

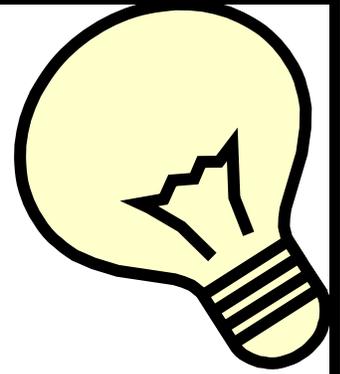
The

Illuminator

Shedding Light on the HR World

6-2009

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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 (MCOE) civilian transition, etc.).

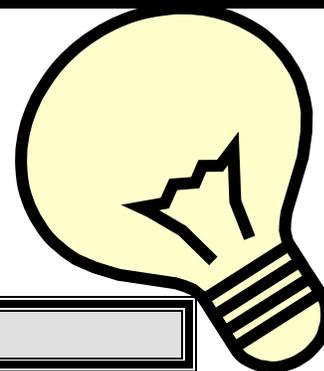
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Retirement, Life/Health Insurance, TSP, Social Security and Such

Time to Reconsider Long-Term-Care Plans. Looking for the perfect gift for your spouse, kids, siblings and parents? Get yourself a good long-term-care insurance policy. And pray — for yourself and your loved ones — that you never need it.

Most of us buy life insurance because we reluctantly concede that someday it will pay off.

Most of us buy health insurance hoping we won't need it but knowing that eventually we will use it.

But most of us buy travel insurance, fire insurance, auto insurance, long-term disability and long-term care (LTC) insurance hoping it will never pay off.

Airplane crashes typically have a bad outcome. Losing a house and your belongings to a fire is not what something you hope for. And being unable to work — and draw a paycheck — or being unable to bathe, feed or dress yourself is not something anybody looks forward to.

Although the federal government is a model employer in many ways, its health insurance program doesn't cover what LTC insurance does. Nor does Medicare. You must be nearly broke before you can go on Medicaid, and it does not pay for the kind of assisted-living coverage most people would want for themselves or a loved one.

LTC is on a lot of people's minds these days, because the program offered to active and retired civil servants (and in some cases, their parents) is about to change. Premiums did not go up during the just-expired seven-year contract. But they are going up in January for many people. The increases will range from 5 percent to 25 percent, depending on age and the options people choose.

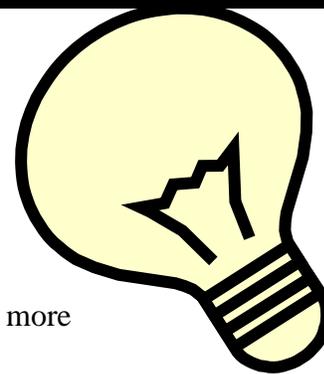
The new benefits will be outlined shortly by the Office of Personnel Management. So will premiums.

Arthur Stein, a certified financial planner who specializes in investments and insurance, says most people need LTC coverage. He recommends that they get a policy from a top-rated firm and that the policy have an automatic 5 percent inflation add-on each year.

Mr. Stein says that many federal and postal workers can get a better deal — that is, equal benefits with lower premiums — by going outside the government program. This is

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especially true if they are younger and healthy enough to pass what are often more stringent underwriting requirements in a non-group private plan.

Improvements Planned for Thrift Savings Plan Website. The Thrift Savings Plan's first Web site overhaul is coming in January to allow participants to more easily access their accounts, find important information and make investment decisions.

The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board said at its monthly meeting Monday in Washington that about 5,000 TSP participants will be randomly chosen to test the site in September. The board said it will use the feedback to finalize the Web site and iron out any bugs.

The [TSP site](#) has not had a major upgrade since its 1997 debut, and its design and functionality are outdated, said Penny Moran, director of the board's Office of Participant Services. She said the board will add interactivity, a modern layout and options to view information in different formats.

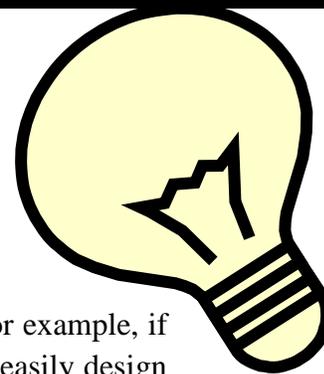
For example, a participant currently can review monthly returns for TSP's different funds only as a series of static tables and graphs. The new site will let the user click through a series of tabs to find facts about a fund, review its key features and performance history, and compare the performance of different funds

The home page will be redesigned with a more modern, attractive look and better organized information, Moran said. It will prominently feature the login screen for participants to access their accounts and four main channels containing information on how to manage one's contributions, research different funds, plan for retirement, and determine how major life events such as marriage, divorce, retirement or military deployment will affect one's TSP account. The information on life events is currently scattered in different locations throughout the TSP Web site, Moran said, and participants have to search for that data.

"One of the things in designing this was to reduce the number of clicks that participants had to make to get to the information, and to recognize that participants get to that information in different ways," said Renee Wilder, director of the board's Office of Research and Strategic Planning. "Some might go through the [four channels in the] middle section, some may use the top bar for navigation, and others may use the quick links at the bottom of the page."

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Moran said the Web site was designed so features could be easily added. For example, if Congress votes to create a Roth 401(k) option for the TSP, the board could easily design a Roth module for the site. Other potential features: additional interactive tables; podcasts from the board's executive director, Gregory Long; or video on how the TSP's lifecycle funds, the L Funds, work.

Fitter Feds. The week of 11 May, President Obama -- who, like several of his predecessors, is a dedicated exerciser -- met with industry leaders to discuss ways to improve employee wellness and health. The idea is employees who hit the gym regularly will experience fewer health problems, leading to savings down the road.

"As a result of many successful programs at businesses across the country, workers have become more engaged in their own health care, productivity is increasing, absenteeism is dropping, and employers are passing some of their health care savings to their workers," the White House said in a statement earlier this month.

The push for a healthier workforce will extend to civil servants. Obama has directed the Office of Personnel Management to work with other agencies to "explore the feasibility of developing such a plan for federal employees and their workplaces."

OPM hasn't released any details about options it is considering. But if the federal plan is modeled after private sector and state-level efforts, it would emphasize assessing employees' health, and initiating programs to address shortcomings. Perhaps most important, it would include incentives for employees to participate in fitness and other classes.

Many private sector companies have cut their costs in the long run by making upfront investments in employees' health. For instance, Coors Brewing Co., based in Golden, Colo., reported that its wellness program, first implemented in the early 1980s, has seen a \$5.50 return on investment for every \$1 spent.

Such programs -- what industry experts call "population health management" -- also have taken hold in state governments.

Ohio, for example, established the Take Charge! Live Well program in 2007 as part of an effort to promote good health and keep expenses low during a budget crunch. The program gives employees \$25 to have their health assessed by an insurance provider. The provider then suggests a wellness program, and the state will cover up to \$100 of the costs for employees who choose to follow the recommendation. The program is relatively new, but 60 percent of Ohio employees already are involved.

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Alvin Jackson, director of the Ohio Department of Health and one of the officials in charge of implementing the state's plan, participated in the Obama round-table last week, along with representatives from Johnson & Johnson, Microsoft, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, Safeway, REI, and Pitney Bowes.

Federal agencies currently develop their own employee health programs and the offerings vary widely. The Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management, for instance, will compensate employees 50 percent of their fitness and wellness costs annually, up to \$275 for a private fitness center and \$375 for a wellness intervention programs.

The Veterans Affairs Department gives its employees access to many of the facilities available to veterans, and has a component -- the VHA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention -- dedicated to long-term health care management. On its Web site <<http://www.prevention.va.gov/W.asp>> , the agency heavily promotes its MOVEmployees campaign, modeled after a similar plan to reduce obesity in veterans.

The department has several employee wellness coordinators who help implement programs ranging from regular jogging and walking campaigns to smoking cessation classes. This focus on employee health dates back to the early 1980s.

Richard Harvey, program manager for health promotion at the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, said VHA is working on a health appraisal for employees and veteran clients to help target its programs.

"Healthy employees are more engaged, they take better care of their patients," Harvey said. "There's a lot of support at the highest levels to be doing this, not just because it's the right thing to do, but for economic and patient care reasons."

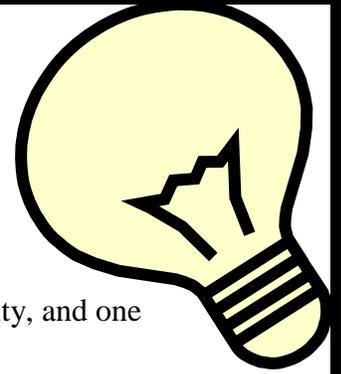
In an August 2008 paper <http://www.prevention.va.gov/Wellness_Ecomonics.asp> , Harvey outlined 15 crucial points for a good wellness program, including health assessments, incentives, coaching and high employee involvement. He noted wellness efforts could be very effective in the federal government.

"Given the size of the federal workforce, significant cost savings in the government's contribution to health insurance premiums for employees could be achieved if a majority of that population were participating in active wellness programs," Harvey said.

Current regulations prevent government agencies from offering employees incentives to get in shape -- but Harvey said he was working with OPM to explore such issues. "It takes a while to change things in the government," he added.

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Of course, everyone likes incentives -- but disincentives are another possibility, and one that's more likely to raise eyebrows.

Last year, the Alabama State Employees Board caused a stir when it announced that it would be implementing a \$25 monthly fee for obese employees, which they could avoid by enrolling in a wellness program.

The bottom line: If you aren't already paying attention to your health, you might have a reason to start soon.

What Will Your Retirement be Like? This is one of the two items that elicited the most curiosity when readers were asked what they would most like to see covered in upcoming articles.

I have met many people who were unsure what they would do after they retire, and this caused some of them to delay retirement out of concern as to what was ahead. However, I have met many pre-retirees who knew exactly what was in their future.

Once we are retired we will still have the same 24 hours in a day (168 per week) that we had while working. It's just that we will have around 50 extra hours per week to fill. The 50 hours assumes a 40-hour workweek and roughly 10 hours a week spent in commuting.

Early in retirement, we will have little trouble filling these hours. We will have projects that have been put off during our working days, and we will revel in the fact that we don't have to be anywhere at any special time. We may have a special vacation or two we want to take to celebrate our retirement.

Once we settle down (a few months after our retirement date) we realize that there is no one-size-fits-all answer to what our retirement life will look like. Our interests vary as much after we retire as they do while we are still working. We can expect that we will enjoy pretty much the same things we did while we were working.

Some people do find that things they thought they would enjoy immensely after their retirement lose some of their luster after a year or so.

Let's take golf as an example. Many of us golf as often as we can while we are still working. Unfortunately, due to our work and home lives, we may only get in a round once every two weeks or so. When we retire, we can play every day if the weather (or spouse) permits. This would allow us to play as many rounds in a month as we did in a normal pre-retirement year. I suspect there are a few readers (wearing Calloway hats as

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they read this) who will be able to enjoy a daily round of golf, but I suspect there are more who would tire of golf after a while if we played it on a daily basis.

Think of the items that society values. They tend to be rare, such as diamonds or gold (or golf only twice a month). More common items such as wood or gravel (or golf every day) are not valued as highly.

I have a retirement readiness "test" I often give to people in my pre-retirement seminars. First, they are shown a circle like the following

Please insert a pie chart here with three unequal slices. One should say "Work, Lunch, Travel: 9 – 10 hours". Another should say "Sleep, Breakfast, Dinner: 8 – 10 hours". The third should say "Other Activities Including Leisure: 4 – 7 Hours".

This chart represents a typical workday, though the pie slices may vary slightly from person to person. Then I show them an empty circle and ask them to imagine they have been retired for a while and to fill Please insert a blank circle here.

If they can quickly fill in the circle with realistic activities, they are mentally and emotionally ready to retire, regardless of whether or not they can afford to or are even eligible to. If they are unable to fill in the circle with realistic activities, they are mentally and emotionally ready to retire, regardless of whether or not they can afford to or even eligible to. If they are unable to fill in the circle, then they are not mentally and emotionally ready to retire.

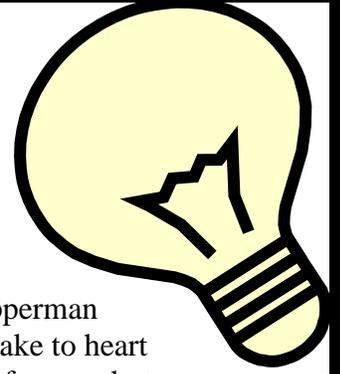
You might want to try this test when you get within a year or so of retirement.

Volunteering is a common activity of retirees. Volunteering, like work, is more rewarding if you have an interest in what you are doing and if you have the skills necessary to do it well. Providing assistance to causes you believe in can be rewarding just in itself. This website <<http://www.volunteermatch.org>> can help you locate multiple volunteer opportunities in your area. Your local United Way or Community Chest would also be aware of volunteer opportunities.

If you stay in touch with former co-workers who have retired, you may wish to talk to them about how they adjusted to retirement. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to know the answers to; then ask them.

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We also don't know what the future holds for us. In a recent article, Steve Opperman outlined his adjusting to a different life in retirement. Perhaps we should all take to heart some advice that Ben Franklin gave many years ago: "Plan like you will live forever, but pray like you will die tomorrow."

If you don't feel ready to retire, don't do so just because it is expected. After all, unless you are in a position with a mandatory retirement age, no one can tell you that you have to retire. On the other hand, if you are ready to go (and can afford to), no one can stop you either.

Employment-Related News

Bill Favoring Fed Retirees Opposed by Unions. The federal "retirement tsunami" has been making news for some time. The theory is that all those federal employees hired about 30 years ago are going to decide to walk out the door in the near future and take their expertise and institutional memory out the door as well.

In addition to the impending loss of tens of thousands of these federal baby boomers, the Obama administration is considering hiring up to another 600,000 or so new federal employees. That is an easy promise to make. Hopefully, the hiring process doesn't mean that anyone able to walk into a federal office will be hired automatically. In fact, the federal hiring process is perhaps the weakest link in this chain of events as getting a federal job is highly desirable but can take months, extraordinary energy and patience on the part of the applicant, and does not necessarily result in hiring the best people to work for Uncle Sam.

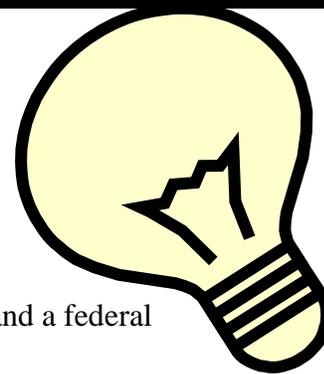
So, with this confluence of events, perhaps it makes sense to bring back to work some people hired by the government before, who worked for the federal government for years, and then retired. Some former federal employees have undoubtedly found that their retirement annuity does not go as far as they hoped and they would like to come back to work and bring in some extra money. If they want to return to work, why not provide an incentive for them to leave the beach or the mountains, put on their work clothes and become an active federal employee once again? The (former) retiree makes more money and the government gets its work done quicker and easier.

Bill to Allow Rehiring of Former Feds

The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) thinks this is a good idea. And a bill in the Senate entitled the "Part-Time Reemployment of Annuitants Act of 2009" (S. 629) would allow federal agencies to re-employ federal retirees on a limited, part-time basis without an offset of their annuity from salary. In

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other words, a retired federal employee could collect his retirement annuity and a federal salary at the same time.

NARFE president Margaret Baptiste says in a press release this Senate bill makes sense "because it would enable federal retirees to continue to make critical contributions to our safety and well-being during this time of national need....While workers deserve their hard-earned retirement, the federal government needs their talents once again, at a time of compelling need. These men and women should not be penalized for returning to federal service, particularly when they are needed to respond to the unparalleled economic upheaval, homeland security and military and foreign policy challenges we face."

Federal Unions Oppose Bill

So, what is the problem making the passage of this bill difficult?

The problem is that federal employee unions don't like it. Many in Congress are therefore hesitant to support a bill because they like getting the support of federal employee unions during an election.

But, if the bill helps former federal employees, why would unions oppose it? The answer is obvious: Retired federal employees are not in a bargaining unit represented by federal employee unions.

Retired federal employees may not become members if they come back to work. An AFGE spokesperson summarized [their opposition](#) as follows: "Managers would have complete discretion to hire annuitants of their choice, without any regard to veterans preference, or any objective, competitive criteria." In other words, the federal employee unions are looking out for their current members and not too concerned about the concerns of federal retirees.

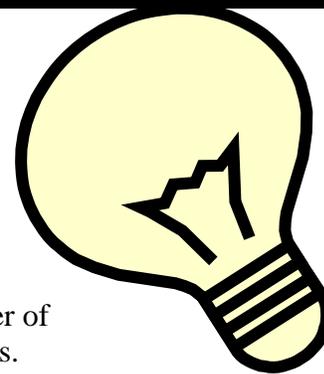
To try and quell some of the opposition, the Senate bill puts restrictions on the hiring of these former feds. The bill prohibits waiving restricting annuities and pay upon reemployment for more than:

1. 520 hours of service performed during the six months following the individual's annuity commencing date;
2. 1040 hours of service performed during any 12-month period; or
3. a total of 3120 hours of service performed by that annuitant.

The bill also limits the total number of annuitants to whom a waiver by the head of an agency may apply to not more than 2.5% of the total number of full-time agency

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employees and requires an agency head to submit a justification if the number of annuitants to whom a waiver applies exceeds 1% of the number of employees.

On May 20th, the bill was approved Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. If the bill is successful, or appears likely to pass, will be the subject of future information.

Premium Pay for Part Time Federal Employees. Five part-time meteorologists with the National Weather Service have caused some problems for the Office of Personnel Management's long-standing policy—formulated based on advice of the Comptroller General—that has denied premium pay for part-time employees. ([*Fathauer v. United States*](#), C.A.F.C. No. 2008-5112, 5/26/2009)

The appeals court parses the meaning of "employee" in the applicable overtime pay law (5 U.S.C. 5542), pointing out that the end result depends upon whether Congress intended to include part-timers when referring to employees for this purpose. (Opinion pp. 5-6) The court concludes that Congress intended that the work be given its "ordinary meaning." (p. 7)

Apparently unimpressed with the definition used by the Office of Personnel Management (that was supported by the U.S. Court of Federal Claims in denying overtime to part-timers), the court instead relies on the dictionary definition of "employees" as "those who work for pay." (Citing, among others, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Opinion p. 7)

Once the appeals court spells out the plain meaning of the term, it "decline[s] to sift through legislative history in search of ambiguity..." which is what the claims court had done in its analysis supporting OPM. (p. 9)

The lower court's decision has been vacated and the case remanded to the claims court to be dealt with "consistent with this opinion." (p. 9)

How OPM will handle this rebuke of its overtime regulations remains to be seen but we are confident that part-timers will be keeping a close eye on developments.

Tips for a Winning Application. Here's a sample of tried-and-true job application tips that have helped many of my federal clients advance.

- Remember that employers don't hire people; they hire applications. No matter how impressive your credentials are, they won't help you land your next job if they are not conveyed in clear and compelling terms on your application.

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- Get a second opinion. To objectively evaluate how well your application comes across to others, show it to others and ask for their opinions.
- Even if your hiring managers know you, assume they have no prior knowledge of your work. Even if you are the “inside” applicant, treat your quest for your target job as seriously as you would if you were an outsider. Managers at your organization probably remember less of your achievements than you think they do. And if you demonstrate a cavalier attitude, you will likely be upstaged by more serious, prepared applicants.
- Research your target organizations. Hiring managers are almost always more impressed by applicants who recognize and show enthusiasm for an organization’s uniqueness than to applicants who are obviously desperate to land just any job.

Show your fire-in-the-belly for your target organization when you answer common interview questions such as, “Why do you want to work here?” Prepare by reviewing your target organization’s Web site, recent press releases, and relevant news reports. If you’re applying to another federal agency, check your target agency’s ratings on the Partnership for Public Service’s www.bestplacestowork.org.

- Prepare for interviews. Politicians don’t go into debates cold, expecting to wing their answers. They prepare by anticipating likely questions, developing answers and role-playing with trusted advisers.

You should prepare similarly before job interviews: Anticipate likely interview questions with your trusted advisers and then prepare answers to them. Also, role-play the interview; the more advisers you practice with, the better. Each of your advisers will probably correctly predict different interview questions and give you different but valid feedback on your answers.

A case in point: I know someone who has excellent credentials, including a doctorate from Yale University and a well-received book on environmental issues, but who nevertheless repeatedly failed to turn her job interviews into job offers. Then, the night before her most recent interview, she called me in a panic, asking for last-minute suggestions on how to prepare for the interview. During our conversation, she assured me that she had reviewed common interview questions. But when she admitted that she had never role-played for a job interview, and therefore had never received feedback on her

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answers and interview style, I encouraged her to role-play for the interview with her husband that night. The result: She got the job.

- Exploit the principle, “Actions speak louder than words.” Give each of your interviewers your success portfolio, which should feature labeled selections of relevant documents that reflect your productivity. These documents should include your résumé together with some of the following, as appropriate: your academic transcripts; recent annual reviews and awards; praising e-mails; printouts of Web sites, speeches or PowerPoint presentations you helped create; published articles or newsletters or annual reports that feature your contributions; samples of your artwork; or photos of products you helped produce.
- Send post-interview thank-you letters. Immediately after you get home from your interview — even before you take off your uncomfortable interview outfit and toss back a cold one — write a thank-you letter to your interviewer. Your letter should confirm your interest in the position, cite several ways that you could contribute to the organization and mention several appealing aspects of your target position and organization. Proofread your letter, and then send it overnight delivery. A thank-you letter stands out more than an e-mail. And an overnight letter that arrives right away will score more points than one that arrives even one day later.

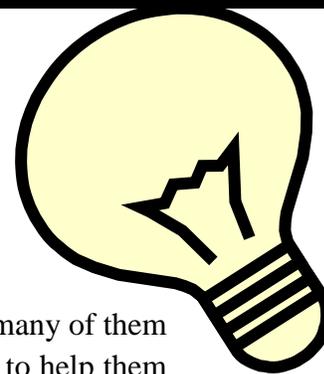
DoD Applies Telework, Subsidies to Ease BRAC Moves. Elizabeth Ahlersmeyer has some tough decisions to make over the next two years. Her job as a program analyst for the Defense Information Systems Agency is moving from Arlington, Va., to a new building at Fort Meade, Md., in early 2011. She likes working for DISA, but the prospect of fighting Washington’s notorious traffic while commuting more than 30 miles from her home in Alexandria, Va., to Maryland — which will probably take at least 50 minutes each way — doesn’t thrill her. Neither does selling her house in the current housing market. Neither does searching for a new job, since she’s happy with DISA’s work life and employee development programs.

“I’m weighing quite a few factors,” Ahlersmeyer said.

Ahlersmeyer isn’t alone. Roughly 36,000 civilian Defense Department employees are due to be relocated over the next three years as part of the base realignment and closure, or BRAC, process.

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Defense Department agencies are taking some unique steps to hold on to as many of them as possible. They are building Web sites where employees can find benefits to help them move or other job opportunities elsewhere in Defense. Some want to expand the use of telework to accommodate employees who don't want to move closer to their new workplaces.

And the Pentagon is broadening its program for compensating military service members and civilian employees who have to sell their homes because of BRAC. Previously, those who lost money on the sale of their home had to prove the loss was because BRAC moves depressed housing values in the area. But because the collapse of the housing industry has brought down home values nationwide — making it nearly impossible to prove a decline was due to BRAC — Congress broadened the requirements when it passed the stimulus bill in February. Now, any Defense employee or service member who bought a home before July 2006 and has to sell his house for a loss before October 2012 because of BRAC can be compensated for some of the loss.

The stimulus bill authorizes payments of up to 95 percent of the loss, but the Pentagon is still trying to decide how much it will offer.

The Pentagon also could buy the house of an employee affected by BRAC for up to 90 percent of the prior fair market value, or help pay the balance of a mortgage if a home's sale price isn't enough to repay the entire mortgage.

"I think that would help a lot of people, because that's a real concern for folks," Ahlersmeyer said. "When people talk about moving, they say, 'I wouldn't be able to sell my house right now.'"

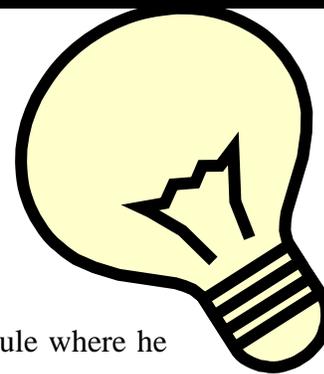
Defense said about 17,000 employees affected by BRAC could use this program. The entire program — which also benefits wounded warriors, other transferred employees, and surviving spouses of combat victims — could cost \$555 million.

Telework options

Some DISA employees already know they don't want to move. Budget analyst Juan Ramirez likes his home and friends in Falls Church, Va., so he plans to use a mixture of teleworking and commuting to Fort Meade after the move is complete. Ramirez already

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teleworks from home from time to time, but he wants to work out a schedule where he can telework on a regular basis after the move.

Jack Penkoske, DISA's manpower, personnel and security director, said about 45 percent of DISA's 2,500 civilian employees now telework, some up to three days a week. But DISA plans to encourage more employees to telework to lessen BRAC's impact, and Penkoske hopes to have anywhere from 55 percent to 65 percent of employees teleworking regularly in a few years. DISA also covers half of the cost of broadband Internet for employees who telework at least one day every pay period.

"We're constantly having education seminars [on telework] so managers know what their responsibilities are, and employees do, too," Penkoske said.

DISA also wants to set up a series of van pools or buses to pick up commuting employees at the Greenbelt Metro station — 18 miles from Fort Meade — or other locations and drive them to Fort Meade.

DISA's [BRAC Web site](#), which went online in February, lets employees organize carpools, share commuting strategies, learn about housing and schools in the Fort Meade area, and find information about moving benefits.

Retention, recruitment strategies

Penkoske said many of DISA's employees — such as information technology specialists, electrical engineers, contract specialists, budget analysts and accountants — have highly specialized skills, and the agency doesn't want to lose them. DISA plans to use an authority granted in 2007 to give bonuses of up to 25 percent of basic pay to retain employees who are likely to go to other federal jobs or elsewhere.

Other Defense organizations also plan to use incentive payments. About 370 civilian employees at Fort Monroe, Va., which is slated to close in 2011, are due to transfer to Fort Knox, Ky., or Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Samantha Newman, Fort Monroe's civilian personnel director, said about one-quarter of those employees are willing to move, so the Army will offer relocation bonuses of up to 25 percent of basic pay to encourage more to transfer.

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But even that won't be enough to persuade some employees to leave Virginia, and Newman said Defense doesn't want to lose them. So Fort Monroe is pointing those employees to its Web site listing other Defense jobs in the area.

"These are budget, human resources, IT, training people," Newman said. "We want to hold on to them."

Agencies are already starting to plan to replace the employees who quit because of BRAC. Recruiters from the Army Life Cycle Management Command and Army Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance team, which will move from Fort Monmouth, N.J., to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Md., by 2012, are attending job fairs and participating in job placement programs for wounded soldiers to attract employees.

DISA expects about 3,000 people to attend its June 13 job fair in Baltimore, and wants to use direct hire authority to bring new employees on immediately.

In the meantime, Ramirez is plotting the best way to get to Fort Meade on the days when he can't telework, whether that means finding routes to drive, or riding his bike to the Metro stop three-quarters of a mile from his home.

"I'll just have a good iPod mix and bring some work with me," Ramirez said.

Give the Right Answers. Some job seekers see a federal job application and fear they'll be hit by the full force of the government's punitive power — including armed marshals and IRS audits — if their application provides anything less than a full confession of all of their professional deficiencies and liabilities. But remember: As long as your answers to application questions are honest, you are within your rights and well advised to keep your faults to yourself and to evaluate your credentials liberally and leniently.

As was written in a previous column, your application will likely first have to impress a computer. How the computer scores your application will determine whether you are invited for an interview. So your answers should represent your highest level of experience, biggest influence, most responsibility and most seniority.

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To help you claim all of the credit you deserve on the short-answer questions included on federal job applications, here are three examples of such questions with explanations of their winning answers.

- Example of a check-the-boxes question:

I have independently written, without supervision, the following:

Newsletters
Magazine articles
Technical and/or status reports
Non-technical correspondence
Congressional testimony
Fact sheets and/or brochures
Briefing packages
Position papers
Policy analyses
Press releases

I do not have or do not meet any of the choices above.

As is usually the case with check-the-boxes questions, a winning answer to this question would feature checks next to all of the boxes except the last one. Why? Because each answer to check-the-boxes questions usually describes a type of experience that is required by the opening. So to be a top contender for the position, you ideally would be able to claim to have all, or at least most, of the types of experience asked about.

When you answer, interpret the language in the question broadly. For example, consider the term “fact sheet.” Almost any type of short, pithy document you have written that contains facts may qualify as “a fact sheet.” And policy analyses you wrote in school — not just those you wrote on the job — may qualify as “policy analyses.”

- Example of a yes-no question:

Have you appraised employees’ job performance through activities such as evaluating their performance against performance standards?

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You could honestly check “yes” if you supervised employees in any previous job no matter how long it was; in an acting position; in a non-federal job; in a freelance job. You could check “yes” if you supervised employees as a manager of contractors or as a team leader without serving as a first-line supervisor. Also, because of the inclusion of the phrase “such as” in the question, you may substitute other appraisal methods for the use of performance standards. These other methods may, for example, include simply observing employees’ work.

- Example of a tiered-response question:

Select the response that describes your highest level of experience analyzing operational problems or issues and recommending solutions:

1. I recommended and implemented a solution that permanently resolved the systemic operational problem or issue.
2. I have successfully implemented solutions that I recommended to resolve systemic operational problems or issues.
3. I have recommended solutions to systemic operational problems or issues.
4. I have identified and gathered information addressing an operational problem.
5. I have not performed this job function on my job.

As is usually the case with tiered-response questions, the winning answer to this question covers a larger number of high-level activities — i.e. recommending and implementing solutions to problems — that address a larger number of problems. In this case, the winning answer is No. 2.

If your answer to any short-answer question warrants explanation, include your explanation in the body of your application.

Management-Employee Relations

Money’s Nice, But a Good Boss is Better. When it comes to sizing up the quality of their workplaces, federal workers value strong leadership and straight answers from their bosses more than even pay and benefits, according to a new comprehensive study of the federal workforce.

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The study places the Nuclear Regulatory Commission atop the list of best places to work in the federal government. Other top performers among large federal agencies include the Government Accountability Office, NASA, the intelligence community and the State Department.

At the NRC, officials said the top ranking was earned because senior management takes the time to listen to the staff. "They are the real human resources managers," said Jim McDermott <<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/m000404/>> , director of human resources for the commission. "I lead a lazy life." Agencies that received the lowest ratings included the Transportation Department, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Homeland Security Department and the Education Department.

What separates these agencies in the minds of their employees is often the senior leadership, how well or poorly it shares information with subordinates, and the training and opportunities it provides workers, according to the study of federal survey results by the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan group devoted to improving public service.

"The challenge is for government managers to do a better job of communicating," said John Palguta, vice president for policy for the group. "Communicate, communicate, communicate. It's like real estate."

Despite a general rise in federal workers' job satisfaction over the past two years, the survey of 212,000 workers last summer found that the government consistently lagged behind the private sector in several important measures of worker contentment -- most significantly, superiors' leadership skills, openness and willingness to help their employees advance their careers.

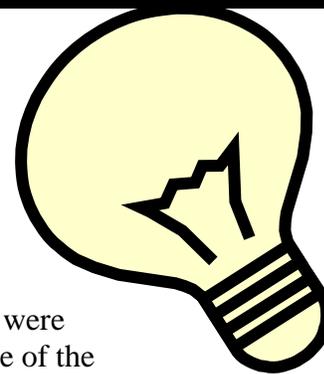
Fewer than half of federal workers, 48 percent, are satisfied with the information they receive from superiors about what is happening in their organizations, a number that trails the private sector by 18 percentage points. Overall, 66 percent of federal workers think their immediate supervisors are doing a good job, eight points less than in the private sector.

"The biggest challenge, clearly, is that the federal workforce has a poor perception of its management and leadership," said Max Stier, president and chief executive of the partnership, which today will release its 2009 rankings of "The Best Places to Work" in the federal government.

The partnership's study is based on the Office of Personnel Management's biennial federal human capital survey, conducted in August and September and released in

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January. About 212,000 employees at 260 departments, agencies and offices were surveyed. The study to be released today amounts to a final report on the state of the federal workforce under the Bush administration, as well as a benchmark to measure what progress can be made by President Obama, who has vowed to reinvigorate the federal government.

"What we have in essence is a challenge to the Obama administration," Stier said. "The new team is in, and they need to better the numbers that have been set. It sets the bar for the new administration. They are now responsible if we see things moving in a positive fashion or getting worse."

Scores on the partnership's 100-point index among 30 large federal agencies ranged from NRC's high mark of 80.7 to the Transportation Department's low of 52.2. They are based on employee responses to questions about whether they are satisfied with their jobs and with their organizations, and whether they would recommend their organizations as good places to work.

Government-wide, agency ratings have increased 2.4 percent from 2007 and 4.6 percent from 2003, a consistent, though not dramatic, improvement.

Several factors may account for the recent higher scores, according to Palguta: the economic downturn, which prompts many employees to better value the jobs they hold; the growing role of the federal government, which these days is more often seen as part of the solution rather than part of the problem; and the expectation of change that would be brought by a new administration.

Even as federal employees attach increased importance to finding a healthy balance between work and home life, however, they report less support from supervisors in achieving that balance. The latest Office of Personnel Management survey found that 75 percent of federal employees think their supervisors support their need to balance work and other life issues, compared with 78 percent in 2006 and 79 percent in 2004.

Of 260 federal organizations that were also in the partnership's 2007 index, many experienced improvement, particularly large agencies -- significant improvement was seen in 14 of 29 organizations. Progress was recorded even among agencies pulling up the rear of the rankings. The three lowest-ranked agencies in 2007 -- the departments of Education and Homeland Security and the Small Business Administration -- all recorded significant gains in their scores but remain mired in the bottom five of the rankings.

The Small Business Administration, ranked last at 30th among large agencies in 2007, improved its score by 30 percent but still ranks 26th. Of some consolation, the organization received the partnership's "most improved" award.

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"We're extremely pleased, but we think there's more work to do," said Administrator Karen G. Mills.

OPM's Berry Opens Door to Union. New Office of Personnel Management Director John Berry pledges to bring employee unions into discussions on pay for performance, benefits and outsourcing federal jobs.

That's a change from the previous administration, where OPM took a hands-off approach to dealing with unions, Berry said.

He favors renewing the labor-management partnerships that brought managers and union leaders together to debate issues during the Clinton administration.

"Labor relations were weak to nonexistent [during the Bush administration]. The partnership has dried up, and we need to revitalize it," Berry told the House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee on the federal workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia last week.

In an interview after the hearing, Berry said he hasn't broached the issue of partnerships with the White House yet.

"I want to have at least one more face-to-face meeting with unions, then take my recommendations up with the president," Berry said, adding that he plans to meet regularly with federal unions to hear concerns.

In his first week on the job, Berry met for hours with leaders of employee groups, including the National Treasury Employees Union, American Federation of Government Employees and National Federation of Federal Employees.

And union leaders say they're optimistic about continued cooperation.

"He said he wants to have an open-door policy — if I have policy concerns on how NFFE feels on issues affecting the federal government, I should give him a call, and vice versa," NFFE national President Richard Brown said.

During the discussions, union leaders brought up their concerns regarding pay for performance, benefits for domestic partners and collective bargaining rights for Transportation Security Administration employees.

NTEU President Colleen Kelley said Berry's meeting was a "new day" for union-agency relations and she's pleased to hear talk of bringing back partnerships.

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“We believe in inclusion. We don’t know what they’ll call the partnerships, and we don’t care what they call it. We just want to be in the conversations and have the experience of front-line employees be tapped,” she said.

Members of Congress used the hearing to air their own grievances. Ranking member Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, told Berry he hoped he would reform pay for performance but not abolish the concept.

“The General Schedule system is clearly broken, but pay for performance as currently implemented shows that we’ve got a long way to go in figuring out how to properly incentivize our federal employees,” he said.

Berry agreed that a pay system needs to be created to merge various agency pay scales and ensure fairness. Agencies opting out of the GS system to create their own pay systems have created confusion and inequities, he said.

“We have workers sitting side by side doing the same job being paid differently, and I can’t defend that with a straight face,” he said. “At some point, we’ve got to come back and say what works and design a system that works for the majority of workers.”

Berry also said he wants to reform the hiring system and the process of applying for positions on USAJOBS.gov, simplifying job qualifications and making the federal government less intimidating.

A Modest Proposal For Improving Federal Supervision. As someone who teaches seminars relating to Federal performance appraisals, it’s become abundantly clear we don’t have a clue how to evaluate/appraise supervisors.

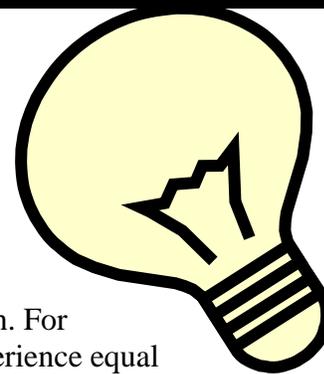
It’s just as clear to me that their performance has everything to do with an agency’s success or failure. This article proposes both a starting point as to how they can be more objectively evaluated while at the same time suggesting how their performance can be improved.

Counting on Metrics

The current philosophy, demanding each Federal management official contribute their fair share to the agency’s overall goals and objectives, on the surface seems a reasonable idea. In practice, however, such calculations seldom occur and, if they did, might be of questionable validity

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Organizational metrics are fickle – especially when delegated down the chain. For example, if budgets are cut 5% across the board, not all supervisors will experience equal impact regarding their goals. Likewise, if senior management settles an appeal by placing a horrible employee under your supervision, shouldn't someone expect that action to affect your metrics?

More importantly, most managers seldom keep such quantitative data regarding their subordinate supervisors.

The law governing most Federal performance appraisals is 5 USC Chapter 43. It was passed by Congress in 1978 and implemented by agencies in 1981. This system of critical elements and objective performance standards is predicated on this same philosophy (Management By Objectives or MBO) of cascading goals and objectives. Over almost three decades it has proven unrealistic and impractical – resulting in evaluations that have lacked the objectivity consultants continue to imagine.

Subjective appraisals are the norm for thousands of Federal supervisors. The EEO critical element has proven an embarrassing example. Front line managers have been rated at various levels by bosses who often understand no more about EEO than the folks they evaluate. I haven't found a case where objective data was used in making such evaluations.

What Ails Us Dr. Peter?

This brings to mind the Peter Principle – one beautifully crafted sentence in a book by the same name and authored by Laurence Peter. That sentence reads, *"In a hierarchical organization, people eventually rise to their level of incompetence."* It was written to evoke smiles of painful familiarity. Who hasn't had a boss that was in over his/her head?

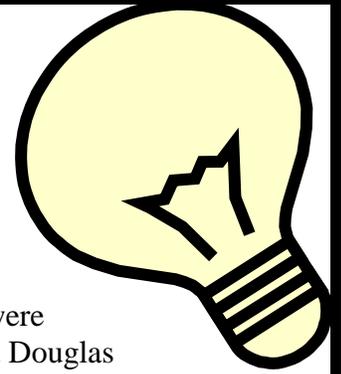
Assuming Dr. Peter's assertion is correct, the complications resulting from subjective evaluations of supervisors and managers are compounded. Not only will our leaders be evaluated by impressions (some call it a "beauty contest") but those evaluating them may not be competent to judge. If they were, after all, wouldn't they be maintaining objective metrics regarding their own subordinates' performance? In reality, there's a good likelihood that their own leadership skills are questionable.

Matters of Taste

As if subjectivity and incompetence up the chain of leadership weren't enough, an additional obstacle to evaluating the first level of management stems from the difficulty of knowing what makes a good boss better than a bad one. Leadership is defined by a

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different book every month. Decades ago when I studied management, we were discussing Frederick Taylor's theories know as "Scientific Management" and Douglas McGregor's concepts of "Theory X" and "Theory Y" ...and then came "Total Quality Management".

Reasonable people disagree on what managers are supposed to do to maximize their subordinates' effectiveness. Is the best manager one who pushes his people or persuades them? Which is more important – results or morale? Can a great boss be a poor writer/speaker? Is micro-management a symptom of failed leadership or needed involvement? I can give you my opinions, but cannot definitively answer these questions. Our experiences, values, and perspectives color our definition of a good supervisor.

A matter of Real Importance

So, to catch up with my own thinking, we've got a high probability of subjective appraisal criteria, a potential for unqualified raters, and unclear definitions of what success looks like. As if these obstacles weren't enough, I have yet another – mentioned at the start of this article. Front-line managers are crucially important folks.

Whatever you consider good leadership to be, it can make or break teams and organizations. When competent people work for supervisors whose leadership they question they become disenchanted with their jobs. If they can, they leave. On the flip side, I estimate that I was 20-30% more productive when working for a boss I liked and respected. Some inspired me. Better bosses make for better mission accomplishment.

So what can we do to evaluate supervisors and managers more effectively? I have two preliminary suggestions. Both require our leaders to stretch in order to achieve ratings they desire. After all, good grades have always required levels of effort we might otherwise fail to put forth.

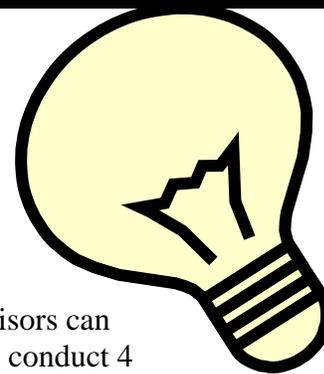
What a quarter might purchase

First, as the Merit Systems Protection Board has informed us, "[employee engagement is clearly linked to organizational performance](#)." I suggest that no supervisor or manager be given a rating above average ("Level 3", "Fully Successful", and the like) unless s/he has had quarterly performance reviews with every subordinate.

Our teachers in grade school managed to grade dozens of students in this fashion. It provided important feedback and often motivated us. Admittedly, those weren't face-to-face encounters. By the same token, agencies are workplaces and most Federal managers are paid more than most school teachers. Such quarterly meetings can be entered in one's

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calendar at the start of a rating cycle and the rest is relatively easy. If supervisors can make it to meetings and dentist appointments, they can remind themselves to conduct 4 sit-downs per year with each employee

A quarterly review system in exchange for higher ratings also represents an appraisal *quid pro quo*. This is important. Unlike the vague demands of generic evaluation criteria, this one's rather specific and requires no complicated metrics or tracking systems. Verification is as simple as asking for the notes from these quarterly encounters. Such reviews would be just one of several specific criteria needing attention if higher ratings are to be earned. It's definable, achievable, and useful.

Dear Diary...

Another work habit our managers should demonstrate is regular documentation. In [yet another FedSmith article](#) I recommended a supervisory diary or "black book". For ratings above average, why not insist that our leaders jot down 10 minutes of workday impressions as a habit. If they do, they are likely to become more focused on the supervision. People and events are better noticed when log entries are coming at day's end.

If diaries were included in a performance indicator, objective, or standard for levels above Fully Successful, Level 3 or C – most supervisors would start doing it. If they did, this (and other desirable work habits) could make for better leaders. Such diaries would also enhance the quality of the aforementioned quarterly reviews. The aggregate of these notes would also lead to more meaningful distinctions among subordinates come rating time.

Breaking a Habit of Hindsight

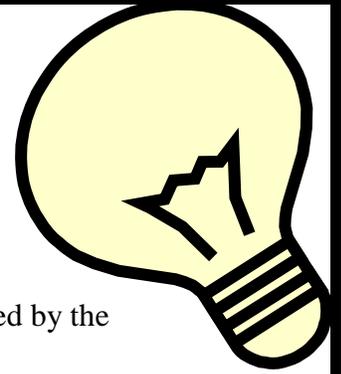
These two manners of performing the supervisory function should be of interest to FedSmith readers who are interested in improving agency appraisals. They focus on improving work habits that make folks successful rather than tallying outcomes after they year is done. Outcomes can be problematic. Work habits can be taught and crafted.

Instead of focusing on the previous year's results, appraisal criteria like these could influence (and potentially improve) such outcomes. Just as the habit of brushing teeth and using seat belts can be instilled, so can these. But just like parents who fail to model the very routines they require of their kids, "Do as I say, not as I do." won't suffice. After all, wouldn't these same work habits apply to those who supervise supervisors?

Performance evaluations can be used to better effect than just rating people. They should make us better at what we do. When appraisal techniques focused on work habits are

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taught in a classroom setting, managers in the field are intrigued, if not excited by the prospect. As one participant from the National Park Service put it:

"I appreciate the focus on the individual employee and effort to actually improve... job performance. I buy it and honestly think the employees will. I often get the question, 'How can I improve and get a higher rating.' It was frustrating for me to realize, given what I put in front of them that I couldn't give them a concrete answer. This provides a way to provide them with that and allows me to specify the most important ways or "hows" to accomplish the job..."

Not a Cure for Cancer

As with the example in my EEO article, these ideas are not panaceas. They won't convert disingenuous bosses into honest men and women. They won't tame the vicious, or provide implants for the spineless. In making these suggestions, I do not presume to reform the government's vast (and often oppressive) management structure – from political appointees down to the front lines of civil service.

Rather than proposing theoretical solutions like MBO, improving leadership (and performance appraisals) needs to begin with practical first steps. This very different approach to individual standards might serve to develop better supervisors as well as rating them. Positive work habits like quarterly reviews and diaries can be used to distinguish good bosses from mediocre ones. They can also enhance the objectivity of their ratings.

Obviously, there are many more manners of supervising than these. Other ideas are welcome. What other practical, verifiable work habits should we be encouraging?

Excessive Employee Absenteeism – What Does it Really Mean? Absenteeism is generally used to refer to unscheduled employee absence from the workplace, and though common place in most organizations, when it becomes excessive, it can be problematic. Excessive absenteeism is typically characterized by either a long-term continuous absence with no projected end or a pattern of frequent, unplanned absences. At what point do absences become excessive? When should they trigger disciplinary action? Are there factors to be considered when making this determination?

Many supervisors struggle with these questions, and the answers are not always clear. In order to understand the underlying issues and ascertain the appropriate course of action, it must be determined whether the absences involve a legitimate use of approved leave, and

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whether the absences are adversely affecting the employee's work. Some warning signs that could indicate excessive absenteeism include, but are not limited to:

- Low leave balances without apparent cause
- Patterns of unscheduled leave requests or usage
- Discovery that a justification for an absence proved false
- Monday, Friday pattern of absences or unscheduled use after paydays
- Habitual tardiness and/or early departures from work
- Use in periods of tension at work or high workload.

Many causes of absenteeism may be legitimate (i.e., personal illness or family issues); however, other factors such as a poor work environment, aloof supervisors, or employees simply not committed to their jobs could also be the culprit.

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) and the courts have consistently held that an employee's absence, by its very nature, adversely affects an agency's ability to accomplish its mission. Accordingly, frequent and unscheduled absences, as well as prolonged absences from work, may form the basis for a proposed adverse action. Notwithstanding the fact that Federal employees have an absolute right to the use of accrued leave for illness and other clearly defined purposes, an employee who uses excessive leave may be subject to certain requirements. For example, an employee who uses excessive sick leave can be required to submit a physician's statement establishing that they were medically unable to work on the date(s) of absence.

When corrective action does become necessary, measures should be accomplished [swiftly] in order to maintain good discipline and morale in the workplace. Formal disciplinary action should *not initially* be taken if corrective action can be accomplished through closer supervision, counseling or other informal procedures.

Management should keep in mind that when leave is approved, it is very difficult to later charge an employee with excessive absenteeism. That is to say, management should weigh very carefully the welfare of the employee and mission requirements for the employee's services when making decisions of granting requested leave. This basic tenant of this argument is the supervisor has the right to deny leave if an employee is suspected of leave abuse.

In order to effectively deal with absenteeism it is necessary for employees and supervisors alike to understand the regulatory requirements of leave administration. Information is available on the Office of Personnel Management website at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/leave/> and installation policy guidance contained in USAIC Regulation 690-630 – Absence & Leave

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Please contact your servicing L/MER HR Specialist for information regarding leave usage, suspected leave abuse, and appropriate corrective measures.

Training, Self-Development, and Personal Improvement

NSPS Connect: The One-Stop Source for NSPS. The NSPS Program Executive Office has developed a single comprehensive webpage for accessing NSPS learning materials, resources and tools. NSPS Connect, Your Gateway to NSPS Information, provides one, centralized portal for accessing NSPS products such as online training courses, fact sheets, tips sheets, worksheets, brochures, user guides, automated tools and more.

Materials on the NSPS Connect web page are accessed through a vast array of links and sub-links which are organized in three ways:

1) Role in NSPS: Learning materials are organized for the employee, manager/supervisor, pay pool administrator/official and HR practitioner.

- Based on specific feedback from HR practitioners, materials for practitioners are organized by NSPS regulations and implementing issuances.

2) NSPS Topic: Materials are also organized under general topics such as applying for and accepting an NSPS position; automated tools; classification; compensation and pay setting; pay pools; and many others.

3) Category: Web users can also search for products based on category, such as external links, HR practitioner's guide, NSPS regulations and implementing issuances, resources and tools, and training.

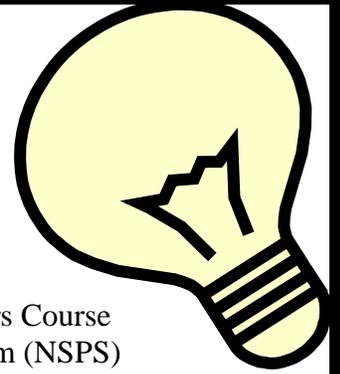
The "Spotlight" box on the NSPS Connect page informs the user when new materials are posted. The Spotlight area of the page also reminds users to bookmark the NSPS Connect page for easy access to NSPS materials.

NSPS Connect is a comprehensive resource that was developed based on important feedback from NSPS key stakeholders. It replaces the Training page previously featured on the NSPS website. To access NSPS Connect, please click the button on the main menu of the NSPS home page, or click <http://www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps/nspsconnect/>.

For more information about NSPS visit the NSPS home page at: <http://www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps>.

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

1 - 5 June 2009

14 - 18 September 2009

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

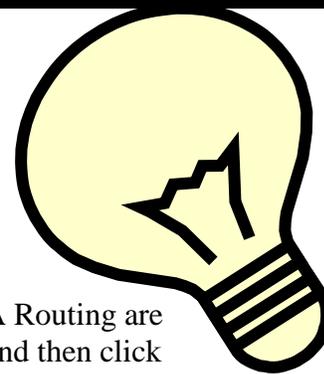
This instruction does *not* cover supervision of non-appropriated fund (NAF) or contract employees.

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

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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 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.

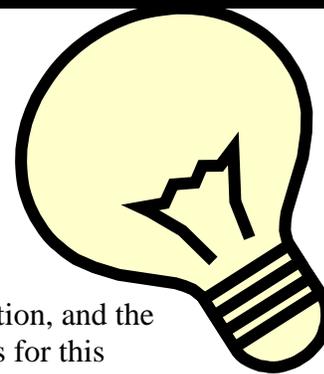
The NAF Corner

The 7-Minute Rule. Over the years what has come to be known as the “7-minute rule” has lingered throughout the NAF community. Under the auspices of this rule, employees erroneously believe they can report to work tardy and not be subject to disciplinary action provided they are not more than seven minutes late.

The foundation of this belief is rooted in an anomaly in the timekeeping system from the early 1990’s when NAF implemented a worldwide automated Time Labor Management System (TLMS). Under this System, employees were automatically afforded a seven minute grace period [as it pertained to quarter hours (.25) worked]. For example, if an employee was to report to duty at 1400 and clocked in between 1400 and 1407, under the automated system, that employee was given credit for coming in at 1400 whether he/she actually clocked in at 1400 or 1407.

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This shortcoming in the automated timekeeping system, employee interpretation, and the subsequent application of that interpretation of the grace period, set the terms for this lingering belief. In some instances, even the supervisors succumbed to this practice as they were not aware they could actually monitor their employee's daily time and attendance through the use of various other reports available within the system. What resulted was employees routinely arriving late with the knowledge that since the timesheet would not reflect their tardiness, it was "okay".

Most supervisors recognize the fact that multiple infractions of tardiness affect productivity, impact morale, and if gone unchecked, may inadvertently give the impression that being tardy is acceptable. Accordingly, many have taken advantage of various HR training opportunities and have taken a more proactive approach in ensuring employees are aware that they are to be in their place of duty and ready to perform their assigned duties at the *beginning* of their scheduled tour of duty.

For more information on employee tardiness and methods by which to address this issue, please contact your NAF Human Resources Office.

Designating Lunch/Meal Periods for NAF Employees – Two Scenarios. Recently, two employees visited the NAF Human Resources Office to discuss their concerns relating to lunch periods. The first employee, who works a six-hour shift, stated that she never receives a lunch and the second employee who works a total of seven hours per shift stated that she is required to eat her lunch at her workstation. Both employees expressed that they had discussed their individual concerns with their supervisor separately but because the explanation varied widely, they requested additional clarification. .

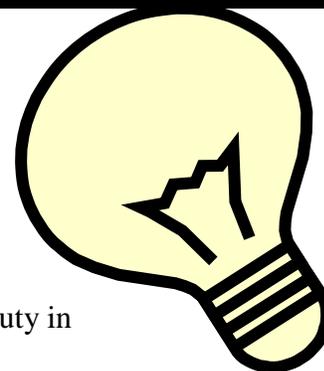
In the case of the first employee who stated that she worked a six-hour shift, she was advised that if she is scheduled to work in excess of six hours in any workday, her supervisor would be required to designate her a lunch/meal period. However, since she was only scheduled to work 6-hours, a lunch period was not designated. In the case of the second employee, her circumstances differed. She worked a seven-hour shift, and although entitled to a lunch, she was only designated an on-the-job meal period. The nature of her duties required that she remain in her work area during her entire tour of duty. Thus, the supervisor established a "working lunch" or an on-the-job lunch/meal period. Pursuant to regulatory guidance, the employee is paid for the 20 minute on-the-job lunch/meal period.

Other significant information surrounding meal period includes the following:

- Non-paid lunch/meal periods should not be less than 30 minutes and no greater than one hour.

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- During non-paid lunch/meal periods, employees are entirely free of duty in connection with their job requirements.
- An employee may not shorten their workday by working through his or her lunch nor lengthen their lunch period by not taking a rest period.

For additional information, please contact your NAF HRO Office.

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