



Firebird 24

Reborn From Our Ashes

NTEU Chapter 24 Newsletter

Volume 11

****General Edition****

October 2007

Sound Off!



Received: “Almost no IRS Collection management has ever worked under RRA 98 or ICS. It would be interesting to put them all in a training group and see how fast they washed out.”

And: I just want to congratulate all of our winners, the [election?] committee, especially to our new president, and all of our officers. I wish for much better representation, especially in the TAC Unit. Looking forward to working with you.”

Also: As a long time Revenue Officer, I am mortified when I found out that IRS has not paid for the location of CPE 2 years ago, although it has been acknowledged by several layers of management no one has actually cut the check to pay those people. It is mortifying to think that we are out there collecting money, yet we do not pay our own bills. So the buck apparently doesn't stop here.”

And: “Now days, I think the only difference between being a Revenue Officer and doing

hard time is I don't risk gang rape when I take a shower in the morning.”

Got something you want to tell us or others about? Want to express your opinion anonymously? We'd really like to hear from you.

Leave your message at **(313) 628-3864** and we will print reasonable topics. Please speak distinctly and limit your comments to a few sentences.

Disclosing Your Password

-Karen Johnson, Assistant Chief Steward

The IRS Headlines...and More edition of July 9, 2007, contained a startling item detailing a Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) audit on employees who continue to give their password information over the telephone. IRS employees have been reminded repeatedly that TIGTA routinely engages in “social engineering” yet the TIGTA study found that sixty percent of the 102 employees contacted gave out their password or user name. Do the math; over 60 of the 102 people contacted did not hesitate to disclose their password when asked.

IRS employees should NEVER give their password information to anyone, under any circumstances. Just because someone is posing as an IRS computer support staffer and asks you for the information does not obligate you to give it out.

If you are ever contacted over the telephone by someone who asks for a password to any one of your operating systems, you should always, without exception, refuse to give out the information. There will not be any negative

consequences for protecting your password. All employees are required to complete annual mandatory briefings designed to remind them of the IRS policy on computer security. These briefings also educate employees on computer security. There is even a Password Security Web Site if you ever have any doubt. There is absolutely no reason why the TIGTA statistics should be so high. Think before you speak. Whenever someone asks you for your password into any operating system, question their motive, and never, never give it out.

Town Hall Meeting

-Ella Porter, Steward

A Town Hall meeting was held June 6 in the Farmington Hills Post of Duty with new SB/SE Area Director **Dretha “Dee” Barham**. Chapter 24 Vice President **Jeri Burger** also attended.

Dee arrived timely with homemade brownies in hand for the revenue officers, managers, and NTEU representatives. **Karen Johnson**, the Chapter’s future Chief Steward, provided lemon tarts—the best I have ever tasted.

Dee started the meeting off with some biographical information, including her career at IRS. She included many jokes in her presentation which kept our attention. She concluded her opening remarks by asking us what she could do to help us better the overall work environment—computers, etc.

As the Union Steward for Farmington Hills, I wanted to make Dee aware that not all managers were following the IRM guidelines pertaining to case receipt and initial analysis. Specifically, we had one manager (present at the meeting) who had created her own rules, requiring the RO to document the receipt and initial analysis within 10 days of assignment. I asked Dee if she were aware of this Manual deviation. She stated she was not, and that Manual guidelines governed; the group manager’s deviation was rescinded.

Another issue addressed was “ICS Downtime, Code 623.” Dee had been instrumental in establishing this code to track computer downtime for Collection nationwide. I informed Dee that this code had to be backed-up with another code to account for the time, similar to “621 Field Time,” and technically this should be “611 Admin Time.” I told her, however, that revenue officers were being told not to report downtime under Admin, but to bury this time in case time. The issue of how to report the downtime was not clearly resolved.

A revenue officer asked why we were not given better equipment, such as computers, photocopiers, etc. The poor condition of current equipment was a hindrance to effectively doing our job. Dee stated she would look into the matter, but ultimately Congress determined the Treasury’s, and IRS’s, budget.

Dee provided us with figures as to where the area is at presently in conjunction with overage and potential overage. We still have a long way to go to reach our goals in this area.

When a Meeting is More than a Meeting

-Mary Cook, Member of the Board

During my career with the Internal Revenue Service, I have been to hundreds, if not thousands, of meetings. Some have been memorable; some are forgotten as soon as I exit the room. In addition to my duties as an NTEU Steward, I am also a member of a Revenue Officer group. Some of the meetings I attend are “stand up meetings”, a quick comment by the manager that is addressed to the entire assembled group. No minutes are kept. Some are committee meetings with specific agendas. Some are formal meetings. NTEU is very interested in formal meetings.

Section 7114 (a) (2) (A) of the Civil Service Reform Act is our guide to formal meetings. This law requires that when a formal meeting is held, NTEU, acting as the exclusive representative of the employees, has the right to be notified and the opportunity to be present. **ATTENTION MANAGEMENT: SIMPLY HAVING AN NTEU STEWARD AS A MEMBER OF THE WORKGROUP DOES NOT FULFILL THE AGENCY’S OBLIGATION TO NOTIFY NTEU ABOUT AN UPCOMING FORMAL MEETING.** The choice of who will represent NTEU will be made by the Chapter, not management. Before the agency is required to invite NTEU under Section 7114 (a) (2) (A), 4 distinct elements must be present in the meeting:

1. There must be a discussion intended. The discussion does not have to consist of a give and take dialogue between management, employees and NTEU. Even meetings to make a statement or announcement can be formal.
2. The discussion must be formal. It is not enough for the meeting to just be between management and the employees to be considered formal. Items such as mandatory attendance, minutes, a formal agenda, and a management-called

meeting, are components of a formal discussion.

3. It must be between one or more representatives of the agency and one or more employees of the work unit. This is limited to bargaining unit employees
4. It must concern a grievance, personnel policy, practice or general condition of employment. A contract grievance if the employee asks for NTEU assistance is an example.

The most recent batch of formal 7114 meetings concerned the new EQMS case review system in place for the Revenue Officer and Revenue Agent positions. NTEU attended these meetings, representing our members. As attendees of a formal meeting, NTEU is permitted to speak, clarify points, ask questions, and make a statement on behalf of NTEU with respect to our position on the subject matter. The right to be represented means more than just the right to be present. If such rights are violated, this is an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP); NTEU Chapter 24 has filed institutional grievances regarding such circumstances. We take the representation of our members very seriously, and the barring of such representation even more seriously. **Chapter 24 needs to know if there are formal meetings being held that we are not notified of in advance. If you become aware of one, or participate in one, please call the Chapter office.**

National Training 2007, New Orleans

-Brenda L. Lowery, Steward

In April, I had the pleasure of attending NTEU National Training for Steward Leadership in New Orleans, courtesy of NTEU Chapter 24. Classes were very educational, providing me with the proper leadership to represent our members. Topics of discussion were:

- 1) Stewardship;
- 2) Labor Law;
- 3) Legislation;
- 4) Grievance Handling, and;
- 5) Investigatory Interviews.

This training has taught me to listen and communicate effectively with our members, and people in general. I've been shown how to empathize with our members, and educate them on their rights, and obligations to the Agency. Analyzing a situation, identifying a grievance, collecting information, and writing a grievance were some of the most important items. We want to make sure we are recognizing and addressing violations, and submitting a proper remedy.

There were different exercises to complete, demonstrating violations committed throughout the agency, not just at ACS-Detroit. While going through the training exercises, I thought, "WOW! These are all the violations being committed everyday by management: such as restricting days you can call in sick, when and how to use your annual leave; informing employees of changes without previously discussing the issues with NTEU; filing AWOL and leave restriction charges for spite's sake." These are all violation of your rights and we must file grievances to get our point across to management that such actions will not be tolerated.

Why do we file grievances? Grievances accomplish different things for different people. For employees (members), it:

- Helps them enforce rights under the agreement.
- Allows them to get information to determine how decisions were made.
- Is a way to empower them in the workplace.
- Allows for the peaceful and orderly resolution of disputes affecting their work lives.
- Ensures fair and uniform treatment.
- Can effect change.

As a representative of NTEU and employee of the Agency, my training has allowed me to bring attention to workplace problems, and protect an employee's claim, while we seek resolution through other means. Most importantly, we fight management's unfair policies and practices with grievances, and it's up to all members to do so. Thanks to the National Training, I am ready to enforce our rights under the contract agreement and establish precedents that prevent future ACS/Agency disputes.

Steward in the Spotlight

Karen Johnson

I was born a poor child on the lower east side of Detroit. No wait, that's not it...

My career with Internal Revenue began 31.5 years ago, in 1973, when I was hired as a typist in Special Procedures. My immediate supervisor was **Norman J. Kanar**; there aren't too many folks left around here who remember him. I worked in the Analysis Section of Office Branch prior to becoming a revenue officer in 1981. I started working in the Old Federal Building on

Lafayette, then moved to the McNamara Building. After completing Revenue Officer training, I relocated to Pontiac. In 1989, I transferred to the Mt. Clemens POD, which is now located in Clinton Twp.

When I was hired by IRS in 1973, I immediately joined NTEU. My grandfather was a business agent for the **Plumbers Local 98**. My father was strictly a management type; however, my brother and I are both pro-union. He was a shop steward at the same company where our father was Vice President. Dinner at our house usually included lively debates. I have been a steward since June 2004. In the spring of 2005, I received the "New Steward of the Year Award," and received the "Steward of the Year Award" this year. In January, 2007 I was appointed Assistant Chief Steward for Col-lection. I have just been appointed Chief Steward, a duty I will assume October 2nd when **Jeri Burger** is installed as our Chapter President. In June, I was elected as a Member of the Board.

I look forward to working with our chapter leaders to make our union stronger and more visible. Without the Union, there is no contract. Without the contract, the rights of employees will be trampled upon. I believe we need to work hard to continue to build our membership to make the chapter stronger. I want to focus on educating our members in their contractual rights, and getting more of our members involved in the activities NTEU supports.

People might be surprised if they knew I listen to alternative rock. My favorite groups are Green Day and The Fray. I stay home to watch "The Closer," "The Sopranos," and "Rescue Me." When I retire, my sister-in-law and I are going to become "Queen Bee Quilters." Although I have dedicated more than half my life to the IRS, at heart I am really a domestic goddess.



Retirements

Marianne Gordon, Kathleen Kelly, Nancy Korch, Patricia Lewis, and Deborah Stokes.



Budget Technician Sherry Forbes' son, Jason, is now a Second Lieutenant, USAF, stationed at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Mt. Clemens. He flies KC-135 tankers, and will be stationed in Oklahoma for seven months. He is seen here with his sister, Shannon.

We Get Letters

We received a question from one of our readers: **"I don't know if your publication accepts questions, but mine is regarding management's use of hidden cameras in the workplace. Is this something that could occur in our work environments, and if so, under what circumstances?"**

**Sign me,
Camera shy"**

To this, we consulted our legal counsel, and have the answer of:

"Could it happen? The answer is "yes" and "it has" in the past and likely will in the future (unfortunately). If the Agency is conducting an investigation into, say: Why calls to an adult sex line are being made from the same phone in a break room or conference room (a real situation that occurred in another area of the Country), they could install a hidden video camera in the break room and record who comes and goes and uses the phone. Now what the process is on the Management end, as far as logistics, I don't know. The Agency cannot arbitrarily install video cameras in the workplace. For instance, I would imagine that your TM cannot just arbitrarily set up a hidden camera rigged to a motion sensor to determine when you actually enter your cubicle."

If you have a question you would like aired in this newsletter, please E-mail me, David Hauenstein, or the Chapter President elect, Jeri Burger, or new Chief Steward, Karen Johnson. Or, you can call the “Sound Off” telephone number at (313) 628-3864. We cannot guarantee an answer to your question, but we’ll certainly try.

We also, indirectly, received some feedback from the Grand Rapids Post of Duty regarding our last newsletter. One was from a Non-Member who took exception to the “Sound Off” segment, where the caller referred to ex-Commissioner Everson as an “SOB.” Another Non-Member did not appreciate my comments in the “Spotlight” column, suggesting younger employees look elsewhere than IRS for work.

I think the character of E. K. Hornbeck, from Stanley Kramer’s production of Inherit the Wind provides the best response, when he says:

“Cynical? True...That’s part of my fascination. I do hateful things for which people love me, and lovable things for which people hate me. I am admired for my detestability.”

More importantly, he goes on to say, “It is the duty of a newspaper to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”

But I would also say to both Non-Members, thank you for reading our newsletter. We hope that it can, at times, be informative and thought provoking. And, if sometimes you don’t like our message, please remember what E. K. Hornbeck also said: “I may be rancid butter, but I’m on your side of the bread.”

In Memoriam

Diane Petrowski, long time secretary in the Mt. Clemens Post of Duty passed away in September of this year. Joseph Liss, retired Revenue Officer, passed away in August.

Office Etiquette

“Office etiquette is based on the concern and consideration you show for your coworkers. Just one person can make an office a nicer place in which to work.

Some points to keep in mind area:

- Be punctual. Don’t keep others waiting. If you are habitually late to work, to appointments, to interoffice meetings, or if you frequently miss deadlines, you will soon be seen as unreliable.

- Set reasonable deadlines for others. Except in emergencies, your staff or assistant should not be expected to meet unrealistic deadlines.
- Always praise someone who handles an assignment well or makes an effort to improve.
- Give credit where credit is due. Don’t even dream of accepting praise for someone else’s work.
- If you are in a supervisory role, you must give criticism if it’s justified and necessary. People cannot learn if you don’t point out their mistakes. But if you must correct or reprimand someone, do it in private. There’s no need to embarrass someone in front of coworkers. And avoid criticizing or blaming people behind their backs.
- Avoid shouting for people to come to you.
- Be neat. Clean up after using communal spaces such as a kitchen or conference room. If you pour the last cup of coffee, make a fresh pot. Make an effort to keep the bathrooms neat, wiping the sink clean with a paper towel and depositing towels in the appropriate receptacle.
- Refrain from primping at your desk and never file or paint your nails at the office.
- Return anything you borrow from a coworker such as a pen, book, or umbrella. And don’t fall into the habit of borrowing money for lunch, bus fare, or incidentals. It’s easy to forget to pay back small amounts of money, yet the person who makes the loan rarely forgets that you owe him a dollar or two.
- Respect others’ privacy. Never go through someone else’s desk or read material that’s not yours.
- If someone you work with looks ill, has lost weight, or seem despondent, unless you know him well, wait for him to bring up the subject of his health. If you do know him well, you can simply say, ‘Are you feeling all right?’
- Don’t be a pest. People who habitually drop by other people’s offices to chat, repeatedly interrupting them, are a dedicated worker’s biggest annoyance.
- Obey rules on smoking. In most large companies, unless you have a private

- office, you must go outside to smoke. Whatever the policy is at your company, don't cheat.
- Keep your voice down. Particularly in partitioned offices where the walls do not go to the ceiling, it's essential to respect our neighbor's need to concentrate.
 - Offer support to colleagues who need it. If you know someone is having a personal crisis or a difficult time at work, lend him a sympathetic ear. You might bring him flowers or a fresh Danish with the message that you hope this will brighten his day.
 - If someone does something nice for you, respond with a note of thanks.
 - Be sympathetic and attentive to a colleague who has been fired. Try to help him find a new job, offer to proofread his resume, or simply call him occasionally to bolster his spirits.

--The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette

Opinion/Editorial

-Anonymous

I realize logic and common sense are bad ideas for the IRS, but why is it they have moved Insolvency from the 23rd floor to the 21st floor? We Revenue Officers are being told we will also be moved down there by the end of the year. And, supposedly, some of the other groups on the 21st floor will be moved up to 23. Maybe you can find some logic in this, but I can't.

Also, are you aware that there was an unwelcome visitor on 23 one night around 5:30? Evidently he was very proud of his anatomy and showed it to some of the trainees. When the issue of security came up, the Training Group Manager decided he wanted TIGTA involved, even though the other collection manager had already dealt with the issue, and security was already dealing with the issue. This is the same person that was telling the trainees to send a L1058 one week and then take enforcement the next. Oddly enough, no one seems to miss him now that the training group has disbanded. The trainees have all been dispersed out to groups across the state; wish them well.



Firebird 24

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