

ORM NEWS

**From the Office of the
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs**



August 2003

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



Customer Service – How it affects you

Frequently, when we discuss customer service, we look outward at what we provide to our external customers: complainants, responsible management officials, and others who request our services. There is another group of customers for whom customer service is just as important, our internal customers, each other.

Our Customer Service Division, headed by Brenda Lewis, has as one of its major tasks surveying ORM employees to identify workplace issues affecting you. We want your input to these surveys in order to address workplace issues of concern to you.

Our customer service efforts, however, go beyond just the surveys. What about the questions, that we don't ask, or the concerns you do not express?

Here are several questions I would like you to consider when you look at where you work. What do we need in order to do the best job that we can do? What can the organization do for you, the employee, to better provide the guidance and tools you need? How can we, as individuals, provide better customer service to each other as we carry out our responsibilities? What else can we do to get to where we want to be? Are you encouraged to provide your thoughts or suggestions on issues affecting the work you do?

Next, take a look at what you do. What are the two or three things working best in your area? What would you like to do differently to improve those areas? Tell us how these changes would create the desired result.

In this month's edition:

EEO Career Intern Program	Page 2
Customer Satisfaction Survey	Page 3
New EAP Provider	Page 5
Electronic Case Management System	Page 5
ORM Flexiplacement Arrangements	Page 5
Office of Special Counsel	Page 7
Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act	Page 8
Office Notes	Page 9

After you have considered these questions, identify the topic and share your answers with your managers and ask that they pass your responses on to Malcolm Porter and to me.

I've often spoken about how ORM has programs and services to help VA become an "Employer of Choice." I have the same goal for ORM. Employer-of-choice environments have a positive effect on the bottom-line—improved quality, productivity, cost, effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and customer satisfaction. Achieving this goal within ORM is a must, if we are to be the best that we can be. We can only do this by hearing from you. I hope you are comfortable sharing your thoughts and asking questions. That's the only way we can reach our greatest potential as an organization.

James S. Jones.

Program Highlights

EEO Career Intern Program

By Waltrunette Gardner, HR Specialist

The ORM Washington Field Office is excited to welcome [Sharon Hughes](#) as its EEO Career Intern. The EEO Career Intern Program is a 2-year training plan for entry-level Federal EEO Specialists.

The purpose of this program is to attract exceptional men and women to the workforce who have diverse professional experiences, academic credentials, training, and competencies, and to prepare them for careers in analyzing and implementing public programs. The goal of the Federal Career Intern Program is to help agencies recruit and attract exceptional individuals into a variety of occupations. This program was created under Executive Order 13162, and is intended for positions at grade levels GS-5, 7, and 9. Individuals are appointed to a 2-year internship. Upon successful completion of the program, interns may be eligible for permanent placement within the agency.

Since this is a new ORM program, Ms. Hughes will assess the program and provide feedback in an effort to perfect and use this program for future recruitment purposes within ORM and possibly within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The ORM EEO Career Intern Program is fashioned after the Federal Career Intern Program.

Ms. Hughes previously worked for the Department of Social Services (DSS) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and has a B.S. in Management from Winston-Salem State University. Ms. Hughes worked at DSS for approximately fifteen years and in her last assignment she completed investigations for child abuse cases. Upon completion of her training, Ms. Hughes will possess the necessary skills to function as an EEO Specialist, able to provide a wide-range of EEO services to any component of VA.

Contact Waltrunette Gardner, HR Specialist, at (202) 501-2891 for more information on the EEO Career Intern Program. ■

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Central Plains Operations (CPO), Houston Field Office, was recently a pilot site for distribution of an ORM customer satisfaction survey. This survey, prepared by Brenda Lewis, Customer Service Manager, asked respondents to respond to questions related to customer service during the counseling session and to rate the overall counseling experience to include EEO counselors.

ORM's Customer Service Division administered this survey and compiled the results on behalf of the CPO. The goal of this survey was to identify best practices and areas for improvement within the CPO related to customer service. Key topic areas were counselor courtesy, respect, prompt response time, the ability to remain neutral, compliance with rights and responsibilities, and effective communication. The findings of this survey were detailed in a presentation prepared by the Customer Service Division. The following information is taken from that presentation.

A total of 160 surveys were distributed to 21 Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), National Cemetery Service (NCA), and other VA facilities under the jurisdiction of the CPO.

The CPO had a 70 percent positive customer service satisfaction percentage rating (30 percent of the respondents rated the CPO as excellent, 23 percent very good, and 17 percent good). Eleven percent rated the CPO as fair and 19% rated the CPO as poor. According to the survey analysis, the 19 percent poor customer service satisfaction rating may be a direct result of only 4 percent of the total number of respondents believing that communication improved between the parties involved in the complaint at the end of the counseling session.

Customers who rated the CPO as excellent, very good or good, appreciated the following:

- **Service that was quick and to the point.**
- **A helpful and understanding counselor who was able to answer questions and returned phone calls promptly.**
- **Counselors who were knowledgeable, professional, courteous, respectful, and showed patience by allowing callers to ask questions when needed.**
- **Counselors who exhibited a positive attitude and provided information that was easy to understand.**
- **Services that kept them informed regarding the status of their case.**

Customers who rated the CPO as fair or poor did not appreciate the following:

- **Failure to address/understand key problems.**
- **Failure to remain neutral – taking management’s side – exhibiting a perception of guilt prior to the end of the counseling session by the counselor.**
- **Failure to understand the process by the aggrieved party/complainant and the counselor.**
- **Lack of communication throughout the process – with regard to timeliness and case status.**
- **Delays or resolution without an adequate explanation.**
- **Missed due dates.**

Insufficient communication can impair relationships with customers. The following examples are communication pitfalls.

- **Lack of responsiveness.**
- **EEO Counselor without the knowledge to assist in resolving the issue.**
- **Multiple transfers.**
- **Purely scripted approach – poor listening skills.**
- **Attempted forced resolution to situations.**
- **Insincere interactions with the aggrieved.**

The following recommendations were developed to address improving customer service at the CPO:

- **Set goals to improve customer satisfaction ratings in all areas. Take a global approach.**
- **In collaboration with the Customer Service Division and Learning Resources Center, establish customer service training initiatives.**
- **Reward and recognize those employees who have outstanding customer service ratings.**

You may contact Mrs. Lewis, Customer Service Manager, at 501-370-3818, for more information on this survey. ■

New Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Provider

ComPsych Corporation, with worldwide headquarters at NBC Tower, 13th Floor, 455 N. Cityfront Plaza Drive, Chicago, IL 60611-5532, is our new employee assistance program (EAP) provider.

Brochures and other information on *ComPsych* will be made available to each employee.

You can reach *ComPsych* by calling **1-888-299-4EAP (4327)**. For additional information on *ComPsych* contact Waltrunette Gardner, HR Specialist at (202) 501- 2891 or visit ComPsych's Web site at www.compsych.com. ■

Electronic Case Management System

ORM's Information Technology Services (ITS) recently visited the Vancouver, Hines and Lyon's offices to test the Electronic Case Management System, train staff in the use of the Electronic Case Management system (also known as the electronic records system), and obtain feedback from actual users of the system on ways to make the system more "user" friendly. Several suggestions, from field office employees, on changes to enhance the system were received and will be implemented. These offices were chosen as pilot sites, with the expected roll out of the system to our other offices to begin the 1st quarter of fiscal year 2004. ■



ORM Alternative Workplace Arrangements (Flexiplace)

Procedures regarding Alternative Workplace Arrangements (Flexiplace) are now available on ORM's Human Resources (HR) Web page. The purpose of this policy is to provide information and ORM procedures regarding alternative workplace arrangements (flexiplace).

For more information on ORM's Flexiplace Policy visit our HR Web page at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/HR.htm> or contact Walturnette Gardner, HR Specialist at (202) 501- 2891. ■



Coming Soon – Zegato Travel System

ORM will soon join Zegato on-line travel management system in the coming weeks. Stay tuned for additional information on Zegato.

For more information on Zegato, contact Barbara Scott, Program Analyst, at (202) 501-2817. ■

ORM Web Site Update

The ORM Web site has been updated to include the following information:

- ITS Flexiplace policy
(<http://vaww.va.gov/orm/ITS/VTC/policies/index.htm>)
- ORM's Records Disposition Program Manual
(<http://vaww.va.gov/orm/ITS/VTC/policies/index.htm>)
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Services
- Publications and Forms Page
- Learning Resources On-line Course Material
(Link: <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/ormlr/courses.htm>)
- The VA Phone Book
(Link: <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/WhatsNew.htm>)

Office of Special Counsel

The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) presented information on *Prohibited Personnel Practices* at a recent meeting of federal agency equal employment opportunity directors, hosted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), in Washington, DC.

OSC is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency. OSC's primary mission is to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices, especially reprisal for whistleblowing, and political activity (Hatch Act). The Whistleblower Protection Act (WPA) requires agency heads to inform employees about the rights and remedies available to them under the prohibited personnel practice and whistleblower retaliation provisions of that Act.

OSC receives, investigates, and prosecutes allegations of prohibited personnel practices, with an emphasis on protecting federal government whistleblowers. OSC seeks corrective action remedies (such as back pay and reinstatement), by negotiating or from the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), for injuries suffered by whistle blowers and other complainants. OSC is also authorized to file complaints at the MSBP to seek disciplinary action against individuals who commit prohibited personnel practices.

OSC has jurisdiction over prohibited personnel practices committed against most employees or applicants for employment in Executive Branch agencies and the Government Printing Office. OSC has limited jurisdiction over other governmental corporations and agencies such as the Federal Aviation Administration and Transportation Security Administration.

OSC promotes compliance by government employees with legal restrictions on political activity by providing advisory opinions on, and enforcing, the Hatch Act.

OSC also protects the reemployment rights of federal employee military veterans and reservists under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

Visit the OSC Web site www.osc.gov to find out more about OSC and its programs. ■

This article suggested by Carol Storey, Investigator, Little Rock Field Office.

Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act

What is the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act?

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), prohibits discrimination against persons because of their service in the Armed Forces Reserve, the National Guard, or other uniformed services. USERRA prohibits an employer from denying any benefit of employment on the basis of an individual's membership, application for membership, performance of service, application for service, or obligation for service in the uniformed services. USERRA also protects the right of veterans, reservists, National Guard members, and certain other members of the uniformed services to reclaim their civilian employment after being absent due to military service or training.

The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is responsible for USERRA. OSC protects the reemployment rights of federal employee military veterans and reservists under USERRA.

OSC is not authorized to receive a USERRA complaint directly from the claimant. Instead, the claimant must first file his/her complaint with the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). If VETS is unsuccessful in resolving the complaint, the claimant may request that VETS refer the complaint to OSC. If the Special Counsel believes there is merit to the complaint, OSC will initiate an action before the Merit Systems Protection Board and appear on behalf of the claimant. The successful claimant is entitled to receive the employment benefits that he/she was denied as the result of the agency's violation of USERRA. Additionally, a prevailing claimant is entitled to attorney's fees, expert witness fees, and other litigation expenses.

The Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service maintains a home page at <http://www.dol.gov/vets>. The VETS home page contains an interactive guided program that provides valuable information and answers questions about USERRA. Additional information on the Office of Special Counsel is available on the OSC Web site www.osc.gov.



Office Notes

Special Messages



Saying Goodbye

Kathleen Sullivan, Office of the DAS, accepted a position with the Office of Congressional Affairs at VA Central Office. We want to wish Kathleen good luck in her new position.

ITS

We want to thank the ORM family for your kind words, cards, flowers, and other messages of support for **Bobby Green**, whose mother passed away July 10, 2003.

Washington Field Office

Two of our employees **Ms. Sharon Hughes and Mr. Lynn Smith**, EEO Investigators, recently attended Investigator Training in St. Petersburg, Florida during the week of July 21-25, 2003. Both found the training to be very informative and intense. Ms. Hughes, who came to ORM via the Career Intern Program, noted that the course was a great introduction in how to investigate EEO complaints. Lynn Smith had this to say, "The training in beautiful St. Petersburg was excellent. The instructors were very well versed in the subject matter. They used expert delivery of the information and tag teamed on the topics covered with orchestrated finesse. Learning the process of investigating a Federal agency complaint was made fun and enjoyable for all of the participants."

Office of Policy and Compliance

Moving On – Joan Hanson, the former Chief, Policy and Compliance (OPC) accepted a reassignment to Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Human Resources Management in VA Central Office. She started her new assignment on July 14, 2003. She will be working on Succession Planning initiatives with Mr. Mel Sessa, formerly the Acting Chief Operating Officer for ORM. Joan has been a valuable asset to the OPC and ORM and will be missed. The OPC staff wishes her much success in her new endeavor. We are confident that she will continue to be a valuable asset to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

New Web Site - The Office of Policy and Compliance is in the final stages of their new OPC web site. The site will contain valuable information that will assist ORM field offices and the Department of Veterans Affairs field

facilities with their daily EEO operations. Information will be provided to assist our customers in navigating through the site. It is anticipated that the site will be up and running over the next several weeks. The Office of Policy and Compliance would like to thank Ms. Sarah Gilbert for her hard work, commitment, and dedication in developing the OPC web site.

Bay Pines Field Office

Congratulations to [Ricky Rowe](#), on his promotion to EEO Investigator effective July 27th. Good job Ricky!! ■

Did You Know?

Reminder – Federal Job Applications

Applicants for Federal employment may now apply for employment consideration using a resume; the Optional Application for Federal Employment, Form OF-612; or any other written format of choice. Occasionally, when electronic application-processing systems are used, or when jobs require special skills, other specialized application forms may be required.

The SF-171, *Application for Federal Employment*, the OPM 1170 supplemental application forms, and certain related application forms, became obsolete on December 31, 1994, when Office of Management and Budget approval for the forms expired. Beginning January 1, 1995, Federal agencies could no longer require the SF-171 as the only acceptable application form.

Contact Waltrunette Gardner, HR Specialist at (202) 501-2891 for more information on Federal job applications.



Employee Express is an easy, convenient system that empowers Federal employees by letting them make changes to their own benefits and personal information on their own, anytime, anywhere. Employee Express replaced Employee Self Service (ESS) on July 28, 2003.

Why use Employee Express?

- **Saves time** – *Employee Express reduces the need for you to complete and submit paper forms by replacing them with user-friendly technology.*
- **Convenient** – *You can access Employee Express anytime, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to process changes or to review current information.*
- **Reliable** – *Employee Express has enhanced procedural checks for accuracy which are not available when using paper forms.*
- **You can access Employee Express on the Internet at www.employeeexpress.gov.** *Contact Waltrunette Gardner, HR Specialist, at (202) 501-2891, for more information on using Employee Express. ■*

Quote:

“Often the difference between a successful person and a failure is not one's better abilities or ideas, but the courage that one has to bet on one's ideas, take a calculated risk, and to act.”

***--Maxwell Maltz (1899 - 1975), American physician and author
Submitted by Elizabeth “Liz” Hawkins, Office of Policy and Compliance***

ORM NEWS is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management (ORM). Please contact Terry Washington or Tyrone Eddins, External Affairs Program, by e-mail or by calling (202) 501-2800 concerning the contents of this newsletter. Back copies of the newsletter can be found on our Web site at <http://www.va.gov/orm/NewsEvents.htm>