



FRONTLINE

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- Exciting Policy Changes Coming
- A day in the life of a TSC manager
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"Many people are facing plights that we cannot even imagine and they call SSA or come to our offices for assistance."
Eric Williamson,
New England Region

National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc.

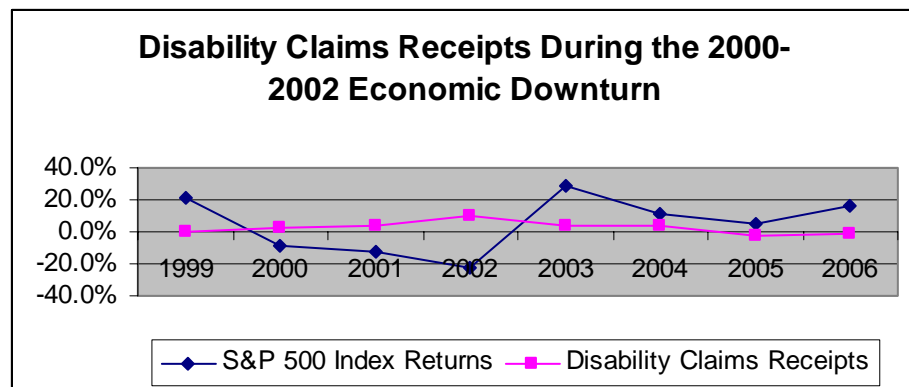
SSA-Ray of Hope in Gloomy Economic Times

by Eric Williamson, Boston Region

"It is with great satisfaction that I have signed into law the Social Security Amendments of 1961. They represent an additional step toward eliminating many of the hardships resulting from old-age, disability, or the death of the family wage earner. . . . A Nation's strength lies in the well being of its people. The Social Security program plays an important part in providing for families, children, and older persons in time of stress, but it cannot remain static. Changes in our population, in our working habits, and in our standard of living require constant revision." John Fitzgerald Kennedy, June 30, 1961

These words serve as a reminder that the Social Security Administration plays a vital role in assisting people, especially through times of economic downturn. Whether the economic struggles we are currently experiencing are defined as a recession or not, we are very fortunate to be employed by an agency whose purpose is to provide benefits to those who desperately need them in these harsh times. Today, we are not only experiencing an increase in retirement claims due to the Baby Boomers, but we are also experiencing an increase in workloads related to the poor economy. As a result of this historic economic hardship, SSA Field Offices and TSCs have been inundated with calls. Over 44 and a half million people visited Field Offices across the nation in 2008 which is a 3.1% increase over 2007. These rising workloads are placing significant stress on SSA's ability to meet the challenges it faces in serving the public on a daily basis.

The inception of Social Security was driven by the Great Depression in 1929. During this time period, the stock market lost approximately \$26 billion of wealth, unemployment exceeded 25% and about 10,000 banks failed. Wages paid to workers declined from \$50 billion in 1929 to only \$30 billion in 1932. History shows that each time there has been an economic downturn we have experienced an increase in disability claims. For example: 2000-2002 was the most recent period where the stock market experienced a significant decline. Stock market indicators are one way to identify poor economic periods and are often the first indicators. Using returns for the S&P 500 Index as a market indicator, we can see from the chart shown below that disability claims increased when the market declined during this period.



(Continued on page 2)

Ray of Hope continued

Fast forward to the hardships of today: Startling official statistics show that as a new economic recession confronts the United States, a record number of Americans will shortly be depending on food stamps just to feed themselves and their families.

"Dismal projections by the Congressional Budget Office in Washington suggest that in the fiscal year starting in October (2008), 28 million people in the US will be using government food stamps to buy essential groceries, the highest level since the food assistance program was introduced in the 1960s. The increase – from 26.5 million in 2007 – is due partly to recent efforts to increase public awareness of the program and also a switch from paper coupons to electronic debit cards. But above all it is the pressures being exerted on ordinary Americans by an economy that is suddenly beset by troubles. Housing foreclosures, accelerating jobs losses and fast-rising prices all add to the squeeze," The Independent World.

Many people are facing plights that we cannot even imagine and they call SSA or come to our offices for assistance. During the first 3 months of fiscal year 2009, we have experienced a 15% increase in retirement claims compared to the same time period in fiscal year 2008. Although we have anticipated some of the increase due to the baby boomers, much of the increase is also due to the poor economy as disability claims alone have increased about 7% and hearing requests are up over 11%. Layoffs tend to push people with less serious impairments into SSA offices to file for disability benefits as a source of income when jobs are difficult to find. With the agency already experiencing criticism over our disability backlogs and the length of time it takes to decide a disability claim, increases in these claims being filed will only exacerbate the problem.

In the Meriden, CT Social Security Office, they are experiencing this phenomenon first hand. District Manager, Paul Gilfillan stated: "In Meriden, we have seen the effects of the economic downturn. Our most recent comparison of initial retirement and disability claims shows an increase in 2008 versus 2007 of over 10%. Folks that are somewhat disabled and marginally employable are finding it more difficult to get work. This increases their chances of filing for disability benefits, not because they are necessarily severely disabled, but because the jobs that they can perform are no longer there. We also have seen a change in attitudes and stress levels of our clients. Although this is anecdotal--no measurements of client behavior or attitudes are recorded, we see more requests for emergency payments, and more need for faster release of underpayments due to eviction or foreclosures."

As representatives of the Social Security Administration, we are the ray of hope in a gloomy economic time. It is good to know that with all of the uncertainty there is in the world; people can still come to Social Security for some kind of assistance. Although we are not a bailout plan, we will continue to serve the public as best as we can, as was originally intended.

"We can never insure one hundred percent of the population against one hundred percent of the hazards and vicissitudes of life, but we have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against poverty-ridden old age." Franklin D. Roosevelt on signing the Social Security Act, August 14, 1935.



NCSSMA Membership Report:

3420 Total Members

**89% of all field office
District Managers**

**81% of all TSC
Managers**

**68% of field office
Operations
Supervisors**

**59% TSC Operations
Supervisors**

**Regional
Association with the
highest membership
percentage of all
management
positions: NYRMS**

FrontLine is Produced by the Communications Committee

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President's Corner

Looking Forward, Challenges We Will Meet!

By Greg Heineman, NCSSMA President



“NCSSMA will continue its advocacy for increased funding for Social Security in the year ahead.”

“NCSSMA will continue to provide agency leaders with streamlining ideas and positive suggestions to improve our service.”

Social Security is the most successful domestic program in the history of the United States Government. It is successful because of the hard work and dedication of Social Security employees, management and leadership throughout the 72 years of the program's existence. It has been said that sometimes, we who work at Social Security are our own worst enemies, because in spite of the budget challenges, increasing responsibilities, and multitude of people we serve, we find a way to meet and exceed our own expectations, as well as the expectations of Congress and the Executive Branch no matter how large the task.

In the past few years, this can do attitude has been put to the test, due to increasing backlogs in our disability programs, new workloads from the Medicare Modernization Act, the expansion of employer verification activities such as E-Verify, and the increased demand for services due to the aging of the Baby Boom generation. The downturn in our economy in 2008 has further increased filings for all of our benefit programs, especially disability and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Given these challenges, Social Security employees once again stepped up and accomplished a 2.72% increase in productivity. This was absolutely necessary to keep our heads above water.

The good news is that due in large part to the efforts of NCSSMA and other advocacy groups, Congress and the Administration have taken notice of our stressed situation. President Bush recommended increases in the Social Security Budget each year. Last year, Congress appropriated an amount in excess of the President's Budget for the first time in 16 years! While we are still waiting for final word on our FY 2009 appropriation, all indications point to another positive outcome for our budget. President-elect Obama has also indicated

the need for additional staffing and support for Social Security to meet our responsibilities to the American public.

NCSSMA will continue its advocacy for increased funding for Social Security in the year ahead. We are supportive of additional funding for a new National Computer Center, which is necessary to ensure our ability to meet our online and conventional service demands for the next generation. We continue to push for additional funding to work SSI redeterminations and Continuing Disability Reviews, both of which save the government more than \$10 for every \$1 spent. We also support additional funding to advance our online services, improve field office telephone service, reduce our hearing backlogs and serve the Baby Boomer generation. But as Social Security managers, we know that whatever amount of funding we receive will not meet all of our needs. As Social Security managers, we continue to look for innovative ways to provide service more efficiently, while maintaining the compassionate human touch we have always provided. NCSSMA will continue to provide agency leaders with streamlining ideas and positive suggestions to improve our service. We are aware that it will not be easy, but as Social Security managers, we know that we will succeed.

As NCSSMA members, there are many ways you can participate in our efforts, be it through our grassroots efforts, serving on a comment committee, or just simply communicating your ideas and concerns to your regional and national leadership. This era of challenge also comes with great opportunities to make a real difference for Social Security into the future. Please join us in these efforts. You'll make a difference, and you'll thank yourself that you did!



<http://geico.com/index.ph>



Ready, Set, Change by Tim Crews, Philadelphia Region

Today we find ourselves with a growing customer base that desires to conduct business electronically. SSA has taken a quantum leap forward by establishing procedures that allow individuals to authenticate themselves and conduct business using online services. With workloads continuing to grow, SSA has to find ways to meet the demand. Technological advancements alone are not enough. Simplifying and streamlining policy must go hand in hand with these advancements if we are to succeed. It's a sure bet that SSA policy will continue to evolve to meet the needs of our customers.

Consider these changes and issues under development:

- **SSI Automated Telephone Wage Reporting (SSIATWR)** – Became available nationally in July 2008 offering an easy to use authentication process to verify the identity of the caller and post reported wages directly to the SSI record.
- **Third Party Protective Filing** – In September 2008, third parties were allowed to begin protecting the filing date for others.
- **Month of Election** – In September 2008, month of election choices are based solely on the claimant's personal decision.
- **Quick, Simple, Safe, SSNs** – Some initiatives under development include:
 - Expanding the Enumeration at Entry process
 - Utilizing signature proxy
 - Creating a data exchange with the Department of Homeland Security to automatically issue some cards
 - Creating an automated online replacement card process for U.S. citizens
 - Piloting the use of video conferencing equipment in the Denver Region to issue no-change replacement cards for U.S. Citizens with North Dakota driver's licenses.
- **Disability Direct** – Simplifying the Internet product available to customers for filing their own disability claims by:
 - Collecting information once and re-using it throughout the application
 - Combining the application and the disability report into a seamless process
 - Collecting certain information only when it is material to the claim
 - Simplifying questions where appropriate
- **Authorized Representative Access to the Electronic Folder** – SSA is piloting a process that gives nine authorized representatives access to a copy of their client's hearings-level electronic disability folders through the Internet. This is being developed as part of a broader suite of services intended to fully automate the claimant representation process.
- **Benefit Offset National Demonstration (BOND)** – T2 disability beneficiaries that return to work and earn above the SGA level after the end of their trial work period, lose their entire cash benefit under current policy. SSA will be testing a change that will reduce cash benefits \$1 for every \$2 in earnings above the SGA level. Recruitment of 90,000 beneficiaries is expected to begin in the first part of calendar year 2009.

2009 looks to be a promising year for changes that will enable us to provide better service to the public!



We welcome your letters, stories, comments, editorials or suggestions for future articles.

Send your feedback to:
Bethany.Paradis@ssa.gov



Profiles Page Featuring James A. Winn

By Virginia Schroder, New York Region and Jewell Colbert, Kansas City Region

Welcome to our series of ongoing interviews designed to enable our membership and other interested readers to get acquainted with members of the executive staff in Central Office. In this edition, Communications Committee members Virginia Schroder and Jewell Colbert sat down with Jim Winn, the newly-appointed Chief of Staff to the Commissioner.

Mr. Winn, what are the responsibilities of the Chief of Staff position?

I report directly to the Commissioner of Social Security and advise him on the array of issues confronting our agency. I review nearly all of the material that requires the Commissioner's attention. I also serve as liaison with the White House, Congress, and other agencies including OMB, HHS, OPM, and DHS.

Although I've only been in this job for a few weeks and will continue to adapt to my new role, I had previously served as the Deputy Chief of Staff. I hope that job prepared me well to be an effective Chief of Staff. One thing I know I need to do is be the lead in promoting the Commissioner's initiatives including driving down the disability hearings backlog and preventing its recurrence, improving training for our employees, preparing for succession, using IT to modernize, and working with Congress to provide technical assistance that shapes legislation. I recognize that components do the actual work; my job is to be sure to communicate the Commissioner's message and vision to all components so that they are on track and our efforts are coordinated. The Commissioner is committed to transparency, and I support that value.

What is the biggest challenge you face in your position?

As I said, just before becoming the Chief of Staff, I was the Deputy Chief of Staff under David Foster. Keeping up with David's legacy is going to be a challenge. David has done an excellent job promoting the Commissioner's message. At the Commissioner's direction, he, along with other executives, worked hard to map out the future direction of the agency in the strategic plan.

What do you see as the biggest challenge facing SSA?

The biggest challenge has been and will remain reducing the disability hearings backlogs. During the Commissioner's confirmation hearing, the Senate made it very clear that this was where he needed to focus his attention. We have presented Congress with our plan to work down and ultimately eliminate the backlog.

Our challenges, though, aren't limited to the hearing process. We know that our field offices are stretched and are finding it difficult to provide the high level of service which the public deserves and has come to expect. In May, Linda McMahon testified before the Senate Finance Committee and did a great job explaining the pressure field offices are under. GAO reviewed our field offices and referred to our situation as "fragile."

We know we need to help our current employees and to hire additional staff, but given the amount of work coming our way, we have to look for other support, too. We really need to look to IT to help us with our challenges. We need to take advantage of the Internet. We will have 80 million baby boomers coming onto our rolls over the next 20 years or so, and we need to use all of our resources, human and IT, as efficiently as possible to uphold our proud tradition of great public service.

The Commissioner has laid out a comprehensive Agency Strategic Plan spanning the next 5 years. How do you think the current economic crisis will impact the implementation of those initiatives? What impact do you expect it to have on the day to day operations and what is the agency doing to prepare for it?

Congress and OMB have our strategic plan, and both know the initiatives in it. The plan covers five years, and we are moving ahead to accomplish our goals. We may need to make adjustments—in the event we receive either reduced or increased funding—but that's the nature of strategic planning. Congress is aware of our challenges, and we have bipartisan support within both chambers. The President's FY 2009 Budget requests a 6% increase over FY 2008. The House Labor HHS Subcommittee mark-up was \$100 million above the President's Budget, and the full Senate Finance Committee mark-up was \$50 million above. That bodes well for us. Nevertheless, nothing is certain.

(Continued on page 6)



The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program™

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James Winn continued

Considerable political party shifts were seen in both the House and Senate in the recent fall elections. Do you think this will impact the day to day operations of Social Security in any way? If so, how?

Part of the purpose of making our agency independent was to take it out of the political arena to allow it to operate without being affected by political changes. And, in fact, Congress has been giving us strong bipartisan support to do what is needed to fulfill our mission.

The agency is trying to pursue program simplification which may require legislation. How successful do you think SSA will be in this political environment?

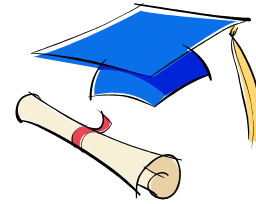
Again, I would like to emphasize the support we have from both sides of the aisle. In May 2008, Senator Grassley said that our policies, systems, and procedures reflected how complicated our programs have become. He noted that it takes longer to train a field office employee than it does for NASA to train an astronaut. Similarly, Senator Baucus said that we needed to make some processes more efficient and do more over the Internet. I think these statements by two key Senators show that they understand the need to simplify our programs.

What impact do you think the Obama administration will have on the agency? Will we return to "reinventing government" days of delaying and partnership?

Every administration has the laudable goal of making Government accountable and results oriented. This administration will likely have a similar plan, but I can't predict what it might be. If there are significant changes based on the new administration's plans, our agency will adapt and deal with them. We have a long history of serving the public well, and we are good at measuring what we do. Social Security is the most successful domestic agency in the history of the United States primarily because our employees work hard every day and do a great job. I'm sure they'll continue to maintain that fine tradition.

How likely is some legislation aimed at Social Security reform/solvency over the next 4 years?

I believe Congress and the new administration will start with stimulus packages and then turn to health care. We may see discussion of solvency over the next four years. Currently the Department of Treasury is the lead agency on solvency; our role is to provide technical assistance about the effects of different policies. We do not lead the policy discussion.



NYRMS Awards Scholarships

For the last three years the New York Region Management Society (NYRMS) has sponsored a member based scholarship program in memory of their Past President, Stephen DeLisle. This merit based scholarship is administered by the Federal Employee Education and Assistance (FEEA) Fund. Applicants must be a dependent child of an NYRMS member, and a full-time student enrolled, or planning to enroll, in an accredited post secondary school in a course of study that will lead to a two-year or four-year degree. They must have good grades and be involved in community service. Winners of the 2008 NYRMS Stephen DeLisle Memorial Scholarship were Amanda Garcia, daughter of Denise Rodriguez, Assistant District Manager, East Village, NY and Elizabeth Zwierzynski, daughter of Mike Zwierzynski, District Manager, Somerville, NJ. Each student received \$500.

Congratulations, Amanda and Elizabeth!

This year the NYRMS will again award two merit based scholarships in the amount of \$500. These scholarships will be for the 2009 - 2010 school year. Contact your NYRMS Area representatives for information on how to apply.

Help others get ahead.

You will always stand taller with someone else on your shoulders.

~Bob Moawad~

Disclaimer

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VoIP: What does it mean (and why should I care)?

By Brian Simpson, Atlanta Region



According to the [FCC](#), "Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a technology that allows you to make voice calls

using a broadband internet connection instead of a regular [analog] phone line."

SSA's execution of the VoIP rollout is part of the agency's Telephone System Replacement Program (TSRP). According to Office of Telephone Services Associate Commissioner Donnell Adams, the TSRP is a ten-year project with a price tag of roughly \$267 million for the vendor [a team led by Nortel Government Solutions] plus another \$295 million for government-furnished equipment, for a grand total of approximately \$562 million. Adams says, "Besides providing centralized management, it will offer callers unified messaging and interactive voice response capabilities instead of the confusing hodgepodge of different systems and features currently in place."

A July 2007 [press release on NortelGov.com](#) states that, "moving to a converged voice and data network will enable SSA to expand and improve service levels, consolidate monthly recurring public network service costs and decrease operating and maintenance costs while establishing a platform to support future applications and services."

Installation details

The basic process involves installation of a second T1 line (4-5 months out), installation of a second switch on your server, a site survey with Nortel (60 days out) and installation of 4 analog lines for 911 and 411 access (40 days

out). The actual training and VoIP equipment installation generally takes one week, with the VoIP telephone installation and training occurring during the first few days (training usually takes two and a half hours for up to 15 employees at a time), phone lines being switched on Wednesday, and Nortel's onsite review and support taking place during the final two days. Nortel is supposed to provide additional administrative and MI training to management and remove your old equipment once it has been held for 30 days. By the way, Nortel provides five wireless headsets. The purchase of additional wireless headsets is considered an IT purchase and must be approved by your RO.

What are SSA managers saying about VoIP?

I asked some "VoIP veterans" about their frontline experiences (I won't name any names here):

What are the advantages of VoIP over our "old" systems?

"Callers don't get a busy signal (they sit in the queue and listen to information about our website and have options to hear about our hours and location)."

"Managers can monitor the phones and the office's resources/people to maximize public service."

"All of our incoming lines are now 800 numbers, which is a benefit for members of the public who used to have to pay a toll to call us."

"The actual telephones are much nicer ... they have small screens that provide the date and time, caller ID and other features such as the ability

to "busy out" your phone when you are not ready to take a call."

"We can change our office's message from home (for example, to show that we are closed due to inclement weather)."

"One cool feature is the "Call Trace" button. If a call becomes threatening, we can push the button and the server will record all the information about the call, the originating phone number, the receiving phone number and the conversation (from the beginning of the call)."



What were your VoIP transition experiences like?

"Choosing the best call flow for your office is a challenge. Words of wisdom: Don't just agree to something similar to what you already have; think outside of the box."

"You only get 1 week to submit your corrections to the call flow meeting. The meeting is an oral discussion. You are not provided any written copies of what you are agreeing to until they send you the call flow chart for review. Fortunately we had copious detailed notes of our meeting."

"One of the issues I faced was that I did not understand all the terminology or know what some of the elements on the VoIP data sheets represented."

(Continued on page 8)

VoIP continued

"The training to the staff was discombobulated, disorganized, confusing and useless. All Nortel reps were gone by Wednesday. They promised several days of onsite support, but there was ZERO support. None of our headsets worked, voicemail did not work, calls were dropped and we had to constantly unplug phones in order to 'reboot' them to get them to work."

What do you know now that you wish you had known before the installation process?

"I wish I had RESEARCHED!! Find out what the VoIP is capable of doing so you can make good decisions about what you want for your office."

"I wish I had understood the programming and installation process better beforehand. Then I might have thought more about some of the choices that I made."



What is your take on the Management Information (MI) that VoIP provides?

"I LOVE the MI! We can see which employees are logged on and answering calls and which days (or time of day) that we receive the most/least calls. We can see how many calls the employees have answered, how long the calls lasted and how long members of the public were left on hold. We can see statistics per call, per employee or per unit. I can see how long they were in "not ready" status, which helps me to monitor lunches and breaks."

"We had a follow-up visit to cover the available reports and data, but unfortunately the Nortel rep did not know about all the reports."

"Our experience involved a trainer who was here twice, knew nothing about the MI and did not know how to get our management team access to the website. We are still waiting for a 3rd round of follow-up training because what we received was so poor."

"The MI will show how many calls were abandoned (someone hung up while in queue before getting to an agent). It also shows 'returned to queue,' where the agent hears the phone ringing and hits 'not ready,' causing the call to go back into the queue."

What are some possible future enhancements for field offices?

"Field offices may be able to link into the automated services that are currently offered on our 800 number, allowing some changes to be processed without human intervention!"

"Calls can be rerouted from one office to another or to the TSC should the need arise."

Be prepared

It sounds like the training has been hit-or-miss, so go ahead and check out the installation guide, VOD broadcast and other materials available on the OTS Intranet site <http://eis.ba.ssa.gov/ots/tsrp/index.html>. After doing your homework, talk to your Regional Office support staff to be sure that you fully understand your current call flow patterns and the possibilities that you will have with the new system, so that you can figure out what will work best in your office.

Once VoIP is in place for the entire agency and we all get the hang of how it works, we'll probably wonder how we ever did without it. However, as with any technology shift at SSA, a learning curve will be a natural part of the transition (and will probably be the most frustrating part for you and your employees). We certainly need to have more staff to answer the phones and while VoIP will not eliminate that need; it certainly looks like it will put us on the right track.

You Made a Difference!

SSA employees were highlighted in FEEA's "Friends and Volunteers Newsletter" for "being the most community-minded" in the federal community. The "chain of giving" that began with our stories on Gustav and Ike victims in our October edition of *FrontLine* led to total donations of \$18,810.00. FEEA provided over \$29,000.00 in assistance to SSA employees and their families.

You can read the entire story at:
http://www.feea.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=342&Itemid=184

Thank you for your generosity.

Did you know that 44,585,358 people visited Social Security field offices in 2008?

The Teleservice Connection by Barb Perian, TSC Representative

2009! I can hardly believe it. A new year and another Peak Period in the TSCs. Actually, we are in the midst of our peak season. This year things heated up in December with many calls about Medicare premium changes due to IRMAA (Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount) and filing for retirement and disability benefits. We may see a shift from the usual peak months of January through March to December

through February. The Office of Telephone Services predicts call volumes based on many criteria such as call history, current calls received and SSA mailings and workloads. During our Peak Season we typically stop all activities, including training, to concentrate all of our efforts on answering calls. In December, Call Forward on Busy was stopped so that 800 number agents could devote their time to calls received on the 800 number network. We

strive to balance performance levels throughout the day, month and year in order to provide the best possible 800 number service. The busiest time of day is typically between 6:30 to 9:00 PM Eastern.

In this issue Denise Hachicho talks more about our Peak Period in "A Day in the Life of a TSC Manager."

Happy New Year!



'Whether in the TSC or another component of SSA, it is the dedication of our employees working together with management that gets the job done each day!'

Denise Hachicho, NY Region TSC Manager



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TSC MANAGER

By Denise Hachicho, New York Region

I have been a TSC Manager for over 10 years now and worked in two different TSCs in the New York Region. I am currently the manager of a "small" TSC with a staff of 32 people. The one thing I can say is that generally there is no such thing as a typical day!

As I approach my office, I greet the staff and say "Good Morning" to Joanne, my administrative assistant. She is always at work bright and early. I turn on my computer, sign on to my phone, check for messages, and get the National 800 Number Network (N8NN) Management Information (MI) reports screen running. Now it is time to check the attendance calendar and the daily statistics from the prior day.

Having adequate coverage in each TSC is critical to every TSC

Manager. We have a National TSC leave policy that uses historical data and expected traffic to the N8NN to determine a service level for each day throughout the year. There are 4 levels. Levels 1 and 2 are busier and only 10% of requested leave, excluding sick leave, is permissible. For levels 3 and 4, 15% is allowed. Today is a Monday, which is generally a Level 1 or 2 day so only 10% can be approved. How many do I have on the calendar? How many have called in sick? Were there any emergency leave requests? Throughout the day my supervisors keep me informed and check the leave calendar, which is always on my desk. Managing leave in accordance with the TSC leave policy and meeting our 60% plug-in goal requires constant management attention. Trying to balance employee needs with agency service level goals is not always easy (especially around holidays and during school vacation times when parents want to be off to be with their

children). I consider myself fortunate that my staff, although not happy when they are advised we cannot grant their annual leave request, have grasped this concept and for the most part, understand and work with their supervisors. They understand the importance of planning ahead and that requesting leave in advance will increase their chances of getting it approved.

I have a great staff that prides themselves in providing high quality service to the public. They understand that the assistance they provide their callers is important. They have the opportunity as the first point of contact for many callers to SSA to make a favorable impression. As needed, I observe them seeking assistance from their technical assistants. They check to make sure they are properly responding because they want to provide world-class service.

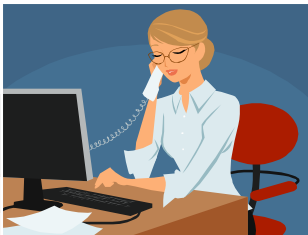
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TSC Manager continued



Management controls and monitors our plug-in percentage daily with a plug-in tracker. This is reviewed each morning and sent to the TSC Director. My office has consistently met our 60% goal and usually exceeds it. This is the one constant theme of my day and the only thing I do each day in a “typical day” as a TSC Manager. Even if I do not get to it as planned first thing in the morning, it will be reviewed before I leave the office for the day. Regardless of what else is on my agenda, attendance and the plug-in tracker are a priority requiring daily review.

What other items require my attention? Let’s see; we received some draft TSCOG transmittals for review and comment. There are a few upcoming conference calls to annotate on my calendar. Are any required actions needed for the staff due to the daily Policy Net and NY Region messages? Were the WMI (Workload Management Information) and CIRP (Comprehensive Integrity Review Process) listings reviewed? Did my supervisors complete the mandatory 3 service observations for each TSR last month? Let me take a look at the database and see what error trends we are experiencing. Do we need any refresher training? I see the e-mail messages from the office box have been forwarded and initiated by my management team. Well, only 154 in my box to review!



Normally, we receive three one-hour training periods per month to meet

with our staff to review operational issues, discuss reminders, or provide refresher training. These hours are predetermined by CO so we need to look at the national calendar to see what time slots have been allocated to us and plan ahead as to what we need to cover during those time slots. Each year our peak season is January through March. Since this is generally the busiest time for our agents, it is also very challenging for management because we are not given **any** planned offnet training time.

Traffic to the 800# continues to increase every year. Our handle time continues to increase and ways to improve service are constantly being addressed by the Network Contact Operations Team in the Office of Telephone Services. TSC managers have monthly conference calls and are consistently discussing ways to improve service on the National 800# Network. Currently, our average speed of answer is 421 seconds year to date. The National goal is 330 seconds and we work hard to reach that goal.

Most TSC Managers I have spoken to across the country have the same issues and complaints. Leave problems seem to be higher in the TSCs and require management attention on a regular basis, possibly because we have more restrictive leave policies than other components. In addition, the amount of grievances, EEO issues, leave problems, and conduct-related problems vary throughout TSCs, but are generally higher than field offices experience. To me, the biggest challenges for a TSC Manager are trying to schedule training for the staff, meeting our service level goals, and addressing individual performance issues and LMR issues.

TSCs differ from one another just like field offices do, presenting managers with different challenges.

In addition, to our IWS-LAN computer, we have a monitor that provides minute-to-minute status of what our agents are doing throughout the day. Are they signed on and available? We monitor their activities and look at hold time frames and other states of their calls. Throughout the day, reminders about returning to their caller “on hold” are sent via instant message. We do not expect a caller to be “on hold” for more than a few minutes without the agent getting back to them.

Recently, some of my staff has mentioned that the supervisors seem to only emphasize what they do wrong. Unfortunately, to meet our service level goals, we tend to discuss and address the negatives, such as low plug-in time, missing in action periods (other than lunch or break), or talking to co-workers. Although we do mention good plug-in time or the occasional exceptional call someone handled, this happens much less often. Employees would like to hear “nice job” more often and an occasional “thank you” when they do a good job. It is my New Year’s resolution to work with my management team to better balance our discussions to include more positive feedback. This is one way we can value and thank our employees for the job they do each day. Whether in the TSC or another component of SSA, it is the dedication of our employees working together with management that gets the job done each day!





Ask Mary!

Mary Glenn-Croft has offered to answer questions about anything within the jurisdiction of the

Office of Budget, Finance and Management. Please send your questions to Bethany.Paradis@ssa.gov. The Communications Committee will select one or two questions to be featured in our next edition.

E2 Solutions Replaces Travel Manager

Mary, why are we changing travel systems?

The Federal Travel Regulation mandates that all Federal agencies select one of three E-Gov Travel vendors to provide their travel services. SSA evaluated the travel systems and services provided by three vendors. A task order was awarded to CWTSatoTravel which provides a document preparation and approval system called E2 Solutions.

What are the benefits of this new program?

Since E2 is a web-based service, users will have 24-hour access. E2 is integrated with GetThere, the online booking engine used by SSA to make travel reservations for air, hotel, and rental cars. This integration means that users can make reservations in E2 as they create their travel documents.

How will we be trained on E2 Solutions?

BFM is providing training through onsite Regional train-the-trainer classroom sessions, Headquarters classroom sessions, Video-On-Demand, and one-on-one training using Microsoft NetMeeting. After receiving this training, the Regions are using various training methods to train the staff in their field offices.

Since managers will need to check their budget reports against travel records, why are we switching now rather than the end of the budget year?

There are two reasons why we are not implementing E-Gov Travel at the end of the budget year. The Office of Management and Budget has given us a mandate to implement E-Gov Travel as soon as possible after an

award of a task order. Based on past implementations, it has been our experience that we should migrate to a new administrative system using a phased approach. Secondly, the end of the fiscal year creates extreme demands on budget components and we do not want to add any additional burden to their workloads. Managers will still be able to check their budget reports against the travel records during the phased implementation process, regardless of which travel system they are using.

Thank you for your questions. I look forward to answering more of your BFM questions, so keep them coming!

Send any questions you would like Mary to answer for our next edition to Bethany.Paradis@ssa.gov.

Coming Attractions—How You Can Help

We are hoping to interview either Dr. Stephen Patrick from the Office of Training or David Foster who is now the Deputy Commissioner for ODAR for our next edition. What would you like to know about training or ODAR? Please send us any questions that you for either of these gentleman and we'll see what we can find out.

Got an interesting hobby or sideline that you would be willing to share? Know any SSA management member who does? *FrontLine* would like to spotlight some of our members and share their interests. Contact any member of the Communications Committee or Bethany Paradis. We would love to hear from you!

For more information about NCSSMA visit our web page at www.NCSSMA.org

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