

HR UPDATE

HR.....SOLUTIONS FOR SUCCESS.



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HR UPDATE

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

Please let us know what you think of our publication. If you have any suggestions about how to improve the HR Update or topics you think should be addressed, please contact franklin.hurt@alaska.gov.

Retro payments for GGU, SU, Excluded and Non-Covered employees mail out date is Wednesday 7/18/08. The Direct Deposit settlement date is Monday 7/21/08.

If you have any questions regarding the retro payments Please see the FAQ @ http://dop.state.ak.us/iscsi/fileadmin/Human_Resource_Services/pdf/retroFAQ2008.pdf or contact the Employee Call Center at 907-465-3009 or by email @ doa.dop.employeecallcenter@alaska.gov.

Spotlight on the DOTPF Service Center

By Shelly Saviers and Brittany Patzke

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT/PF) Human Resources Service Center provides one-stop, full service to Department of Transportation and Public Facilities staff in the areas of management services, personnel and employee relations, recruitment, and personnel/payroll processing. The Juneau Office serves the Headquarters, Southeast, and Northern Regions of the department. The Anchorage Office serves the Central Region and Northern Regions of the department.

The DOT/PF Human Resources Service Center strives to provide client-centered, efficient support to DOT/PF staff whose mission serves the entire state. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities designs, constructs, operates and maintains the state's transportation infrastructure systems, buildings, and other facilities used by Alaskans and visitors. These include more than 5,000 miles of paved and gravel highways; more than 300 aviation facilities, including 260 airports and 2 international airports; 43 small harbors; and a ferry system covering 3,500 nautical miles serving 33 coastal communities. HR staff is committed to working with DOT/PF managers and supervisors to ensure we meet the Department's diverse needs.

The DOT/PF Service Center is led by Human Resource Manager Amanda Holland and Assistant Human Resource Manager Sherilyn Knight.

Amanda and Sherilyn bring a valuable HR background and many years of experience to the Service Center. They are located in Juneau and assist the Department with workforce planning, policy and procedure development, employee trend reporting, and resolving complex HR issues. In addition, Sherilyn coordinates the Department's affirmative action and equal employment opportunity reporting, which is critical to federal funding.

The DOT/PF Service Center has 16 staff members who provide timely and accurate Payroll processing and ensure the Department is in compliance with applicable regulations, statutes, laws, and bargaining unit contracts. Marine Payroll staff is led by HR Technical Services Supervisor Shanna Burns who is located in Juneau. Shoreside Payroll is led by HR Technical Services Supervisor Lorine Day, who is also located in Juneau. Payroll staff in Juneau process payroll for the Alaska Marine Highway System, Headquarters, Statewide employees located in Southeast and the Northern Region area as well as the Southeast and Northern Regions. Payroll staff in Anchorage process payroll for Central Region, Ted Stevens and Fairbanks International Airports, and Statewide employees located in the Central regional area. Payroll staff is available to answer a wide variety of questions, including interpretation of pay policies and procedures, FMLA/AFLA eligibility and processing, new hire paperwork, and responding to pay problems.

The DOT/PF Service Center's recruitment staff provides strategic guidance to managers and supervisors

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through the recruitment process. Recruitment staff ensures DOT/PF is in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and bargaining unit contracts, assists Hiring Managers with the recruitment and selection process, approves applicants for hire, reviews advanced step placement requests, and assists with minimum qualification determinations. Recruitment staff is located in Juneau and led by Human Resource Technician Shannon Conger. Recruitment staff is happy to answer questions during any phase of the recruitment and selection process and is always looking for innovative ways to market DOT/PF jobs to prospective applicants.

DOT/PF Service Center's Management Services staff provides guidance on a wide variety of employee relations issues, including coaching, discipline, preparing employee evaluations, and preparing grievance and complaint responses. Management Services staff is located in Anchorage and Juneau. Dana Lattimore, located in Anchorage, provides Management Services for Ted Stevens International Airport, Central Region, and Statewide employees located in the Central regional area. Brittany Patzke, located in Anchorage, provides Management Services for Fairbanks International Airport, Northern Region, and Statewide employees in the Northern regional area. Inga Aanrud, located in Juneau, provides Management Services for the Alaska Marine Highway System employees throughout Southeast and Southwest Alaska. Shelly Saviers, located in Juneau, provides Management Services for Southeast Region and Headquarters. Several members of the Service Center team are adjunct instructors and are certified to deliver a wide variety of courses including ALDER training, Academy for Supervisors, and a Respectful Workplace. Management Services staff is available to provide guidance on a wide variety

of HR questions, including ADA accommodations, employee training, drug testing issues, organizational development and classification, and employee relations.

The DOT/PF HR Service Center staff works together as a team in an effort to provide strategic and effective support to our client agency. We are committed to working with the Department to ensure HR issues are resolved in a manner that is effective for the Department and legally defensible. For more information on our Service Center, including a detailed description of staff functions, please visit our website at <http://dop.state.ak.us/website/index.cfm?fuseaction=dot.main>

Email Etiquette in Business Communications

By Carol McLeod

Email is often the easiest, least costly, fastest, and most effective way we have today to send and receive information to and from our internal and external customers. Sometimes, though, the messages that we send are not the messages that we intended to send—we say things in a manner that are perceived differently from what our intentions were. It is amazing how many of us do not think about the image of the State of Alaska that we project when we send business communications by email.

'By requiring employees to use appropriate, businesslike language in all electronic communications, employers can limit their liability risks and improve the overall effectiveness of the organization's e-mail and Internet copy in the process' - Excerpt from 'Writing Effective E-mail', by Nancy Flynn and Tom Flynn.

By having an agency or division standard for writing and sending emails, supervisors are helping to ensure that the messages that are sent are appropriate

for the business of the agency. There are three main reasons to have an agency email policy that addresses how business communications will be sent when using email. These three reasons are:

- Professionalism: by using proper email language the agency will convey a professional image.
- Efficiency: emails that get to the point are much more effective than poorly worded emails.
- Protection from liability: employee awareness of email risks will protect the agency, department, and the State of Alaska from costly law suits.

If your agency needs to write a new policy or revise an existing policy on email, here are some email etiquette pointers that you may find helpful. As with any other suggestions about policies, you will want to take agency culture and who your agency serves into consideration. While this list is a good starting place, there may be other rules that would be beneficial to incorporate and some on this list that do not reflect your agency's culture or customers.

- **Answer swiftly.**

People send e-mails because they wish to receive a quick response. If they did not want a quick response they would send a letter or a fax. Therefore, each e-mail should be replied to within at least 24 hours, and preferably within the same working day. If the email is complicated, just send an email back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them. This will put the person's mind at rest and usually they will then be very patient.

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- **Do not attach unnecessary files.**

By sending large attachments you can annoy customers and even bring down their e-mail system. Wherever possible try to compress attachments and only send attachments when they are productive.

- **Mailings > use the Bcc: field or do a mail merge.**

When sending an email mailing, some people place all the email addresses in the To: field. There are two drawbacks to this practice: (1) the recipient knows that you have sent the same message to a large number of recipients, and (2) you are publicizing someone else's email address without permission. One way to get round this is to place all addresses in the Bcc: field. However, the recipient will only see the address from the To: field in their email, so if this was empty, the To: field will be blank and this might look like spamming. You could include the group name or put your name in the To: field. An even better solution—if you have Microsoft Outlook and Word you can do a mail merge and create one message for each recipient. A mail merge also allows you to use fields in the message so that you can address each recipient personally. For more information on how to do a Word mail merge, consult the Help in Word.

- **Take care with abbreviations and emoticons.**

In business emails, try not to use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud). The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations and in business emails these are generally

not appropriate. The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-). If you are not sure whether your recipient knows what it means, it is better not to use it.

- **Do not ask to recall a message.**

Chances are that your message has already been delivered and read. It is better just to send an email to say that you have made a mistake. This will look much more honest than trying to recall a message.

- **Do not use email to discuss confidential information.**

Sending an email is like sending a postcard. If you don't want your email to be displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it. Moreover, never ever make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in emails.

- **Do not overuse Reply to All.**

Only use Reply to All if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.

- **Use proper spelling, grammar & punctuation.**

This is not only important because improper spelling, grammar and punctuation give a bad impression of your agency, it is also important for conveying the message properly. E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text.

- **Do not write in CAPITALS.**

IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. This can be highly annoying and might trigger an unwanted response.

- **Do not copy a message or attachment without permission.**

Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator. If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws.

- **Use a meaningful subject.**

Try to use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. For example, when you send an email to another agency requesting information about a policy, it is better to mention the actual name of the policy, e.g. 'information on policy for out of state licenses' than to just say 'policy information requested.'

So how should you enforce any email policy that the agency develops? It is helpful to first write the policy down and give it to all employees (maybe even by email!). If feasible provide a short training on the appropriate way to use email to enhance the business functions of the agency. Supervisors will also want to stress the importance of email in projecting the image of the agency and the state. Email is fast, economical, and how business is run today. It is important that users understand the significance of using email for the State of Alaska in a professional manner.

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How to Reduce Employee Burnout

By Carol McLeod

Lately, the star performer in your team—the one everyone relies on—is surly, responds irritably to co-workers' requests, and has called in late for the third time this week. Her work habits have gone downhill, she's been frequently ill, and it is apparent that her weight has changed over the last couple of months. When employees exhibit these kinds of changes, very often the cause is employee burnout.

Burnout is caused by the perception of an increasing amount of negative stress in an employee. By itself, stress is neutral. It is the individual who interprets stress as either negative or positive. Let's say you have two employees with similar projects and the same deadline. One of your employees may view the deadline as positive stress because it helps her know how to plan her time and manage the project. The other employee may view the deadline as negative stress, because he immediately begins to worry that he won't be able to finish the project by that date, and he becomes resentful that he has to complete such an important project in such a short amount of time. Most employees seek a certain level of stress in their jobs—it keeps them motivated to grow and to learn. But when employees feel overwhelmed by the pressure to perform and try to achieve goals that are not reachable, negative stress happens. When an employee gets enough of these negative stresses, burnout is the inevitable result.

So why should you care? Stress is stress, right? And it comes with being employed. Often, it is your *best* employees who experience burnout. Those are the employees who invest themselves into the work, spend more time at work, and take work more

seriously. The employee who doesn't have an interest in the success of the agency, who comes to work to get a paycheck rather than serve the citizens of the State of Alaska, who doesn't take the work personally is *not* going to be the employee who suffers burnout. Burnt out employees are the ones who care about what they do.

Other reasons that burnout matters are because employees who experience high levels of stress are three times more likely to suffer from frequent illnesses; eight times more likely to make costly mistakes on the job; and often become so discouraged that they just quit. According to a recent study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 25 to 45% of employees report high levels of negative stress caused by their jobs.

Burnout is often easier for a supervisor or co-worker to see than it is for the employee suffering from it to realize that's what is happening. In fact often, a burnout employee will try to "outperform" his or her stress, without realizing that's what is going on, which in turn, only increases the stresses for the employee. Fortunately, there are some signs that supervisors can look for that often signal employee burnout.

- Change in performance. The employee suddenly has an increase of errors, misses deadlines, has a decrease in productivity.
- Change in health. The employee calls in sick more frequently, suffers headaches and stomach pains, does not sleep well, comes to work not rested. There have been obvious weight losses or gains.
- Change in social behaviors. The employee is no longer even-tempered and friendly to co-workers or customers, behaves irritably towards

others, explodes at seemingly inconsequential things, or, on the end of the scale, is manically happier, boisterous, and noisier.

- Change in attendance. The employee arrives late, leaves earlier, or comes in early and leaves late, doesn't take breaks in an attempt to "outperform" the stress.
- Change in work habits. The employee becomes disorganized, doesn't manage time efficiently, fails to follow through or up with assignments.

[Please realize that all of these behaviors reflect *changes*. If an employee is always late and continues to be late, and has never followed through and still doesn't, chances are the problem is not burnout, but a different kind of performance issue you need to address in another way.]

Burnout is a relatively easy problem to solve—reducing some of those things, as feasible, that create negative stress for your employee. Here are some simple proven ways to reduce negative stress for your employees that are not expensive or time-consuming.

1. Allow your employees to talk to each other about non-work related topics. Chatting at work has been shown to reduce stress significantly.
2. Allow your employees to take appropriate control over their work and how they do it.
3. Allow a certain level of creativity—pictures, arrangement of cubicles, some freedom of expression in dress (as appropriate to the agency).
4. Allow a certain amount of fun, as long as it is not disruptive to others in the group.
5. Allow some diversity in work and assignments. Encourage cross-training across functional

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areas in your group, so that boredom doesn't contribute to negative stress.

6. Keep the work environment pleasant, without noise pollution or safety concerns.
7. Invite your employees to talk to you openly and talk to them openly about the work and causes of negative stress.
8. Try not to do too much with too little. Asking your employees to constantly give more than they are able is a sure fire way to induce negative stress in all of your best employees.
9. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, recognize good work when you see it and reward it appropriately.

Eliminating or reducing negative stress is one way to help retain those star performers who are most likely to suffer from burnout.

Invitation from HR Update

A major purpose of this publication is to assist supervisors and managers in State of Alaska agencies with their workforce planning efforts and to provide some helpful suggestions for improving retention of their current workforce.

Many of you are in the process now of developing and implementing your agency workforce plans. We would like to invite you to share with other departments, divisions, and agencies what's going on with your agencies workforce planning. Other agencies will find it useful to know, for example,

- Where you are in the process of workforce planning, retention efforts, and recruitment,
- What you've done so far that works,
- What you've done so far that has been less successful than you'd hoped,
- What questions you'd like to ask each other in this forum, and
- Any other topics on workforce planning, retention efforts, and recruitment that you'd like to share.

With the July 2008 issue of HR Update, there will be a column entitled *Workforce Forum: What's Happening Now*. Each month, we'll publish a question, an answer, or an article written by you for other agencies in the state. This is a great opportunity for you to share your thoughts, successes, accomplishments, and concerns about workforce planning and retention efforts, and to get your questions answered by your peers who are also going through the same sorts of issues that your agency is. You may submit your questions, articles, answers, and other information to franklin.hurt@alaska.gov.

Quick Facts June 2008

New research on why people leave jobs—bad bosses are still in the top three, but the number one reason has been replaced by involuntary movement, such as layoffs or downsizing. According to Right Management, the 7 top reasons people left jobs in 2007 are:

- Downsizing or restructuring (54%)
- Seeking new challenges (30%)
- Ineffective leadership (25%)
- Poor relationship with manager (22%)
- Improve work-life balance (21%)
- Contributions to company not valued (21%)
- Better compensation and benefits (18%)

The percentages add up to more than 100% because the 1,308 respondents were allowed to select all that applied. As State of Alaska supervisors and managers, it is essential to note that challenging work, effective bosses, and feeling valued are still all more significant to retention efforts than better compensation and benefits.



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