

Respectful Workplace Committee of the  
Classified Staff Advisory Council  
Presentation to CEAC at its December 13, 2007 Meeting

The Respectful Workplace Committee would like to thank CEAC for this opportunity to address its meeting. The mission of the Respectful Workplace Committee is to foster a positive workplace environment where Classified Staff are acknowledged and recognized for their contribution to Cooperative Extension.

The Respectful Workplace Committee conducted a survey to help define the committee's priorities. The survey was sent to a classified staff email list that contained slightly more than 90 names. We got feedback from 16 people. In addition to the initial send-out of the survey, there were two follow-up emails to encourage responses.

The survey was conducted to gauge the sentiments of classified staff towards our workplaces and to help define the Committee's priorities. Respondents were asked to indicate their attitudes, both positive and negative, about their workplace, and give three examples in each case. Finally, they were asked to suggest how the Respectful Workplace Committee could help them create a more positive work environment.

The survey results were categorized according to how they match up with the four elements and eight values that build trust within an organization. This was done in an effort to tie the results with one aspect of the effort to instill a Responsibility Based Culture in Cooperative Extension. The four elements of trust are Congruence, Openness, Acceptance, and Reliability.

We found that a large number of the positive and negative examples provided by the respondents centered on the element of Acceptance and its two associated values of Respect and Recognition.

Positive examples of Respect included remarks such as:

- My opinion is valued!
- I seldom feel that I am being “talked down to” by anyone in the organization.
- We are respectful and polite.
- Input offered that is beyond strict scope of position is respectfully accepted.

Positive examples of Recognition included:

- My bosses are positive and use appreciation and positive reinforcement for many tasks that I complete.
- I am personally acknowledged for my contributions by my supervisor.
- Appreciation of assistance and effort is expressed.

While there was considerable positive emphasis on Acceptance, there was also considerable negative emphasis. Negative remarks included:

- Overall, there exists a culture in Cooperative Extension that looks down on classified staff.
- Hierarchy issues still exist. Hate being referred to as someone’s support person – as though a supervisor/boss has taken claim on a person.
- Civil Service Job title and compensation should better reflect professional duties.
- Classified staff are not recognized for their positive contributions that benefit their unit and/or Cooperative Extension. Many treat classified staff poorly.

Some positive comments from the other three elements of trust included:

- I am trusted enough to be given responsibilities that can only enhance and enrich my career with Extension.
- We are being encouraged to join groups, and “take the lead” in facilitating meetings or carrying out an idea or project.
- People tend to give positive feedback for jobs well done.
- Flexibility in work schedules is tolerated. (There were a considerable number of comments echoing this sentiment.)

Some negative responses from the other three elements of trust included:

- The workplace is more of a social club for some than a work place.
- A number of comments focused on the physical aspect of the workplace – ventilation, space, too hot, noise levels.

Because of the strong emphasis based on the number of responses centering on the element of Acceptance and its associated values of Respect and Recognition, the Committee members thought it best to place the bulk of its effort here. While not minimizing the importance of responses that fell into the other categories, the Committee members believe that Acceptance is a good place to start.

Suggestions from respondents for further action that fell along this line of thinking included:

- I'm very fortunate to be working with people who are respectful and value contributions. Having said that, it doesn't just happen. Individuals need to take responsibility and actions for creating a positive work environment. You must model it if you want others to take your lead.
- I feel that I have leadership skills, but how do I get recognized in a positive way for my being a leader? How do I get staff to see this trait in me?
- Encourage language and actions that promote all of us recognizing each others' talents and abilities to contribute. For example, rather than having a goal of getting certain recognition for classified, I would like to encourage us to model the behavior of inclusiveness in both the language we use and our actions, so that we are not looking to improve conditions just specifically for "our group," but for all people in all the different groups...

At its next meeting, the Respectful Workplace Committee will begin to look at ways it can work to improve the Acceptance of classified staff within Cooperative Extension.