

ORM NEWS

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



August 2004

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



Telling Our Story

When it comes to telling our story, no one else can tell it as well as we can through our work and the services we provide.

Our goal must always be to provide the highest quality service in the timeliest manner to our stakeholders. When we provide high quality service; be it written correspondence, a telephone call, or face-to-face conversation; we are telling a story of our ability to deliver the very best service. When we fail to accomplish this, we tell a story of our inability to provide the level of service expected of us and we leave ourselves open to criticism, deserved or not, that we can not meet these expectations. It is within our power to avoid this type of criticism through attention to detail because it is in the details that we truly show the quality and professionalism of our organization.

It is important that we focus on the needs of our stakeholders and to make sure that their needs are met. We do our stakeholders and ourselves a disservice when we fail to do so. Every interaction with a stakeholder is another chapter in the story we tell and it sets the tone for how we are perceived as individuals and as an organization.

Effective communication, whether written or spoken, is another key to being successful. It does not matter what we know if we **cannot** or **do not** communicate this information effectively.

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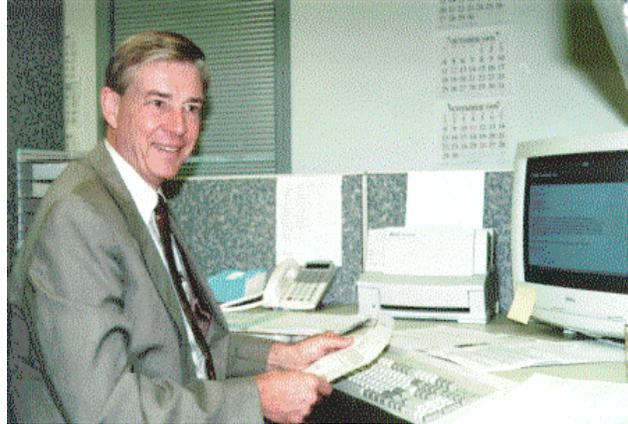
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Poorly written correspondence, including reports, and the inability to verbally relate information can do more harm than imagined because once that correspondence is released or those words are spoken they cannot be retracted before perceptions are formed and the damage is done. In the case of written correspondence, the pen is truly mightier than the sword. Double check your written correspondence and ask a coworker to review it. Ensure you are knowledgeable about your subject matter and that you effectively convey the appropriate information.

I'll end with some valuable advice in the form of a quote from an old professor of mine who said, "The goal of effective communication is not to write or speak so that you can be understood; it is to write and speak so that you cannot be misunderstood."

James S. Jones

Jack Frost
June 29, 1946 – August 12, 2004



A memorial service was held on August 21, 2004, in Bonner Spring, Kansas, for Jack William Frost, who passed on August 12, 2004. Jack was born on June 29, 1946, in Ft. Worth, Texas and is survived by his wife Judi, two daughters, a son, his mother, and a sister. Contributions, in Jack's name, can be made to the First Christian Church of Bonner Springs, Kansas, or the American Cancer Society.

Jack was one of 13 employees selected March 1998 to staff the Office of Resolution Management, Leavenworth, Kansas. He was appointed to the position of EO Investigator and served in this capacity until his selection as a C-2. As a C-2 his responsibilities included investigative and intake specialist duties. In addition to these duties, he conducted basic investigative training at both the local and national levels. As a high performing investigator with a genuine ability to engage people, he was often assigned high profile and complex cases at the Department level. In 2000, he was named Investigator of the Year for ORM.

In 1978, Jack began his VA career as a Chaplain at VA Medical Center, Danville, Illinois. During the nineteen years he served as a Chaplain at this facility, he worked in all areas of the medical center with special emphasis on Psychiatry Service. During the last ten years of his tenure at the medical center, Jack performed collateral duties as an EEO Counselor. Jack received a Bachelors of Arts from Lynchburg College, Lynchburg, Virginia; a Masters of Divinity from Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut; and a Masters of Science in Health Services Administration from the College of St. Francis.

Jack and his wife, Judi, loved to travel the world looking for adventure - a safari in Africa, cruising the Mediterranean, trekking the Mayan ruins in Belize, and scuba diving/snorkeling in the Caribbean. He was a licensed pilot who frequently flew he and his wife on weekend trips to see family and friends. He also enjoyed ballroom dancing and clogging. The ORM family has lost a valuable member who exemplified fairness, integrity, and trust.

Program Highlights

Investigator of the Month

Mr. James S. Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management, has recognized Thurman Story, Patricia Draucker, and Norma Reed as Investigators of the Month. Investigators of the Month receive \$500, a letter of appreciation and a certificate of achievement signed by Mr. Jones. Each letter of appreciation from Mr. Jones stated, *“Your dedication and hard work exemplify those characteristics continuously needed to improve the overall quality and service that we provide our customers, ultimately benefiting the veterans we serve. Again, congratulations on a job well done!”*



Each of these employees was recognized for their ability to complete a significant number of cases, contributing to the overall success in reducing the backlog of cases, and in helping to improve the timeliness requirement for completing investigations. Their accomplishments were previously announced in the Centralized Investigation Project (CIP) News Bulletin.

Mr. Story, EEO Intake Specialist, Great Lakes Operations, was recognized as Investigator of the Month for June 2004. He completed 17 “C” investigations, with an average time of 25.5 days while continuing to perform his regularly assigned intake duties.

Ms. Draucker, Customer Service Specialist, Customer Service and Satisfaction Division, and Ms. Reed, EEO Investigator, Mid-South Operations, were recognized as Co-Investigator for the Month for July 2004. Ms. Draucker completed nine investigations, with an average processing time of 32.1 days while detailed to the CIP. Ms. Reed completed nine investigations, with an average processing time of 43.4 days.

In addition to these employees, the CIP has recognized other employees, in the CIP News Bulletin, who have completed a significant number of investigations in a month. They are Daniel Spilsbury (Pittsburgh), Cheryl Campbell (Washington, DC), Kimberly Martinez (Menlo Park), Winston Johnson (St. Petersburg), Angela Myers (Lyons), Ida O’Neal (Hines), Tamara (Tami) Press (Hines), Patricia Connerty (Hines), Hwa-Soon (Sue) K. Thorson (Leavenworth), Magdalena (Maggie) Padilla (Houston), Glen Hevy (Bedford), Laura Williams (New York), George Garrett (North Little Rock), and Eleanor Wilson (North Little Rock). Congratulations! ■

VIRTUAL VALUE AND PERFORMANCE

By Waltrunette Gardner, Acting COO

As the end of the fiscal year draws near, we will soon know the results of the backlog initiative. I want to take this opportunity to say that we know how hard each of you is working towards meeting the 180-day goal and we commend your efforts and your commitment to this project. In fact, we are already making great progress. As of June 3rd, our average processing time for un-amended cases was 229 days. As of July 31st, it was down to 223 days.

Special thanks to Rosa Franco for taking the lead on this initiative and for keeping upper management informed about our progress.

I also want to remind investigators that field managers are required to use "virtual value" when assessing individual performance. Determining "virtual value" enables us to measure the complexity of investigations and to give appropriate credit for more complex investigations. While ORM, as an organization, will continue to track actual investigations completed, all investigators will be evaluated based on the "virtual value" of each case they complete. In order to ensure that investigators are given appropriate credit for completing complex investigations, I will work closely with the managers to ensure that "virtual value" is understood by all and applied correctly.

One of the changes resulting from the implementation of the 5-tier performance appraisal system is that every performance appraisal in ORM will be reviewed by Human Resources to ensure consistency throughout ORM. Special attention will be given to the "quantity" element of the investigator standards to ensure that "virtual value" is addressed.

Virtual values will be awarded as follows:

Virtual Value System for Investigations

Using the prescribed criteria below, an investigation may be assigned additional value, referred to as a "virtual" value. The basic investigation (weight 1) is one claim based on a single event and using a single basis. Additional weight will be added to the investigation as follows:

- Each additional claim or event will add one (1) to the weighted value1[1].

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- Each additional basis will add one (1) to the weighted value
- A harassment claim will add one (1) to the weighted value.
- A reasonable accommodation claim will add one (1) to the weighted value.
- An Equal Pay claim will add one (1) to the weighted value.

For purposes of productivity, the virtual value of an investigation is determined as follows:

- Virtual 1 = investigation weights of 1 through 7
- Virtual 2 = investigation weights of 8 through 11
- Virtual 3 = investigation weights of 12 through 15
- Virtual 4 = investigation weights of 16 through 19
- Virtual 5 = 20 or higher

Each completed investigation will be assigned a virtual value and the total values for all investigations completed during an evaluation period will be added together to determine an investigator's average productivity for the appraisal period.

For more information, contact your Field Manager or Human Resources at (202) 501-2800. ■

FEDERAL RETIREMENT THRIFT INVESTMENT BOARD TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE SERVICE



The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board recently announced that it will provide toll-free telephone service to Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) participants and beneficiaries beginning July 1, 2004.

Those using the toll-free service will be able to obtain TSP account or transaction information via the ThriftLine's automated telephone service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They will also be able

to speak to a participant service representative at one of two TSP call centers between the expanded hours of 7:00 am to 9:00 pm Eastern time, Monday through Friday. To find out more about your TSP account call [1-TSP-YOU-FRST\(1-877-968-3778\)](tel:1-877-968-3778). The TDD number for the hearing impaired is [1-TSP-THRIFT5 \(1-877-847-4385\)](tel:1-877-847-4385). ■

Breach of Settlement Agreement Process

Office of Policy and Compliance

Who can File a Breach Claim?

Any individual who entered into a written settlement agreement with management to resolve a pending EEO complaint of discrimination and believes this agreement has been breached or violated can file a Breach Claim.

Where to File a Breach Claim

Breach Claims must be filed in writing with the Office of Resolution Management within 30-days of the date when an individual, who signed a written settlement agreement, becomes aware that an alleged breach has occurred. Breach Claims should be sent, in writing, either by fax to (202) 501-2811 or mailed to:

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management
Office of Resolution Management (08)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

What Information should be submitted with a Breach Claim?

- The provision(s) of the settlement agreement the complainant claims were breached.
- A detailed explanation of why they believe the provision(s) of the agreement has been breached along with;
- The specific dates (if known) when they believe the breach occurred and the name(s) of those involved;
- A copy of any documentation that supports the claim; and
- A signed and dated copy of the original settlement agreement.

What are the Steps in the Breach Process?

1. Filing a Breach Claim. Additional information may be requested if needed.
2. An analysis of the claim and any supporting documentation.
3. Issuance of a breach decision with appeal rights. Appeals go to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the claimant can file a civil action in U.S. District Court for a court decision.

For more information on Breach Claims, go to <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/> and click "Office of Policy and Compliance" or call the Office of Policy and Compliance at (202) 501-2680. ■

Government Credit Card Holder Responsibility Reminder

The following information applies to all holders of government issued credit cards:

1. As a credit card Holder, I am cognizant that having a credit card is a privilege and I am responsible for the proper use of such card.
2. I understand that my credit card will be used only for official business. Under no circumstances will I use it for personal business.
3. I understand that advances are limited to 80% of the miscellaneous and incidental expenses (M&IE).
4. I understand that payments are my responsibility and must be made on time.
5. I understand that failure to comply with the above procedures will result in my card being canceled.
6. I understand that disciplinary action may be taken for unauthorized usage of the card.



One last note, protect your government and personal credit cards from theft at home and on-the-job. We recently had an incident where an employee had her purse stolen, on-the-job, and the thief tried to use her government credit card. They were unable to do so because she promptly reported the theft of the card to the bank that issued the card.

ORM's policy for use of government issued credit cards was recently sent to all ORM employees. Please take a moment to read this very important information. Barbara Scott can answer questions concerning your government credit card holder responsibilities. She can be reached at (202) 501-2817. ■



Office Notes

Office of Policy and Compliance – Elizabeth Hawkins has been named Administrative Officer for the Office of Policy and Compliance.

Congratulations to **Vernet Fraser** for his promotion to the rank of Master Sergeant in the Army National Guard. Vernet returned to work, earlier this year, after serving in Kuwait and Iraq.

Central Plains Operations – Congratulations to Earl Hatcher, Administrative Officer, Leavenworth, who was recently recognized for completing **40 years** of government service. Earl's longevity is a testament to his willingness to reach for goals that set a standard for others.

Barbara Barnes, EEO Counselor, received her 20 years of Service Certificate and pin on August 15, 2004.

Timothy Helke, Intake Specialist, and **Annie Fontenet**, Administrative Officer, have new additions to their families. Each has recently adopted a child. *Congratulations*

Did You Know?

ID THEFT

How to Protect Yourself

With identity theft on the rise nation-wide, as evidenced by the recent on-the-job theft of the purse and attempted use of the credit cards of one of our employees, what do you do if you suspect that your personal information has been hijacked and misappropriated to commit fraud or theft? Here are four basic steps you can take to protect yourself:

1. Place a fraud alert on your credit report and review your credit report.

Call the toll-free fraud number of any of the three major credit bureaus (Equifax – 1 800 525-6285, Experian – 1 888 397-3742, or TransUnion – 1 800 680-7289) to place a fraud alert on your credit report. This can help prevent an identity thief from opening additional accounts in your name, the other credit bureaus will be notified, and you will be provided a free copy of your credit report.

2. Contact the credit card company, bank, or other service provider to advise them of any evidence of tampering or fraudulent charges that appear on your credit card or bank account.

3. File a report with your local police or the police in the community where the identity theft took place. Keep a copy of the report. You may need it to validate your claims to creditors. If you can't get a copy, at least get the report number.

4. File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). You will provide important information that can help law enforcement officials track down identity thieves and stop them. The FTC can also refer victim complaints to other appropriate government agencies and companies for further action. To file a complaint with the FTC or to learn more about identity theft, visit www.consumer.gov/idtheft or you can call the FTC toll-free at 1-877-IDTHIFT(438-4338); TDD: 202-326-2502.

Source is the FTC.

How identity thieves use your personal information:

- They call your credit card issuer and, pretending to be you, ask to change the mailing address on your credit card account. The imposter then runs up charges on your account. Because your bills are being sent to the new address, it may take some time before you realize there's a problem.
- They open a new credit card account, using your name, date of birth and SSN. When they use the credit card and don't pay the bills, the delinquent account is reported on your credit report.
- They establish phone or wireless service in your name.
- They open a bank account in your name and write bad checks on that account.
- They file for bankruptcy under your name to avoid paying debts they've incurred under your name, or to avoid eviction.
- The counterfeit checks or debit cards, and drain your bank account.
- They buy cars by taking out auto loans in your name.
- They give your name to the police during an arrest. If they're released from police custody, but don't show up for their court date, an arrest warrant is issued in your name.

Telephone Techniques

Rules for Answering the Telephone

The basic rules for answering the telephone are simple but they need to be practiced.

These include:

- ❑ Greet the caller
- ❑ State the name of your department, Service, Section, or Office
- ❑ Introduce yourself by name
- ❑ Offer your assistance to the caller



Be enthusiastic when you answer the phone. Help make the calling party feel truly welcome. A tired voice lacking enthusiasm is unappealing.

Use friendly phrases as part of your greeting, Such as “Thanks for calling,” “May I help you?” or “How are you today.”

Remember smile as you pick up the receiver.

Addressing Callers Appropriately

Rules about how to address callers can be confusing because of the many options. Here are some helpful tips when addressing callers:

There are eight basic ways to address a calling party:

- ❑ Mr.
- ❑ Mrs.
- ❑ Miss.
- ❑ Ms.
- ❑ Ma’am
- ❑ Sir
- ❑ First Name

The average caller may or may not be sensitive about how they should be addressed. To be on the safe side, keep these suggestions in mind.

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- ❑ When addressing a male, you are always correct to use Mr. or Sir.
- ❑ Addressing women is more confusing. The use of Mrs. or Miss is common and generally acceptable. Some women prefer Ms. and may request this form of address. If you are uncertain, simply ask the caller for her preference.
- ❑ Often when we ask for the correct form of address, the caller will suggest use of a first name. The use of the customer's first name is when:
 - ❑ You have established a good rapport over a period of time
 - ❑ You have been called by your first name
 - ❑ You know the caller and know they are comfortable with a first name basis.

Using Your Most Desirable Speaking Voice

There are several things you can do to produce a more desirable speaking voice.

These include:

- ❑ Warm up by humming a song. This will help deepen the sound of your voice.
- ❑ Practice your pitch and control by calling a telephone-recording device and delivering several messages. Then listen to the playback and critique yourself or ask a friend to help critique the playback.
- ❑ Role-play with a friend and tape record the conversation. Review it for tone, rate of delivery, etc.
- ❑ Take a speech class at a local college or extension program to learn some voice exercises to help you avoid a monotone sound.
- ❑ Put a smile into your voice. It's easy to do. Simply remember to smile as you answer a call. Believe it or not, your voice will sound friendlier.

Source is "Telephone Courtesy and Customer Service." ■

ORM News is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Contact Terry Washington, External Affairs Program, by e-mail or by calling (202) 501-2800 concerning the contents of this newsletter. Copies of this newsletter are available at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm>.