

HR Update

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Division of Personnel and
Labor Relations

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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.

Feedback Rich

By Camille Brill

I was fortunate to have a great boss early in my career. She pointed out a number of places where my fledging managerial skills were lacking. One in particular has always stayed with me. She remarked that I often gave positive feedback to people with whom I worked. Thinking she noticed my great skill, I beamed. But then she went on, saying that if you really care about someone, you give them constructive feedback. And if you don't care about someone, you say only positive things or nothing.

That seemingly simple piece of advice gave me a glimpse of how much I had to learn. Over the years, it has extrapolated to the realization that if you are the boss and you haven't gotten any constructive feedback from

people who work for you, there is likely a fundamental problem in your work unit such as a lack of trust or a lack of communication skills.

The advice also taught me to highly value constructive, honest feedback from any one with whom I worked. It really is a gift. When done well, someone has taken the time to think about and focus on some aspect of your work and is giving you the opportunity to learn something you may not have known and to improve. It's really an expression of value and respect and is an investment in you as an employee. It's another way of saying I'm committed to your success.

So why was I handing out positive feedback but not constructive feedback?

- The first answer is simple: It was easier. I was comfortable giving and receiving positive feedback. I learned that the best and most effective positive feedback was specific. The general "good job" felt fine and I was glad to hear it, but I really didn't know specifically what I had done that was good. So now I try to remember to give detailed feedback: "Your utilization analysis was key to the success of that project – thanks!"
- The full answer is not as simple. I relate to managers and employees who have told me they don't give constructive feedback for a number of reasons: they don't know how to do it; they don't want conflict; and no one wants to hear it. It boils down to fear and avoidance.

The first one – they don't know how to give constructive feedback – helped

me to pinpoint one of my skill gaps. I gave positive feedback because I knew how to do it. I didn't give constructive feedback because I didn't know how to do it effectively. It was a skill gap that I needed to close.

Giving constructive feedback has to be learned and practiced. The vast majority of the time it should be informal, focused, relatively quick, private, and timely. Don't let things pile up. If you avoid it, you are likely helping to "build" a larger problem that will be more of a challenge to solve. Constructive feedback is always thoughtful and is backed with positive intent. In "HR language," some of the underlying behavioral anchors of the skill of giving feedback are: the ability to describe specific behaviors, present factual information and ask open-ended, probing questions that encourage understanding. When you give feedback, it should promote an exchange of information and seeing the issue from each other's view point. What about people who don't give constructive criticism because they think people don't want to hear it? This runs counter to two other recurring themes that I've heard in my HR work over the years: 1) There is NO feedback in my work environment. It's stressful not knowing what I'm doing well and what I'm not. 2) I really want people to come to me directly and let me know if something is not going well or if there's a problem with something I've done.

Generally, I think most people do want to hear feedback. The "fear" of giving feedback comes from the worry over how the person is going to react

to the information. Some of us really don't know how to handle constructive feedback.

The key to receiving constructive feedback is listening. Sounds so simple, but truly, it's one of the hardest skills to learn.

It's difficult enough to truly listen in everyday situations – we are, after all, inundated with information -- but it's especially challenging to do in certain situations: when you are being criticized; when the other is not a skilled communicator; or when you disagree with what the other person is saying.

When someone is giving you constructive feedback, listen. Don't be formulating your response and waiting for a break so you can talk. Stop; quiet your internal voice; and listen.

Listening is the first step to understanding. Listening does not necessarily mean you agree. If, after listening to the constructive feedback, you don't understand or need further clarification, ask questions. Ask for more details. Try to understand the feedback and acknowledge it. Then, if appropriate, focus on finding a solution together and agree to it.

The vast majority of the time this will not take long. Of course, for more substantial and complex matters, it will take more time. But if you build your communication skills, it will make

the more challenging or delicate issues easier to address and resolve.

Feedback – both positive and constructive – should run up, down, and across work units. Feedback rich environments encourage communication, trust, information sharing, and collaboration. It's no surprise that these are some of the traits of high functioning work units, which have excellent morale.

If you want to learn more about the skill of giving and receiving feedback, do it! There are many excellent books and resources that address communication in the workplace. The Division of Personnel and Labor Relations has classes that address feedback in the workplace. The Performance Coaching course focuses on a coaching or supervisory model. The Interpersonal Skills course features an empowered communication model. Sign up at TrainAlaska at <http://aws.state.ak.us/TrainAlaska/Default.aspx>.

Free Online Job Posting Boards

By Tara Stephens

As part of the Division of Personnel & Labor Relations' (DOPLR) continuing efforts to attract qualified job seekers to Workplace Alaska (WPA), recently many of the 'All Applicant' recruitments have been placed on free online job posting boards. This effort has generated a considerable amount of interest, and has resulted in WPA application submissions

from qualified applicants.

Following are links to free online job posting boards. Hiring managers are encouraged to advertise their positions, i.e., those open to All Applicants, on these websites. If you need assistance with posting your recruitments to these websites, you may contact the recruitment staff in your HR Service Center, or Tara Stephens at tara.stephens@alaska.gov or 907-465-4432.

Free Recruitment Advertising Websites

www.thejobspider.com
www.jobahoy.com
www.jobvertise.com
www.bestjobsus.com
www.workfinders.net
www.jobisland.com
www.getjob.us
www.job-ad-venture.com
www.career-file.com
www.careercentral.com
www.devbistro.com
www.getmeajob.com
www.today-classifieds.com

Disclaimer: These online job posting boards are provided as third party research and information websites. Please note that third party websites are NOT affiliated with DOPLR and that any views or opinions presented by third party websites are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of DOPLR.



Staci Agustus



Duplicate W-2 Request for 2009 and Prior Years

By Rick Morrison

The 2009 W-2 forms were mailed out to State of Alaska employees on January 19, 2010. All requests for duplicate W-2s should be directed to the Employee Call Center at 465-3009, or by fax at 465-6624, or by email at employeeccallcenter@alaska.gov. Employees of the Governor's Office, Legislative Affairs, Legislative Audit, and the Court System should contact their Human Resources office directly.

All requests will be forwarded to the Division of Finance the same day they are received. Requests received by the Division of Finance by noon will be printed and mailed by 2 p.m. each workday. After April 15th, W-2 requests will be printed and mailed within three workdays. Due to the high volume of requests for duplicates during the tax season, duplicates will be delivered by physical mail from the Division of Finance.

The mailing address for the 2009 duplicate W-2 is the address in the payroll system effective January 15, 2010. If you need to update your mailing address, you must submit a signed Address Authorization Form, which can be found online at the Division of Personnel's HR forms page. This form will update your address in the payroll system. For your protection a signature is required

as sensitive financial and other personal information will be sent to the address provided.

If you have any questions, you may contact the Employee Call Center at 465-3009 or employeeccallcenter@alaska.gov.

Withholding Changes

Employees are asking why their income tax withholding has increased when all other factors (wages, withholding exemptions, marital status) have stayed the same. The answer lies in how the Making Work Pay tax credit was implemented in 2009 and then extended to 2010.

The federal withholding tables were changed in February 2009 to apply the credit through reduced withholding. In 2009, the withholding tables were adjusted so that employees received one year's credit over nine months instead of twelve months. The credit is still in place for 2010 but the credit is now spread over twelve months which means withholding is higher.

Provisional Hire – A Great Opportunity

By Fran Rabago

The State's provisional hire program allows State hiring managers to select a qualified person with a disability to fill a vacant position for a trial period of up to four months without the need for competitive recruitment and with no obligation to retain if performance is less than acceptable. Upon acceptable completion of the trial period the employee is converted to probationary status. Throughout this process, support, and if necessary, on-site job coaching is available to the employee through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Representatives from the Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education and Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and Personnel & Labor Relations are members of a

Provisional Hire work group that meet regularly to discuss ways to improve the State of Alaska's Provisional Hire Program. Recent enhancements include:

- Request for Hire Approval Checklist for Provisional Hires (new form)
- DVR Steps to Utilize the Provisional Hire Process (new internal guidelines)
- On-going discussions on best practices and methods for success of the program.

The Provisional Hire work group is an offshoot of the State as a Model Employer Task Force. For information on how you may take advantage of this developing opportunity, or to share your ideas on how to better the program, please contact Assistant Chief of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Sean O'Brien at 465-6969 or Equal Employment Opportunity Program Manager Fran Rabago at 375-7705.

Classification - Study Updates

Active Studies

- GIS/Cartographer I-IV
- Fisheries, Habitat, & Wildlife Biologists I-IV
- Equal Employment Opportunity Officer
- Eligibility Technician and Workforce Development Specialist
- Program Coordinator Study and Phase 3 (outliers)
- Regulatory Commission of Alaska job classes

Recently Completed Studies

- Employment Unemployment Insurance Technical Manager, effective 03/01/10
- Department Communication Manager, effective 01/01/10
- AMHS International Safety Management Coordinator, 11/16/09
- Petroleum Economic Policy Analyst, effective 10/16/09
- Assistant State Petroleum Property Assessor, effective 9/14/09