



MSAOP News Notes

January/February 2011

Editor: Kelli Adkins



NEW WEBSITE—CHECK IT OUT!!

Have you been missing the website??

If you answered yes then you are in luck!

The council has revamped the website. A committee was responsible for not only bringing it current but also fixing links so you, the Office Professional, can use it to obtain information to help you in your job.

If you answered no...well you might want to go to the link and check out what is

new...improved...or just to reacquaint yourself with it.

Here is the link to the webpage.

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



The Council would like to recognize you...the Office Professional. Look for the link on the website for the form to provide information about yourself. Don't miss out on being recognized for the outstanding person that you are.

CHANGE and STRESS don't have to be synonyms.

Submitted by: Drusilla Fratesi



Employees today are experiencing sudden and more frequent environmental change than ever before. ARS employees are no exception. New programs to handle our daily work are continually being revised or replaced. And our personal lives seem to be changing equally as fast. However, according to Price Pritchett and Ron Pound in *Survival Guide to the Stress of Organizational Change*, much of the pressure we feel these days is self-induced. How we react to stress caused by change will differ with each person, since we are all individuals. Instead of being "stressed out" by changes, we should know when to surrender to change...when to "give up" and instead to "toughen up" and "wise up." According to Pritchett and Pound, "People waste far more emotional energy hanging on to old habits and beliefs than it would take for them to embrace the changes." Too many of us resist change because we want to stay in our comfort zone. We know the old job; we can do it well. Rather than learn the new ways, we use

too much energy complaining about change and resisting new methods and assignments. And our stress increases as we hold on to and defend the previous work methods. Even more stress may result from the feeling of being insufficiently skilled as changes are implemented. Basically, we want stress (and change) to go away, but we don't want to have to work at it. However, nobody is in a position to stop change – personal or work-related. There is no right or wrong way to react to change, but there are things we can each do to help ourselves adjust to change and get involved in positive ways.

- 👉 Keep an open mind and be patient. Do not assume the results of change will be negative. Take an active role by learning new skills or setting goals for yourself. Give change a chance to work.
- 👉 Stay flexible. Be ready to try the new. Recognize the capabilities and contributions of colleagues. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

- 👉 Pay attention to yourself. Eat right. Cut down on caffeine. Get plenty of sleep. Learn relaxation techniques. Exercise. Laugh. Count your blessings. Simplify. Individuals who feel good mentally and physically are better able to handle change.

These suggestions probably sound familiar. With exercise, for example, too many of us know we should, but don't want to make the effort. We want stress to go away, but we don't want to have to work at it. It is easier to blame someone else and wait for the solution. It is time we accept the responsibility for softening the stress we experience. It is time for change.



Three Breathing Exercises

Submitted by: Tammy Dorman

"Practicing regular, mindful breathing can be calming and energizing and can even help with stress-related health problems ranging from panic attacks to digestive disorders." Andrew Weil, M.D.

Since breathing is something we can control and regulate, it is a useful tool for achieving a relaxed and clear state of mind. I recommend three breathing exercises to help relax and reduce stress: **The Stimulating Breath**, **The 4-7-8 Breathing Exercise** (also called the Relaxing Breath), and **Breath Counting**. Try each and see how they affect your stress and anxiety levels.



Exercise 1: The Stimulating Breath (also called the Bellows Breath) The Stimulating Breath is adapted from a yogic breathing technique. Its aim is to raise vital energy and increase alertness.

-  Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Your breaths in and out should be equal in duration, but as short as possible. This is a noisy breathing exercise.
-  Try for three in-and-out breath cycles per second. This produces a quick movement of the diaphragm, suggesting a bellows. Breathe normally after each cycle.
-  Do not do for more than 15 seconds on your first try. Each time you practice the Stimulating Breath, you can increase your time by five seconds or so, until you reach a full minute.

If done properly, you may feel invigorated, comparable to the heightened awareness you feel after a good workout. You should feel the effort at the back of the neck, the diaphragm, the chest and the abdomen. Try this breathing exercise the next time you need an energy boost and feel yourself reaching for a cup of coffee.



Exercise 2: The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise This exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

- ⇒ Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- ⇒ Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**.
- ⇒ Hold your breath for a count of **seven**.
- ⇒ Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**.
- ⇒ This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned; it will pass.

Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.



Exercise 3: Breath Counting If you want to get a feel for this challenging work, try your hand at breath counting, a deceptively simple technique much used in Zen practice.

Sit in a comfortable position with the spine straight and head inclined slightly forward. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then let the breath come naturally without trying to influence it. Ideally it will be quiet and slow, but depth and rhythm may vary.

- ⇒ To begin the exercise, count "one" to yourself as you exhale.
- ⇒ The next time you exhale, count "two," and so on up to "five."
- ⇒ Then begin a new cycle, counting "one" on the next exhalation.

Never count higher than "five," and count only when you exhale. You will know your attention has wandered when you find yourself up to "eight," "12," even "19."

Try to do 10 minutes of this form of meditation.

Quotes to Ponder

Submitted by: Virginia Kelley

- ☞ If you have a job without any aggravations, you don't have a job. ~ **Malcolm S. Forbes**
- ☞ There are no menial jobs, only menial attitudes. ~ **William J. Bennett**, *The Book of Virtues*
- ☞ The closest to perfection a person ever comes is when he fills out a job application form. ~ **Stanley J. Randall**
- ☞ Researchers at Harvard say that taking a power nap for an hour in the afternoon can totally refresh you. They say that by the time you wake up you'll feel so good you'll be able to start looking for a new job. ~ **Jay Leno**
- ☞ You're no good unless you are a good assistant; and if you are, you're too good to be an assistant. ~ **Martin H. Fischer**
- ☞ The brain is a wonderful organ. It starts working the moment you get up in the morning, and does not stop until you get into the office. ~ **Robert Frost**
- ☞ The difference between a job and a career is the difference between forty and sixty hours a week. ~ **Robert Frost**
- ☞ Wednesdays are like Mondays in the middle of the week! ~ **Lee Fox Williams**
- ☞ One of the symptoms of an approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one's work is terribly important. ~ **Bertrand Russell**
- ☞ By working faithfully eight hours a day you may eventually get to be boss and work twelve hours a day. ~ **Robert Frost**



Polish Your Speaking Habits

Submitted by: Dawn Reed

Your voice can be an asset or a liability. To cultivate a pleasant voice:

- ~ *Relax.* If you are tense, it will be reflected in your voice. Keep it well modulated; speak slowly and distinctly. It is amazing how much influence speaking quietly can have when someone else is rushed or irritated. Before you start talking, take a few deep breaths, relax your jaw muscles, and feel the tension lessen.
- ~ *Read aloud.* If you have no one to read to, read to yourself. Practice varying your pitch. Read the same paragraph over several times and express a different emotion for each reading (i.e., happiness, excitement, fear, hostility, sympathy).
- ~ *Control your volume.* Try to speak forcefully without screaming and softly without sounding uninteresting.
- ~ *Separate your words.* If you speak too quickly, you may run one word into the next. Make your conversation easier to understand by speaking slowly and deliberately.
- ~ *Enunciate distinctly.* Pronounce vowels clearly. Pay particular attention to word endings.
- ~ *Pronounce each syllable.* Many words are mispronounced (or sound as though they are) because speakers slur over, omit, or add syllables. Speak with precision.
- ~ *Smile.* Read a paragraph while you are smiling; reread the same words with a deep frown on your face. Notice the difference? If you want your voice to sound warm and friendly, smile while you are speaking. A frown can be heard.
- ~ *Be enthusiastic.* Keep your voice animated and interesting. You can't expect people to accept ideas you offer in a low unemotional tone.



Remember that good speech will always be a great asset to you.
It is the mark of a cultivated person. Take pride in your voice and your speaking manner.



MID SOUTH AREA COUNCIL OF OFFICE PROFESSIONALS

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>



Back Row (L) : Archie Tucker, Kelli Adkins, Virginia Kelley, Linda Fulton, Marlene Coley, Drusilla Fratesi

Front row (L) : Ginger Carden, Tammy Dorman, Dawn Reed, Lynda Taylor

HAPPY RETIREMENT

Look who has retired!

Submitted by: Virginia Kelley & Linda Fulton



Mrs. Paula Brodofsky, after 30 years of Federal Service, retired on December 31, 2010. As a member of the Area Office, she was a loyal Secretary to the Mid South Area Deputy Area Director, Mr. Archie Tucker, for the past 17 years.

Paula also spent about five years as the Area Ethics Assistant and completing the Financial Disclosure process for the MSA. She also served on the National Panel for the Automation of the Directives System and was skilled at using shorthand.

She was a member of the Secretary Council, now MSACOP, when it was established in 1996 and served until 1998.

Her colleagues agree that she is known throughout the Agency for her professionalism, quality of work, confidentiality, and her loyalty.

Ginger Carden, Program Support Assistant for the Poultry Research Unit, Mississippi State, MS, retired January 31, 2011, after 25 years of federal service.

She is looking forward to spending time with her children and their families, with special time devoted to her 5 grandchildren. She will also partner with her husband, Martin Carden (also a former ARS employee), in his ministry as he serves as Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Eupora, MS. Additionally, she will devote time to her enjoyment of reading as well as writing poetry and songs. Here is a poem that Ginger wrote in June of 2006 about a "Day's Work".



Day's Work

With a smile and a 'Good Morning'
We begin a new day
The work's piling up
But there's more on the way.

'Could you...' 'Would you...'
'When you get a minute ...'
'Did you get that report out?'
'Oh - you've already sent it!'

ARMPS, ARIS, STAR
Email and CATS,
Door buzzing, phone ringing,
I think I'll go bats!!!

'Thank you, good job.'
Oh, by the way
It's all in a day's work
Here at U.S.D.A.

Ginger Carden
June 22, 2006



Attitude is Your Key to Success!!

Or: If you think you will succeed, you will!!!

Submitted by: Althea Hunt



- ☞ Your attitude toward your life influences your behavior.
- ☞ Your attitude determines the level of your job satisfaction and professionalism.
- ☞ Your attitude affects everyone who comes in contact with you, either in person or on the telephone.
- ☞ Your attitude is not only reflected by your tone of voice but also by the way you stand or sit, your facial expression, and in other nonverbal ways.
- ☞ Your attitude is not fixed. The attitude you choose to display is up to you.
- ☞ Remember that no one is ever rewarded or promoted because of a bad disposition or negative attitude.

- ☞ If you have more enemies than friends, it is time to examine your attitude.
- ☞ Remember, your mental limitations are of your own making.
- ☞ It is not defeat, but rather your attitude toward it, that whips you.
- ☞ Your attitude is your real boss.
- ☞ Change your attitude, and the world around you will change accordingly.

Have you ever heard of a self-fulfilling prophecy? It often happens without our conscious awareness of it. Self-fulfilling prophecy is the phenomenon that results when we experience what we expect to experience. It is our getting from others just what we thought we would. We often succeed or fail because we subconsciously "knew" we would!

Our lives are full of examples of this phenomenon. Have you ever thought, "I'll never get this finished on time!" and then proved yourself right? Have you noticed that some people approach situations with an "I can't do this" attitude and experience problems and failures, while other approach the same situations with an "I can do this" attitude and suc-

ceed? Expectations and attitudes are powerful influences on actual income. Your mind is one of the most powerful forces on earth. It can be your strongest ally or your worst enemy. How often have you imagined failure and fulfilled that negative expectation? What would happen if you put as much creativity and emotional energy into picturing success?

The remarkable thing is we have a choice to make every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past, nor can we change the fact that people will behave in a certain way. The only thing we can do is change our attitude. The longer you live, the more you will realize the impact of attitude on your life.



Humility in the Work Place

Submitted by: Linda Fulton



This is a follow-up from a previous article I submitted on "Pleasant Attitude in the Workplace". Humility is a major contributor to a "Pleasant Attitude". The definition of humility is, "a disposition to be humble; a lack of false pride." Also, humility signifies courtesy and respectfulness. Synonyms associated with humility are humbleness, modesty, unassuming nature, unpretentiousness, and meekness.

It may seem that these synonyms are not traits of a "pleasant attitude". However, when you look at the antonyms which include prideful, conceit, arrogance, etc., humility seems to be a more realistic trait for a pleasant attitude. Projecting negative traits certainly do not inspire a pleasant attitude to our co-workers.

We, as office professionals, are major contributors (in my opinion), to the Agency in promoting the ability of our scientists to conduct research, but, at the same time, we do not know all there is to know. And, let's face it we have, on occasion, been wrong about something. Realization that we do not have all inclusive abilities allows us to seek insight from others, therefore promoting respectfulness and a more pleasant atmosphere for all. Everyone feels good about being able to sincerely contribute. This feel good feeling promotes smiles and camaraderie which proves to be motivational in accomplishing Agency goals.

Below are a few quotes related to "Humility":

"Swallow your pride occasionally, it's non-fattening!" - **Author Unknown**

"What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself." - **Abraham Lincoln**

"It wasn't until quite late in life that I discovered how easy it is to say 'I don't know!'" - **Somerset Maugham**

"Nobody stands taller than those willing to stand corrected." - **William Safire**

"You shouldn't gloat about anything you've done; you ought to keep going and find something better to do." - **David Packard**

"None are so empty as those who are full of themselves." - **Benjamin Whichcote**



And, for the last quote:

"It is far more impressive when others discover your good qualities without your help." - **Author Unknown**

From The Executive Guide to E-Mail Correspondence: Including Model Letters for Every Situation

Submitted by: Lynda Taylor

by Dawn-Michelle Baude. All rights reserved. Reproduction and/or distribution in whole or in part in electronic, paper or other forms without written permission is prohibited.

This book was in AgLearn 24x7. The information is so good that I ordered the book for a desk reference. The information provided here is just some basics from Chapter 1.

Writing clear concise emails takes effort but the outcome is beneficial. Use your time wisely. It's quicker to spend 5 extra minutes cleaning up a sloppy e-mail than it is to take time correcting misconceptions triggered by confused writing. A poorly written e-mail usually requires additional correspondence to clarify and correct what should have been clear the first time around.

Use "I" whenever you can. It usually speeds things up, allows you to take credit, emphasizes the bond between the writer and the reader,

When writing your message, start with the point. Remove all unnecessary words. Keep your e-mail tone informal and professional. The goal is to be friendly and straightforward.

Options

I accept....	You've got a green light to...
OK...	I'll give you my approval on...
Do it...	I'm alright with that...
I agree...	You have my OK on...
I approve...	Proceed with...
I concur...	Go ahead and...

When responding use direct statements, such as

I need information about...	I need to know...
Please provide feedback on...	Do you know...
Could you please tell me...	I want to know...
What's the status/update on...	Do you have details on...
You might be able to help with...	Can I have your opinion...

Favor short e-mails over long ones whenever you can. Don't make a message more than can be seen on the screen.

For more information, use AgLearn.usda.gov.



FROM SKILLSOFT E-MAIL ETIQUETTE SERIES

FEATURING TIM SANDERS, ALSO IN AGLEARN.

Submitted by: Lynda Taylor

E-mail Etiquette Rules

1. Don't give bad news over email. This should be done face to face, or over the phone.
2. Don't copy an email over someone's head. Don't tattle until you have talked to that person about the issue. If you are unable to reconcile the issue, then and only then do you go up the ladder.
3. Stamp out "reply to all". The world doesn't need to know your response. It uses bandwidth.
4. Think before you forward. Ask "Do I have permission to forward?" "What will it accomplish?" "Is it loaded (emotionally charged)?"
5. Never pre-address an email. Keep the safety on just in case you are typing while you are angry or upset and unintentionally lash out at someone. The biggest reason is that emails are just too easy to send.
6. Don't send emails at unprofessional hours (a time you wouldn't call them on the phone).
7. Have one call to action in an email. Put that in the Subject line.
8. If you have back-and-forth transactions on the same subject use the "three-for" rule. If it goes back and forth three times, it's time to pick up the phone.
9. Don't send an email to someone that you could hit with a rock. Get up and go to their desk or office. Emails have a tendency to eliminate face-to-face conversations.
10. Don't be cryptic in your email response, whether using a computer or your Blackberry.
11. Don't send large attachments.
12. Before hitting the send button ask the CLEAR system.
 - C**, is it **c**onnected to their job?
 - L**, give them a **l**ist of what you want them to do about the information in your email.
 - E**, what are your **e**xpectations?
 - A**, what are my **a**venues to get something done?
 - R**, what is the **r**eturn on investment?



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.

Did you know?

More AgLearn resources are available at no cost to you. (Your agency has prepaid for your license!)



Do you know what your co-workers are doing?

We do!

Team AgLearn researched what other clerical and administrative staff at USDA are interested in and below are the top ones.

[Defensive Driving](#) (1 hour) Learn simple defensive driving techniques to reduce your chances of being involved in a motor vehicle accident.

[Microsoft Office Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook 2007](#) (1.5 hours) This course will introduce the new features of Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook 2007.

[DMASON Financial and TSP Planning Course](#) (self paced) Select Early-Career, Mid-Career, or Late-Career and then click on the course title that's right for you to develop your own personal financial plan with the help of a Certified Financial Planner.

[Editing and Proofreading Documents in Microsoft Office Word 2007](#) (1 hour) Learn how to make changes to documents, insert saved text into a document, as well as working with document outlines in the Word 2007 environment.

[10 steps to getting organized](#) (2 minute video) Focus on getting organized through this Instant Advice.

[Dealing with anger](#) (3 minute video) This Instant Advice will help you deal with anger effectively.

When the pressure is high and the heat is on....

You can still be positive!



[Creating a Positive Attitude](#) (2 hours) It isn't always easy being positive. Learn how to change your perspective from negative to positive, and gain skills for overcoming the challenges.

[Looking for positive opportunity](#) (2 minute video) This Instant Advice® focuses on dealing with individual conflict.

[Optimizing Your Work/Life Balance: Analyzing Your Life Balance](#) (1 hour) This course highlights ways to assess your current work/life balance and overcome internal and external obstacles to achieving balance. Then, you will be able to construct a map that will take you to your objective of a balanced, fulfilled life.

[Managing Workplace Negativity](#) This book will help you recognize negativity trigger points, create a positive environment, and more.

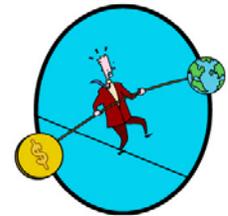
[Start with a positive attitude](#) (2 minute video) This Instant Advice® focuses on starting with a positive attitude.

[Managing Change: Building Positive Support for Change](#) (1 hour) Discover techniques for listening to your employees during change initiatives such as encouraging open communication, listening to employees feelings, checking for understanding, and taking employee input into consideration.

[Team Speak: How to Ask Positive Questions](#) This valuable book is designed to be used during team training sessions devoted to productivity and communication skills, or before a meeting starts.

Is your life unbalanced??

Let AgLearn help you find the perfect balance?



 [Analyzing Your Life Balance](#) (1 hour) Getting the balance right can provide you with tremendous payback - assess your current work/life balance and overcome internal and external obstacles.

 [Maintaining Your Life Balance](#) (1 hour) Learn techniques for maintaining work/life balance including recognizing the behaviors of passiveness, aggressiveness, and assertiveness and how those affect your ability to find balance in life.

 [Taking Control of Your Stress](#) (1 hour) Are you constantly adding items to your to-do list and it seems like your list never shrinks? Learn strategies for coping with stress and avoiding burnout.

 [Keeping Your Life in Balance: How to Connect a Disconnected Life](#) (2 hours) Mary demonstrates how to counter the urge to assume responsibility for everything in this 120 minute video. She gives participants straightforward techniques for maintaining their energy and keeping their balance.

 [Life Matters: Creating a Dynamic Balance of Work, Family, Time & Money](#) This book covers creative ways to successfully balance four major aspects of life: family, money, work and time; the program rests on what the authors call three gotta do's--validate expectations, optimize effort and develop navigational intelligence.

 [Work/Life Balance](#) (2 minutes) This Instant Advice® focuses on finding balance in your life.