



NACOP Newsletter

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Message from the Co-Chairs

By Barbie Ballengee, PWA
Sherri Buxton, MWA



The NACOP annual meeting, hosted by Barbie Ballengee of the Pacific West Area, was held June 14-17, 2004, in Albany, California. In conjunction with the annual meeting, the Council hosted NACOP's 10-Year Anniversary, "Stepping into the Future: Proud Past and Promising Future" in Emeryville, California. Former council members were invited to the celebration which took place Tuesday, June 15, 2004. During the session, two key questions were identified and asked of the participants: (1) What do you see the strongest challenges that the ARS office professional must meet as we strive to manage and support research in the near future (next 5-10 years)? (2) How can NACOP help prepare the office support professional to meet these challenges?

The Council met at the Albany Area Office during the remainder of the week and began to prioritize the material received from the breakout sessions. Members worked on assigning short and long term goals and establishing teams to implement them. From the responses received, we identified 6 initiatives which we will work on during the course of the next year.

The 2004-2005 NACOP Council Members are:

Sherri Buxton, MWA –Co-Chair
Debra Duckworth, SAA – Co-Chair
Olivia Pedraza, SPA – Recorder
Terry Henrichs, NAL – Webmaster
Barbie Ballengee, PWA – Ex-Officio Member
Cathy Lonaberger, Technical Advisor
Iris Rosa, HQ
Jan Cline, HQ
Louise Dalton, NPA
Madeline Hall, MSA
Sheila Messineo, BA
Stephanie Lively, NAA
Veronica Cullum, PWA





Office of the Administrator Welcomes New Staff Member

By Cathy Lonaberger, OA

A hearty welcome is extended to Crystal D. Lewis. Crystal joins the support team in the Office of the Administrator as Secretary to the Associate Administrator.

Crystal, a native Washingtonian (D.C.), has been in the Federal Government for over 13 years. Her most recent work experience was earned at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service in the Communications Unit. She previously worked for the U.S. Department of Transportation, Departments of Army and Navy, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Defense Mapping Agency.

Her private industry work includes stints at Logistics Management Institute, Covance, and the Union Labor Life Insurance Company.

Ms. Lewis has extensive experience in the administrative and secretarial fields. She continues to enhance her skills through training and challenging work assignments.

Crystal is the mother of three girls—Andrea, Tiera, and Tara.

Her hobbies are bowling, singing, and watching movies.

To contact Crystal, you can call her at 202-720-3658 or e-mail clewis@ars.usda.gov.

Special Thanks!



The NACOP would like to take this opportunity to thank Clarice Carter for her service as Technical Advisor to the NACOP.

Clarice's participation has been invaluable and will be sorely missed. We wish Clarice the best in her future endeavors!

ARS Correspondence Manual To Be Updated

By Jan Cline, NPS



Under the leadership of Kathleen Townson and Lynn Booker, the Headquarters Advisory Council of Office Professionals, in Beltsville, MD, began the long overdue process of updating the ARS Correspondence Manual. Kathleen and Lynn convened a meeting of numerous HACOSP members. At this meeting the manual was broken up into sections for smaller groups to update individually. When the smaller group updates are complete, they will be forwarded to HACOSP leadership for compilation. When the draft revision is completed, it will be disseminated for several layers of review. This is no small task that this Council has undertaken and will not happen overnight. Periodic progress reports will be made in future Newsletter editions.

Controlling Your Workday by Reducing Interruptions

From a class attended by Wanda Rohrer, SAA



Do you handle interruptions with grace? Your mission demands it. Remember, it is considered better for you to be interrupted at your rate of pay than for senior managers to be interrupted at theirs.

You can gain some control of your workday by reducing the randomness of your interruptions and by eliminating the least productive 20 percent of them. Do this by providing other options—self-help tools for requesters.

Self-Help Tools for Time Wasters

Offer drop boxes: Whether real or virtual, label them well, so people can leave requests without talking to you. Include time estimates on the label.

Provide clinics: If you are the house expert on some topic, provide half-hour clinics once a day for a week (not at your workstation). Post the time and place. Cut down on random interruptions, and don't let people tap you at will for instructions.

Post electronic sign-ups: Post templates on your home page where people can sign up for meetings or travel. Help people submit expense requests and vouchers electronically. Post expected turnaround times so people don't have to inquire face to face.

Remove soft chairs or snacks: If your office looks like a lounge, people will lounge there.

Ideas obtained from Seminar #2294 by American Management Association, entitled "Management Skills for Administrative Professionals," August 4-6, 2004

Federal Career Programs

By Debra Duckworth, SAA
From the March 15, 2004 issue of the *Federal Employees News Digest*

There are many changes in employment opportunities with private industry. However, Federal employment is still considered rewarding with great benefits and good pay. These benefits retain employees and the result is a senior Federal workforce. With over half of the workforce retirement eligible within the next 5-10 years, recruitment will be necessary.

Most of you probably have heard of the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) and the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP).

But, listed below are two programs I have never heard about and found them interesting.

Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP): Agencies may develop intern programs for recent college undergraduates with degrees or experience relevant to an agency's hiring needs. Individuals receive a non-competitive "excepted" appointment; there are no grade point average requirements. If the individual successfully completes the program's required two-year internship, he or she may be non-competitively converted to a permanent career appointment.

Outstanding Scholar Program. This program is open to any recent undergraduate with a 3.5 GPA or better, or who is in the top 1 percent of his or her graduating class, with a Bachelor's or equivalent degree relevant to an agency's hiring needs. Those who qualify for this program may be appointed non-competitively to a permanent, career position. Agencies must use this program to supplement regular competitive hiring.



PARKINSON'S LAW

By Sandy Groneberg, MWA

Parkinson's Law says "work expands to fill up all available time." I enjoy my job (a good thing!); but as a result, I tend to strictly adhere to Parkinson's Law (a bad thing!).

If work expands to fill up all available time, it does no good to ask for more time—it will still be filled with work! So, I went in search of ideas to become more organized, hoping that I could start controlling the work instead of the work controlling me.

Following is a list of things I found:

Simplify. Extra things and activities waste energy, time, and space. Now, the challenge is to take this thought and decide what to do with

the information. For example, which things and activities waste my time? Do I make unnecessary trips to the copier instead of doing several jobs at one time? Do I spend too much time searching my piles of work to find a piece of paper I need for a project? What clutter do I need to clear in order to be more efficient? Tip: Always keep things close to the place where they will be used, with the most frequently used items being the most easily reached.

Set realistic goals and have clear and concise objectives to meet those goals. Use a month-at-a-glance calendar to help prioritize tasks for each day, setting aside time for priority tasks before they become unmanageable. Concentrate time and efforts on one task at a time—don't let less important tasks sidetrack you from high priority items. Control interruptions—It's easy to let others dictate your priority list; but you know your work load, so make sure that you set your own priority list and stick to it. If you're feeling overwhelmed, divide complex tasks into manageable sub-tasks. Train yourself to go down your "To Do List" without skipping over the difficult items. Tip: If you tend to drift from your priorities, set specific time limits and use your computer's alarm or timer to remind you every hour or half-hour to stay on track. Frequently ask yourself: "What is the best use of my time right now?" Be aware of time robbers: side-trackers, procrastination, daydreaming and laziness.

Important: Don't waste time feeling guilty about what you didn't do. It's gone now; move ahead. Try not to think of work on weekends.

Manage the paper load. Keep all notes to yourself in a single place, whether in a notebook, a paper organizer, or on your computer. Try to handle paper only once by making a decision about it the first time it crosses your desk. Tip: While reading a letter, or instructions, mark the items that require an

action to avoid re-reading the entire document again. Keep files vertical whenever possible to avoid the habit of piling papers.

Manage the computer. Use disk optimization/defragmentation software regularly. It saves disk space, speeds up software, and reduces computer errors. Backup regularly—you don't want to redo something you spent hours preparing the first time. Tip: Learn short cuts and macros for the software you use. Keep on top of the latest technology.

Manage yourself. Pay attention to your health, diet and sleep. Take your full lunch period, eat a light lunch and then take a walk so that you don't get sleepy in the afternoon. Use the subconscious mind to think while walking, jogging, etc. Keep paper and pencil by your bed to jot down ideas before you have a chance to lose them. You will sleep better if you write down your idea and then forget about it than if you try to remember it until morning. Examine old habits for possible elimination or streamlining. Tip: Try to find a new technique each day that helps gain time—make it a mental challenge on your drive to or from work. Telephone instead of writing. Delegate work when possible, but use a follow-up system. Communicate clearly and be specific to eliminate having to redo things. Minimize meetings. Develop a routine for general procedures. Take concise notes—not novels. Keep track of your mood on a calendar and plan time to do things that make you feel good. Take time to make someone else happy; it will keep you positive. Plan a quiet hour for yourself every day.