



# AUDITOR- CONTROLLER'S NEWSLETTER

*Editor: Jan Ingold*

## Our Mission

***Safeguard the County's resources and ensure its financial integrity through responsible fiscal monitoring and reporting.***

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## **\*\* LARRY'S LINES \*\***

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--By Larry Haugh, Auditor-Controller



### **Beginning of a New Year!**

As the 2008-09 fiscal year comes to a close, I want to thank and congratulate everyone for a year of commitment, hard work, and accomplishments. Each year we are faced with implementing new processes, rules, regulations, budgets, and legislation. This is particularly true in the 2009-10 fiscal year. The State budget that was recently passed has many provisions which will require implementation by the Auditor Controller's Office. This will require us to work harder, and more effectively, than ever before. Each of you has contributed to the successes in the office including the fiscal year end close for the financial system, Oracle, the property tax system, Megabyte and the calendar year end for the Human Resource Management System, Peoplesoft.

The work that is done in the Auditor-Controller's Office makes a difference in the success of the County's operations and the stated Board priorities. We will continue to be challenged by changes we have little control over as changes occur due to the fiscal condition of the State and our community. It is important to take just a moment and appreciate all that has been completed during this past year.

Success is measured in many ways. There are two measures, however, that stand out. One is the way in which people outside our office judge us. This can include comments from other departments, other governmental agencies, and by our coworkers. The other is how we judge ourselves about what we have accomplished. That feeling of satisfaction, and perhaps relief, once a major task is completed or a milestone has been reached. Since no one knows better than us the efforts we put forth each day, this is perhaps the best measurement. We know if we have made the effort to make a difference in the job we do each day.

While we will be challenged once again in the coming year I know that we all will make the effort necessary to overcome these impending challenges. Thank you again for making this past year another successful one. I look forward to the challenges that tomorrow will bring.

I hope each of you and your families have a relaxing and enjoyable summer.

### **CROSS TRAINING**

--Submitted by *Jan Ingold*

#### **Office Etiquette 101**

Not long ago, offices were places where legions of similarly dressed people arrived at the same time, sat in neat rows of desks and performed nearly identical tasks. At noon, everybody vacated the office, then returned in exactly one hour, refreshed and ready for an afternoon of highly predictable behavior. It was boring, but at least you knew what to expect and how to act.

#### **That was then, this is now:**

- Casually dressed people come and go at different times.
- Many organizations have reduced office sizes and moved them closer together
- Some people share offices
- Some people have no assigned office – they find a workspace when they arrive each day
- Often there is a kitchen on-site where employees make their own meals anytime
- There are more snacks available – soda, coffee, candy, bagels etc.
- There are more meeting spaces mixed in with cubicles, creating “team-space”
- There are more open, collaborative spaces for impromptu meetings
- More people are working part time, flex time, as temps or on contract
- Fewer people are trying to do more work as a result of downsizing and a tight labor market

Although a relaxed work environment has many advantages for worker recruitment, retention and productivity, new work conditions can create confusion, frustration and stress when noise and other distractions are common. As casual workspaces and meeting spaces are mixed with more traditional offices, workers have a greater number of distractions to deal with, while at the same time common behavior rules become blurred.

Which behaviors are OK in which spaces?

Developing and communicating a set of shared expectations can create a more positive office atmosphere. Such “rules” reintroduce a sense of predictability, lower stress and allow people to focus more on the tasks at hand. Some suggestions follow:

#### **Appearances Count**

With people working various schedules, it's becomes difficult to simply track down the people you need to see at any given time. For example, if one person drives to the office to collaborate with others who are working at home that day, the effort is wasted. To save coordination time, it is helpful to set core hours or core days when each member of a work group will be on-site, or otherwise available.

Regardless of how your organization decides to handle flexible work arrangements, there are several group behaviors that can smooth the way:

Etiquette tips:

- Use sign-out boards (electronic if possible). This allows coworkers to quickly and easily locate each other

- Have a predetermined method of notifying other group members if a person decides to work at home; how to notify, who to notify, when to notify, contact information
- If you find out that coworkers are inheriting your calls and crises when you work away from the main office, take on extra tasks that help them, or cut back voluntarily on time away until a fair way to manage this overflow can be worked out
- Coordinate set work times for your administrative support person to be available to the work group. For example, if the group routinely needs secretarial help preparing for early-morning meetings, flexibility for the secretary to show up later will cause frequent disappointments. Take the time to work this out before trouble starts.
- Dressing for success no longer means formality. But if you are meeting with customers or others who expect more formality, dress appropriately. If your organization has a dress code, find out what it is.
- If you have the option to set your own hours, don't abuse the system or become unavailable. If this way of working does not get results or causes workgroup problems, everybody suffers and formality has a way of returning.

### Let's Meet

Meetings are frequently named as the biggest office time wasters. They don't need to be.

With people working different hours, meetings are more important than ever as a way to set project directions and get to know coworkers. Consistent meeting behavior helps make this time count.

#### Etiquette tips:

- Be on time. Busy people don't want to wait and will bail out if others don't show up.
- If meetings routinely don't start when scheduled, people will stop taking meeting notices seriously and nobody will show up
- Plan ahead when it's your meeting. Check the space before the meeting starts to be sure needed equipment is there and working. Are markers, flip charts or other needed supplies in the space? Do you have enough copies of handouts?
- Start and end meetings as scheduled. People have other places to be and other things to do.
- If you don't need a full hour, just schedule 30 minutes and end even sooner if you can.
- Get to the point. First announce the purpose and the desired outcome of the meeting.
- When you've reached your desired outcome, end the meeting.
- Turn off your phone during meetings. Your conversation about the taking the dog to the vet is not pertinent to the other people at the table. If something truly urgent does come up, leave the meeting and attend to it privately.
- If the meeting space is tucked into an area of cubicles, be aware that people are trying to concentrate. If the meeting cannot be conducted at conversational volume levels, move the meeting to a space where the noise will not disrupt others.
- If you rearrange a meeting space, put it back into usable order before leaving. Erase marker boards, take down charts and clear up all papers etc. If you borrow items from other meeting spaces, return them promptly.

### Let's Eat

In many offices, people often work through lunch and dinner; eating snacks, even elaborate desktop dinners at their workstation. Food is often catered in, and snack machines are everywhere. The result is an all-day cacophony of soda HISSES, microwave BEEPS, CRUNCHING, MUNCHING and the BANG-SCRAPE-BANG of silverware on dishes. Add a variety of strong food aromas, and you have a recipe for workgroup distraction.

#### Etiquette tips:

- Don't use china and silverware within 50 feet of anyone who's trying to concentrate.
- If you want formal dining, go out.

- Use office areas outside of workstations for lunch. It's better ergonomically to take a break, and routinely eating quickly is not healthy. If there is no café, break space or cafeteria, find a spot outside or by a window. Or take the opportunity to interact with others over lunch in a casual space.
- If you have to eat at your desk, choose "quiet" foods. Cut back on the crunchy stuff.
- Stirring ice tea with a vengeance is also hard on group peace. Also think twice about foods that have strong odors – remember that other people will have to live with those odors all afternoon.
- Get a grip. Coworkers may be trying to cut back on fat, salt and calories. If you are choosing food for a meeting, offer healthy options and/or agree as a group on whether the meeting needs to include food.
- Be respectful to the next group to use a teaming space. Always clean up unless you know there is a cleaning crew on the way.

### **Cube Life**

58% of American offices use some type of open plan layout. Commonly called cubicles, these workstations offer some privacy, but typically do not have doors or ceilings.

Although open plan layouts increase collaboration, they also require basic consideration of others.

#### Etiquette tips:

- Respect others' privacy. Don't borrow items from other peoples' workstations or hover over their shoulder while they finish a phone call. Never open drawers or cabinets in other peoples' stations without permission
- Never use a computer without permission. "PC" stands for "Personal Computer," surprise visitors are rarely welcome.
- If you do have permission to use someone's PC, remember that settings should not be changed without the owner's knowledge. E-mail and files should be considered confidential and off limits.
- Your organization may have some rules about decorating. Check with your facilities person or coworkers to determine what the corporate culture accommodates. Even if there is no written policy, pictures or other items that could offend coworkers are never a good idea.
- Music should be played on headphones, not speakers—tastes in music vary too much for anyone to choose for a whole group.
- If you share a cubicle, remember to clean up after yourself each time you leave and store shared materials where the coworker will be able to find them.
- When using a shared printer, reload paper when it's your turn and save huge print jobs for times when your work group will not be in a hurry for printed documents.
- Just because you have some visual privacy, don't assume your annoying habits are a secret. Chewing ice and clipping nails are not ways to make friends in open plans.
- Respect your coworkers' concentration. If you see someone deeply involved in typing, reading or thinking, come back later or send an email if possible.
- Using speakerphones keeps your hands free, but ties up both ears of every coworker in your immediate area. Not a good tradeoff—pick up the receiver, or get a headset.
- Group cultures vary. In some organizations it's OK to carry on a discussion with someone ten-feet away. In others, that would cause distraction. Pay attention to the conduct in your office and if there's a problem, talk it over with your work group.

The more our work styles change, the more new issues will come up. Flexible work styles often communicate that the individual is the center of a universe and that group norms are no longer important. With some patience and consideration of others however, the workplace can remain a comfortable and productive place for everyone.

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## **ETHICS**

### **Thoughts About Work**

Labor Day is a good time to think about the role work plays in your life.

Henry Thoreau said, "The mass of men spend their lives in quiet desperation." For some, work is part of that desperation. For others, it's part of what makes life worth living. Finding the right job is as difficult as finding the right mate, but it's just as important.

People who love their work get more out of their lives. Teddy Roosevelt said, "Far and away, the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." George Sand put it another way: "Work is not a punishment; it's a reward."

According to W. H. Auden, three things are needed if people are to be happy in their work: "They must be fit for it, they must not do too much of it, and they must have a sense of success in it." Elbert Hubbard told his readers to "Get happiness out of your work or you may never know what happiness is."

In summing up his life, comedian Johnny Carson said, "Never continue in a job you don't enjoy. If you're happy in what you're doing, you'll like yourself and you'll have inner peace and more success than you could possibly have imagined."

One of the profound questions is where does work fit into a balanced life. Some live for their work. If their work is truly meaningful and gratifying, that may make sense, but Harold Kushner points out, "I've never met anyone on their deathbed who said, 'I wish I'd spent more time at the office.'"

Work is, of course, a common subject of cynical observations such as "Accomplishing the impossible means only that the boss will add it to your regular duties" (Doug Larson) or "Many people quit looking for work when they find a job."

*Michael Josephson, Character Counts*

## **HEART WALK**

--Submitted by **Paris Scott**



In 1924, six pioneering cardiologists founded the American Heart Association to ramp up research and promote public education. Millions of Americans were alerted to the effort by a 1948 network radio contest on the popular program "Truth or Consequences". The first fundraising campaign was launched the following year and by this time, thousands of doctors and scientists joined the grass-roots group. The Heart Walk is a national event that raises funds to support the American Heart Association's continuing fight against heart disease and stroke. Stanislaus statistics are at an alarming rate. The California Health Interview Survey states that 68% of all Stanislaus county residents are overweight, while 33% are considered obese. That's up 25% in 2001 and it's higher than Californians overall, at 21%. You can help fight the cause by participating in this year's event now entering its 18<sup>th</sup> year. It will be held at the Modesto Junior College, East Campus on September 12 at 9:00 a.m. Everyone is welcome to walk, please come see me if you have any questions!

## **SAFETY FIRST**

--Submitted by **Paris Scott**



I walk around the office quite often to observe how each of you sit while at your work station. Some of you hunch over, some slouch, some sit on one leg, and some low ride (almost lying down) and some even sleep (oops, just kidding). Also, some of you sit too far from your computer or just too close. Come on you know it's true! So, here's a Computer Workstation Refresher:

## How to sit at a computer:



- Push your hips as far back as they can go in the chair.
- Adjust the seat height so your feet are flat on the floor and your knees equal to, or slightly lower than, your hips.
- Adjust the back of the chair to a 100°-110° reclined angle. Make sure your upper and lower back are supported. Use inflatable cushions or small pillows if necessary. If you have an active back mechanism on your chair, use it to make frequent position changes.
- Adjust the armrests (if fitted) so that your shoulders are relaxed. If your armrests are in the way, remove them.

## Your Keyboard...



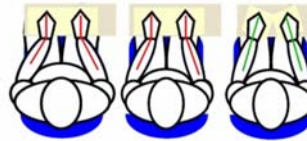
- An articulating keyboard tray can provide optimal positioning of input devices. However, it should accommodate the mouse, enable leg clearance, and have an adjustable height and tilt mechanism. The tray should not push you too far away from other work materials, such as your telephone.
- Pull up close to your keyboard.
  - Position the keyboard directly in front of your body.
  - Determine what section of the keyboard you use most frequently, and readjust the keyboard so that section is centered with your body.
  - Adjust the keyboard height so that your shoulders are relaxed, your elbows are in a slightly open position (100° to 110°), and your wrists and hands are straight.

## Your Keyboard...



- Place the pointer as close as possible to the keyboard. Placing it on a slightly inclined surface, or using it on a mousebridge placed over the 10-keypad, can help to bring it closer.
- If you do not have a fully adjustable keyboard tray, you may need to adjust your workstation height, the height of your chair, or use a seat cushion to get in a comfortable position. Remember to use a footrest if your feet dangle.

## Your Keyboard...



- The tilt of your keyboard is dependent upon your sitting position. Use the keyboard tray mechanism, or keyboard feet, to adjust the tilt. If you sit in a forward or upright position, try tilting your keyboard away from you at a negative angle. If you are reclined, a slight positive tilt will help maintain a straight wrist position. Wristrests can help to maintain neutral postures and pad hard surfaces. However, the wristrest should only be used to rest the palms of the hands between keystrokes. Resting on the wristrest while typing is not recommended. Avoid using excessively wide wristrests, or wristrests that are higher than the space bar of your keyboard.

## Monitor, Documents and Telephone...



- Incorrect positioning of the screen and source documents can result in awkward postures. Adjust the monitor and source documents so that your neck is in a neutral, relaxed position.
- Center the monitor directly in front of you, above your keyboard.
  - Position the top of the monitor approximately 2-3" above seated eye level. (If you wear bifocals, lower the monitor to a comfortable reading level.)
  - Sit at least an arm's length away from the screen and then adjust the distance for your vision.
  - Reduce glare by careful positioning of the screen.

## Monitor, Documents and Telephone...



- Reduce glare by careful positioning of the screen.
  - Place screen at right angles to windows
  - Adjust curtains or blinds as needed
  - Adjust the vertical screen angle and screen controls to minimize glare from overhead lights
  - Other techniques to reduce glare include use of optical glass glare filters, light filters, or secondary task lights

### Monitor, Documents and Telephone...



- **Position source documents directly in front of you, between the monitor and the keyboard, using an in-line copy stand.** If there is insufficient space, place source documents on a document holder positioned adjacent to the monitor.
- **Place your telephone within easy reach.** Telephone stands or arms can help.
- **Use headsets and speaker phone** to eliminate cradling the handset.

### Pauses and Breaks...

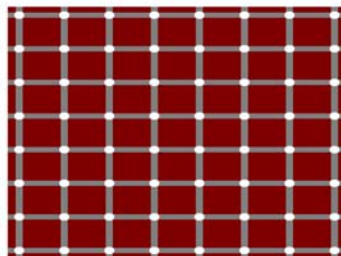


Once you have correctly set up your computer workstation use good work habits. No matter how perfect the environment, prolonged, static postures will inhibit blood circulation and take a toll on your body.

- **Take short 1-2 minute stretch breaks every 20-30 minutes.** After each hour of work, take a break or change tasks for at least 5-10 minutes. Always try to get away from your computer during lunch breaks.



### Pauses and Breaks...



- **Avoid eye fatigue by resting and refocusing your eyes periodically.** Look away from the monitor and focus on something in the distance.
- **Rest your eyes by covering them** with your palms for 10-15 seconds.
- **Use correct posture** when working. Keep moving as much as possible.

## Health/Wellness

--Submitted by **Paris Scott**



Moves That Get You In The Groove:

**Bike!** For the true spa effect, take a ride in the park, on the beach, wherever you can find a path through nature. A comfortable pace burns about 380 calories and hour. For extra thigh-firming, try adjusting the gears, but not so much that you hesitate or stall. You want to keep pedaling steadily through each stroke. You can also use a stationary bike or treadmill. On the treadmill, for more toning, tip the incline ramp higher (but not so much that you have to bend forward or grab the handlebars), and walk for up to a minute. Do another minute at an easy level. Repeat eight times....**Tighten Your Tush:** Stand in front of a chair and hold your arms straight out in front of you for balance. Bending your knees, lower your body smoothly until your bottom grazes the chair seat. Do not sit down. Stand up slowly. Do 12 to 15 reps....**Jog For Focus:** Run slowly backward and forward, 10 steps in each direction, for three to five minutes. This short exercise will improve your focus and balance and also challenge muscles that you don't ordinarily use. For safety, do this run indoors or on a park path where you won't bump into people or trees or other objects....**Mix It Up:** While walking-even if it's just a half mile-vary your stride. Start out with short, quick steps. After one minute, mix in 15 longer slow steps, then repeat for another minute of quick steps. Alternating your stride works more muscle groups and helps protect your knees-and can increase your calories burn. Note: Save your walk for a day that you're not also bicycling or using the treadmill (from Jennifer Huberty, University of Nebraska). This what I say: Now turn the television off, put the remote control down, put your tennis shoes on and grab your ipod...Start Movin' to the Grooves!

## **Mentor Site Program**



-- Submitted by **Paris Scott**

Mentors are life changers. I am sure that each of us can think back and remember at least one person that we might recall as being our mentor and/or role model. The mission of the Stanislaus County Mentor Program is to role model, advise, teach and inspire at-risk youth and young adults in our communities. It only takes a little time and will leave a lasting affect on a young person's life. The program has been around for 10 ½ years now and the investment in mentoring has proven to be a successful, cost-effective means of helping today's at-risk children become productive adults. Why not consider becoming a mentor to a young child today? ...I'll be more than happy to give you more information or you can go to the website located on the Stanislaus County intranet, check it out.

## **INTERESTING TIDBITS**

### **Ramadan: The High Holy Days for Muslims**

Ramadan, the highest religious days for Muslims, begins in August.

Unfortunately, so many Americans have come to associate Islam with Arab extremists who have adopted a campaign of terror as part of their jihad (holy war) against America that the scope and meaning of this holiday is little understood.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims are expected to express their devotion by fasting, contemplation, and prayer. They are expected to pay special attention to charity and self-accountability.

Muslims must arise before dawn, eat, and perform the first of five daily prayers. Once the sun comes up, they must fast all day until sunset.

Islam is based on Holy Scripture called the Quran as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Like Christianity and Judaism, many rituals and prayers are designed to define and demand virtuous personal conduct.

Muslims are to be even more self-conscious than normal about strengthening their faith and family ties and controlling negative emotions like envy, greed, anger, and lust. They must also avoid words that demean or injure others.

The self-discipline and sacrifice entailed in the daytime fasting is considered an act of deep personal worship designed to stimulate understanding, sympathy, and charity for those who are less fortunate. All this brings the worshipper closer to God (Allah).

On the evening of the 22nd day of this August, Muslims celebrate the night Muhammad first received the revelation of the Holy Quran. According to the Quran, this is when God determines the course of the world for the following year.

--*Michael Josephson, Character Counts*

## **QUOTE FOR THE QUARTER**

Once you label me, you negate me.

--*Soren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher, theologian (1813-1855)*

**ON THE LIGHTER (HEAVIER?) SIDE**

Look again at that dot. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, ...



.....every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader", every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there - on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

-- Carl Sagan

**THOUGHTS FOR YOUR THANKSGIVING TABLE**

"Saying thank you is more than good manners. It is good spirituality."

-- Alfred Painter

"If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, 'Thank you,' that would suffice."

-- Eckhart von Hochheim, German theologian, philosopher (1260-1328)

"The unthankful heart...discovers no mercies, but let the thankful heart sweep through the day and, as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings!"

-- Henry Ward Beecher, clergyman, social reformer (1813-1887)

"Silent gratitude isn't much use to anyone."

-- GB Stern, British author (1890-1973)

"The only people with whom you should try to get even are those who have helped you."

-- John E. Southard

"Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: It must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all."

-- William Faulkner, author (1897-1962)

"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."

-- Albert Schweitzer, Alsatian theologian, physician (1875-1965)

"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."  
-- *William A. Ward*

"If you want to turn your life around, try thankfulness. It will change your life mightily."  
-- *Gerald Good*

"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."  
-- *John F. Kennedy, 35th President (1917-1963)*

"I would rather be able to appreciate things I cannot have than have things I cannot appreciate."  
-- *Elbert Hubbard, writer, philosopher (1856-1915)*

"Hem your blessings with thankfulness so they don't unravel."  
-- *Anonymous*



Thank you to our monthly column contributors: **Larry Haugh** for Larry's Lines, **Paris Scott** for the Safety, Heart Walk, Wellness and Mentoring articles, and to all those who submitted other items of interest for this quarter's newsletter.

## KUDOS!

*Kudos, as well as opportunities for improvement feedback we've received from our customers.*



### CUSTOMER CORNER

#### FEEDBACK FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS/CUSTOMERS

Marcia Cunningham from SBT wishes to thank **John Bettencourt** for his assistance in getting the SBT billing posted in a timely manner.

**Lauren Klein** received a letter of appreciation from County Counsel for a presentation she did for their staff on tips on traveling.

**Letti Ortiz** received a note of appreciation from Mark Loeser in the CEO's office for assisting his team by providing some necessary documentation they needed. Mark says, "She was positive, responsive and displayed a CAN DO attitude; going the extra mile."

The Property Tax Division would like to thank **Veronica Ascencio** for providing lunch time coverage for their division on August 3, 2009. They would also like to thank her supervisor **Lauren Klein** for allowing a member of her team to help them out. They had a birthday luncheon for Curtis and enjoyed themselves very much. Part of that enjoyment was attributable to the fact that they knew there was coverage back at the office.

A memo was received from Paris Scott thanking **Ruth Engen** for her assistance with the Safety Incentive Luncheon and the Workers' Comp forms.

Supervisors – Please forward comments/suggestions received from our customers (compliments or opportunities for improvement) to be shared on this page.

--Editor