

ORS Look Out

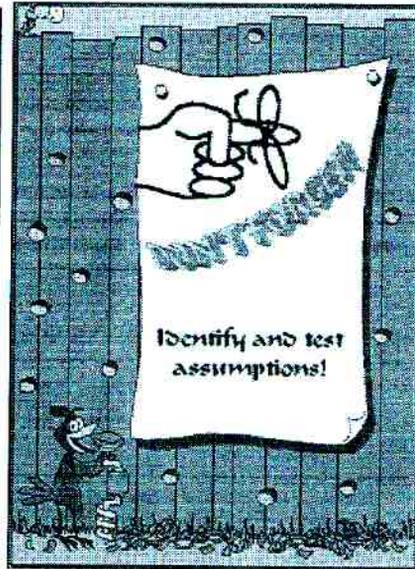
January 30, 1998

Volume 1, Issue 13

Question all of your assumptions about your workload

Stop and think about how much of your work is based on assumptions you think are true, but have never questioned. Are there assumptions you make in your daily activities that may be incorrect?

Too often, tasks become habits and remain in place long after the reasons for doing them are forgotten. In



some cases, the reason for performing the task may no longer exist. Still, those performing the task continue to do so until someone stops to ask why.

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Share your best ideas on disability processing

If you have an idea that will improve disability retirement processing, the Reengineering Team wants to hear about it.

Beginning in February, the Team will reengineer disability processing. Looking ahead to that project, the Team is

soliciting suggestions and ideas from staff.

Included in this newsletter is a yellow Disability Processing Suggestion form. Complete it and return it to Judy Simon, Joanne Busley, Angela Gilmore or Audrey Smith.

CIC begins toll-free phone service

The Customer Information Center's toll-free telephone number, 1-800-381-5111, is fully operational and available for customer use.

Callers in the Lansing area should continue to use the local number, 322-5103.

Apart from initial testing, the toll-free line has generally not been made public until recently, CIC Team Leader Trish Walker Webb said.

After opening the center, management wanted to give the CIC staff time to acclimate to the new operation before facing the increased call volume the toll-free number

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CIC begins toll-free phone service....

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is expected to generate.

"Our intent from the beginning was to get the center on its feet and operating before making the toll-free number public," Trish said.

ORS Director Chris DeRose said he is confident the CIC team is ready to handle the calls.

"Since the CIC opened, the team has consistently exceeded its goals in terms of handling calls," Chris said. "I am pleased with the progress the CIC Team has made and grateful for the extra effort

the Team has put in to make it a success."

Toll-free access to retirement staff has been a long-standing goal in ORS, Chris said.

"In the private sector, toll-free service is commonplace," Chris said. "This is something our customers have been requesting for a long time, and I'm very happy to be able to offer this service now."

"The Customer Service Division has developed a plan to educate customers about the toll-free number and will implement it in the coming weeks," Chris said. In addi-

tion to publicizing toll-free service, Customer Service staff will begin revising ORS documents to include the toll-free number.

"It's important that we get the number into widespread circulation quickly," Chris said. "As we implement the communications plan, our customers will have numerous opportunities to learn about this new service."

You should make the toll-free number part of your everyday communications with customers, Chris said.

"When you communicate with a customer, tell them what's available," Chris said. "Encourage them to tell their friends to use the toll-free number as the best way to access our services."

Sandy Ball earns praise for DC presentation

Trish Walker Webb wants to pass on a comment a colleague made regarding Sandy Ball and a DC seminar at which she was a presenter.

"Sandy Ball was exceptionally knowledgeable and helpful at the seminar. I got a lot of helpful



Sandy Ball

information from the seminar and she seemed to know everything inside out. I was glad that I attended because now I think I can make the right decision about my future."

Way to go, Sandy! When one of us succeeds, we all succeed!



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ORS forms Employee Activity Committee

Wanted: people who take having fun at work seriously, who have ideas and energy to contribute to make the workplace enjoyable for everyone.

ORS is forming an Employee Activity Committee, named EMPAC (pronounced "Impact"), to plan and organize fun activities for staff. Fundraising will be an element of the committee's responsibility.

The committee's purpose, ORS Director Chris DeRose said, will be to initiate fun activities with a purpose.

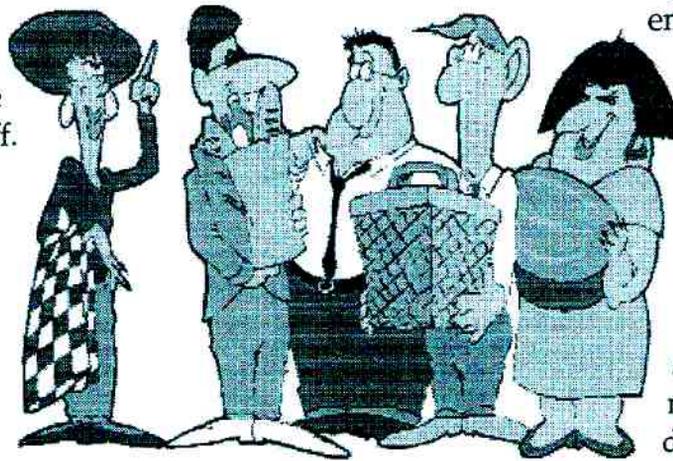
"Making the workplace fun has been an important element of my vision for where ORS is going," he said. "If we enjoy being

here and look forward to coming to work every day, that's going to carry over into the quality of service we provide our customers."

The Committee's objectives are to put fun into our work, promote an ORS team environment and to develop cohesion by giving staff opportunities to interact outside the work environment on non-work activities.

The Committee will be small, comprising one member from each division in ORS. If you are interested in representing your division, see your Division Director.

Committee members will be announced in February.



'Shaking things up' from time to time promotes growth

The owner of a greenhouse had a gardener who was careful, methodical, and a hard worker. In spite of this the plants did not prosper under his care. The owner hired a more experienced gardener. Immediately the plants began to thrive.

The first gardener explained what happened: "When I transplanted flowers, I removed them carefully from their pots. I disturbed them as little as possible. This new man didn't treat them that way. He was rough with them. He didn't care how much he disturbed their roots. I thought he would ruin the lot, he was so careless in his handling of them."

He was silent a moment, then said, "But they're growing."

The roots of the plants in the pots were packed tight. The experienced gardener, by this apparent roughness, loosened the soil and gave the roots a chance to breathe and stretch. He made growing easier for them by handling them roughly at the start.

People handled too gently often fail to prosper. Praise is effective. Gentleness is effective. But there are times when a little shaking up will jar people out of their complacency, will challenge them to make the most of themselves.

Y2K: Turning lemons into lemonade

The enormity of "Y2K" became apparent to ORS managers and supervisors January 28th as representatives from Automation Services Division (ASD), CTA Corporation, the vendor assisting on this project, and Acting Director of Information Technology and Reengineering, Ginger Bomar, explained the impact Year 2000 will have on all of our computer systems.

Y2K is a common computer software glitch that prevents computers from accurately calculating dates beyond 1999.

Opening the session, ORS Director Chris DeRose describe the level of commitment ORS staff will need to meet the State mandate of being Year 2000-compliant by

December 31, 1998.

"This effort will not provide increased value." Chris said. "Checks won't go out faster, customers won't get better service. However, if we don't fix the Y2K problem, our business will stop. Let's take these lemons and make lemonade."

To meet this challenge, selected ORS staff will be asked to take on new temporary assignments. They will help develop test matrixes to make sure the new Y2K changes won't affect other aspects of our computer operating systems. However, the rest of the staff will need to pick up the slack to keep ORS operations running smoothly.

"I would urge people to use this opportunity to learn how

to be a better project manager or team member on a project," Chris said.

Deadlines for fixing the Year 2000 problems can't be pushed back, as the attendees at this week's Y2K meeting learned. Many of our pension estimates will soon require using the year 2000 in the calculation. If we don't have the necessary "fixes" in place before then, the information we provide will be inaccurate, and it could dramatically affect the credibility of everything else we do.

Each of us will feel the effects of the Y2K project. The challenge facing us now is to get behind this effort and do whatever we can so the necessary changes can be completed as quickly and efficiently as possible.

You don't have to buy a vowel!

You don't have to rent a consonant. You don't even have to borrow a question mark. Just get out your handy Fargo North Decoder Ring and figure out this week's scramble. Here's what it says:

thonnig si reev caveehid ahtt tassy ni a merad keat iontac!

It goes without saying that once you've rearranged the letters, you should ponder the import of the words. The unscrambled version will be posted on first and third floors next week.



Orban recognized for local arts patronage

George Orban: civil servant by day, patron of the arts by night.

Recently, the *Lansing State Journal* published an article highlighting George and his wife, Rae Ramsdell, for their patronage to the arts in the Lansing community.



George Orban

A nine-year member of the Lansing Arts Council, George has served as president for two years. Also, since the early 70's, George has sat on the board of the Lansing Lyric Opera. He is part of the board for the BoarsHead Theater.

George said he has seen tremendous growth in the Lansing area arts scene.

"We started getting involved in the arts when we lived in Kalamazoo. Surprisingly, even though Kalamazoo is smaller in size, it has three hard working colleges promoting the arts."

George encourages Lansing area residents to seek out arts opportunities.

"Once people realize that art is not for the elitist and everyone can get involved, art will become recognized within the Lansing community."

Currently, George has season

tickets to the BoarsHead Theater, tickets for Wharton Center Productions and plans to see productions by the Lansing Lyric Opera and the Opera company of Mid-Michigan.

In what left over spare time, George enjoys MSU athletics and listening to his collection of nearly 1,000 albums and CD's, which rivals that of some small music stores.

George also has a passion for fire trucks. He enjoys going to fire truck exhibits and collecting memorabilia. His plans include someday fulfilling his dream of owning an antique fire truck.

Comings and goings in ORS

Lorie Herendeen joined the Finance and Administration Division January 26 as an accounting specialist. Previously, she worked in the Department of Consumer and Industry Services in a similar function.

Kathy Landes leaves the Finance and Administration

Division today to work for Project MAIN.

Barbara Grover, former manager of the MPERS Member Entity Reporting and Auditing Section, left the Finance and Administration Division January 23 to work for State Street Bank in Boston.

Thought for the Day

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

In praise of praise

An excellent way to reinforce good work is to recognize it with a heartfelt compliment. This simple act can increase harmony within a work group or between departments. It will also encourage people to focus more attention on getting other jobs done right.

Here are some pointers on how to give high-quality praise:

- **Be specific.** Say: "The three additional points you added to that report really explained a difficult concept well." This means much more than just saying "Nice work!"
- **Be generous.** When you hear a

compliment about a co-worker who isn't present, find that individual and share the praise.

- **Put it in writing.** To reinforce a verbal compliment, follow it up with a memo and a copy to appropriate associates and superiors.

—from *Quality 1st Newsletter*

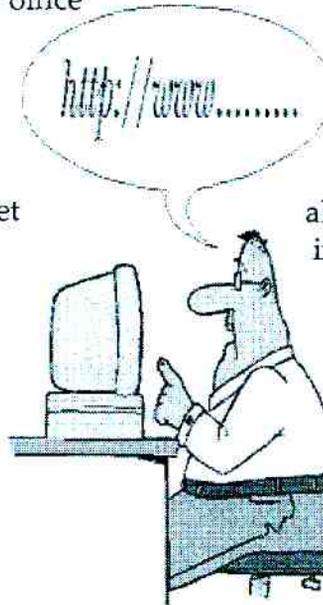
Limit office internet use to ORS business

If you have internet access on your office computer, remember to limit your use to legitimate ORS business purposes, ORS Director Chris DeRose said.

"If you have State-provided internet access, you should not use that for entertainment or personal use," he said.

Before receiving internet access, every employee must read and sign the Department of Management and Budget rules describing appropriate internet use.

"Even during lunch and break periods or after-hours, the rules



that describe appropriate and inappropriate internet use still apply," Chris said.

In the past, media reports have focused on State employees who allegedly used State-provided internet access for personal use.

"As a reminder, the Automation Services Division can and does monitor staff's internet use," Chris said.

"They can identify the sites every employee visits, and anyone found using the internet inappropriately is in danger of losing access to that service."

Question assumptions about your workload

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Recently, ORS staff have made good progress in identifying and eliminating tasks based on assumptions no longer true.

Example: Several different departments within MPSERS used to produce status reports containing various information based on the assumption that management needed this information and used it for other purposes.

Upon closer review, some of the reports contained excess information not required and some reports were not necessary at all! By testing that assumption, staff creating the report were able to use their time more effectively and

management got a better product.

One of the most common assumptions, Reengineering Team Leader Judy Simon said, is assuming we know what the customer wants.

"When we think about what a customer wants, there's a temptation to put ourselves in that person's place and think about what we would want," she said. "There's a chance that customers will have needs and preferences very similar to your own, but they may need something very different, for reasons you may not be aware of unless you ask."

To answer questions about

what customers want, Judy said, ORS is looking toward expanded surveying to identify those preferences.

Conclusion: We often make assumptions when we believe a task exists "because that's the way it's always been." It is time consuming and requires thought to consider "WHY" a form is set up a certain way, or "WHY" the customer must supply certain information, or "WHY" we perform certain tasks over and over again every day.

The next time you feel like a commonly held belief or a task is *assumed to be necessary*, **test that assumption!** Ask WHY!