



# Food for Thought

Editor:  
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## TAMU's Center for Employee Education Course Curriculum Available to TAES and TCE Employees

We are pleased to announce that courses offered through TAMUs Center for Employee Education (CEE) are now available to TAES and TCE employees effective immediately. Registration costs for agency employees are \$79 per person for a half day (3 hour) workshop and \$129 for a full day (6 hour) workshop. For more information, go to: <http://employees.tamu.edu/employees/training/workshops/schedule.aspx>.

In addition, as announced earlier in November, CEE has opened its registration for all levels of training in computer software applications. Open enrollment classes, special classes for departments/units, and one-on-one training are available for employees on a course fee basis. Also, free software training is available to faculty members, teaching assistants and staff using technology in their development and/or instruction of Texas A&M University academic courses. For more information, go to: <http://cis.tamu.edu/training/index.php>

Classes typically contain 3-9 hours of instruction, and regularly scheduled classes carry Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credits. Some programs may be available away from College Station. At this time, however, courses are delivered only on a face-to-face basis. Discussions are ongoing with CEE to have programs available online in the future.

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*One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today.*  
— Dale Carnegie

## Loans and Hardship Withdrawals Not Allowed Under ORP or TRS

Rules for loans and hardship withdrawals differ for each type of retirement plan. Texas state law prohibits distributions, including loans and hardship withdrawals, under the Optional Retirement Program (ORP) until a participant retires, dies, reaches age 70½ or terminates employment with all Texas public institutions of higher education. The Tax-Deferred Account (TDA) program and the TexaSaver Deferred Compensation Plan (DCP) do allow loans and hardship withdrawals regardless of the participant's employment status. However, not all TDA vendors offer loans. For more information, employees should contact their vendor representatives.

Participants in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) may not borrow against accumulated contributions. You may withdraw contributions only if you permanently terminate employment with a TRS-covered employer.

— Jan Kyles



*Silent gratitude isn't much use to anyone.* — Robert Louis Stevenson

## A&M Care Plan Participants Have a New Source for Health Information

If you are an A&M Care plan participant, you can register for BlueCross BlueShield of Texas' **Blue Access® for Members** online interactive health and wellness tool. With this tool, you can:

- Take a Health Risk Assessment,
- Get advice on how to start an exercise program
- Start a weight loss or smoking cessation program
- Research specific medical conditions

You can register by logging on to the BlueCrossBlueShield of Texas website at [www.bcbstx.com](http://www.bcbstx.com) and using the information found on your ID card to set up a password.

— Jan Kyles



*Praise and appreciation of someone else's deeds have an amazing impact on your own spirit as well.* — Unknown

## 2008 Support Staff Symposium—Something for Everyone!!

The schedule and description of workshops for the upcoming 2008 Support Staff Symposium/Texas AgriLife Conference is posted at <http://aqhr.tamu.edu/Symposium-Schedule-2008.pdf>.

The keynote address, scheduled for Monday, January 7 at 1:00 p.m., will be presented by Dr. Joni Baker, manager, Equal Opportunity, The Texas A&M University System. Dr. Baker's presentation—"Dispute Resolution in the Workplace"—will take a look at varying methods of resolving conflicts without letting them escalate into resentment and creating an even more unpleasant situation. The session will end with a role play of the mediation of an 'imaginary' employee/supervisor conflict.



On Thursday morning, Jason Cook, the director of Communications & Marketing with Texas A&M Agriculture, will give a two-hour presentation on the new branding of our agencies and organization. This presentation is specifically directed at support staff and the role we will all play in the development, protection and promotion of our new brand identities.

This year's workshop topics include: Canopy, Conference Services, Contracts & Grants, Copy Services, Department Budget Requests, EPA/New Hires, Benefits, FMLA, Form I-9 Compliance, HUB, Inventory, Laserfiche, LeaveTraq, Management Team Findings, FAMIS & DDRINT, Purchasing, TimeTraq, TrainTraq, Travel & Accounts Payable, the Budget Process & Form 800 and Updates/Changes in Human Resources.

In addition we have expanded our schedule with: Adobe Fillable Forms, Ergonomics in the Workplace, Hiring Foreign Personnel, Managing Change & Transition and Workplace Safety and Security.

We have also worked with the Center for Employee Education at Texas A&M University in scheduling open enrollment workshops in computer skills software training. Specifically, based on your suggestions, these courses have been added to their regular offerings:

Course	Date	Time	Fee
Microsoft Publisher	Jan. 7, 2008	8:30—11:30 a.m.	\$65
Microsoft Excel 2007 Upgrade	Jan. 9, 2008	8:30—10:30 a.m.	\$40
Microsoft Word 2007 Upgrade	Jan. 9, 2008	1:30— 3:30 p.m.	\$40
Macromedia DreamWeaver 1	Jan. 9-10, 2008	1:30—4:30 p.m.	\$139
Effective Presentations with Microsoft PowerPoint	Jan. 10, 2008	1:30—4:30 p.m.	\$65
Microsoft Access 2007 Upgrade	Jan. 11, 2008	8:30—10:30 a.m.	\$40
Endnote—for Faculty and Staff	Jan. 11, 2008	8:30—11:30 a.m.	\$65

Check their website to register at: <http://cis.tamu.edu/training>

— Beverley Rose



*Let us not be too particular, it is better to have old second-hand diamonds than none at all.*

— Mark Twain



## Helpful Websites

**Human Resources** - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/>

**Ag Program Directory** - <http://agdirectory.tamu.edu/>

**A&M System Online**

The Newsletter for A&M System

Employees and Retirees) - <http://tamus.edu/systemwide/>

**Benefits** - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/benefits.htm>

**Dictionary** - <http://dictionary.reference.com/>

**Employment**

**Posters** - <http://hrtoolbox.tamu.edu/>

**GreatJobs** - <http://greatjobs.tamu.edu>

**Forms (Alpha List)** - <http://agservices.tamu.edu/Forms/forms-alfa.htm>

**HR Connect** - <http://sso.tamu.edu>

**LeaveTraQ** - <http://sso.tamu.edu>

**Online Employee**

**Processing** - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/processing.htm>

**Payroll** - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/pay.htm>

**Policies, Procedures**

**& Forms** - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/policies.htm>

**Selective Service Registration**

**Verification** - [http://www4.sss.gov/regver/verification\\_nc.asp](http://www4.sss.gov/regver/verification_nc.asp)

**Single Sign On** - <http://sso.tamu.edu/>

**Zip Code**

**Lookup** - <http://zip4.usps.com/zip4/welcome.jsp>



## Did you know...?

It takes the same amount of time to age a cigar as wine.

A nanosecond is one billionth of a second.

Greenwich Mean Time only became universally accepted as the standard time throughout Britain with the growth of the railways in the late 19th century. It was felt that all train timetables should be standardized so GMT was adopted.

According to 1903 issue of "the Old Farmers' almanac," the best time of the day to select a new pair of shoes is in the afternoon, when the exercise of the day has stretched the muscles to their largest extent.



In most advertisements, including newspapers, the time displayed on a watch is 10:10.

There are no clocks in gambling casinos.

The average person spends six years of life dreaming.

## Make Meetings Less Dreaded

by Stuart R. Levine

Mention the word “meetings” to a group of managers, and you’re likely to hear at least one person groan. Meetings are the bane of our existence—the thing we love to loathe. Ineffectively run meetings cost companies hundreds of thousands of dollars each year and become career stoppers for managers. People and their time are your company’s resources, and it’s your job as the manager to maximize the value of both to the organization.

Meetings that reflect these best practices become valued opportunities to communicate and learn instead of resented gauntlets we’re required to run.



### Before Anyone Convenes

The following steps will help you and your meeting attendees prepare for the meeting:

- **Define your purpose.** Without clarity about what you’re trying to achieve, there is no way to achieve it effectively.
- **Meet only when necessary.** Ask yourself honestly, do you really have to meet, or are you getting people together because it’s the only way to get them to review documents that can be e-mailed or faxed?
- **Create an agenda.** Always create an agenda to focus the conversation on your purpose and always begin the agenda with a clear purpose statement. If you are a participant and there’s no agenda, ask for one. If you attend a meeting with no agenda on the table, you can say, “I’d like to have a sense of what we’re here to accomplish and sketch out a quick agenda.”
- **Involve only the people necessary.** Having people in your meetings is a luxury because their time is precious to the company and to their families. Invite carefully. (Pretend you’re paying for their time because, in a sense, you are.)
- **Prepare and give participants the time and materials to do the same.** If you’re holding the meeting, distribute the agenda at least 24 hours in advance, 72 hours if you need colleagues to review documents before the meeting.

If you’re invited to attend a meeting, always schedule time to review the advance materials. If it’s not clear to you why you’ve been invited to a meeting, as. A simple e-mail saying, “I’m not sure what value I’ll add in this meeting; what did you have in mind when you put me on the list? will do the job.

### In the Room

Stick to these suggestions, and your meeting will stay on track:

- **Start and end on time.** No matter how many people are in the room, shut the door when the meeting is scheduled to start. Waiting for latecomers is the practical equivalent of saying to those who came on time, “Their time is more valuable than yours.” Always end on time unless you’ve asked for permission to run over and everyone in the room has agreed.
- **Get to the point.** If it’s your meeting, begin by stating your purpose and then stay focused on it. If you’ve been invited, link every comment you make back to the meeting’s objective.

Cont’d. on page 7, see “Meetings”.

## Meetings (cont'd. from p. 6)

- **Keep things on course.** The chair is primarily responsible for this, but everyone in the room is free to respectfully comment if they believe a discussion is off course and request that an “out-of-scope” conversation be taken off-line.
- **When you're in agreement, move on.** Don't give in to the temptation of discussing how much you agree and sharing war stories about how right you are. When you say, “I think we're in agreement,” it should be a signal to everyone that you're moving on.
- **Wrap with action steps and commitments.** At the close of the meeting, define next steps. Then determine who will own each and by when they can deliver.

### Follow-Through

A meeting is pointless without these follow-up action items:

- **Send meeting notes within 24 hours.** At a minimum, these notes should capture the action steps defined by the group, who is accountable and deadlines agreed to.
- **Facilitate follow-through to ensure results.** As each deadline approaches, send an e-mail to each task's owner reminding him of the deadline and offering help or assistance to meet it. As participants deliver on their commitments, send a note thanking them for following through and copy everyone who attended the meeting.

### Putting Steps into Action

Commit to using these best practices to get the strongest result with the leanest resources and track how consistently you achieve your objective. I can almost guarantee that you'll be hooked.

*Stuart R. Levine is chairman and CEO of Stuart Levine & Associates LLC, an international consulting and leadership development company, and author of The Six Fundamentals of Success: /the Rules for Getting it Right for Yourself and Your Organization (Currency, 2006) and Cut to the Chase: and 99 Other rules to Liberate Yourself and Gain Back the Gift of Time (Doubleday, January 2007). Levine can be reached via his web site, [www.stuartlevine.com](http://www.stuartlevine.com), where you also can download a template of the best practices.*

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**Once, when John D. Rockefeller was asked to what he attributed most of his success, he replied, “To others.” — Unknown**

## Speak Up! Have Your Say!

In September we launched two new online workshop series: *Employee Learning* and *Lunch with Leaders*. I am working on the January-May calendar for both, along with the TTVN schedule. If you'd like to have input into topics/guests, now's your chance. Call/email me at: 979-458-3279, [barose@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:barose@ag.tamu.edu). Thanks!

\_\_\_ Beverley Rose

## Do the Right Thing With Your References

Caroline Levchuck, Yahoo! HotJobs

If you're like most job seekers, you probably pay lots of attention to your resume and even your cover letter. In comparison, your references may be something of an after-thought, but treating them as such is a huge tactical error in your quest for work. A thoughtful and stellar reference can help you get hired, while an unenthusiastic, uninformative reference may hurt your chances.

Here are eight do's and don'ts to make the most of your references.

### The Do's:

- Do remove "references available upon request" from your resume. Of course they are!
- Do mention a reference by name in your cover letter if that individual works at the company to which you're applying and has a good reputation there. This will help ensure that your resume gets the attention it deserves.
- Do keep your references varied. List just one per job or period in your professional life.
- Do check in with your references at least two times a year. Let each person know where you're at in your career. Also, remember to see if there's any way you can help them in their careers.

### The Don'ts:

- Don't give your references out to prospective employers without being asked. Also, make sure you're being asked at the appropriate point in the hiring process. It should be clear that you're under serious consideration when you provide them.
- Don't provide a prospective employer with too many references. Three should be ample. Just be sure that each has something unique to say about your talents and your contributions at each job you've done.
- Don't list references that go too far back in your employment history, unless the person you're using as a reference is famous in the field in which you're working, or your contribution to that company was particularly noteworthy.
- Don't ask your references to "stretch the truth." It's bad enough if you get caught in a lie. If a professional reference is implicated in it, it can damage that person's reputation as well.

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Merry Christmas & Happy Holidays!