

NTEU Monday Minute for the Week of April 3, 2016: Staying Connected When Normal Connections Break Down

During the third week of March, a number of union officers and stewards attended training to be able to better assist our bargaining unit employees as we maneuver through the challenges that we face as federal employees. A large amount of this training focused on the importance of effective communications.

Sometimes receiving information can be unsettling but there is no question that having information is better than NOT having it. Communication is KEY!

With the recent bad weather, for example, NTEU was able to provide several employees with information regarding the 3 hour excused absence available to employees traveling into the office, as well as how the OPM guidance which the NRC has adopted regarding the use of telework and leave, should be applied when the agency remains in an "Open" status. We pointed out that employees that are telework ready can telework without prior approval; however, if employees who are telework ready decide not to telework or come into the office, they must use appropriate leave even when dependent children are home due to school closures. When the agency remains in an "Open" status, this applies to non-telework ready employees as well.

With the recent yellow announcement on the use of the agency Verification Notification Service (VNS), a couple employees wanted to know if employees were required to provide the requested information for use during emergencies. NTEU responded that employees are required to provide this information. This requirement began with a Presidential directive in 2005 which required all agencies to begin internal planning to ensure readiness in the event of an influenza pandemic. The system put in place has now been expanded to cover other important events including building closures, weather related events, and other emergency notifications. It does NOT address normal communications, e.g. contacting an employee or contractor about normal work related items. In discussions with the agency, NTEU requested that the announcement highlight that employees are not required to purchase equipment to comply with the requirement; they are only required to provide the information on equipment they currently possess, which the agency agreed to do. Additionally, NTEU requested information regarding the security controls that are in place to ensure that personal information is secure. In response the agency pointed out that "Access to customer data is restricted to authorized employees and is achieved through a VPN connection with two-factor authentication. Additionally, all new and existing employees of Varolii (the provider of this service) are screened for federal and local criminal background checks." There is additional information available including information addressing the unique security features that are employed. If you would like this information, please contact the union office at nteu@nrc.gov or stop by the union office at O 1 G22.

NTEU is partnering on the Article 49, Reduction In Force, Working Group to work to explore ways to avoid a Reduction in Force (RIF). The recent voluntary buy outs/early outs did not meet the number of slots available; therefore, the agency is currently focusing on voluntary

downgrades applicable only to the corporate offices, as well as SOIs limited to employees in corporate support. It is critical to explore all voluntary measures to reduce the number of employees in the corporate support offices to avoid a RIF. NTEU's field representative from our National Office is a member of the team and we are meeting bi-monthly.

NTEU is also meeting with the agency's Strategic Workforce Planning Group to provide comments and insights regarding the development of a more strategic plan. The working group held an informational session in the TWFN Exhibition Space and is looking for other effective ways to communicate this proposed plan with our employees. Three NTEU members are attending meetings as often as possible. This is very important to the agency's mission and your role, as an NRC employee, in that mission. More information to come.

Finally, the Labor Caucus met in March. This forum is designed to provide an opportunity for labor partners, stewards, and NTEU officers in HQ and the regions, to discuss issues that are occurring in specific offices/regions. This allows us to coordinate the information instead of working in "silos." Your role as a bargaining unit employee is to ensure that your labor partners are aware of your questions and concerns so that they can be brought up in partnership at your monthly Labor Management Partnership Committee (LMPC) meetings and also in the Labor Caucus meetings which meet approximately every 6 weeks. Don't have a partnership in your office?? Let us know and we will help you get one started. LMPC meetings are an invaluable tool in ensuring that your bargaining unit is working with management to arrive at mutually agreeable approaches and decisions that affect your working environment.

Stay connected. The Chapter website at www.nteu208.org contains a lot of information for all bargaining unit employees. Additionally, if you are a member of NTEU and we need to reach you regarding internal union business, we cannot use your work email; if the agency is shut down, we may not be able to use your work email. Please make sure we have your personal email so that we can reach you. You can send it to us at nteu208@gmail.com. Or you can go to the National NTEU website at www.nteu.org and enter your personal email there. If you have any questions or comments or thoughts about what is happening in your work unit or in the agency, please send us an email to nteu@nrc.gov or drop by the Union office at O 1G22. Feedback is also very welcome.

Someone Said: "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." George Bernard Shaw, a much decorated Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw is the only person who has won both an Academy Award and a Nobel Prize.