

"Understanding [elderly parents'] situation regarding deductions, credits, exemptions and how they apply can be incredibly confusing," says Rosica. Because they are often based on age, income, types of income and more, they often change each year. He advises clients to rely on a tax professional to know the ins and outs: "No discussion can replace going through the checklist for the eligibility."

Still, there are several key tax breaks for seniors to be aware of. The elderly or disabled credit is the most common. "At the end of the day this credit ends up being a maximum of about $1,125 and it's a direct function of a person's age or disability. The individual must be either over 65 or fully disabled." It's important to remember that it's a credit that each person is entitled to—so for two parents filing, each can receive the credit.



The Earned Income Credit, though less common for senior citizens, may apply depending on living situations as there is no age restrictions. Other situational credits include child or dependent care credits of the senior cares for a grandchild or other relative. If the child tax credit applies, Rosica says that the senior may also be eligible for the education credit provided they are responsible for tuition fees.

Shafi adds that the green tax credit is often an easy credit for senior citizens. Because many elderly parents have lived in their homes for years, he says, they tend to be much older homes—and tend to require repairs. By ensuring those repairs are energy efficient, they can become eligible for what Shafi calls a “goody” of a tax credit. “If they can install energy efficient improvements, air conditioners, furnaces, solar things, then they can get a very good tax credit of up to $1,500 dollars.”

“Bottom line,” concludes Shafi, is that while you can—and should—help your parents prepare for tax season, the most important rule is to remember is: you’re no expert. “Each year people lose billions and billions of dollars for not claiming all of the credits and deductions they are entitled to.”

While adult sons and daughters have the best intentions, they unfortunately may not be all that familiar with the ever-changing tax laws. “Remember the most recent lame duck session,” he advises. “So many items were pushed through at the last minute that have affected tax regulation this year. It’s a very dangerous time to prepare your own taxes right now. And that applies for your loved ones as well.”

Please refer questions to your financial advisor, tax attorney, or investment broker. Expertise in this arena is not readily available among CPAC staff members.

FEHB Children’s Coverage Clarified. OPM has sent guidance to agencies on the change in law that took effect at the start of this year extending children's FEHB eligibility up to age 26. It notes that to include a newly eligible child in the coverage, an enrollee who has self-only coverage must switch to self-and-family coverage. It is up to the enrollee to make that decision, apart from where court order requires family coverage. Nor can an enrollee remove a child from self-and-family enrollment except by switching to self-only coverage. Also, children under age 26 who are federal employees themselves are covered under a parent's FEHB family policy unless the parent is in a health maintenance organization plan and the adult child lives outside its coverage area, or unless the adult child has a spouse and/or child or children of his or her own for whom the child wishes to get coverage. Unless one of those exceptions applies, a federally employed adult child covered by a parent's family coverage cannot enroll in FEHB on his or her own account until turning age 26, at which point enrollment will be allowed, even outside an open season, as a qualifying life event. The guidance also describes more restrictive policies applying to foster children.

Stop Saving so Much Money for Retirement. Recently, Christine Fahlund, the financial planning director at mutual fund company T. Rowe Price circulated what you'd have to call a pretty novel retirement planning strategy for boomers. Stop saving. Instead, spend the money on cruises and other indulgences until you retire. Do this, her calculations showed, and you'll end up with 70 percent more income in retirement than someone who saves like crazy for the rest of his or her career.

Why, yes, there IS a catch: You have to work until age 70. Fahlund contrasts the results of that tactic with those of a hard-saving boomer couple who leave the workforce as soon as they become eligible for Social Security at age 62. You can see how it works out in the chart below. Maybe it's cheating to compare retiring at 62 to slaving away until 70, but Fahlund's point is, it all depends on how you define slaving.

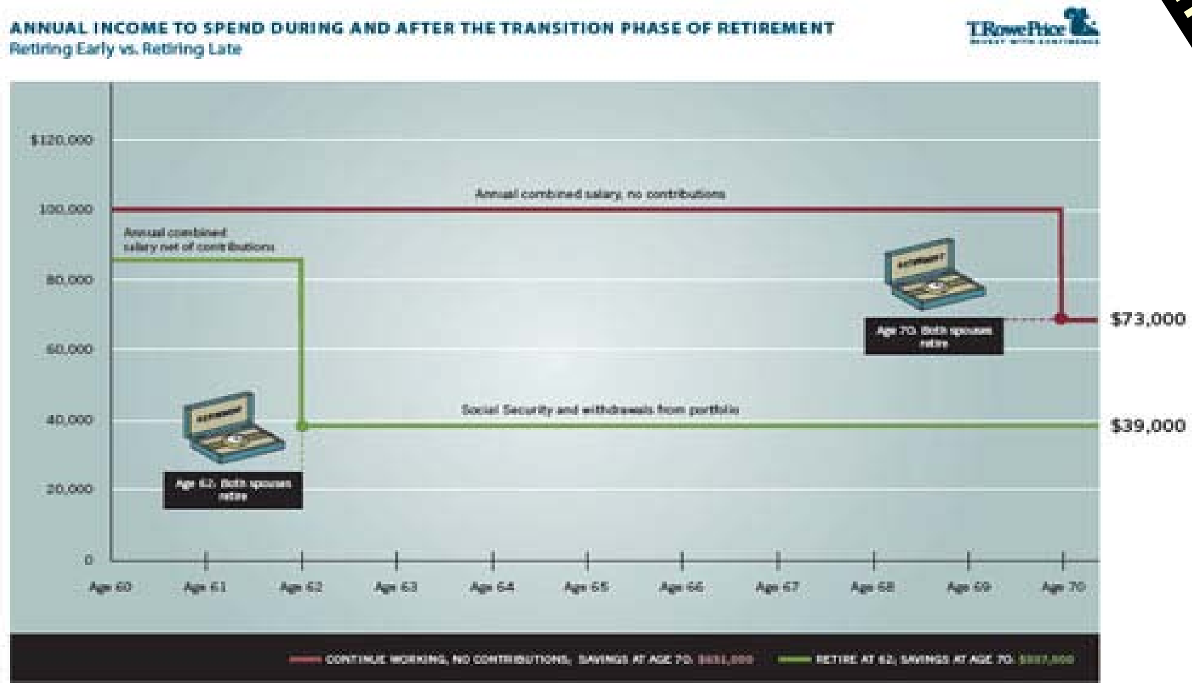
I give her credit. Fahlund's approach addresses one of the key dilemmas anyone faces in planning for financial independence. You fix a lot of retirement financing issues if you stay with your job until 70. CBS MoneyWatch writers like Charlie Farrell, Carla Fried and Steve Vernon have written extensively about the powerful financial upside of working longer. Among other things:

• Retiring at 70 rather than 62 means you have to support yourself without a paycheck for eight fewer years. That means that, for same size nest egg, you get more income.

•Your Social Security benefit grows every year you delaying claiming. For a top earner, the maximum Social Security benefit grows from $21,600 a year for someone retiring at 62 to $38,300 at 70. Claiming that fatter age-70 benefit means you have to provide less of your retirement income out of your own savings.

•You have eight more years to save and your savings have eight more years to grow.

Only problem is, who wants to work until 70? It sounds like the definition of retirement planning failure, not success. Fahlund's strategy finesses the problem by, essentially, inviting you to start enjoying "retirement" before you leave work. You trade the dream of leaving work in your early 60s for the extra cash flow of staying on the job. To make the eight extra years of servitude palatable, you spend the money you had been saving for retirement.



Spouses 1 and 2, each age 60, have a combined salary of $100,000, assumed to increase 3% annually. Salary of Spouse 1 is $55,000; salary of Spouse 2 is $45,000. Income is pretax, in current dollars, assuming a 3% discount rate. Together the spouses have saved $450,000 in tax-deferred retirement accounts, earning 7% annually. In Scenario One both spouses plan to remain employed full time until age 70 when they will retire and live off of Social Security and withdrawals from their investments. They are not eligible for any employer matches and do not plan to contribute further to their retirement plan accounts. At age 70 they intend to withdraw 4.5% of their balance, increasing that dollar amount 3% annually for inflation. Social Security estimates were derived using the SSA website's Quick Calculator (http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OACT/quickcalc/index.html), with benefits quoted in "today's dollars". In Scenario Two, the assumptions are identical except that both spouses remain employed until age 62 when they begin taking Social Security and withdrawals from their investment portfolio. In the first year they withdraw 3.5% of their portfolio balance, increasing the dollar amount 3% annually for inflation. Unlike Scenario One, they do contribute 15% to their retirement accounts while they are still employed, at ages 60 and 61.

Okay: You get the concept of living it up in your 60s. But how does not saving leave you with more income than saving? A lot of is due to the aforementioned benefits of delayed retirement: The age-70 retirees have to stretch their nest egg over eight fewer years of life, and they collect a bigger Social Security benefit. But a lot of it also comes from earnings on savings they already had. Fahlund's illustration assumes both couples hit age 60 with $450,000 in the pot. Yes, the hard-saving couple hit age 62 with more in the bank. But then they have to start drawing on their savings to cover living expenses. Meanwhile, the stay-at-work couple are able to their nest egg grow another eight years (in Fahlund's example at 7% annually). By the time they hit 70, they have much more in their nest egg than the early retirees, even though they didn't save a penny of their salaries for the past decade.

Can you do this? Yes. Will it work out for you the way it does in Fahlund's illustration? Don't count on it. The model is highly dependent on the return over those years you continue working but not saving. What if, instead of getting 7% you get 2.8%, the rate of return on 7-year Treasury bonds now?

More important, what if you start spending your savings on cruises and spa vacations at 62, as the delayed retirees do in Fahlund's illustration, and the boss cans you at 64? Some

40% of retirees never make it to their intended retirement age because of illness or layoff — and their intended retirement age is usually 65, let alone 70.

You can't control the return on your retirement stash, and you can't necessarily control when you get to call it quits. Fahlund's strategy is psychologically astute, in that it blends the security of working longer with the pleasures of enjoying life while you're still young enough to enjoy it. But in the end, Fahlund's plan depends on two things that are outside your control: Market returns and the length of your career. To stop saving in the hope that you won't need to draw on your nest egg until you're in your eighth decade is a gamble.

What's the takeaway? There's no way around the fact that the best retirement strategy is a balance between three sound but contradictory pieces of advice. Work as long as you can. Save like you'll be on your own tomorrow. Live each day like it could be your last.

What's the "Return" on your Social Security Taxes? Whether you believe it or not, Social Security is going to be a part of your future, and when the time comes, you'll be glad you've got it. Yes, our national pension system has some well-known fiscal problems, but Uncle Sam can solve them by any number of bearable cost-cutting and/or tax-raising solutions before the money runs out. The question remains, though: Is it worth it? Will the benefits you'd receive under current law compensate you for the career's worth of taxes you'll have paid into the system? The latest answer, generated by a new Urban Institute Social Security study, is: yes. (Surprised?) As far as it's possible to project, Social Security and Medicare give you a positive return on your tax "investment" even after inflation.

That question has been chewed over through the years with generally less upbeat answers. Uncle Sam, for example, does its own Social Security money's worth calculation and generally shows that the payoff for being a loyal Security Security taxpayer shrinks a lot with each succeeding cohort. The big difference is that the Urban Institute study, conducted by Eugene Steurle and Stephanie Rennane, adds in Medicare. That, it turns out, has been a very good deal, in part because all taxpayers (not just Social Security payroll taxpayers) pick up so much of the cost.

A random walk through the Urban Institute numbers below show that Social Security definitely plays favorites. Ladies, you make out better than men, tax dollar for tax dollar, because a) you are more likely to make it to retirement and live longer once you get there; b) you're more likely to collect widow's benefits and c) you're not stuck with the benefit you've earned from working; you're also entitled to the half your husband's benefit if that turns out to be higher. (The benefit, of course, is available to the lower-earning spouse regardless of gender, but let's face it, that's usually the woman.)

How's it shake out? If you retired last year as an average wage-earning man, for example, you could expect a lifetime benefit worth $417,000 in today's dollars on $345,000 in taxes. If you were a woman with the same work history, you could expect to collect $464,000 on the same taxes.

Social Security and Expected[1] Medicare Benefits (in 2010 dollars)

Single man earning the average wage ($43,100 in 2010 dollars)

If you turn 65 in…	Annual Social Security benefits	Lifetime Social Security benefits	Lifetime Medicare benefits	**Total benefits received over a lifetime**	Lifetime Social Security (OASDI) taxes	Lifetime Medicare taxes	**Total Social Security & Medicare taxes paid**
1960	$9,200	$111,000	$14,000	**$125,000**	$17,600	$0	**$17,600**
1980	$14,900	$200,000	$57,000	**$257,000**	$95,000	$7,800	**$102,800**
2010	$17,400	$256,000	$161,000	**$417,000**	$290,000	$55,000	**$345,000**
2030	$19,700	$318,000	$251,000	**$569,000**	$392,000	$84,000	**$476,000**

Single woman earning the average wage ($43,100 in 2010)

If you turn 65 in…	Annual Social Security benefits	Lifetime Social Security benefits	Lifetime Medicare benefits	**Total benefits received over a lifetime**	Lifetime Social Security (OASDI) taxes	Lifetime Medicare taxes	**Total Social Security & Medicare taxes paid**
1960	$9,200	$145,000	$21,500	**$166,500**	$17,600	$0	**$17,600**
1980	$14,900	$246,000	$74,800	**$320,800**	$95,000	$7,800	**$102,800**
2010	$17,400	$283,000	$181,000	**$464,000**	$290,000	$55,000	**$345,000**
2030	$19,700	$348,000	$279,000	**$627,000**	$392,000	$84,000	**$476,000**

But of course, ladies, the system does find a way to stick it to you nonetheless, as this Boston College study of women and social security points out. Because you qualify for a spousal benefit whether you work or not, the taxes you pay if you do work are totally wasted if don't earn enough to qualify for higher benefits on your own. As a result, there's a high implicit tax on your decision to work or not.

Social Security and Expected[1] Medicare Benefits (in 2010 dollars)

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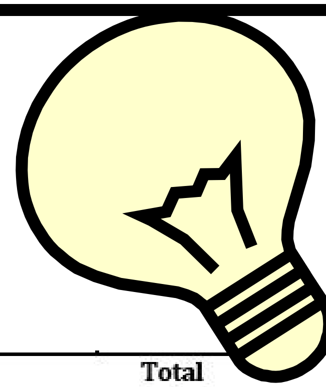
If you turn 65 in...	Annual Social Security benefits	Lifetime Social Security benefits	Lifetime Medicare benefits	**Total benefits received over a lifetime**	Lifetime Social Security (OASDI) taxes	Lifetime Medicare taxes	**Total Social Security & Medicare taxes paid**
1960	$9,200	$145,000	$21,500	**$166,500**	$17,600	$0	**$17,600**
1980	$14,900	$246,000	$74,800	**$320,800**	$95,000	$7,800	**$102,800**
2010	$17,400	$283,000	$181,000	**$464,000**	$290,000	$55,000	**$345,000**
2030	$19,700	$348,000	$279,000	**$627,000**	$392,000	$84,000	**$476,000**

Other winners? Social Security is strongly tilted in favor of married couples with single breadwinners, as you can see below, just as you'd expect of a system that launched in 1935. The other winners, stated before but borne out the new Urban Institute study, are baby boomers and their parents. The Social Security payoff tends to decline for later generations. But then, we already knew that the boomers' kids were in for it anyway, didn't we?



The Illuminator

4-2011

One-earner couple earning the average wage ($43,100 in 2010)

If you turn 65 in...	Annual Social Security benefits	Lifetime Social Security benefits	Lifetime Medicare benefits	**Total benefits received over a lifetime**	Lifetime Social Security (OASDI) taxes	Lifetime Medicare taxes	**Total Social Security & Medicare taxes paid**
1960	$13,700	$207,000	$35,000	**$242,000**	$17,600	$0	**$17,600**
1980	$22,400	$365,000	$132,000	**$497,000**	$95,000	$7,800	**$102,800**
2010	$26,000	$435,000	$343,000	**$778,000**	$290,000	$55,000	**$345,000**
2030	$29,500	$534,000	$530,000	**$1,064,000**	$392,000	$84,000	**$476,000**

Two-earner couple with one spouse earning an average wage ($43,100 in 2010) and one earning a low wage ($19,400 in 2010)

If you turn 65 in...	Annual Social Security benefits	Lifetime Social Security benefits	Lifetime Medicare benefits	**Total benefits received over a lifetime**	Lifetime Social Security (OASDI) taxes	Lifetime Medicare taxes	**Total Social Security & Medicare taxes paid**
1960	$15,300	$220,000	$35,000	**$255,000**	$25,500	$0	**$25,500**
1980	$23,900	$381,000	$132,000	**$513,000**	$137,000	$11,300	**$148,300**
2010	$29,900	$457,000	$343,000	**$800,000**	$421,000	$79,000	**$500,000**
2030	$36,600	$562,000	$530,000	**$1,092,000**	$568,000	$121,000	**$689,000**

Two-earner couple both earning an average wage ($43,100 each in 2010)

If you turn 65 in...	Annual Social Security benefits	Lifetime Social Security benefits	Lifetime Medicare benefits	**Total benefits received over a lifetime**	Lifetime Social Security (OASDI) taxes	Lifetime Medicare taxes	**Total Social Security & Medicare taxes paid**
1960	$18,400	$256,000	$35,000	**$291,000**	$35,200	$0	**$35,200**
1980	$29,800	$446,000	$132,000	**$578,000**	$190,000	$15,600	**$205,600**
2010	$33,500	$539,000	$343,000	**$882,000**	$581,000	$109,000	**$690,000**
2030	$39,400	$666,000	$530,000	**$1,196,000**	$784,000	$167,000	**$951,000**

Employment-Related News

__**Executive Order 13473 – Military Spouse Hiring Authority**__. Executive Order 13473 became effective September 11, 2009 and is intended to provide military spouses an opportunity to obtain employment with the Federal government. The Order is part of an effort to recognize and honor military service members and to minimize disruptions in military families due to permanent relocations, disability, or deaths resulting from active duty service. This authority does not constitute a hiring preference, grant selection priority over other qualified applicants, nor does it create an entitlement to a Federal job. Spouses must meet one of the following criteria in order to be eligible for the Executive Order:

- Spouses of military service members serving on active duty for more than 180 days who relocated to the new permanent duty station via Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Orders. The spouse must be married to the military service member on or before the date of the orders, relocate with the service member to the new duty location and the orders must indicate that dependent travel is authorized. The authority does not apply if the military service member is traveling to a different installation for training or attendance at a service school;

- Spouses of military service members who retired under Title 10, Chapter 61, Retirement or Separation for Physical Disabilities, or is retired or released from active duty and has a disability rating of 100% from the Department of Veteran's Affairs; or

- Un-remarried widows or widowers of military service members killed while on active duty. The military member did not have to be killed in combat in order for a spouse to be eligible under this Executive Order.

Spouses are eligible for non-competitive appointment for a maximum of two years from the date of the service member's PCS orders; documentation verifying the service member is 100% disabled; or documentation verifying the service member was killed while on active duty. This documentation is required to support eligibility under this authority.

The two year time limit cannot be extended for individuals appointed to temporary or term positions under this authority. If a spouse was appointed to a term position under this authority and has held it for two years, he or she may not be appointed to another position. If the appointment would be within the two year requirement, the employee may be appointed to another position using the Executive Order. The Order can be used to fill temporary, term or permanent positions. Spouses are eligible for only one permanent appointment per relocation or PCS move under this authority. There is no limit on the number of temporary or term appointments a spouse may receive per PCS move. If a spouse is hired on a temporary or term appointment, he or she is still eligible for one permanent appointment based on the same PCS move and if within two years from the date of the orders. There is no limit on the number of appointments a spouse may receive if the eligibility is based on the disability or death of a service member, although the eligibility is only good for two years from the date of the documentation verifying the service member's disability of death while on active duty.

Spouses must relocate to the new duty station with the service member in order to be eligible under the Executive Order. Relocation is not required for spouses of service members who are 100% disabled due to active duty service or killed while on active duty because their eligibility does not derive from a PCS move.

Spouses are not subject to any grade level limitations under this authority but they must meet all qualification requirements for the position. All job requirements can be found in The Office of Personnel Management Qualification Handbook.

Spouses may also be entitled to consideration for competitive service positions through registration in the Priority Placement Program. To be eligible, spouses must meet the requirements in Chapter 14 of the Priority Placement Program Operations Manual. If all the requirements are met, spouses will be registered in the S Program. Spouses must be found well qualified under this program to be considered for a vacancy. Registration in this program goes by the reporting date of the military service member's PCS move, and is automatically terminated 12 months after registration or the last file maintenance.

Federal Jobs Fast Becoming an Endangered Species. Only months ago, getting a job as a federal government worker was a reasonably safe bet. Private sector hiring was sputtering. Baby boomers at federal agencies were retiring in droves, replaced by newly recruited college graduates.

But before the class of 2011 could don their graduation caps, the federal job market has turned dramatically weaker. Agencies are imposing hiring freezes on new employees or filling vacant positions, as they wait under the raised hammer of a government shutdown at worst and severe budget cutbacks at best.

The resulting federal job shrinkage is due to huge budget deficits, which were already ballooning years earlier, with income tax breaks and two wars depleting federal coffers. The 2008 Wall Street meltdown pushed everything over the edge, and federal programs and personnel are now prime targets as deficit hawks complain the government is bloated and that employees work too little and are paid too much.

Dashed hopes for upcoming grads

The latest jobs forecast for 2011 college graduates found that the government is expected to fill 10% fewer posts than it did last year. The 2011 jobs outlook, by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, found that more than one-third of government employers plan to cut plans to hire new college grads -- the largest group of the industries surveyed. And government employers planning decreases are reducing their staff numbers by at least 25%.

Upcoming graduates like Emily Marsh say they are casting aside their plans -- and dreams -- of landing a federal job. Marsh, 20, majored in international relations with the hope of working for the State Department or the Agency for International Development. But finding a federal position has been discouraging.

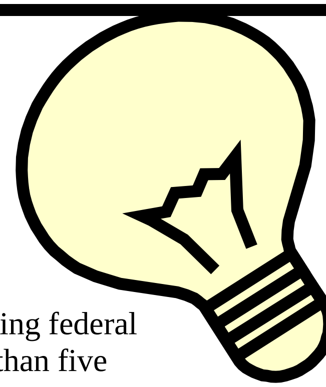
"I honestly considered not applying," says Marsh, a Garrison, N.Y. native who will receive her degree from American University's School of International Service in May. "There are no jobs, and there's hardly any hiring at a lot of agencies.

"This is directly affecting me in my career," says Marsh, who is currently interning with an international rights group.

What happened to our "Sputnik moment"?

The paucity of openings represents a sharp turnabout from the hiring wave many anticipated, even as recently as the January 25 State of the Union speech in which President Obama called for bolstering the country's economy with labor-intense ideas such as improving infrastructure.

Two years ago, a survey forecast that 273,000 federal jobs would be available between 2009 and mid-2012. The Partnership for Public Service report found that major federal agencies would be hiring. The Social Security Administration, for example, was expected to be a prime employer, because about 66% of the agency's supervisors will be eligible to retire by 2018. Combined with the soaring benefit applications from retiring baby boomers, the agency will likely need substantial numbers of claims representatives and others to replenish its ranks.



Hiring additional full-time federal workers could reverse the tide of outsourcing federal jobs to private contractors, who currently number about 10 million, or more than five times the number of federal employees. Such "in-sourcing" of critical government functions to career civil servants would cut costs, proponents argue, because each contractor is estimated to cost the taxpayer 250% more than a government worker.

The concern over depleted federal ranks even prompted lawmakers to introduce legislation to create scholarships -- much like the military's ROTC program -- to pay for students' education in exchange for a commitment of three to five years of government service.

Such concerns have fallen by the wayside amid the budget battles and growing accusations that federal workers receive overly generous compensation and are often do-nothing paper pushers.

Sizing up the federal worker

The heated issue was thrashed out Wednesday at a congressional hearing where, perhaps surprisingly, there was broad agreement that federal employees generally have more experience and education than their private sector counterparts.

"So, in a competitive market they should receive higher pay," says Andrew G. Biggs, of the American Enterprise Institute, "but the question is how much higher?"

James Sherk, labor economist for the The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, agrees, testifying that federal employees "earn total compensation 30% to 40% greater than comparable private-sector workers.

"Reducing their compensation to market rates," he argued before the federal workforce subcommittee of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, "would save taxpayers $47 billion in 2011."

Biggs testified that "simple pay freezes and furloughs are blunt instruments that will not get to the heart of the issue. They do not address the often significant differences in the generosity of pay among different federal employees."

Such pay comparisons are misleading and unfair, countered Colleen M. Kelley president of the National Treasury Employees Union, which has 160,000 members from 31 agencies and is the second largest government union.

Kelley stressed the importance of examining "actual job duties, not just job titles." Federal employees are also facing a two-year pay freeze on account of the "belt-tightening measure" the White House recently imposed.

"They are seeing proposals every day to expand and extend that freeze. They are seeing proposals to cut the retirement benefits they have spent years earning and have seen proposals to require unpaid furloughs," Kelley said.

To top it off, Kelley argued, they have had to bear the brunt of harsh criticism from elected officials and the public.

"They are being called lazy, selfish and greedy. Sometimes even by members of this body, who earn much, much more than they do," Kelley said.

The freeze is expected to save $2 billion initially, and more than $60 billion over the coming decade. The Obama administration argues against further paring because the 2.1 million federal employee work force is smaller than it was in 1953, nearly 60 years ago, and government services are more complex.

Eliminating employees wholesale, warned Kelley, would mean not only hardships for federal workers, it would also mean longer lines and phone waiting time for public services, and "fewer resources to handle everything from food safety to Social Security disability claims."

Last month, the private sector added 192,000 jobs, according to U.S. Labor Department data, and federal payrolls remained unchanged, for now, leaving graduating college seniors like Emily Marsh with little choice but to turn their sights to private industry.

Marsh is applying for jobs at contractors that administer international development programs for the federal government. But they are so swamped with applications that most contractors do not even acknowledge applications, but keep them in a database for six months before they are automatically removed.

"It's a tough climate," says Marsh.

<u>Shutdown Anxiety Strikes Feds who Fear 'Non-Essential' Label.</u> The head of a major federal employees union recently said that her members are "anxious" about the possibility of an impending government shutdown, and unclear whether they will be considered "essential" or "non-essential" workers.

Colleen Kelley, president of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), told reporters that the labels of "essential" and "non-essential" workers — used to describe which employees will and will not go home in the event of a government shutdown — will likely anger federal employees.

“That is causing a lot of consternation. Even the terms — ‘essential,’ ‘non-essential’ — that mean different things to different people. Some people are highly offended that they are considered non-essential,” Kelley said. “No matter what words you use, you still have to put a definition around it.”

Kelley said she has had discussions with administration officials, whom she declined to name, regarding how best to define government workers. She said she has not come up with better labels for agency personnel in the event of a shutdown.

“I have not come up with two words that will not offend somebody. People are talking about ‘exempt,’ ‘non-exempt.’ That raises a whole different set of issues,” Kelley said.

NTEU has 150,000 members spread across 30 different federal agencies, with most concentrated in financial regulators like the IRS and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The federal government will run out of funds this Friday if Congress does not approve new funding. House Republicans passed a new two-week funding bill Tuesday, and Senate Democrats have said they will take up the legislation.

Even if both chambers do sign off on a two-week funding bill, Kelley doesn’t believe that will lessen the chances for a government shutdown later on, due to GOP campaign promises of huge budget cuts this year.

“I don’t think the odds are any different on March 4 than they are on March 18,” Kelley said.

NTEU opposes a federal government shutdown since its members would likely see their paychecks delayed or lost. It is also worried about taxpayers being denied government services, with national parks and Social Security Administration and IRS offices all shutting if the government runs out of funds. Other federal employee unions also oppose a shutdown.

“Agencies operating on skeleton crews can’t deliver the services that the American public expects and deserves. Shutting down the government means shutting down services, plain and simple,” John Gage, national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, said in a statement to The Hill.

"The bigger concern is the services. They want to work," Kelley said about federal workers.

Workers have heard little on what to do from their agency bosses in the event of a government shutdown, according to Kelley.

"The communications to the employees has been almost zero," Kelley said, leading to questions about how they will get paid.

"For many federal employees, March 7 is a payday. They want to know if the government gets shut down on March 4, do they get paid on March 7?" Kelley said. "Someone needs to tell them that their paycheck will be in their bank account on Monday, March 7."

Kelley said she is preparing her members for a government shutdown. The union is collecting its members' home e-mail addresses so they can communicate with them if they are away from work. NTEU is also trying to answer questions about unemployment benefits and finding another job outside of the federal government during a possible shutdown period.

"I'm telling them what I'm comfortable with. I'm not going to substitute NTEU's judgment for something the agency should be telling them," Kelley said.

The union is lobbying hard to keep federal agencies' budget levels safe from cuts.

NTEU supports President Obama's fiscal 2012 $13.2 billion budget proposal for the IRS. In turn, it is opposing the House GOP plan to reduce the agency's budget to fiscal 2008 levels, saying it could mean 7,000 to 8,000 jobs lost at the IRS.

Pay Reform: Lawmaker Wants your Input. Rep. Dennis Ross, R-Fla., plans to overhaul federal personnel rules later this year. But in drafting his plan, he first wants to hear from the average fed.

Ross, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee on the federal work force, plans to launch a website — likely in the next two months — on which federal employees and other members of the public can anonymously suggest how to improve the civil service system.

Fred Piccolo, Ross' chief of staff, said the subcommittee is considering posting those ideas online and allowing the public to vote on the best ones — an idea reminiscent of the

GOP's YouCut program or the administration's SAVE Award program, both of which solicited ideas online on how to cut spending.

"We want to go right to the horse's mouth and see how they would improve things," Piccolo said in a March 14 interview with Federal Times. "What system would you envision that would motivate you to continue to do good work?"

Ross, a freshman lawmaker, is intent on overhauling how federal employees are paid, evaluated and managed to make the federal workplace more like the private sector — although he admits he's still learning the intricacies of the federal workplace. By this fall, Ross hopes to unveil a proposal — partly informed by federal employees themselves — for reforming the civil service.

But already, broad outlines of Ross' vision are coming into focus.

He wants to base all raises on good performance, give managers a freer hand to discipline poor performers, and extend the probationary period for new employees from one year to two years.

A new approach to pay raises

Ross is a firm critic of the General Schedule's step increase system, which provides automatic pay raises every one, two or three years for most employees. He wants the government to pay employees based on their performance instead of their longevity.

Federal unions are resistant to any revisions of the General Schedule, which they say protects against favoritism and discrimination while giving managers flexibility to reward hard workers with quality step increases and bonuses.

"There is quite a bit of confusion among critics about [the GS system], and criticisms are usually vague and exaggerated," said Colleen Kelley, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, at a March 9 hearing held by Ross. "It has rules, standards and evaluations, which must be written. It has both merit- and market-based components. … I don't know of a single so-called pay-for-performance system that is getting good reviews from the employees who are working under it."

In a March 15 interview, Ross said that with the ballooning federal budget deficit, the government must make the federal work force more efficient and save money by not coddling poor performers. And if unions resist necessary changes, Ross said, "We're going to go forward anyway.

"Changes are going to be made," Ross said. "If we keep the status quo, it's going to implode. If we make changes, we can save it. I'm advising the unions to please be at the table with us."

When asked if there could be an attempt by lawmakers to limit federal unions' collective bargaining rights if they feel labor is trying to derail changes to the civil service, Ross said, "There may be. That's not on my agenda right now. Anything's a possibility."

Ross said he does not now feel that unions are an impediment to change, and said he hopes they can make necessary changes "without having to threaten each other, which I think is a terrible way to do any kind of negotiations. We're all in this together."

Ross specifically rejected reviving the Defense Department's outgoing National Security Personnel System, which he called an "abject failure."

Poor performers

One of the most necessary parts of pay reform will be giving managers more discretion to discipline poorly performing employees, Ross said. The current disciplinary process favors employees and places too much burden on managers to prove their case, he said.

"I don't think you can change the GS system without giving supervisors and managers the tools to use it correctly," Ross said. "When there's a disciplinary action against an employee, a supervisor spends more time trying to overcome the presumption in favor of the employee that it's so much easier to say, ‘I'm not going to do this. I'm just going to give them a 3 [out of 5] on their performance review,' and they're going to be here forever."

Ross said he wants to use resources that otherwise would have gone to poor performers to reward hard workers, through bonuses or other forms of merit pay.

A 2009 report from the Merit Systems Protection Board concluded that many managers lack the skills to track and document poor performance, and to effectively deal with those who are unwilling or unable to improve. But some managers say they are stymied by workplace rules that make it tough to fire or demote poor performers, or are hindered by senior leaders who are afraid of inviting discrimination lawsuits or angering unions.

A longer probationary period

Ross also said the government must lengthen its probationary period for new employees from one year to two. Most new employees now have a one-year probationary period.

The now-defunct Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP) was opposed by unions partly because it contained a two-year probationary period.

In a January interview, Homeland Security Chief Human Capital Officer Jeff Neal said the two-year probationary period was a major advantage of FCIP. Neal said one year isn't enough time to judge new Border Patrol agents and other law enforcement officers, and said he would like a longer probationary period.

Michael Hager, the former acting director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), said the civil service must be overhauled and Ross is on the right track. But he said he doubts Ross will succeed.

"I don't think he has a prayer of getting anything done right now, with everything that's going on with the budget," Hager said. "I commend him for his out-of-the-box thinking, and every taxpayer would agree with it. But even in the best of times, it's a complicated issue to deal with."

Reform planning already underway

Some work to reform personnel practices is already happening.

The interagency council of top personnel executives, called the Chief Human Capital Officers Council, is looking at new ways to hold poor performers accountable and reward good performers under existing laws and rules, OPM Director John Berry said last week. The group will not consider pay for performance.

Berry also outlined his desire to overhaul performance management in a March 16 speech.

"The formal review process [now] seems to take place in Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon, where everyone is above average," Berry said. "If that doesn't make our performance ratings suspect, I don't know what would."

He said performance standards must be objective, detailed, tied to agency goals, and crafted with employees' input, and managers must set deadlines and quality standards they can use to measure employees' progress. Berry also said managers must give their employees frequent, specific and constructive feedback.

Berry also dusted off his idea, first floated in 2009, to replace the government's four- or five-level performance rating system with a simplified three-level system. Under that system, Berry estimated that more than 80 percent of federal employees would be judged to be "doing a good job," given feedback, training, their regular raise and minor rewards such as gift cards.

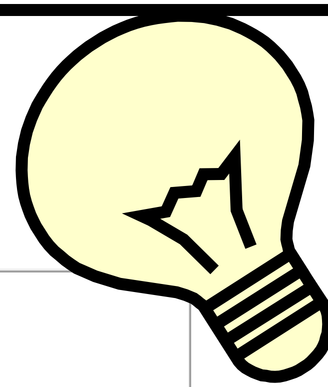
Top performers' accomplishments would be rewarded more through public recognition and greater opportunities to innovate than through cash rewards, he said.

And Berry said agencies need a clear and consistent way to fire poor performers quickly and fairly.

"Failing to remove poor performers disrespects and de-motivates the entire team," Berry said. "And what's more, we don't have a position to waste."

Merit System Principle of the Month

MERIT SYSTEM PRINCIPLE OF THE MONTH



NUMBER 1
RECRUITMENT, SELECTION AND ADVANCEMENT

"Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a work force from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity."

What is the intent behind the first Merit System Principle?

The first clause, concerning recruitment, sets forth the vision of a federal workforce that is representative of the very people who fund the government through their tax dollars and whom the government exists to serve. The second clause, concerning selection and promotion, represents the core value of a merit-based employment model. Up until the latter part of the 19th century, most executive branch employees obtained their jobs through political connections. The Pendleton Act of 1883 replaced this patronage system with a merit system under which anyone, regardless of political affiliation, may receive a civil service appointment so long as he or she is the best-qualified applicant based on objective criteria. The final clause, concerning equal opportunity, echoes the purpose behind Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related laws barring discrimination in employment.

Are there any recent decisions from the Merit Systems Protection Board addressing the first Merit System Principle?

The MSPB recently imposed discipline on two agency officials who gave an unauthorized preference to a job applicant. In so doing the MSPB emphasized its obligation to "faithfully uphold the Merit System Principles," and "to [put] agencies subject to the [CSRA] on notice that selections for employment must be made in accordance with law and must not be the result of personal or political favoritism." Special Counsel v. Lee, 2010 MSPB 89, ¶ 35. To take another example bearing on the first Merit System Principle, the MSPB recently found that an individual was entitled to a hearing on his claim that the qualification standards used to exclude him from consideration for a federal job were not rationally related to performance in the job. Sauser v. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2010 MSPB 50.

Has the Office of Personnel Management issued any guidance to help agency HR offices comply with the first Merit System Principle?

The Office of Personnel Management has issued detailed rules governing hiring that are designed to ensure fair and open competition, as well as assessment and selection based strictly on merit. 5 C.F.R. Parts 300A, 330, 332.

Has the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued any guidance to help agency HR offices comply with the first Merit System Principle?

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has published formal guidance, known as Management Directive 715, to assist agencies in their efforts to promote a work force that is representative of all segments of society.

Management-Employee Relations

Supreme Court Finds Employer Liable Because of Discrimination by Proposing Official. In Staub v. Proctor Hospital (No. 09–400), the United States Supreme Court held that an employer may be liable for employment discrimination based on the discriminatory animus of an employee who influenced, but did not make, the ultimate employment decision. For federal employees, this means agencies may be liable for discrimination based on the animus of a proposing official or a selection panelist who taints the process with discriminatory animus. Agencies may no longer be able to hide behind neutral deciding or selecting officials where their decisions are based on the actions of others with animus.

Staub, an employee of the hospital who was also in the Army Reserve, filed a claim under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) after he was fired. Staub claimed that his first line supervisor fabricated an allegation leading to his termination out of hostility toward his military obligations, and that the deciding official adhered to her decision. The court observed that Staub brought what is often referred to as a "cat's paw case," meaning that he sought to hold his employer liable for the animus of a supervisor who was not charged with making the ultimate employment decision.

USERRA forbids an employer to deny "employment, reemployment, retention in employment, promotion, or any benefit of employment" based on a person's "membership" in or "obligation to perform service in a uniformed service," 38 U. S. C. §4311(a), and provides that liability is established "if the person's membership . . . is a motivating factor in the employer's action," §4311(c).

Staub contended that while the deciding official was not motivated by hostility to his military obligations, the first line supervisor was, and that her actions influenced the ultimate decision. The first line supervisor made several comments about Staub's military service, including saying that he would "pay back the department for everyone else having to bend over backwards to cover [his] schedule for the Reserves," that his "military duty had been a strain on the department," and referring to his military obligations as "a bunch of smoking and joking and [a] waste of taxpayers' money."

A jury found the employer liable and awarded Staub damages, but the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit reversed because there was no evidence the deciding official discriminated. The Supreme Court reversed, and found that if a supervisor performs an act motivated by anti-military animus that is intended by the supervisor to cause an adverse employment action, and if that act is a proximate cause of the ultimate employment action, then the employer is liable under USERRA.

While the Supreme Court did not extend this decision to other anti-discrimination statutes, such as Title VII, this is the first case where the Supreme Court has held that the "cat's paw" can work to hold employers liable for discrimination by officials involved in the decision making process, even where the ultimate decider was neutral. This should be fewer agencies can rely on their neutral and isolated selecting and deciding officials to get away with discrimination.

How to Avoid Getting Depressed at Your Job. With all of the changes that are occurring in the federal workforce, such as a two year pay freeze for many federal employees, and all of the changes that have been proposed (including furloughs, benefit changes, etc.), some may start feeling depressed at their job without knowing what to do about it.

Here are techniques one can use to make a job more satisfying and may prove helpful in fighting a feeling of depression.

Challenge Negative Thinking

One of the ways to manage your depression at your job is to challenge your negative thinking with positive statements and realistic thinking.

When encountering thoughts that make you fearful or depressed, challenge those thoughts by asking yourself questions that will maintain objectivity and common sense. For example, you are afraid that if you do not get a job promotion you were hoping for, you will be stuck at your job forever. This may depress you but it is like your conclusion in this situation is unrealistic.

In fact, there all are kinds of jobs available and just because you do not receive a specific job promotion does not mean you will never get one.

In addition, people change jobs all the time. In all likelihood, you have an option of going elsewhere if you are unhappy at your present location.

Take a Deep Breath

Some people get depressed for a few minutes and do not know what to do. When this happens, take a deep breath. Find something to do to get their mind off the problem. You could take a walk, listen to music, read the newspaper or engage yourself in an activity that will give a fresh perspective. Doing something other than focusing on the problem that is depressing you may get your mind off of the problem that seems overwhelming and give you confidence to do other things.

Visualize Your Future Performance

Sometimes, we can get depressed over a task that we will have to perform in the near future. When this happens, visualize yourself doing the task in your mind. For instance, you may be required to give a presentation to a large group of people in the next few days. Before the big day arrives, imagine yourself in that role and that situation. By going through the process in your mind, you will be better prepared to perform for real when the time comes. Self-Visualization is a great way to reduce the fear and stress of a coming situation.

Positive Affirmation

Another technique that is very helpful is to have a small notebook of positive statements that makes you feel good. Whenever you come across an affirmation that makes you feel good, write it down in a small notebook that you can carry around with you in your pocket. Whenever you feel depressed, open up your small notebook and read those statements.

Take advantage of the help that is available around you. If possible, talk to a professional who can help you manage your fears and anxieties. They will be able to provide you with additional advice and insights on how to deal with your current problem. By talking to a professional, you will be helping yourself by becoming better able to deal with future problems. Managing your fears and anxieties takes practice. The more you practice, the better you will become.

Telecommuting as a Reasonable Accommodation. On July 10, 2007, a District of Columbia federal judge ordered the Department of Commerce to pay $303,881 in additional relief for Lisa Bremer, a disabled federal employee, who worked at the Department of Commerce until the Department revoked her right to telecommute three days a week. (Bremer v. Gutierrez, D.D.C. No. 1:03CV01338). In August 2005, a jury determined that Commerce discriminated against Ms. Bremer and violated the Rehabilitation Act (the statute which protects the rights of federal workers with disabilities) when it removed her reasonable accommodation, and awarded her $3 million in compensatory damages for emotional and physical distress. By law, that jury verdict was reduced to $300,000. After the trial, Commerce filed a motion to overturn the jury's verdict but the judge denied that motion.

Although the jury was empowered to award compensatory damages, which could compensate for effects of the discrimination such as emotional distress, physical pain, and out-of-pocket expenses, the jury did not have the authority to decide "equitable relief." Equitable relief can constitute such items as reinstatement, back pay, back benefits and front pay, and are solely within the judge's purview to grant.

After the judge denied the Commerce Department's motion to set aside the jury verdict, Ms. Bremer's attorney filed a motion for equitable relief.

Ms. Bremer sought back pay and benefits, from the time she was forced to apply for disability retirement until the date of the jury's verdict -- two years and 10 months later -- as well as front pay. In addition to lost pay, the benefits Ms. Bremer sought included lost annual leave and the value of the agency's contributions to her Thrift Savings Plan had she remained an employed by the agency, all with interest.

The Commerce Department objected to awarding Ms. Bremer any equitable relief, arguing that Ms. Bremer "voluntarily" resigned her position by applying for disability retirement. The judge disagreed and held that Ms. Bremer was presumed entitled to back pay and benefits because the jury found that she had been discriminated against. The judge did not, however, award front pay because Ms. Bremer could have continued to look for employment after her disability retirement. The judge then ordered Ms. Bremer's attorney to submit a proposed order on the amount of back pay and benefits to which Ms. Bremer was entitled to be paid by the Department of Commerce.

After receiving the proposed order from Ms. Bremer's counsel, with its accompanying expert opinion from an economist, the judge ordered an additional payment of $303,881 to compensate Ms. Bremer for the back pay and benefits she lost because she was unable to work after the Department of Commerce refused to continue to accommodate her multiple sclerosis.

The back pay portion of the order was already offset by the amount Ms. Bremer received in disability annuity payments.

In total, as a consequence of its discriminatory act of revoking Ms. Bremer's partial work-at-home accommodation, the Commerce Department of Commerce is now required to pay Ms. Bremer in excess of $600,000. It is expected that Ms. Bremer's counsel will next ask the Judge to order the Commerce Department to reimburse Ms. Bremer for the attorney fees and costs incurred in bringing this matter to justice.

Ms. Bremer was represented by Washington, D.C. lawyer Joseph V. Kaplan, of Passman & Kaplan, P.C.

Watch What you Say in E-Mail. The Office of Special Counsel, which enforces the Hatch Act restrictions on partisan political activities by federal employees, has tightened its policies on emails sent through government computer systems. OSC rescinded earlier guidance that had said that a limited amount of partisan content in email to a limited number of employees was acceptable on the theory that such messages were comparable to "water cooler" conversations in which employees might express personal political views. However, OSC noted that in four decisions recently released involving political content of email, MSPB--the agency that adjudicates Hatch Act cases brought by OSC--rejected the "water cooler" defense. Said OSC: "The four MSPB decisions send a clear message to the federal community. The Hatch Act prohibits federal employees from sending emails that advocate for a political party or candidate for partisan public office while on duty or in a federal building, and engaging in such activity may subject them to disciplinary action, including the loss of their job. No political activity means no political activity, regardless of the specific technology used."

Training, Self-Development, and Personal Improvement

Human Resources (HR) for Supervisors Course. The HR for Supervisors Course encompasses instruction applicable to the Legacy (i.e. GS) System. The course is 4.5 days long, includes lecture, class discussion, exercises; and, is designed to teach new civilian and military supervisors of appropriated fund civilian employees about their responsibilities for Civilian Human Resource Management. This instruction does ***not*** cover supervision of non-appropriated fund (NAF) or contract employees.

Instruction includes the following modules:

- Introduction of Army CHR which includes coverage of Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices, CHRM Life Cycle Functions, Operation Center and CPAC Responsibilities
- Planning
- Structuring – Position Classification
- Acquiring – Staffing and Pay Administration
- Developing – Human Resources Development

- Sustaining – Performance Management, Management Employee Relations, Labor Relations

Training dates for the next iterations of this course are below. Registration information will be disseminated electronically three weeks before each class start date.

Next course offerings:

13-17 Jun 11
19-22 Sep 11
5-9 Dec 11

RPA and ART Workshop. The Fort Benning CPAC HR specialists are available to conduct RPA and ART desk-side walkthroughs and/or workshops to assist HR liaisons, managers/supervisors, and new DCPDS account holders with accessing and using DCPDS, ART, initiating RPAs, forwarding and tracking RPAs, generating reports and printing SF 50s. Training can be accomplished via individualized sessions or activity specific workshops upon request. If you desire training of this nature, please contact your servicing HR specialist to arrange for scheduling.

Job Aids Available on the Web. Lotus ScreenCams (how-to-movies) are available to assist DCPDS users with DCPDS, Army Regional Tools (ART), Oracle 11i and other automation tools. ScreenCam movies ART Logon, Ghostview, Gatekeeper, Inbox Default, Initiating an RPA, Logging On, Navigator, RPA Overview and RPA Routing are available on the web at: http://www.chra.army.mil/. Click on HR Toolkit and then click on the name of the movie to download or play it. Managers/supervisors and administrative personnel responsible for initiating RPAs are encouraged to review this site and check out these new tools. ART Users Guide has been updated and provides descriptions of and instructions for using tools available in ART, including such tools as Employee Data, Inbox Statistics (timeliness and status information about personnel actions), Organization Structure (information about positions in various organizational elements), and many more tools. It is intended for use by managers, resource management officials, administrative officers, and commanders as well as CPAC and CPOC staff members. There is both an on-line and downloadable Word version (suitable for printing).

In addition, to the ART Users Guide, there is a Defense Civilian Personnel Data System (DCPDS) Desk Guide which provides how-to information about tasks and functions that end users might need to perform in DCPDS, such as initiating a Request for Personnel Action (RPA) and creating a Gatekeeper Checklist. The ART Users Guide and the Desk Guide can be accessed from the CHRA web page at: http://www.chra.army.mil/, by clicking on HR Toolkit. In addition to these tools the Fort Benning CPAC staff is available to assist you in accessing DCPDS, ART, initiating RPAs, creating a Gatekeeper Checklist, forwarding and tracking RPAs, generating reports and printing a Notification of Personnel Action (i.e. SF 50). If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact your servicing HR specialist to arrange a time so we can come to your office to help you.

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