

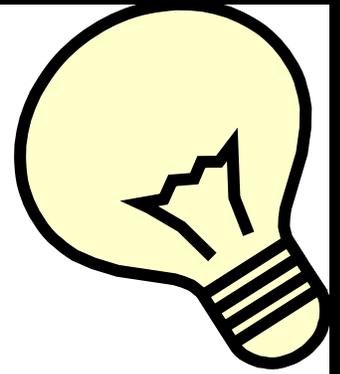
The

Illuminator

Shedding Light on the HR World

2-2009

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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, NSPS implementation information, the Maneuver Center of Excellence civilian transition, etc.).

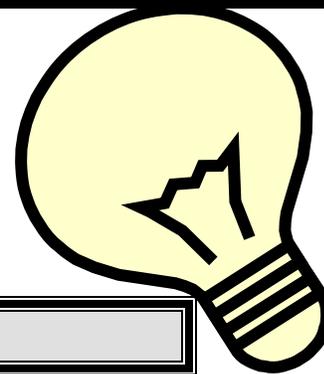
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Retirement, Life Insurance, TSP, Social Security and Such

Lawmakers Renew Battle Against Pension Provisions . An old fight resumed early January when two House lawmakers unveiled legislation that would ease the burden of two Social Security laws that significantly reduce benefits for some public sector retirees.

The bill (H.R. 235), introduced by Reps. Howard Berman, D-Calif., and Howard (Buck) McKeon, R-Calif., would repeal two provisions in Social Security law -- the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision -- that reduce or eliminate Social Security benefits for federal employees who entered the government before 1984 and are covered by the Civil Service Retirement System. Employees in CSRS do not pay into Social Security and receive a government pension instead.

The Government Pension Offset law cuts the Social Security benefits that some employees -- including widows and widowers -- would have received from their spouses, while the Windfall Elimination Provision reduces benefits for public employees who also worked in private sector jobs where they paid into the Social Security system. The Social Security Administration estimates that 465,000 beneficiaries are affected by the pension offset. Seventy-seven percent are women, 43 percent are widowed and 75 percent have lost their entire Social Security spousal benefit. SSA data also indicates that about 972,000 beneficiaries are affected by the Windfall Elimination Provision.

Various legislators have introduced bills to repeal or modify the two laws with little success, largely because lawmakers have been unable to find a solution to offset the estimated \$81 billion price tag of a full repeal.

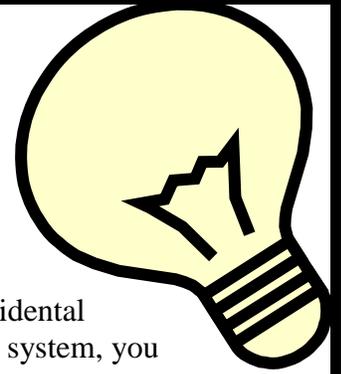
The bill's swift reintroduction drew praise from the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, which has lobbied for more than 25 years to repeal the two provisions. The group pledged to work with lawmakers to ensure action on the bill in the 111th Congress.

"The GPO and WEP arbitrarily eradicate the earned Social Security benefits of far too many public sector retirees," NARFE President Margaret Baptiste said on Thursday. "There is absolutely no legitimate reason for one segment of seniors being denied their Social Security benefits for which full Social Security taxes were paid."

30 Years of Retirement: What Will You Do? Most of the articles you read are about the financial side of retirement. For example, you might learn about Thrift Plan rates of return, tax implications for retirees, Social Security earnings limits or CSRS versus FERS survivor benefits. This time we are going to take a quick look at the non-financial side of your retirement.

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Actuaries tell us that a 55 year old can expect to live another 30 years. Coincidental perhaps, but if you are a full career federal employee in the CSRS retirement system, you are able to retire at 55 years of age with 30 years of service. Think about it - you are likely to live as long after you retire, as you worked for Uncle Sam prior to your retirement. Look back to where you were 30 years ago and consider all the changes you went through during those years. Then look ahead another 30 years – do you have any idea where you will be then?

The plans you have now for retirement may be colored by your view of retirement as retiring from something (i.e., work). It is healthier to think of your retirement as retiring to something. Looking forward in anticipation is better than looking backward in relief. Right now you may anticipate spending all your time in hobbies you have neglected during your working career. Early in retirement planning, retirement is like a dream to us. It is a good dream (we hope), a dream that may have us fishing, travelling or making something in our workshops.

Well before we retire, we should give our dreams a reality test in order to see how well they will translate into actual retirement. Here are some suggestions:

Talk to people who have retired before you. You are not the first, nor will you be the last, person to retire. Find out what issues others faced as they made their adjustments from work to retirement.

Will you be able to fill in 50 or more hours of time each week without getting bored? That is about how much time (including your commute) as was spent working when you were employed by Uncle.

Consider your options. They may be:

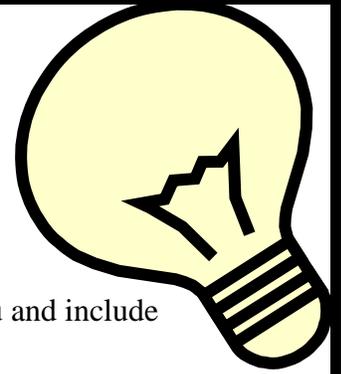
- Part-time work.
- Volunteer activities.
- Returning to school.
- Taking up another occupation altogether.

One thing that can get in our way when we plan our life after retirement is that often there are other, more immediate, needs facing us. We are inclined to focus on these short-term needs and put the long-term view aside. We must do our best to resist this natural tendency when we are planning our retirement life. Consider the following:

Develop an action plan for retirement. Include long, mid and short-term targets in the plan.

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Don't plan by yourself. Share your concerns with others who are close to you and include them in the planning process.

Test your plans if you can.

If you are planning another career, volunteer in that field and see how you like it.
If you are planning on relocating, rent a place in that area and see if it is as good as you imagined.

Don't base your decision to retire on whether or not you are eligible and can afford to.
Look closely at your interests and goals for a happier and more satisfying retirement.

Employment-Related News

Undergraduates Cite Government as a Top Career. A new survey of undergraduate students indicates that government and public service careers are a top choice for employment after graduation.

The [report](#), released by the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service and employment consultant Universum USA, showed that out of 46 career fields, government and public service vocations are the most popular among young people, with 17 percent of U.S. undergraduates selecting the category as "ideal" for their first job after graduation.

"A lot of attention is being paid right now to how President-elect Obama is filling the 4,000 political positions he has to fill," said Max Stier, president of the Partnership, during a presentation of the survey results on Wednesday. "The untold story is how the federal government is going to fill many more positions over the next several years with career civil servants."

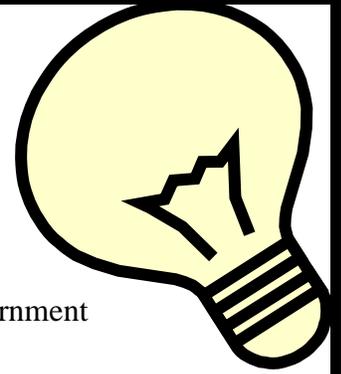
The report is based on Universum's 2008 survey of 43,000 undergraduates worldwide to determine the qualities young people seek in employers. The Partnership and Universum narrowed the survey to include only the 32,000 U.S. respondents, since American citizenship typically is required for federal jobs.

The survey said that among U.S. students' top 15 ideal employers, five out of 260 are federal agencies -- the State Department, NASA, Peace Corps, the CIA and the FBI. The government also offers the top qualities that attract undergraduates, the report stated, such as a healthy work-life balance, opportunities to serve the public good and job stability.

Still, despite more interest in working in the public sector, many young job seekers are leery of bureaucracy and red tape in government jobs, according to the survey.

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Additionally, interest in government service is lower among groups the government needs most, such as technical and science majors, the report said.

Survey participants also have high salary expectations, saying they expect to earn an annual salary of more than \$49,000 in their first job after graduation. Federal government salaries for entry-level employees with undergraduate degrees typically range from \$30,000 to \$38,000, adjusted by locality, the survey said.

To address these challenges and to recruit a large pool of young applicants, the report said, government leaders must understand the preferences and interests of the new generation and be able to sell their department's mission in an engaging and comprehensible way. Agencies also must meet students online and on campus, and provide them with information, meaningful contact and possible internships, the report added.

"With the slumping economy ... the conditions are right for federal agencies to bring in top talent," Stier said. "The question is, will they take advantage of this opportunity or let it pass?"

Ten Ways to Screw up a Job Interview. Many books have been written on the interview process and the things that you need to do to in order to succeed in interviewing. When you have read one of these books, your head may be swimming with numerous hints and tips that you will try to execute in your next interview.

All that advice is well and good, but the thing all job seekers should strive for is simply not to screw up their job interview. If you manage to come through a job interview without messing up and damaging your chances you are going to be ahead of most of your competition. This article was originally written for private sector job seekers, so some of the ten items may not apply to federal interviews. Here are ten sure-fire ways to mess up in an interview.

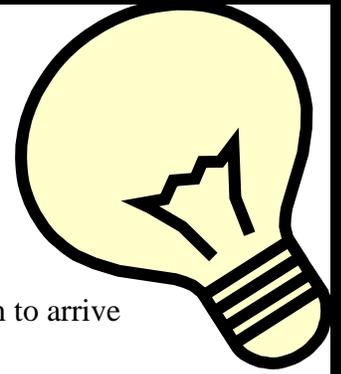
1. Arrive late for the interview. The last thing you want to do is to show up late. An employer expects you to arrive timely for work; so showing up late for an interview really gets you off on the wrong foot. Some ways to avoid tardiness are:

Get complete instructions from the interviewer or the HR department. If possible ask them approximately how long it will take to drive (or take public transportation) to the interview site from where you will be coming. If it is a large company or plant, ask which building the interview is in and ask where you should park.

If possible do a dry run, go to the interview site at the approximate time of day for which your interview is scheduled. This will give you a good idea of how long it will take.

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Give yourself at least a 15-minute cushion. It is far better to arrive early, than to arrive after your scheduled time.

If all else fails (traffic jam, Presidential motorcade, act of God) call the interviewer to inform him or her that you will be late and the reasons for your lateness. Ask if they can still fit you in, or if you should reschedule.

2. Forget to perform a "Jam Check." If you have arrived with time to spare, you can use that time to double check your grooming. Head for the rest room and check yourself out in the mirror. Make sure your clothes are as they should be and check your hair and your teeth. Very few things will turn off an interviewer like spinach caught between your teeth.

3. Dress inappropriately. Regardless of the level of job for which you are interviewing, you should be dressed neatly and cleanly. For professional jobs, men should wear suits and women should wear professional office attire. For other jobs, neat business casual clothes will suffice. Flamboyant clothing or jewelry is a no-no. You do not want anything to distract attention from you and your qualifications for the job.

4. Don't participate in small talk. Many interviews begin with a little bit of small talk to set both you and the interviewer at ease. At all costs, avoid religion and politics as topics. Safe topics for small talk are the weather, sports (How 'bout those Cubbies!) and whether you had any difficulty finding the location of the interview. Commenting on pictures or other items in the office is often very effective. However, make sure you are in the interviewer's office, rather than in one that was borrowed for the interview, before you comment on office accoutrements.

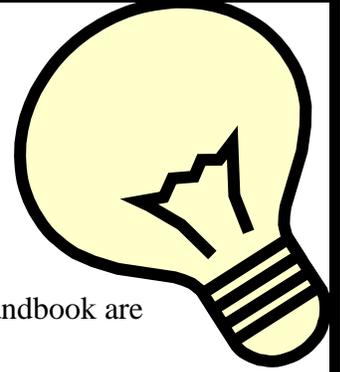
5. Be unable to talk about your work experience as listed on your resume. Many interviewers are not experienced and even some of the more experienced ones will use your resume as a guide for the interview. Be prepared to speak in depth about everything you have on your resume. If you can, practice interviewing with a friend or career counselor. Practice may not make perfect, but it will sure help you polish your interview skills and will put you towards the front of the pack.

6. Be unfamiliar with the job. The more you know about the job and the company (or agency), the better you will be able to present yourself as the solution to the employer's needs. If you are in a serious job search, you might have done a lot of company research before you got the interview. If you haven't done such research, do what you can before the interview. Sources for information can be:

The Internet. Either the company's web site or sites dealing with the occupation or industry.

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The library. Trade periodicals or books such as the Occupational Outlook Handbook are helpful.

Networking. Talk to people who are familiar with the job or company. Even if you don't know anyone with the knowledge you require, you very likely know someone who knows someone who has that knowledge. Networking begins with asking questions, so don't be afraid to ask others for information.

7. Fail to listen for clues about the needs of the employer. Many interviewers begin the interview by giving you a background of the company and its needs. Treat this information as a gift. Once you have this information, you can tailor your responses to how you can help them fulfill those needs. The employer is looking for someone to solve their problems and, if you can convince them that you have the ability to do so, you will be far ahead of your competition.

8. You don't know when to stop. If you have practiced you will be able to clearly and concisely respond to their questions and let them know of your accomplishments. Avoid rambling responses that get off the topic of the interview. Do not be afraid of silence and do not attempt to fill in all "dead air." If you are unsure as to whether the interviewer has gotten enough information from your response, ask him or her if your response was satisfactory.

9. Fail to ask insightful questions. Generally, at the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. Do not use this time to ask about benefits or when you can take your first vacation. The questions you ask should show your interest in the position. You might want to ask questions such as:

What are the long term plans for this organization? For this position?

What do you think are the most important skills for this job?

How would my progress be evaluated?

Do you have any questions I could answer before I leave?

10. Fail to send a thank-you or follow-up letter. A thank you letter has several good points.

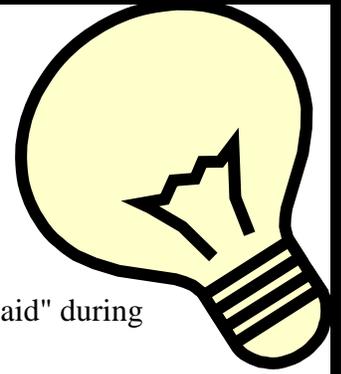
It will remind the interviewer of you and your qualifications. Few individuals actually send such letters and sending one should make you stand out.

It can be used to expand on answers you gave during the interview.

You can beef up areas where you felt you didn't do well in the interview.

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You can add additional information – the things you "wish you would have said" during the interview.

Throughout the interview process, keep in mind that the process is a competition. You do not have to be perfect, just better than your competitors. By avoiding these ten ways to screw up an interview, you will have a good chance of winning the competition.

OPM to Modify Senior Executive Selection Process. The Office of Personnel Management is adjusting the process federal agencies use to select members for the Senior Executive Service, following a pilot project that won high praise from applicants.

In a [Jan. 12 memorandum](#) to agency human resources heads, acting Director Michael Hager said OPM is developing an improved version of a new selection process tried out at eight agencies from June 1, 2008, to Nov. 15, 2008.

During the test run, agencies advertised 61 vacancies by asking applicants to submit a record of accomplishments or a resume in lieu of narratives focused around five broad executive core qualifications. Applicants had characterized the narratives as too cumbersome and some had hired experts to help write them.

Agencies advertised 34 of the SES vacancies using the accomplishment record approach, in which job-seekers were asked to submit a more streamlined application that targets selected competencies of the five core qualifications. The remaining 27 vacancies were announced using the resume-based approach, in which applicants were asked to submit only a standard resume. Both methods drew heavily on structured interviews of well-qualified candidates.

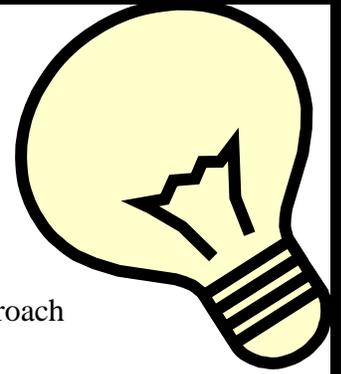
"These interviews to a large degree took the place of the lengthy [executive core qualifications] narrative statements typically required of candidates under the traditional SES selection process," Hager said. "In this way, the pilot attempted to make the hiring process more inviting to applicants by shifting some of the burden from them to agency staff."

The project also tested the use of virtual qualification review boards, OPM-administered independent panels of senior executives that assess the qualifications of Senior Executive Service candidates. Using an automated system, board members were able to review candidates without actually convening at OPM. "This method seems to hold considerable promise as a way to streamline this critical OPM function without diminishing the quality of the decisions rendered," Hager said.

Results from the pilot project indicate that it was successful in shifting the burden from the applicant to human resources staff, he said. The pilot produced a 50 percent increase

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in applicants compared to the traditional method, with the resume-based approach attracting more than twice as many non-federal applicants.

Still, HR staffers said they found the new approaches somewhat unwieldy, noting that the streamlined applications and structured interviews required extra work. But for agencies with the most hires under the pilot project, there were fewer objections as staff became more practiced in the processes. Those agencies included the Homeland Security Department.

Hager said OPM will improve the pilot methods, taking into account some of the concerns of staff and applicants, and will provide training within the next few months to agencies that want to use the new approaches. After completing the training, he said, agencies will be able to choose between the new processes and the traditional method.

Veterans' Preference, Merit Promotion and Federal Jobs: What Does the Law

Require? The Federal Circuit has turned aside a veteran's challenge to an agency's decision to select off of a merit promotion list rather than from a competitive exam list. (*Joseph v. Federal Trade Commission*, C.A.F.C. No. 2007-3073, 11/5/07).

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced a paralegal position and invited applications under both merit promotion and competitive procedures. Mr. Joseph was a veteran working at the Merit Systems Protection Board. He applied for the FTC job and asked that he be considered under both procedures. With his 10-point veterans' preference, he was ranked first on the competitive list. Since he had civil service status, he was also considered under the merit promotion procedures, but did not receive a numerical boost for his veterans' preference although he did make the top four list. After holding interviews, the agency opted to fill the position from the merit promotion list. It selected a current FTC employee who was a non-veteran. (Opinion, pp. 2-3)

Joseph appealed to the Merit Systems Protection Board, arguing that his veterans' preference rights were violated. Because he worked at MSPB, the complaint was referred to the National Labor Relations Board for a hearing before one of its judges. The AJ sided with Joseph and ordered that FTC select him for the position. However, the Board reversed, pointing out that an applicant is not entitled to veterans' preference under merit promotion procedures. (p. 4, citation omitted)

Joseph took his case to court, taking issue with the way the FTC opted to use the merit promotion procedures to fill the position. He argued that having conducted the open competition in which he received his 10-point preference, the FTC could not then select from the merit promotion list that did not reflect his preference. By doing so, the FTC effectively denied him his preference rights. (p. 4)

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The court flatly rejects Joseph's argument, holding that point addition to a veteran's score only applies in the open competition examination process. In that process, the FTC did the right thing by adding 10 points to Joseph's score. Under the merit promotion process, the veteran does not get a score boost, nor should he. "The question is whether the provisions governing veterans' rights" prevented FTC from filling the position from the merit promotion list. The answer, according to the court is "no." (p. 5)

The court opines that the law gives the veteran the "opportunity to compete" under merit promotion procedures, which is not to be read as an "entitlement to veterans' preference that is not otherwise required by law." In short, "We know of no statute or regulatory provision that required the Commission, once it undertook to inaugurate the selection process...to limit itself to the competitive examination process in making its final selection." (p. 6)

Defense Finalizes Changes to NSPS Hiring, Promotion Rules. The Defense Department has issued final rules to expand the hiring and promotion flexibilities available to managers under its new personnel system.

The rules, published by Defense and the Office of Personnel Management in the [Federal Register](#), modify the department's procedures for recruiting, hiring and promoting employees under the National Security Personnel System. Defense originally proposed the changes in December 2008.

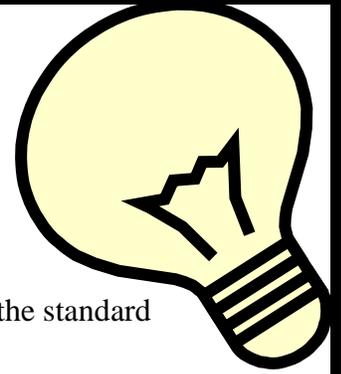
"In order to meet its critical mission requirements worldwide and respond to a dynamic national security environment, the department needs flexibility to attract, recruit, assign and retain a high quality workforce," the notice stated. "The current federal hiring system does not have the flexibility needed by DoD to meet all of its mission requirements." The rules enable Defense to exercise direct-hire authority and expand its use of term, temporary and time-limited appointments to help address surges in workload and extended absences due to military or civilian deployments. The temporary spots could be noncompetitively converted to permanent status later, the notice said.

The regulations also revise Defense's recruiting and competitive examining process by allowing the department to limit consideration to job applicants in the local commuting area. To preserve merit principles, Defense would provide public notice for all vacancies and accept applications from all sources. But managers would have the option of looking only at local residents, should a sufficient number apply.

Department managers also have new tools for making promotion decisions, including assessment boards, alternate certification procedures and selection processes that rely on employee performance ratings, according to the final rules. Managers would have to complete a job analysis to identify requisite skills. They also would be required to notify

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potential candidates, but they would not have to advertise the opening using the standard vacancy announcement procedures.

Some comments on the draft regulations expressed concern about the fairness and equity of the staffing and employment rules, charging that increased flexibilities could result in hiring or placement decisions not based on merit. Many complained about the geographic limits placed on hiring decisions as well as the alternative promotion procedures, noting that such authorities could result in a supervisor's favorite employees or cronies being selected.

"This opens the door for nepotism and for potential discrimination and runs counter to the protections offered employees and applicants through the passage of the Civil Service Reform Act in 1978," said William Dougan, national secretary-treasury for the National Federation of Federal Employees, on Friday. "The resilience, capability and strength exhibited by a diverse and productive workforce are eroded through these hiring practices NSPS allows to be employed."

Terry Rosen, a labor relations specialist for the American Federation of Government Employees, also expressed concern on Friday over a provision that shifts the ability to authorize direct-hire authority from OPM to the Defense secretary. "It's not that we believe OPM should be heavy-handed, but we think OPM has been going the opposite direction over the past eight years in that it is getting out of the business of monitoring and ensuring that things are done fairly and agencies are held accountable," she said. "More and more, OPM is relinquishing its authority."

Rosen said AFGE would try to bargain over the new regulations, but added that Defense likely would argue that they are nonnegotiable. While the fiscal 2008 National Defense Authorization Act restored collective bargaining rights under NSPS to government-wide labor relations rules, she said, the law also included a "major rule" that requires regulations jointly promulgated by OPM and Defense to be treated as government-wide rules for the purposes of collective bargaining. The complexity and detail of the regulations also make them difficult to negotiate, she added.

"Defense has done this complete about-face to limit involvement of the unions and limit bargaining," Rosen said. "There's going to be a lot of litigation over this."

FBI Seeks More than 3,000 New Staff in Historic Hiring Blitz. The FBI has launched a major hiring initiative aimed at filling more than 3,000 professional and special agent jobs left vacant due to retirements and attrition, the bureau announced.

The FBI said that it expects to fill more than 2,100 professional staff positions throughout its field offices and headquarters divisions. The vacancies include fields such as

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engineering, finance, human resources, information technology, nursing and records management. The bureau also plans to hire 850 new special agents.

"The FBI has posted these new positions to meet current and expected vacancies primarily due to retirements and attrition," spokeswoman Denise Ballew said Wednesday. The hiring blitz is one of the largest in the FBI's 101-year history.

The bureau's recruitment strategies will include enhanced targeting for critically skilled professionals, specifically those fluent in at least one of several foreign languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Pashto, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese, Ballew said. The bureau also will target individuals with skills in information technology, engineering, intelligence, law, military and physical sciences, she added.

To speed the process, the FBI also plans to hold a mega career invitational, where all selected candidates will gather at designated locations for interviews. Those who are selected for positions will be immediately scheduled for polygraphs, drug screenings and employment briefings, the bureau said.

All open positions, which were posted on the new FBI Jobs Web site, closed Jan. 16. The bureau expects to have all positions filled and employees on board by Sept. 30.

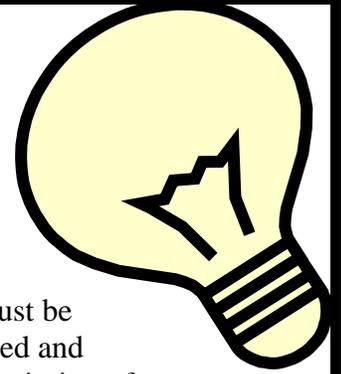
Featured Articles

The Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE) Volunteer Process. As a result of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) 2005 decision, the US Army Infantry School located at Fort Benning, GA, and the US Armor School located at Fort Knox, KY, will realign into the newly established MCOE. The Headquarters, Training and Doctrine Command received Department of Army approval to process this action through a civilian volunteer process. The volunteer process affords employees the same entitlements and benefits as Transfer of Function or other processes used to realign civilians under reorganizations, and will afford management flexibility, as well as, provide employees a choice in the process. Those individuals from the realigning organizations who elect to participate in the volunteer process will initially staff the new MCOE organization.

Each current permanent employee in the affected center, school or activity forming the MCOE will be offered the opportunity to volunteer to realign to a new position in the newly established organization. To be considered for placement under this process, each employee must respond to the formal Survey of Interest (SOI) not later than 9 Mar 09, and provide an up-to-date resume. Resumes are to be created and/or updated in the Resume Builder on the Army's CPOL website located at

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<https://cpolst.belvoir.army.mil/public/resumebuilder/builder/index.jsp> and must be submitted to the centralized RESUMIX database. Resumes must be completed and posted in RESUMIX not later than close of business Monday 9 Mar 09. Submission of resumes through this medium will be the only method by which resumes will be accepted. Mailed, hand carried, digitally transmitted, or faxed resumes will not be accepted.

For those employees without ready access to a computer, a computer classroom located in Bldg. 2764 has been secured and will remain available each Wednesday during the hours 0900-1600, until 4 Mar 09, to assist in the process.

Each employee participating in the volunteer process must initially volunteer for his or her current permanent title, series and grade or equivalent level. Thereafter, employees may prioritize unlimited position choices based on the Maneuver Center Organizational Listing (MCOE) TDA paragraph/line number at their current permanent grade or equivalent level. In order to be a match for any position, employees must be fully qualified in accordance with Office of Personnel Management (OPM) qualification standards and meet any special requirements or conditions of employment. If an employee does not match or is not selected for one of his volunteer choices on the SOI, that employee is still guaranteed placement and will receive a specific written job offer at their current permanent grade/ equivalent level.

All direct matches will be made first. A “direct match” is a position in the new MCOE organization that is the same grade or equivalent level, with essentially the same duties and skill requirements an employee is currently performing in one of the organizations being realigned. If more than one employee qualifies for a direct match to a position, the service computation date for leave will determine who is placed in the position.

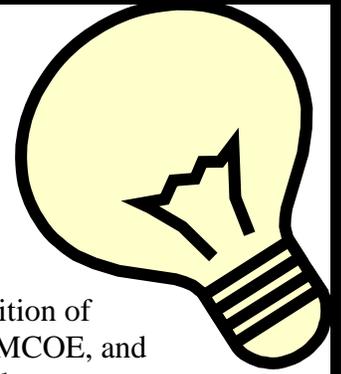
When there are multiple volunteers for a position, a panel comprised of management officials as determined by the respective schools and centers will determine which volunteer will be offered the position based on documented, pre-determined, job-related criteria.

In the event there is no direct match for an employee, every effort will be made to offer positions that employees have indicated as their preferences; however, this may not always be possible. In these situations, an employee will be offered a position at the current grade or equivalent level for which qualified.

During the volunteer process, the anticipated movement date for each position will be identified. The date the employee will realign will be provided when the employee receives the placement/realignment offer.

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Upon acceptance of a specific written offer, volunteers will enter into a condition of employment constituting a firm and binding commitment to realign into the MCOE, and will subsequently be placed in a separate competitive area. Any employee who volunteers to realign to the MCOE and later declines a specific job offer will remain in their permanent position unless otherwise placed. Once the position becomes excess he/she will be subject to Reduction in Force (RIF). The scenario will be identical for employees who do not volunteer to realign to the MCOE. That is to say they will remain in their permanent position unless otherwise placed and when the position becomes excess, those employees will be subject to RIF procedures. On the other hand, employees who volunteer to realign to the MCOE, accept specific written job offer, and then subsequently decline placement will be subject to separation under adverse action procedures [for failure to fulfill a condition of employment].

Acceptance of a volunteer offer does not preclude employees from seeking and accepting employment against other installation positions. Remaining MCOE positions that are not filled through the volunteer process, management directed reassignments, or conversions will be filled through other recruitment procedures the minimum area of which will initially be the Fort Benning/Knox affected centers, schools, and activities forming the MCOE.

If you have questions reference the volunteer process, please contact your servicing HR Specialist for information.

Training, Self-Development and Personal Improvement

Army Creates Organization to Oversee Civilian Training. The Army recently announced it was standing up a civilian university to better manage employee education and training. With plans for a staff of 15, however, the university is less a physical entity than a governing headquarters that aims to better coordinate education programs.

The move is part of a broader plan to centrally manage career development for the Army's 250,000 civilian employees, about 60 percent of whom do not have established career paths. By centralizing management the service plans to level the playing field for all civilians and gain a better understanding of the skills it must develop to meet long-term needs.

Eventually, the service expects to create eight broad career tracks that will provide employees with a clear path for promotion and give them more visibility into opportunities elsewhere in the Army.

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"We have a variety of subgroups of civilians that are well-managed, that have career programs and functional programs that provide for the developmental needs of portions of the workforce," said Jim Warner, the retired brigadier general tapped to lead the Army Civilian University. "What we don't have is a departmental system that analyzes the entire workforce and provides a level of standards and oversight for all of that."

That will be the university's responsibility, Warner said. In January, the university assumed oversight of the Army Management Staff College at Fort Belvoir, Va., where Warner and his staff will be located. The college runs the Civilian Education System -- a leadership development program -- but the system isn't linked to other functional education programs in the Army or to department-wide initiatives aimed at the entire civilian workforce, Warner said. Part of the university's role will be to integrate those things across the service.

Warner said he will serve as an advocate for civilian education and training, which will almost certainly require more funding. "The Army's senior leadership has determined that the civilian workforce has a large and growing role in leadership and management of various important functions within the Army as an institution," he said.

One of the university head's near-term goals is to improve distance-learning programs offered through the college. Classroom training at the college is very good, Warner said, but the distance-learning program needs to be enhanced.

Other top priorities will include documenting the education and training requirements for civilians throughout the Army's major commands and organizations. "Requirements are what get funded," Warner said.

Human Resources (HR) for Supervisors Course. The HR for Supervisors Course encompasses instruction applicable to the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) and the Legacy (i.e. GS) System. The course is 4.5 days long, includes lecture, class discussion and exercises; and, is designed to teach new civilian and military supervisors of appropriated fund civilian employees about their responsibilities for Civilian Human Resource Management.

The dates for remaining training are highlighted below. Registration information will be disseminated not less than 3 weeks from the course start date.

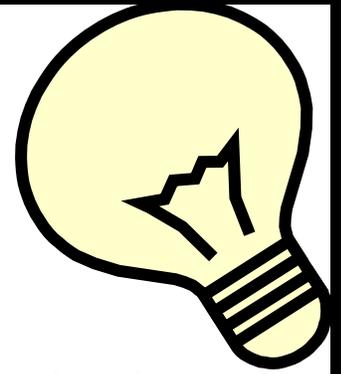
2 - 6 March 2009

1 - 5 June 2009

14 - 18 September 2009

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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

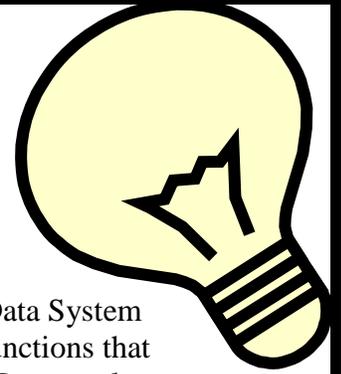
This instruction does *not* cover supervision of non-appropriated fund (NAF) or contract employees.

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 managers/supervisors and new DCPDS account holders with accessing and using DCPDS, ART, initiating RPAs, creating Gatekeeper Checklists, 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).

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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 an 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.

Labor/Management Employee Issues

Conduct Versus Performance Problems: Determining the Difference. Disciplinary actions are used to correct conduct problems, not performance problems; therefore, it is crucial that managers and supervisors be able to recognize the difference. Sometimes it may be difficult to see the dividing line, but in most cases it is fairly easy to do so. Conduct, or behavior, problems are dealt with very differently from the way performance problems are handled

In general, conduct problems involve the breaking of a rule, regulation, requirement, or direct order. For example if an employee does not show up for work, takes agency property for personal use, or refuses to follow a direct order from a supervisor, the behavior would violate rules, requirements or orders and therefore should be considered a conduct problem. Disciplinary penalties such as a reprimand or suspension, are used to correct such problems.

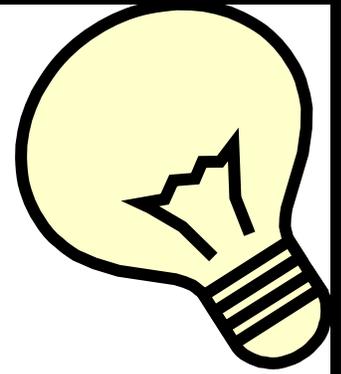
Poor performance is a failure to perform the duties of a position at an acceptable level of quantity, quality, or timeliness. Performance problems involve situations in which an employee is performing a job poorly. What kind of performance problems are you likely to meet? The following are some examples cited by experienced supervisors.

The employee

- Is unable to perform adequately one or more or major parts of the job
- Concentrates on one part of the job at the expense of other major parts
- Takes too long to complete assignments
- Does not keep up with technical advances
- Is unable to troubleshoot standard problems
- Can't handle unusual problems or situations
- Seeks out routine work to do

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Avoids the every-day routine work for the more interesting or unusual
Does accurate work but is sloppy in the way it is done
Turns out low production
Has a high error rate
Produces work which must be redone or requires constant review and checking
Gets a high number of complaints about workmanship
Improperly cares for work equipment and supplies
Wastes or damages work materials
Does not follow work procedures
Follows work procedures too closely or rigidly
Shortcuts safety or other rules to increase production figures
Exhibits poor decision-making skills

These examples are all of poor or unacceptable performance of duties, but not the deliberate breaking of a rule or requirement. Accordingly, they qualify as performance problems. Such problems are usually dealt with through performance counseling, training, performance improvement opportunity periods and other work improvement efforts.

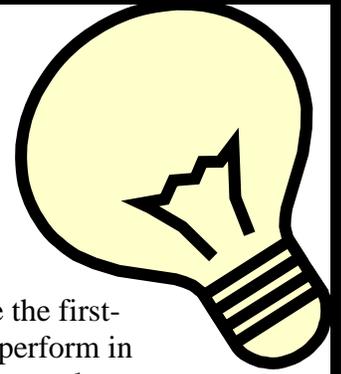
If you are not sure how to label a problem or how to approach corrective action, consult your servicing HR Specialist.

Taking Advantage of the Probationary/Trial Period. The probationary/trial period is the final step in the examination process of a new employee. This period of time can be a highly effective tool used to evaluate a candidate's potential to be an asset to an organization and management's opportunity to weed out a poor performer or one not considered fit for continued Federal employment. The traditional probationary period lasts one year, but some hiring authorities have different rules; therefore, it is important for managers to understand these differences if they are faced with removing or disciplining a newly hired employee.

The term "probationary period" generally applies to employees in the competitive service. "Trial period," by contrast, generally applies to employees in the excepted service, as well as to some appointments in the competitive service, such as term appointments, which have a one-year trial period set by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). A fundamental difference between the two is the length of time in which employees must serve. The probationary period is set by law to last one year. Trial periods are set by individual agencies and can last up to two years. The term "probation" is also used to refer to the one-year trial period served by individuals who are newly appointed to supervisory positions.

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The probationary/trial period facilitates the removal of a new employee since the first-year performance is usually a good indication of how well an employee will perform in the future. With minimum procedural requirements and without the need to meet the stringent “efficiency of service” standard that governs the removal of a tenured employee, Management may terminate a probationary employee for any perceived deficiency in performance or conduct, absent a claim of discrimination based on partisan political reasons or marital status*. The laws and regulations specifically exclude probationary employees from the procedures that require the use of an opportunity to improve period. The rationale being the entire probationary period is similar to an opportunity period. It should be noted however, that in order to afford the Agency the benefit of full productivity as quickly as possible, these employees should receive close supervision, instruction and training during their first year of employment.

Proper use of the probationary period promotes the efficiency of Federal service and reinforces the merit system principle that selection should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge and skills. But without the necessary supervisory action, the probationary period becomes meaningless.

Should management have significant concerns with a new employee’s performance or conduct that may result in termination of services, immediate coordination with the servicing Human Resources Specialist, Civilian Personnel Advisory Center, should be initiated. The HR Specialist will advise management of the administrative requirements needed to support the probationary employee termination.

*Be aware that some probationary employees in the competitive service may be afforded other appeal rights based on previous government service.

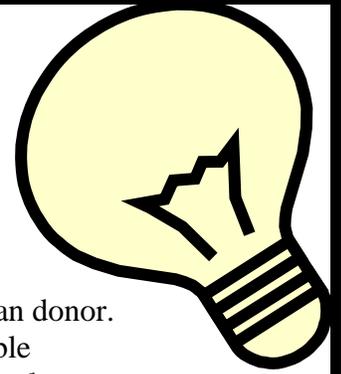
The NAF Corner

Employee Participation as a Donor Under The Organ Donor Leave Act. In 1997 President Clinton launched the National Organ and Tissue Donation Initiative, which included new efforts by the Federal government to increase of the need for organ and tissue donation. Thereafter, the Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) implemented a government-wide campaign to encourage Federal employees to consider organ donation and, as the country’s largest employer, to set the example for the private sector as well as other public organizations. Two years later, via Public Law 105-56 which was signed on September 24, 1999, the Organ Donor Leave Act came into existence.

The Act authorizes regular full-time (RFT) non-appropriated fund employees to use up to 56 hours (or seven days) of paid administrative leave to serve as a bone marrow donor

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and up to 240 hours (30 days) of paid administrative leave to serve as an organ donor. The Act also authorizes regular part-time (RPT) or regularly scheduled flexible employees to use a pro-rated amount of paid administrative leave [that is directly proportional to the number of hours in the employee's administrative workweek].

Employees serving as organ or bone marrow donors are required to complete OPM Form 71, Request for Leave or Approved Absence. The form must be properly annotated to reflect "other paid absence" and must specify under remarks their intent to be placed on administrative leave for the purpose of participating as a organ or bone marrow donor. The OPM Form 71 should be accompanied by a medical certificate issued from the employee's healthcare provider which substantiates/ supports the employee's participation.

For questions regarding entitlements under the Organ Donor Leave Act, please contact your NAF Human Resource Office.

Recruitment/Retention Bonuses and Relocation Allowances for NAF Employees. As of February 1996, the Department of Defense (DoD) implemented policy permitting the use of recruitment and retention bonuses as well as relocation allowances as a way of attracting or retaining personnel where there is competition for employees with scarce, highly-sought talent and/or specialized skills.

Under these incentives, in addition to their annual salary, regular full-time (RFT) non-appropriated fund employees may receive up to 25% of their basic pay as a recruitment or retention incentive or a relocation allowance. Recruitment bonuses are offered to newly-appointed employees to accept positions with the Federal government; whereas, retention bonuses are offered to current employees to remain with the Government. An employee may be paid a retention incentive upon determination that his unusual or unique qualifications makes it essential to retain the employee, and that absent an incentive, the employee would be likely to leave the Federal service position.

Payments for bonuses and allowances are to be used sparingly and only in selective recruitment and retention situations. Under no circumstance should these incentives be routinely offered. Bonuses and allowances may not be substituted for incentive awards, pay adjustments, foreign and non-foreign allowances and should not be considered as a part of the basic pay for any purpose, including calculation of retirement annuity.

Upon determination that a position is considered hard to fill, or a specialized skill is needed, the activity manager is required to request funding. Once funding has been approved, the recruitment bonus or relocation allowances becomes available for payment once the employee has accepted employment and entered on duty.

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Thereafter, the manager is directed to ensure a written service agreement is completed by the employee covering a period of at least six months. In the event the employee fails to complete his/her required period of service, the agency is required to recover the funds on a pro-rated basis.

For questions relating to Recruitment and Retention Bonuses or Relocation Allowances, please contact your NAF Human Resources Office.

Just Before Press

The Future of Pay for Performance Under President Obama. This article was written by Robbie Kunreuther and is copyrighted. Permission was sought and granted to use it in its entirety. Future use/reproduction will require additional permission.

Barack Obama is now President of the United States of America. By all accounts, he is a bright and thoughtful man who wants to examine all perspectives on an issue before charting a course. Many Federal employees (and Federal employee unions) are looking to the new president and his appointed leadership in hopes that recent pay-for-performance (PFP) initiatives will be discontinued.

This is the second in a series of three articles. In the first article, I listed several items the incoming Obama administration should consider when deciding whether to expand or contract pay-for-performance initiatives that proliferated in Federal agencies under the outgoing Bush regime. This article and the one that follows will expand on each of those factors.

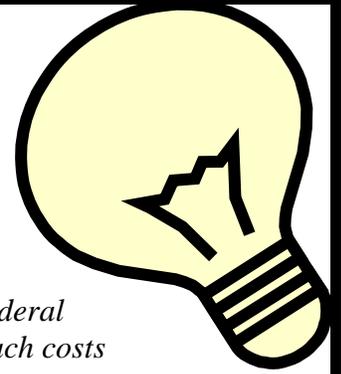
The issues to be considered in this article are:

Distinguishing between the pay-banding aspects of PFP and the appraisal processes upon which they rely. Pay-bands and salary increases are the easier part of PFP. Much tougher is a realistic and unbiased evaluation system. Despite decades of experience with individualized evaluations, the competence of Federal supervisors and managers in the area of performance evaluations is open to debate.

Worrying about inflated ratings often results in a leadership that is more concerned with rating distributions or bell-shaped curves than with individual and collective achievements. This can prove incompatible with (supposedly) objective appraisal criteria.

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The costs of administering the PFP programs that are now established in Federal agencies are not clear... at least to this author. Many officials believe that such costs exceed any benefits accruing from merit-based pay.

In calculating merit compensation, agencies may substitute one-time bonuses (formerly known to Feds as "awards") for ongoing salary increases (the equivalent of "steps" under the General Schedule). This can have a negative effect on an agency's most talented and motivated employees.

The two P's in PFP

Merit (or variable) pay systems present Federal leadership with two fundamental components:

Pay banding – establishing and using broad spectra of possible salaries for broad categories of jobs. Thus an employee can see the lowest and highest potential compensation for the job category in which s/he is placed.

Performance appraisal – comparing an individual employee's achievement over the course of a year to pre-established standards or objectives. Much like school, standards are established at the start of a given year and employees rated at the conclusion.

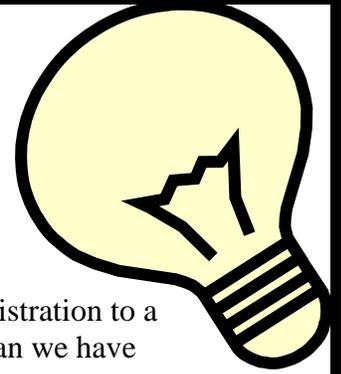
Pay-for-performance does not apply to the president, senators, congress members, or cabinet secretaries. They do not get compensated for their successes, although the question of their continued service (re-election) may hang in the balance. Moreover, political appointees to the Executive Branch tend to inflate their own achievements and underplay their shortcomings. Consider Donald Rumsfeld – former Secretary of Defense, the godfather of NSPS. Did he achieve to written ("SMART") objectives? Would his evaluation of his own tenure and those of his immediate subordinates comport with the strictures of the PFP system he brought into existence?

Within the Federal rank-and-file, performance evaluations have had scant success. Inflated, subjective ratings led many agencies to abandon five-tiered appraisal systems in the 1990s in favor of "pass/fail" alternatives. These two-tiered constructions rated virtually no one, as more than 99% of an agency's workforce received any meaningful news concerning their job performance. As those same agencies are returning to five-tiered schemes, supervisors and managers know nothing more about appraisals than in decades past.

Since I entered the civil service in the mid-1970s, supervisors and managers have seldom been accountable for maintaining good performance documentation. When they have kept good data (qualitative and/or quantitative), pressures from higher levels to limit the number of high outcomes have sometimes trumped efforts to rate people based on merit

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alone. If PFP is to succeed in years ahead, commitment from this new administration to a realistic performance management system needs to be broader and deeper than we have known in the past.

What's the worst that can happen?

As in school, a primary reason for having appraisal systems is to weed out those who are failing. Certainly, a program titled National Security Personnel System (NSPS) should concern itself with removing defense employees who cannot carry their weight in the post-9/11 era. But that isn't necessarily so. As was true with earlier incarnations, most of today's Federal PFP systems are more concerned with *rewards* than *consequences*. Unlike appraisals under the General Schedule and Federal Wage System, PFP plans often fail to prescribe definite personnel actions for civil servants evaluated as failing. Most FedSmith readers are familiar with systems that mandate major personnel actions (demotion and removal) for those who fail in just one "critical element". Nothing I've found in the NSPS regulations (please correct me if I'm wrong), for example, speaks to firing employees whose performance is unacceptable. Instead, these constructs presume that stagnated salaries and the possibility of sending employees to a lower pay band will bring about the desired result.

According to the Federal Times, 0.2% of DoD employees were rated at the lowest of 5 levels. This statistic (one of every 500 employees) seems alarmingly low to those of us who have worked in DoD agencies. What may be more disturbing than the statistic is that the department failed to tell us *what happened to those people*. How many of that .2% are still working in DoD? Are supervisors willing to make repeated unacceptable assessments of those who remain both employed and incompetent? Isn't that asking a lot?

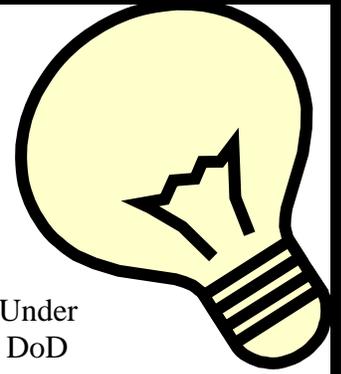
Performance appraisal works best when both the carrots and sticks look credible to the workforce. While being denied an annual pay increase may be humiliating, if not financially threatening, it may prove bearable when compared to resignation and/or unemployment. If President Obama favors PFP for Feds, he would do well to consider how his branch's worst employees will be effectively weeded out of the civil service. He will be lauded by the many and reviled by the few for doing so.

Do "Valued Performers" feel valued?

In my experience, status and exclusivity commonly stem from a willingness to rule out the majority. For those who believe in PFP, it only works if just a few employees are rated (and, therefore, compensated) at higher levels – while the many continue on without such distinction. If stellar performers are to be rewarded (and therefore motivated) by substantial pay-outs, there must be a large population of mediocre employees to support them by accepting much more modest ratings and pay increases.

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In my school experience, a "C" was the middle rating in a five-level system. Under NSPS, this middle level (3) is termed "Valued Performer". More than half of DoD employees rated under PFP a year ago were bestowed this designation. Similar experiences can be found in DHS, FAA, and other agencies employing PFP.

These modest assessments seem to be backfiring. Employees rated as "valued" are too-often feeling *under-valued*. Leaders who believe that "A's" should be conferred upon a few stellar performers may find such a practice misplaced in 21st century Federal agencies. Anecdotal evidence (see comments posted to the previous article in this series) indicates that ensuring a large percentage of employees are rated at the median level is proving as destructive as it is motivational.

Obama administration officials should consider the efficacy of desired rating dispersions (bell-shaped curves) – especially those that exist in the face of rhetoric to the contrary. If large numbers of employees achieve to the standards/objectives management held out to them, is it right to deny them higher ratings in order to maintain an appropriate dispersion of ratings?

We're winning... if you don't count the losses

PFP may actually cost much more than it's worth. In confidence, HR specialists and management officials describe endless hours of paperwork and meetings that are required by these systems. When asked if that time and effort has been well spent, few answer affirmatively. Given the economics of the United States government in this new century, no program should be cost-ineffective without a good reason.

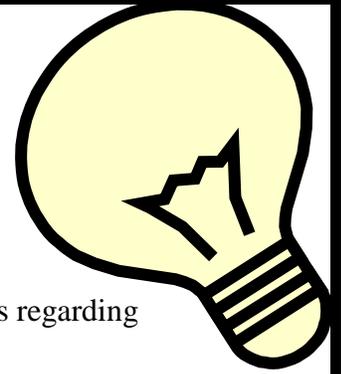
Serious studies of Federal PFP programs (at GAO, DHS, DoD, FAA, etc.) have not seriously explored the price tags associated with running them. These experiments have added layers of complexity to both pay-setting and performance evaluations.

When colleges determine which students make "dean's list" and which graduate "magna cum laude", we hope such efforts motivate students to increased learning and scholarship. We also presume that the college administration used objective data to arrive at that conclusion. In many PFP environments, however, objective data does not definitively determine who is worthy of which rating. As a result, self-appraisals, written justifications, ongoing salesmanship, and debating endurance are often required to determine who should receive what grade. All that time (running over a 3-month period in many models) adds up.

Calculating the overhead costs associated with PFP will go a long way toward determining their projected value to the Executive Branch. Until the Obama

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administration has good estimates of these expenses, well-informed decisions regarding PFP cannot be made.

PFP depends on what you mean by "pay"

When Federal employees get raises via "within grade" or "within band" increases, those salary bumps continue into the future and also serve to increase retirement benefits. Under some Federal PFP plans, however, the pay-out to those with the highest performance ratings may be in the form of bonuses rather than (or in combination with) raises. This practice proves most common as our government's best and most experienced employees reach toward the top of their pay bands.

While one-time bonus checks are often more substantial under Merit Pay, they are in no way equivalent to a similarly valued salary increase. Top performers are smart enough to recognize this. Many complain that their reward is of less value than those of others who received similar amounts in the form of salary increases.

While pay pool management no doubt has reasons for employing such strategies, it may not serve the interests of the incoming administration to have top achievers questioning the form in which they've been paid for their superior performance. After all, if the biggest winners are complaining, what value is accruing from these experiments?

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