



MSAOP News Notes

July/August 2011 Issue

Editor: Kelli Adkins

Mid South Area Council for Office Professionals (MSACOP) Annual Meeting

The Mid South Area Council for Office Professionals held its Annual Meeting, May 10, 11, & 12, 2011. Due to the budget constraints the meeting was held over three days by conference call.

We welcomed Brenda Aysenne, Houma, LA, and Wendy Smith, Stoneville, MS, as the newest members of the Council.

Some of the items discussed were the Charter and the goals for this past year that were accomplished. One goal that the Council accomplished was to plan and execute a Round Table discussion with invited RLs and AOs. This was held on November 2, 2010. Look for some

upcoming events resulting from this one day meeting.

Another goal that the Council completed was to revamp the website and make it available. If you have not checked it out, please do so.

The timing of the Annual Meeting (calls) coincided with the pending high water from the Mississippi River. There were some locations that were impacted by this and were busy preparing for the emergency. This made the calls a real challenge that we overcame.

Thank you to the Council members for working with me and making the Annual Meeting (calls) a success.

Submitted by: Kelli Adkins

The **Mission** of the MSACOP is to provide a resource for the Area Director's Office and all levels of management for matters relating to office professionals.

The **Goal** of the Council is to enhance office professions through training, networking, mentoring, and recognition of office support employees. It is the desire of the Council to work with all levels of management to assure that office support staff are highly skilled and motivated professionals and to assure that the clerical and administrative needs of the Mid South Area and ARS are met.



We're on the web:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/msa/msacop>



A group photo of the Council members is not available. Due to the Annual Meeting being conducted by conference call we were unable to take a picture.

2011-2012 Members

Virginia Kelley, Senior Chair, Stoneville, MS
Tammy Dorman, Junior Chair, Auburn, AL
Kelli Adkins, Ex-Officio, Lexington, KY
Brenda Aysenne, Recorder, Houma, LA
Mr. Archie Tucker, MSACOP Sponsor, Assistant Area Director, Stoneville, MS
Drusilla Fratesi, Area Director's Administrative Assistant, Stoneville, MS
Linda Fulton, Technical Advisor, Mississippi State, MS
Ann McGee, Deputy Area Director's Assistant, Stoneville, MS
Wendy Smith, Stoneville, MS

Exercise at Work

Submitted by: Tammy Dorman

Too busy to exercise? Now you can workout at work.

It's hard to find time to exercise, especially for those of us who work in an office. Exercising at work may seem impossible, but it's one option for staying fit and keeping your energy up. It takes some creativity, but there are opportunities to exercise at work if you pay attention. All it takes is a little planning and some inspiration to squeeze in a little movement all day long.

The Basics

You probably know a few tricks for staying active at work. Taking the stairs when you can, parking further away from the door, and walking around the office when you can are good places to start. Beyond that, there are a few other options to keep you moving:



Sit on an exercise ball instead of a chair. This will strengthen your abs and back and you'll work on your posture without even trying.

- **Set an alarm to go off every hour to remind you to stand up and move around. Even if you just swing your arms or take a deep breath, you'll feel more alert.**

Use the restroom on another floor and take the stairs.



Use a pedometer and keep track of how many steps you take. Aim for 6,000 to 10,000 steps a day.

- **Leave something important in your car (your lunch, your briefcase, etc.) so you have to run out to get it (and take the stairs).**



Deliver documents or messages to co-workers in person rather than by email.

- **Go to the mall for lunch and park on the opposite end of the food court. Don't forget to buy something healthy.**



Get a headset for your phone so you can move around while you talk.

- **Adding short bouts of exercise throughout the day will help you burn more calories and will also reduce stress so you can easily smile at your boss when she piles more work on you.**

Does Challenge Inspire Job Enjoyment

Submitted by: Linda Fulton

Is it possible that the challenge of a new task or a different way of accomplishing a task encourages job enjoyment? Oftentimes status quo becomes boring and humdrum, and a challenge makes the day go by faster. Should we embrace challenges as job fulfillment?

Initial reaction pretty much dictates the thought, "Oh man, another change, why can't they just leave things alone." However, when we implement something new, and work through a new process or a new task (oftentimes imagination is needed) to achieve the impossible, it is a real sense of accomplishment that causes one to "feel good" We all enjoy feeling good and being inspired even if it is a non-traditional method of being inspired.

Just food for thought.

Interesting Communication Quotes

Submitted by: Linda Fulton

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." - George Bernard Shaw

"The biggest mistake is believing there is one right way to listen, to talk, to have a conversation – or a relationship." – Deborah Tannen

"When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen." – Ernest Hemingway

"Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life." – Brian Tracy

"The trouble with talking too fast is you may say something you haven't thought of yet." – Ann Landers

"The basic building block of good communications is the feeling that every human being is unique and of value." - Unknown

"The art of communication is the language of leadership." – James Humes

"Communication works for those who work at it." - John Powell

"The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate." –

Joseph Priestley



Are you contemplating retiring? Beth Holt, Program Support Assistant for the Conservation and Production Research Laboratory, SPA, is actually doing just that...retiring. Below is part of an email that she sent to Brenda Aysenne detailing her plans for retirement.

"I have 39 working days counting today (email was sent on July 21, 2011). As for plans, we currently live in our 5th wheel RV and plan to live and work (part time) anywhere we want to in the U.S. We particularly will focus on national parks or monuments to work, but one summer I'd like to work at an amusement park perhaps selling ice cream.

There's a special name for folks like us; we're called Workampers. There's a website where employers need folks like us who live in their RV and only want part time work. I've worked behind a desk for 35 years (and so has my husband). We love the outdoors and traveling, so this seems to be the best life for us. We sold our house here on 5.31 so we are totally unencumbered. We've been planning for this for 5 years now; just waiting for me to get old enough (reach my minimum retirement age). That happens on 8.30. Yippee. I love my job and what I do, but it's time to pass the torch. Life is short so we plan to embrace it with a gusto until our health prevents us from traveling."

To find information on Workampers just go to the web and type in Workampers in the search engine.

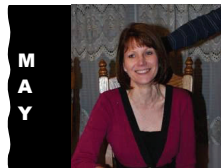
OFFICE PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHT PROGRAM

This is the MSACOPs way of getting to know each other and recognizing each other! Each month a different OP will be "TAGGED" by the previous month's Highlighted OP!

Also, visit our new website - <http://www.ars.usda.gov/msa/msacop> - to get current information and to access our SOP with tons of information that will make your job easier.



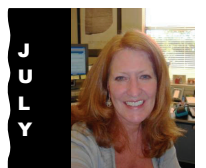
Sandy Hineman is a Program Support Assistant for the Honey Bee Breeding, Genetics and Physiology Research Unit in Baton Rouge, LA, and has worked there for seven years. She is married to William Hineman and has 3 children. She enjoys spending time with her grandchildren.



Brenda Aysenne is a Program Support Assistant for Dr. Edward Richard at the Sugarcane Research Unit in Houma, LA, and has worked for ARS for thirteen years. She also worked for USDA, Rural Development from 1982 to 1997. Brenda is married to Joseph and has 2 daughters, Lauren 24 and Kaitlyn 16.



Gena Pancake is an Office Automation Clerk for Dr. Prakash Arelli at the ARS Crop Genetics Research Unit worksite in Jackson, TN. She has worked for ARS for one year. She went to high school in Tennessee and has a BS degree in Criminology. Gina is a widow, her husband Nick passed away in 2011, and they have 1 son, Quentin, 15. They also have 3 dogs named Riley, Mudbud and Benny.



Patricia 'Tricia' Brown is the Office Automation Assistant at the Auburn Location Administrative Office. Her supervisor is Betty J. Shepherd, Administrative Officer. Tricia has been with ARS for 4 years in November, 2011. Tricia is a widow. Her husband of 28 years, Frank, passed away February 2010. Tricia's education is as follows: Auburn University (undergraduate) B.S. English Secondary Education; Georgia College & State University (graduate) Master of Public Administration.



Donna Signa is a Program Support Assistant in Stoneville, Mississippi. Donna began her ARS career in 2004, with her first five years serving as the Program Support Assistant for Application & Production Research Unit. Donna has worked for the last three years in the Genomics & Bioinformatics Research Unit. Her supervisor is Dr. Brian Scheffler. Donna is married to Frank Signa, Jr. and they have three children, Frank III, Francine and Severino.

Tag...you're it!

Will One of These Productivity Tools Work for You—or Your Boss?

by ASAPorg.com Staff

Submitted by:
Brenda Aysenne

To-do lists, notebooks, white boards, flow charts, checklists, or post-it notes...each of us has favored methods for keeping track of work that needs to be done. And time management experts tell us that we will be more productive when we use those methods that mesh with our preferred style. A number of online productivity tools are now available to help you track tasks, coordinate work, remember deadlines, and capture and organize ideas. One of them may be right for you, and, even better, one might be just the thing to sync schedules and projects with your boss!

These seven web sites offer productivity, time, and task management tools that have been highlighted as among the most useful web sites available. Some are free, but a few require subscriptions. All of those, however, do offer free trials so don't be shy about taking them for a test drive!

1. www.evernote.com Evernote allows

you to capture, organize, and then find your information easily. Put your thoughts, ideas, inspiration, and things to remember all in one place. "Use Evernote for work, for play, and for everything that's noteworthy".

2. www.usestacks.com This site is excellent when you (or your boss) need to manage the workload of a group. The status of each member is instantly visual and the tool allows you to manage group tasks and projects. Free trial, subscription after that.

3. www.springpadit.com Quickly and easily save anything you want to remember. Take a note, create a task, scan a product barcode, and look up the book your friend mentioned. Everything you save is automatically synced across your mobile devices and any browser.

4. www.zoho.com Zoho provides a muscular, integrated portfolio of more than 20 web-based applications for businesses. Apps are grouped by Col-

laboration, Business and Productivity, and there are plugins for Office and Sharepoint. Free for personal use, otherwise priced by the application

5. www.lifehacker.com Many people love this blog that offers a range of tips, tricks, articles, and downloads to help you get things done. The goal is to help people work smarter, faster, and better.

6. www.TeuxDeux.com is a simple, visually attractive, and easy to use to-do app. If you like making to-do lists, you will love TeuxDeux. Use the free browser-based TeuxDeux at work/home and then take your to-dos on the road with the iPhone app.

7. www.checklist.com Checklist is a simple task management application to help you get things done. It offers a large database of checklists that help you get started right away.

Here's a bonus for you iPhone users--- check out the app "taskdude!"

Microsoft Word Shortcuts

Submitted by: Drusilla Fratesi

Familiarity and regular use of any software leads to shortcuts and streamlined use. Most of us, however, do not take the time to learn or get used to shortcuts we don't already routinely use. Accept the challenge to learn periodically one new shortcut. "Helpful Shortcuts" for working in Windows was a helpful article in the January 2010 issue of MSAOP News Notes. Random "tips" you may not have discovered yet to help with Microsoft WORD are listed below. Perhaps there are some that will make your work easier.

It is not necessary to cut and paste in order to move paragraphs within a document. Instead, with the cursor located somewhere in the paragraph, hold down the SHIFT and ALT keys at the same time then use the up and down arrow keys to move the paragraph around in the document.

To create a horizontal line across the width of a document, press the hyphen key 3 times then hit Enter.

Subscript or Superscript? Hit CTRL and + at the same time when you have a number or word selected for subscript. For Superscript, hit CTRL, SHIFT and + all at the same time.

To select a **word**, double click on it.

To select a **sentence**, hold down CTRL and click anywhere in the sentence.

To select a **paragraph**, triple click within the paragraph or move the mouse just past the left margin of the paragraph. When the pointer changes to a right pointing arrow, double click to select the whole paragraph.

To select an entire **document**, press CTRL A. This is handy when you need to change the font or remove formatting. Be careful. If you accidentally press DELETE or type a keystroke and erase everything, press CTRL Z or choose UNDO from the Edit menu.

To decrease font size one value – CTRL + SHIFT + <

To increase font size one value – CTRL + SHIFT + >

To decrease font size one point – CTRL + [

To increase font size one point – CTRL +]

To insert a comment – ALT plus CTRL + M

To turn Track Changes on or off – CTRL + SHIFT + E

To go back one page – ALT + Left Arrow

To go forward one page – ATL + Right Arrow

To single space lines – CTRL + 1

To double space lines – CTRL + 2

To set 1.5 line spacing CTRL + 5

13 Ways to Be a Better Co-Worker

<http://www.rd.com/13-things/13-ways-to-be-a-better-coworker/>

from Stealth Health

Submitted by: Wendy Smith

1. Say a cheery “Hello!” in the morning. Do you plod into the office, eyes down, shoulders slumped, and immediately start work? If so, you’re likely to find that co-workers ignore you (at best) or avoid you (at worst). Get into the habit of smiling and greeting everyone as you arrive in the morning or begin your shift. It’s amazing how fast this little courtesy can thaw chilly workplace relations.

2. Learn the art of small talk. Ask your co-workers about their interests — their favorite music, films, books, hobbies. Showing a genuine interest in them will make them feel comfortable around you. Talk about your life outside the office when it’s appropriate. This will remind the people you work with that you’re a person first, not just an employee or employer.

3. Ask what they think. People love to be asked their opinion, so go out of your way to ask, “What do you think is missing from this report?” or “How do you think I should handle this situation with X?” Then give the advice-giver a sincere thank you, even if the ideas are less than helpful.

4. Avoid gossip. You don’t want anyone talking about you behind your back, so return the favor. When a co-worker sidles up to you bearing some gossip about an office romance or someone’s impending firing, respond with, “Really?” Then change the subject or get back to work. If you don’t respond, the gossipier will move on — and you’ll retain the trust and respect of your co-workers.

5. When dealing with a difficult co-worker, pretend your children are watching. This simple visualization technique will help you to keep a cool head. After all, you’ve taught your children to have good manners. With them “watching,” it will be difficult to stoop to the level of your infuriating co-worker.

6. Ladle out the compliments. Did Tom fix the office photocopier — again? Has Ann stopped smoking? By all means, compliment your co-workers on their achievements — personal or professional. Too often, we focus on what people are doing wrong.

7. Spread your good cheer. You don’t have to be a Pollyanna, but try to perform one kindly act a week, choosing a different co-worker each time. For example, one week you might bring in muffins for no reason. Another

week, it might be a card for a co-worker — maybe a thank-you note for helping you out the week before, or a light, humorous card for a co-worker who seems to be a bit down.



8. Return calls and e-mails promptly. To win friends at work, a good place to start is good office etiquette. There’s nothing more frustrating to busy people than to have their e-mails and phone messages ignored. Your silence doesn’t just make their job harder to do; it also conveys an unpleasant message to them: you’re unimportant to me.

9. Give credit where credit is due. Don’t withhold credit from deserving co-workers. You’ll alienate them, and they won’t be there for you when you need them (or when they all go out for lunch). Embrace the attitude that we all win together, and let others know when someone has done something above and beyond the call of duty on a project. Also, if someone incorrectly gives you credit and praise, acknowledge your co-worker who does deserve the accolades. It will be remembered.

10. Here’s one for the boss: always work at least as hard as anyone working with or for you. Make it clear that you would never ask anyone to do a level of work you wouldn’t be willing to take on yourself.

11. Always be on time to show you respect other people’s time.

12. Express your good ideas in a way that makes it clear that they are not the only good ideas, and that others may have equally good insights to add.

13. Assume the positive about what you don’t know. Isn’t it funny how a team of workers often think they’re working harder than another team elsewhere in the building? Or that the bosses are clueless? Don’t subscribe to that kind of toxic thinking, even if it’s rampant. It’s a negative attitude that makes work become miserable. Instead, assume that everyone else is working hard and doing their best, even if you don’t know what their work is. You should believe both in the work you’re doing and the organization you’re doing it for. If you can’t, perhaps it’s time to move on.



Question(s) Corner



There were no questions for this issue.

If you find yourself pondering a question and need help finding the answer then this is the place for you.

Submit your question(s) to kelli.adkins@ars.usda.gov and your question and answer will be printed in the next News Notes.



Professional Dress Code Tips

By Donald K. Burleson, Burleson Consulting

Submitted by: Ann McGee

...sions count. A professional consultant who does not take the time to maintain a professional appearance sends the image of not being able to perform adequately on the job. Our professional dress code is codified because many professionals have never been taught appropriate professional appearance and demeanor.

Professional dress code standards are alive and well in major financial and executive management levels. Anyone who aspires to top management knows that personal appearance counts.

If you look and behave like a highly trained and well-groomed professional, you will win the respect and honor of our valued clients.

A fresh haircut, spit-shined shoes and a crisp suit go a long way in establishing a professional demeanor.

It's also about quality; most professionals can spot a cheap suit at twenty paces and high quality dress shoes are de-rigueur.

If you have never worked in a professional environment and you are not sure how professionals look, watch the lawyers on an episode of **Law & Order** on television.

Dress Codes are protected by law

Remember, employers in the USA have a legal right to ask you to [adhere to dress codes](#):

"A person can be fired because the company doesn't like your shoes," explains Robert D. Lipman, who manages the New York employment firm Lipman & Plesur, LLP...

"People say 'This is America. We should be able to do what we want.' But I tell them that once you walk into a private employer's workplace, your rights are limited."

Plus, it's not sexual discrimination to require separate grooming standards and dress codes for men and women:

"In 1998, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in *Harper v. Blockbuster Entertainment* upheld Blockbuster's dress code that mandated male employees to cut their long hair, but not female employees."

Inappropriate dress code and grooming

Have you ever gone to church on Sunday and instantly noted the people who normally do not wear a suit? You know, the men with striped shirts, plaid ties and lime green sport coats? Sadly, professional dress and grooming standards have fallen from popular culture, and we don't have to look far to find examples of unprofessional dress.

Here are some examples of inappropriate male grooming:



No Neanderthal-style unibrows are allowed, and you should shave any loose hair on your forehead or the palms of your hands. All ear hair must be shaved, and remove any "Admiral Zumwalt" style giant eyebrows. If you must wear a toupee, have it custom fitted and secured properly. Please, no Trump-style comb-overs.

Here are some examples of inappropriate female grooming:



In the next issue of the News Notes: A closer look at specific dress codes for male and female professionals.

Read the following from Rita Keeling:

I recently took **Managing Change: Understanding Change** in AgLearn (takes about an hour) and during this time of transition, it offers some insight.

Description of the course follows: To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly. This is a quote by Henri Bergson, a nineteenth century French philosopher. Since the nineteenth century, the pace of change in all aspects of our lives has become faster and faster and responding to change well is a necessity in today's competitive business environment. Leaders and managers, regardless of industry or organization, require a clear understanding of how important organizational change is in order to propel their organizations forward. This course outlines what is meant by change, as well as the importance and benefits of implementing change within an organization. It also details the three different types of organizational change: strategic adjustments, strategic reorientation, and transformational change. Finally, this course covers different practical approaches for managing organizational change, taking into account factors such as the time allotted for the change, the expected degree of change, and the potential resistance to change within the organization.

Reminder Calendar

October

- Review Delegation of Authority for GovTrip.
- Performance Appraisals (AD-435).
- Submit documentation for employee accomplishments, appraisal, and award forms to Area Director (if at Center, submit through Center Director).
- Update Investigator/SY time on projects in ARIS to agree with Annual Resource Management Plan System (ARMPS).
- Check Status of Funds to make sure funds for all prior FY expenditures have been obligated.
- Prepare files for the coming year and transfer old files.
- Fall cleanup of Incoming Agreements <\$25,000 only.
- Funded Postdocs announced.
- Area requests meeting names and dates for foreign travel anticipated April 1 of coming year through March 31 of following year. (Travelers names are not necessary at this time.)
- Send Procurement a list of who can purchase on what account.
- Prepare general authorization for individual travelers.

November

- Complete new Performance Plans (AD-435A) and new Individual Development Plan (ARS-48) for all employees, except limited appointments.
- Complete Appraisal process for all employees.
- Distribute copies as required.

December

- Prepare new files for the coming year for T&A's and any other "calendar year" files.
- Foreign Travel Meeting Numbers will be provided.

January [or during slower times perform these tasks]

- Rethink how you work and establish goals for efficient management of tasks.
- Time to catch up on all paperwork and filing.
- Security Awareness Training.

February [or during slower times perform these tasks]

- Perform ARIS cleanup.
- Check manuscript files and update as needed.
- Ethics Training.
- ADODR Training.

March [or during slower times perform these tasks]

- Update SY manuscript information in ARIS.
- Mid-year reviews due March/April.

April

- Update Mission Statement in ARIS.
- Request input from SY's for equipment, travel, and personnel needs for the ARMPS.

May

- First ARMPS input.
- Draft ARMPS is due in the Area Office.

June

- Postdoc application process opens for data entry in ARIS.
- Run guideline dollars from ARIS using briefing packet for NEXT FY to complete ARMPS when message is received from Area that it is available.
- ARMPS reviews scheduled June/July.

July

- Schedule is announced for ARIS entry of Annual Reports (421's).
- Area notification of deadline in ARIS for: Permanent or Temporary FY fund transfers between D-type projects; HQ-funded

Postdoc's; and, deadline for extramural agreements adding current year funds or extending time in ARIS.

- Postdoc fund transfers to be included in next FY ARMPS are due (person has to be on-board before funds can be transferred). (If you plan to use Postdoc funds next fiscal year, this temporary funds transfer must be put in ARIS now in order to show up in August guidelines.)
- Prepare and enter Annual Reports (421's) in ARIS.

August

- Final ARMPS guideline dollars available for printing from briefing packet.
- Final ARMPS due in mid-August to Area Office.
- In ARIS, check to make sure funds were added on all projects, especially those mandated from HQ.
- Pull Detail by Author reports from ARIS and ask for input in preparation for Performance Appraisals (AD-435).

September

- Prepare requisition AD-700 for Research Support Agreements (RSA) for coming year. Update related documentation.
- Prepare new files for travel vouchers and other "fiscal year" filing.
- Prepare AD-700's to renew service contracts.
- Update Investigator/SY time on projects in ARIS.
- Review Status of Funds weekly.
- Pull another Detail by Author report from ARIS and check accuracy of updated information for Performance Appraisals (AD-435). This is the last month.
- Request Specific Goals for new Performance Plans (AD-435A) and new Individual Development Plan (ARS-48).
- Prepare Performance Appraisal (AD 435) for all personnel. Distribute to supervisors with instructions for completion.
- Prepare new Performance Plan (AD-435A & B) with Specific Goal(s) and Individual Development Plan (ARS-48).
- Late September: Employees submit documentation of their accomplishments to immediate supervisor for Performance Appraisals (AD-435).
- Go through both computer and hard copy files, disposing of materials that can be destroyed.
- **Recommendation & Approval of Awards (AD-287-2) for the FY must be completed by the first week of the last pay period of the year to be paid from same FY funds.**

Weekly or Regular Basis

- Check Access Online [AXOL] and CATS II weekly.
- Back up computer on a regular basis.

Bi-weekly

- T&A's

Monthly

- Check for any supplies that need to be ordered.
- Reconcile Status of Funds report (except at year end increase frequency as instructed).
- Check ARIS to monitor progress of manuscripts, check for any 416/417's, Agreements which will be terminating and need to be extended or will require reports. Request necessary reports from SY's.

Quarterly

- Quarterly Civil Rights Assessment Report due to Area Director.
- Quarterly ACRM, Outreach, and 1890 Institutions Reports due to Area Personnel Office.
- Quarterly White House Initiative Report for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- Quarterly Visitors report due to Area Director.