



# Food for Thought

**Editor:**  
**Pat Onstott**

## Strategic Planning for Diversity

As the new Director of Diversity and Inclusion for Texas A&M AgriLife, I am pleased to write this inaugural diversity article for *Food For Thought*. As I assess the needs for diversity and inclusion in the workplace, I am reminded how complex our organizations are and the mission and purpose of those we serve are all different. With this in mind, a diversity program must include a number of strategies to be successful. As we reflect on differing methods of how to move forward in order to integrate a deliberate strategy such as diversity and inclusion into the workplace, we have to be mindful of the time it takes to fully implement a new strategy. Depending on your past experiences with “diversity,” a truly structured and deliberate program will take between three to five years to see the effects of implementation. Governance, Leadership, Budgets, Policy, Assessment, Internal Communications, Reporting, and Alignment are some, not all, of the core principles which must be considered when developing most new plans - diversity plans are no different. In addition, implementation of successful diversity plans also deals with Talent Acquisition, Talent Development, Talent Retention, Compensation, and Strategic Planning. Over the last several months, considerations of the above principles have taken place in order to prepare a proposal to administration about strategies for a deliberate diversity management structure.

Within the coming months and into the New Year, we will begin to layout the process and plan to take as we embark in this committed effort by administration. Achieving real and lasting change in areas of organizational culture and performance requires the formulation and execution of a well thought-out comprehensive plan. We ask you to join us in this effort by becoming engaged and supportive in our endeavors to make our organization an even better place to work.

— Edward Romero

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Although I may not walk with kings,  
 Let me be big in little things.  
 — Edgar Guest





## It's Not Too Late to Sign Up for Payroll Direct Deposit

Friday, January 2, 2009 is a monthly and a biweekly pay date, and an official HOLIDAY for most units! Enjoy your break and avoid the hassle of having to pick up your check.\* NOW is the perfect time to sign up for two great features available to you, FREE of charge: direct deposit and electronic check stubs. During the holidays, avoid the lines and burdens of the bank, SIGN UP TODAY!

\* For those employee's located in College Station, checks will be available for pick-up on Friday, January 2, 2009, between 10:00 a.m. and Noon at the Wells Fargo Bank Building, First Floor Lobby. Checks not picked up by that time will be delivered through normal channels on Monday, January 5, 2009. Instructions have been sent to your unit payroll contact for further details and information.

### **SIGNING UP FOR DIRECT DEPOSIT:**

*Allows your paycheck to be in the bank before you even get to work on payday. It's safe, secure, and easy to enroll.*

1. You may now sign up for Direct Deposit through HR Connect.
2. Log onto HR Connect through the Single Sign On Website at: <https://sso.tamu.edu/>
3. Select the Payroll Data Tab in HR Connect
4. Scroll down until you find "Direct Payroll Deposit Information" and just 'CLICK TO EDIT'
5. Follow the instructions and enter your banking information through our safe and secure website.
6. Or, you may still complete the Direct Deposit Form, located at:  
<http://agservices.tamu.edu/forms/AG-501.pdf>
7. Return to the Payroll Office at:  
AgriLife HR / Payroll  
2162 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-2162  
or by email: [agpayroll@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:agpayroll@ag.tamu.edu)

### **SIGNING UP FOR ELECTRONIC CHECK STUBS:**

*By signing up for electronic check stubs, you are delivered an email reminder that your check stub is available to be viewed through the HR Connect Website.*

1. Log onto HR Connect through the Single Sign On website at: <https://sso.tamu.edu/>
2. If you have never logged onto the system, follow the directions titled "New Employees—Set up your pass word."

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## Payroll Deposit, continued from page 2

3. Follow the password wizard to create your password. If you do not know your UIN or ADLOC number, contact your departmental payroll contact. They will provide you with the correct information.
4. Once you have created a password, click onto HR Connect, and select the Payroll Data tab. Scroll to the bottom of the page, and under "On-Line Payroll Earnings Information," just **CLICK FOR DETAILS**.
5. Follow the instructions, and you will receive an e-mail reminder that your check stub is available to be viewed and printed through HR-Connect.

### **It's Almost W-2 Time, Again!**

It's already that time of year. When W-2's are sent out in January, make sure your personal information is correct in order to receive your W-2 in a timely manner. Just log on to HR Connect, at <https://sso.tamu.edu> and click on the Personal Data tab. If your address is wrong, simply correct it and submit your changes. Avoid any hassle and confusion and get your W-2 on time.

**You may also sign up to receive your W-2 electronically.** On-line W-2's provide employees with the option of printing their own W-2 days before the mailed copies are even sent out. On-line W-2's provide many BENEFITS:

No fear your W-2 was sent to the wrong address.

No worry of lost or ruined W-2's in the mail.

The ease and convenience of printing cleaner, neater copies yourself.

These copies are official and accepted by the IRS

1. If you would like to take advantage of this option, simply log onto HR Connect through the Single Sign On Website at: <https://sso.tamu.edu/>
2. Select the Payroll Data Tab in HR Connect
3. Scroll down until you find "On-line W2 Information" and just 'CLICK TO EDIT'
4. Once in, simply indicate you want the online W-2 , and a paper copy will not be mailed. Once the W-2's are processed, an email will be sent to the email of your choice reminding you to print your W-2. You have until mid January to sign up. If you do not sign up for this option, you will not have the opportunity to view your W-2 online until the second week of February.

— Vic Seidel

Progress always involves risk. You can't steal second base and keep your foot on first.

— Frederick B. Wilcox



## UnitedHealthcare Vision Members (formerly Spectera)

An annual routine eye exam is an important part of a good health and wellness program, especially for those with diabetes. UnitedHealthcare Vision members are eligible for a routine eye exam, once every plan year.

A routine eye exam includes:

- Case history of patient
- Examination for eye pathology and abnormalities
- Visual analysis (refraction)
- Diagnosis and prescription
- Visual skill testing

Not all vision providers perform *dilation* as a part of their routine eye exam. Dilation is a covered service only if it is a part of the provider's routine eye exam. If you request a dilation to be performed by a provider who does not routinely include this, you will be responsible for the cost. Ask your vision provider, when you make your appointment, what services are included in the routine eye exam.

A provider list for UnitedHealthcare Vision can be found at:

[www.uhcspecialtybenefits.com](http://www.uhcspecialtybenefits.com) or [www.spectera.com](http://www.spectera.com)

— Jan Kyles

If you have accomplished all that you have planned for yourself, you have not planned enough— Meddigo Message

## Administrative Professionals Day—IAAP

The International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP ) would like for you to save the date for their annual Administrative Professionals Day (APD) Conference to be held on Thursday, April 23, 2009. All administrative/clerical/support staff personnel are encouraged to attend this day long event to be held at the College Station Hilton. More information will be forthcoming or you may contact Betty Cotton at [blcotton@tamu.edu](mailto:blcotton@tamu.edu) for more information.



## Employee Training and Development

### **Have you seen the 2008-9 AgriLife Course Catalogue?**

The first edition of Texas A&M AgriLife's Professional Development and Learning Course Catalogue was distributed to units/departments last week. If you missed seeing it or would like additional copies, we still have a few left. An electronic copy is available at [http://agtraining.tamu.edu/ProDevel\\_LearnCat\\_Web.pdf](http://agtraining.tamu.edu/ProDevel_LearnCat_Web.pdf)

It is our intent to 'grow' this Catalogue into a document representing professional development and learning opportunities for all employees of Texas A&M AgriLife agencies. Get in touch with us if you have content – or a link to existing contact/resources – you would like to see included in the catalogue. The printed copy will be updated annually; the electronic version will be updated more frequently, as changes occur.

### **2009 Texas A&M AgriLife Conference – Support Staff Symposium**

We are pleased to bring you the schedule and details for the 2009 Support Staff Symposium, January 12 – 16, 2009. Go to <http://aghr.tamu.edu/Symposium-schedule-2009.pdf> to view.

Registration for workshops and events for the Support Staff Symposium will be included with the online Conference registration details this year. Information on how to register will be emailed out within the next few days – maybe by the time you are reading this newsletter!

This year's schedule has changed slightly in response to your suggestions. We are working on a networking luncheon for Thursday, January 15 – just for support staff - we'll keep you updated on that. Of course, the Conference networking luncheon on Tuesday, January 13 is open to all Conference registrants, as per other years.

The schedule for Thursday's workshops has morphed into a one day program with all topics and presenters available to everyone. No more trying to schedule workshop times and topics to suit your Conference agenda! This change is in response to your suggestions – of course, we'll be looking for your feedback!

Gina Konderla and her planning team have been working on the 2009 Support Staff Social. Keep the evening of January 12, 2009 open, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. for a fun evening of socializing and networking with your colleagues and peers from across the state!

### **Save the Date – April 29 & 30, 2009 – New AgriLife Supervisors Conference**

A two day conference for AgriLife's new supervisors, with three years or less of experience is being developed. Local presenters, along with a national speaker – or two – will facilitate workshops on topics related to core supervisor competencies. We hope to make this conference an annual event in varied locations around the state. The 2009 event is being planned for College Station. Details re agenda and registration will be available in late January 2009.

### **Training Calendar**

#### **December 2008 - February 2009**

December 5	Certification Process for Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) & Certified Administrative Professional (CAP)
December 12	Teaching Effectiveness
December 19	Workplace New Year Resolutions
January 9	Project Management
January 16	Time Management

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## Training, continued from page 5

January 23	Diversity
January 30	Minding Your Money
February 6	Overview, Hiring & Recruiting
February 13	Workers Compensation Update
February 20	Performance Evaluation (GreatJobs)
February 27	Effective Writing

If we can assist you further with employee development or learning needs, please let us know. For details on how to access any of these great opportunities, go to <http://agtraining.tamu.edu/TD-News.pdf> or get in touch with Beverley Rose at 979-458-3279 or [barose@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:barose@ag.tamu.edu)

— Beverley Rose

If you're not sure where you are going, you're liable to end up someplace else.

— Robert F. Mager

## Helpful Websites

**A&M System Online** - [tamus.edu/systemwide/](http://tamus.edu/systemwide/)

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

**Dictionary** - [dictionary.reference.com/](http://dictionary.reference.com/)

**Employment Posters** - [hrtoolbox.tamu.edu/](http://hrtoolbox.tamu.edu/)

**GreatJobs** - [greatjobs.tamu.edu](http://greatjobs.tamu.edu) (Applicant site)  
[greatjobs.tamu.edu/hr](http://greatjobs.tamu.edu/hr) (Employee site)

**Food For Thought Archives** -  
[aghr.tamu.edu/food4thought.htm](http://aghr.tamu.edu/food4thought.htm)

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

**Holiday Schedules** - [aghr.tamu.edu/holidays.htm](http://aghr.tamu.edu/holidays.htm)

**Human Resources** - [aghr.tamu.edu/](http://aghr.tamu.edu/)

**Maps** - [www.mapquest.com/](http://www.mapquest.com/)

**New Employee Processing** -  
[aghr.tamu.edu/processing.htm](http://aghr.tamu.edu/processing.htm)

**Postage Rate Calculator** - [postcalc.usps.gov/](http://postcalc.usps.gov/)

**Payroll** - [aghr.tamu.edu/pay.htm](http://aghr.tamu.edu/pay.htm)

**Policies, Procedures & Forms** -  
[aghr.tamu.edu/policies.htm](http://aghr.tamu.edu/policies.htm)

**Position Descriptions—Generic** —  
[aghr.tamu.edu/title-index.htm](http://aghr.tamu.edu/title-index.htm)

**Selective Service Registration Verification** -  
<https://www.sss.gov/RegVer/wfVerification.aspx>

**SSO (HR Connect, TimeTraQ, LeaveTraQ)** -  
<https://sso.tamus.edu>

**Texas A&M AgriLife Directory** -  
[agdirectory.tamu.edu/](http://agdirectory.tamu.edu/)

**Training and Development** -- [agtraining.tamu.edu/](http://agtraining.tamu.edu/)

**Zip Code Lookup** - [zip4.usps.com/zip4/welcome.jsp](http://zip4.usps.com/zip4/welcome.jsp)



## Did you know...?



The “urn of Fate” is part of the Christmas celebrations in many Italian households. It was brought out on Christmas Eve and held a wrapped present for everyone. The mother tries her luck first, then the others in turn. If you get a present with your name on it, you keep it; otherwise, you put it back and try again. Italian children also put out shoes or stockings to receive presents on Epiphany (January 6). Their gift-giver, Befana, rides through the air and slips down the chimney to deliver presents.

In ancient Scandinavia, mistletoe was associated with peace and friendship. That may account for the custom of “kissing beneath the mistletoe”.

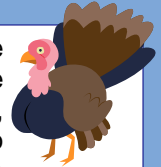


In Lithuania, if Kaledu Senelis, or Grandfather Christmas, appears to children on Christmas Eve to hand out presents, the recipient must perform a song or poem before receiving the gift. The gifts are usually given after the traditional Christmas feast of 12 meatless dishes, which itself does not begin until the first star appears. Each diner at this special meal—the *Kucios*—must at least sample each of the dishes.

The name Santa Claus was derived from Sinterklaas, the Dutch term for the ancient Christian figure of Saint Nicholas who was famous for his generosity to the poor. The Dutch immigrants to America imported their gift-giving saint to New Amsterdam where he merged with his British counterpart, Father Christmas, to become America’s own Santa Claus.



In Victorian England, turkeys were popular for Christmas dinners. Some of the birds were raised in Norfolk, and taken to market in London. To get them to London, the turkeys were supplied with boots made of sacking or leather and were walked to market. The boots protected their feet from the frozen mud of the road.



There once lived a woman so poor, says a Ukrainian folk tale, that she could not afford Christmas decorations for her family. One Christmas morning, she awoke to find that spiders had trimmed her children’s tree with their webs. When the morning sun shone on them, the webs turned to silver and gold. An artificial spider and web are often included in the decorations on Ukrainian Christmas trees.



The poinsettia is a traditional Christmas flower. It originally grew in Mexico. The poinsettia is known as the “Flower of the Holy Night”. It was brought to America by the diplomat Joel Poinsett in 1829. Among other accomplishments, Poinsett also played an important part in founding the Smithsonian Institution.



In Germany, holly is called Christdorn in memory of Christ’s crown of thorns. According to legend, the holly’s branches were woven into a painful crown and placed on Christ’s head while the soldiers mocked him saying, “Hail, King of the Jews.” The holly’s berries used to be white but Christ’s blood left them with a permanent crimson stain.





## Hone Your E-mail Messaging Skills to Improve Communication

by Andrea C. Poe

E-mail is supposed to accelerate office communication—and it does. But the lack of interactivity and real-time communication also introduces problems. Just ask Marnie Puritz Stone. When she was as an account executive at a Dallas-based public relations firm, nearly all intra-office communication was done via e-mail—no matter how sensitive. Her managers may have felt they were being efficient, but she and her colleagues thought the managers were rude. “I think that the callousness with which e-mail delivers news—good or bad—is a poor way to show leadership,” she says. “And it creates a lot of resentment.”

One problem is you can't create tone with e-mail, which increases the potential for misinterpretations. Disagreements that might have been cleared up quickly in a face-to-face conversation often fester when the recipient misinterprets an e-mail message. Then, there's the lack of etiquette and standards, which also leads to communication snafus. “A lot of managers don't even bother to say please or thank you—or even sign their names,” says Samantha Shepard, who works in the graphics department of a New York law firm. “That doesn't make you rush to do what they want.”

The bottom line: there are real consequences of poor e-mail skills. “How you communicate with each other affects productivity, morale and retention,” says Kenneth Pritchard, a human resource and management consultant in Lusby, MD.

So, how do you improve your e-mail messaging skills—and those of your employees? By setting an example for other employees in how you use e-mail, says Carol Beaudu, president of CJB Associates, a Seattle-based HR consulting firm specializing in technological issues. “A few niceties go a long way,” says Perrin James Cunningham, president of Ethologie, a business and protocol consulting firm in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and co-author with Sue Fox of *Business Etiquette for Dummies* (IDG Books Worldwide, 2001). Writing polite e-mail messages, for example, doesn't take much time and “can have a major impact on the workplace and relationships in the office,” says Cunningham.

Second, try following these guidelines from Ethologie when you're composing e-mail messages:

- Write in the same way that you would for any other form of communication. If you wouldn't give lectures that ended with “Do it now,” don't use similar language in e-mails.
- Use correct grammar. Bullet points make a message easy to read, but sentence fragments (sentences that do not contain a subject and a verb) do not. And, it's difficult to understand sentences that lack punctuation or capitalization.
- Use the spell check that comes with your e-mail package.
- Make e-mails self-contained with one subject and one message.
- Unless you're engaged in an ongoing conversation, include a greeting/and or closing, such as, “Hi, Charlene,” or “Best wishes, Bob.”

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## Email Skills, cont'd. from page 8

- Read messages a couple of times for clarity and tone before hitting the “send” button.
- Change the original subject line if you need to forward a long chain of e-mail to avoid a subject line such as, “FW: FW: RE: FW: RE: Our Meeting.”

It's also important to be aware of the management considerations of e-mail use. For instance, the sheer volume of e-mail messages—including mass e-mails that are of little or no concern to the recipients—causes much more frustration among workers than is necessary. Managers shouldn't contribute to the heavy load. “Managers, like everyone else, have to be respectful of other people's time,” says Cunningham. Try the following tips to help “manage” your incoming and outgoing e-mail volume:

- Don't use your in-box as a catchall folder. Read items once, then answer immediately, delete or move to a project-specific folder.
- Agree on company acronyms for subject lines, such as AR for action required or MFR for monthly financial report.
- Send group mail sparingly—use only when useful to *all* recipients. Use “reply all” and “cc” with caution.
- Ask to be removed from distribution lists you do not need to be on.
- Use the “out of office” feature and voice mail message to alert people when you are traveling.
- Before sending an attachment in a particular format, make sure the recipient can open it.
- Avoid sending attachments and graphics to people on the road, unless absolutely necessary. Such attachments can be slow to download. Post large attachments (more than 5 MG) on a web page instead.
- Be specific and helpful. If you send a 30-page attachment, point out critical information on certain pages.
- Respond to your messages as quickly as possible, preferable by the end of the same day.

Then, there's the question of when and when not to rely on e-mail. According to Ethologie, the following do's and don't should help you determine when e-mail is appropriate.

Do use e-mail to:

- Set up meetings and prepare attendees. “Thank you for making time to attend Wednesday's board meeting. Before we meet, please review the attached articles about attention deficit disorder in mice and be ready to discuss them.”
- Recap spoken conversations. “As we discussed this morning, Jane Smith of ABC Corp. will supply 75 seat cushions for the foot ball game next Saturday.”
- Transmit regularly scheduled news feeds, reports, etc.

[Continued on page 10, see “Email Skills.”](#)



## Email Skills, cont'd. from page 9

- Distribute exactly the same information to multiple recipients.
- Lambaste a colleague and then copy others on the message. That's tantamount to chewing out someone in front of a room full of his/her peers. Disagreements or discipline are best handled in person, or at least, over the phone.
- To write something you wouldn't want published in the newspaper. Even if you send it to someone you trust, e-mail with sensitive, mean or potentially embarrassing information has a way of being forwarded beyond your original audience.
- Don't e-mail someone who sits across the aisle from you unless you're recapping a meeting. If you have a question for discussion, try the old-fashioned approach of speaking to each other.
- Send jokes or forward chain letters.
- Respond to angry colleagues. Pick up the phone or walk in to their office.

Remember, while e-mail is a fast, easy and convenient communication tool, it's not always the best choice. Certain kinds of information such as layoffs and firings should be off limits to e-mails. Even Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, whose 13 board members are scattered throughout North America, turn to the telephone when discussing sensitive matters. "When there are nuances that need to be expressed, and when tone is important, we handle things by conference call because something gets lost on e-mail," explains Coralee Whitcomb, president of the group.

*Andrea C. Poe is a freelance writer based in Easton, MD, who specializes in human resource and management issues.*

Age is a quality of mind.  
If you have left your dreams behind,  
If hope is cold,  
If you no longer look ahead,  
If your ambition's fires are dead—Then you are old.  
— Unknown



**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**



Veselé vánoce a šťastný nový rok

Me Nomuni na marau ni siga ni sucu dei na yabaki vou

Frohe/Fröhliche Weihnachten

Mele Kalikimaka me ka Hau oli Makahiki Hou

Selamat Hari Natal dan Tahun Baru

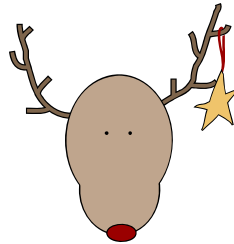
Buon Natale e felice anno nuovo

A Blithe Yule an a Guid New Year



God jul och gott nytt år

wan Christmas sawatdii pimaï)



¡Feliz Navidad y próspero año nuevo!

สุขสันต์วันคริสต์มาส และสวัสดีปีใหม่ (souksaan

