"A Commitment to Excellence PASTG for the 21st Century!"

NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

By Sherri Buxton, MWA Office, Peoria, IL, and Heather Lewandowski, Columbia, MO

The Directors of the Midwest Area Office and the Program Administrative Support Task Group (PASTG) are happy to announce that an Area-wide Program Administrative Support meeting is tentatively planned for October, 2004. Please mark your calendar for the week of October 25-29 as the *tentative dates* for this meeting. This meeting will be mandatory for all RL secretaries and highly encouraged for office automation support staff. We will post additional information regarding this meeting on our website located at www.mwa.ars.usda.gov/pastg.

RPES SUBMISSION CHANGES

By Brittney Mernick, Peoria, IL

The RPES submission process has recently been updated. Beginning in April, requests for case writeups in the FY 2005 review schedule will require the changes. Following are suggestions to make the transition easier:

- Adobe Acrobat 6.0!
- Document feeding, two-sided scanner (Try an HP ScanJet 8250). A flat-lid scanner will require hours of one-page-at-a-time scanning.
- Only two exhibits are allowed per *Demonstrated Accomplishment*.
- Only two *Additional Accomplishments* are allowed.
- All accomplishments can only be a half page each. No exceptions!
- Label Factor I-IV file: *B.Mernick Writeup*.
- Most sections of *Factor IV* have either been changed or eliminated. Read this section of the new guidelines carefully.
- Performance Awards are no longer allowed to be listed.
- Publications are now divided into two sections: *Peer-reviewed* and *Other*.
- No Abstracts! (Everyone cheer!)
- Make all changes/updates in the MSWord file before converting to .pdf (file increases in size when changes are made in Adobe Acrobat).
- You may convert your MSWord file to .pdf as many times as you need.
- Label exhibits with stickers or typed text before scanning.
- Scan the exhibits directly to file (.pdf). This will eliminate having to paste individual page images into an MSWord document before converting the file to .pdf.
- Label exhibit file: *Exhibit 1a*.

The text length and other guidelines that were previously a *suggestion* are now a *requirement*. The RPES Staff will no longer be accepting writeups that are too long or give more information than allowed.

Overall, the new Factor I-IV writeup is much more concise. It is easier to read and edit for mistakes; also, deleting the abstracts eliminates a lot of proofreading work. Finally, using a document feeding, two-sided scanner means exhibits can be scanned in minutes.

CHANGING FACES

Lori Wilson-Voss

Lori Wilson-Voss has accepted an Accounting Technician position with Carol Moran, Location Administrative Officer, Ames, Iowa. She will begin her new position on March 22, 2004. Lori served as Supervisory Program Support Assistant at the North Central Regional Plant Introduction Station (NCRPIS), Ames, Iowa. She also served as Co-chair on the Midwest Program Administrative Support Task Group (PASTG) since its establishment in 1995. In 1999, Lori joined the National Secretarial Advisory Council as the Midwest Area representative and Co-chair of the committee. She also served as the Technical Advisor to the Midwest Area PASTG. In 1997, she was selected as the Midwest Area Secretary of the Year. Lori has most recently served as the editor of the Standard Operating Procedure manual (SOP) for the Midwest Area. As one of the founding members of the PASTG, Lori played a key role in the success of the group. She will be greatly missed not only at the NCRPIS but also by members of the PASTG. We wish her the best of luck in her new endeavor.

Julie Grogan

Ms. Grogan joined the Administrative Office of USDA-ARS in Madison, Wisconsin in January, 2004. Ms. Grogan attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is a life member of the American College of Healthcare Administrators Foundation, and is a certified trainer/ instructor for the American Red Cross and CBRF Fire Safety Training. Before joining ARS, Ms. Grogan was involved in the private sector industry where for the past 10 years she owned and operated multiple assisted living communities for the elderly throughout the state of Wisconsin. In addition, Ms. Grogan worked for 8 years in the financial division of a national hospital management and healthcare consulting company and 4 years managing a travel agency.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY

By Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, MI

The National Agricultural Library (NAL) was established by the U.S. Congress to serve America as a primary agricultural resource. As the largest agricultural library in the world, its mission is “to ensure and enhance access to agricultural information for a better quality of life.” As a national resource, the NAL works to collect, preserve and distribute knowledge that is fundamental to the continued well-being and growth of U.S. agriculture, contributing to the development of food supplies for the nation and the world.

The NAL provides the world with leadership by developing and applying information technology and ensuring that agricultural information will be available to those who need it. The global information infrastructure grows faster and reaches farther every day and the NAL has moved rapidly to take advantage of this new opportunity to reach its customers. In addition to providing services based on its collection of printed materials, the NAL has led the development of electronic information services for more than thirty years.

AgNIC is a guide to quality agricultural information on the Internet as selected by the NAL, Land-Grant Universities, and other institutions. Another beneficial resource available through the NAL website is Agricola.

For more details about the NAL and its services, contact the National Agricultural Library at 301-504-5755 or agref@nal.usda.gov or visit www.nal.gov.

PARKINSON'S LAW

By Sandy Groneberg, Morris, MN

Parkinson's Law says "work expands to fill up all available time." I enjoy my job (a good thing!); but as a result, I tend to strictly adhere to Parkinson's law (a bad thing!).

If work expands to fill up all available time, it does no good to ask for more time-it will still be filled with work! So, I went in search of ideas to become more organized, hoping that I could start controlling the work instead of the work controlling me.

Following is a list of things I found:

- *Simplify*: Extra things and activities waste energy, time, and space. Now the challenge is to take this thought, and decide what to do with the information. For example, which things and activities waste my time? Do I make unnecessary trips to the copier instead of doing several jobs at one time? Do I spend too much time searching my piles of work to find a piece of paper I need for a project? What clutter do I need to clear in order to be more efficient? *Tip*: Always keep things close to the place where they will be used, with the most frequently used items being the most easily reached.

- *Set realistic goals* and have clear and concise objectives to meet those goals. Use a month-at-a-glance calendar to help prioritize tasks for each day, setting aside time for priority tasks before they become unmanageable. Concentrate time and efforts on one task at a time-don't let less important tasks sidetrack you from high priority items. Control interruptions-It is easy to let others dictate your priority list; but you know your work load, so make sure that you set your own priority list and stick to it. If you're feeling overwhelmed, divide complex tasks into manageable sub-tasks. Train yourself to go down your "To Do List" without skipping over the difficult items. *Tip*: If you tend to drift from your priorities, set specific time limits and use your computer's alarm or timer to remind you every hour or half-hour to stay on track. Frequently ask yourself: "What is the best use of my time right now?" Be aware of time robbers: Side-trackers, procrastination, daydreaming and laziness.

- *Important*: Don't waste time feeling guilty about what you didn't do. It's gone now; move ahead. Try not to think of work on weekends.

- *Manage the paper load*. Keep all notes to yourself in a single place, whether in a notebook, a paper organizer, or on your computer. Try to handle paper only once by making a decision about it the first time it crosses your desk. *Tip*: While reading a letter, or instructions, mark the items that require an action to avoid re-reading the entire document again. Keep files vertical whenever possible to avoid the habit of piling papers.

- *Manage the computer*. Use disk optimization/defragmentation software regularly. It saves disk space, speeds up software, and reduces computer errors. Backup regularly-you don't want to redo something you spent hours preparing the first time. *Tip*: Learn short cuts and macros for the software you use. Keep on top of the latest technology.

- *Manage yourself*. Pay attention to your health, diet and sleep. Take your full lunch period: eat a light lunch and then take a walk so that you don't get sleepy in the afternoon. Use the subconscious mind to think while walking, jogging, etc. Keep paper and pencil by your bed to jot down ideas before you have a chance to lose them. You will sleep better if you write down your idea and then forget about it than if you try to remember it until morning. Examine old habits for possible elimination or streamlining. *Tip*: Try to find a new technique each day that helps gain time - make it a mental challenge on your drive to or from work. Telephone instead of writing. Delegate work when possible, but use a follow-up system. Communicate clearly and be specific to eliminate having to redo things. Minimize meetings. Develop a routine for general procedures. Take concise notes - not novels. Keep track of your mood on a calendar and plan time to do things that make you feel good. Take time to make someone else happy; it will keep you positive. Plan a quiet hour for yourself every day.

WEEKLY REPORT
Each week an e-mail report is due to the Area Office. This is to notify Headquarters of any outside activities such as meetings, invited talks, request for information by congressional representatives, press inquiries, freedom of information requests, or awards. Negative responses are also required. The secretary and Research Leader should meet each week to decide what information should be submitted. Send the report to Sherri Buxton at sbuxton@mwa.ars.usda.gov by close of business each Wednesday.

March

- Spring Clean-up on 425s ONLY.
- Watch for letter from Area Office to initiate ARMP process.
- Solicit SYs for equipment, travel, and personnel needs for the Annual Resource Management Plan (ARMP). Provide

information to RL for narrative section of the ARMP.
- Performance Cycle for CAT 5, 7, 8, & 9 personnel ends March 31.

April

- Type performance elements on Performance Appraisal (Electronic AD-435) for CAT 5, 7, 8 & 9 personnel. Distribute to supervisors with instructions for completion.
- Prepare new Performance Standards and Individual Development Plan (IDP form ARS-48). These must be in place by June 6, 2004, to be considered a full performance appraisal period.

NON-ARS AUTHORS ON 115's

ARIS will recognize when listed authors on a 115 are not ARS employees, and the "cleared" box must be checked for each non-ARS author before a 115 can be submitted electronically for approval. Please note that by checking the "cleared" box, submitters are indicating that non-ARS authors have reviewed and approved the interpretive summary (if provided), technical abstract, and are indicating that cooperators are authorizing release of their affiliation in the submission to Tektran. Although ARS does not uniformly require documentation by the submitter, it is recommended that submitters of 115s keep notes or e-mail correspondences in the manuscript file to refute potential criticism from co-authors.

REQUIRED SOURCES FOR PURCHASING

Listed *in order* are sources you need to consider when making purchases:

- Excess property
- www.jwod.com
- www.boisecascade.com
- www.gsaadvantage.gov
- Open market

REE DIRECTORY

Add/update your REE Directory on a regular basis to ensure ARS personnel information is current.

NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS
By Sherri Buxton, MWA Office, Peoria, IL, and Melissa Stiefel, E. Lansing, MI
The PASTG is hard at work putting the finishing touches on our upcoming meeting, “Discover Tools to Build a Better You.” This three-day conference has been designed with you in mind. Our planned general and break-out sessions cover a wide range of topics that have a direct impact on our roles as office professionals. We hope this conference will enhance your professional skills and serve as a catalyst for developing networking partners throughout the Area.

The website to the conference is now available and ready for registration. You can access this information through this URL:
http://www.mwa.ars.usda.gov/mwa/pastg/news/news.htm

We request that you register no later than September 3, 2004. We look forward to seeing you in St. Louis, Missouri!

MWA SECRETARY OF THE YEAR
Marsha Ebener
Marsha Ebener of the Fermentation Biochemistry Research Laboratory located at the National Center for Agricultural Research in Peoria, Illinois, has been selected as the 2003 MWA Secretary of the Year. Marsha will be recognized at the Office Professional’s Meeting for her outstanding service to ARS and the MWA. You may pass along your personal congratulations to Marsha at: ebenermm@ncaur.usda.gov

CHANGING FACES
Ann Komo
Ann Komo is the new Office Automation Assistant at Cropping Systems and Water Quality Unit in Columbia, MO. Prior to joining ARS Ann worked for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for 5 years. Ann spent three years in the United States Navy as an airman stationed at Naval Air Station in Norfolk, VA. Ann enjoys spending time with her husband and four girls, camping, boating and being a Girl Scout assistant leader.

WHY I KEEP P&P 253.4 HANDY AT ALL TIMES!
By Paula Snell, MWA IT Specialist
We all wonder at times “*Can I go to XYZ website?*” or “*Can I get email from my mother?*” or “*Can I use my PC to type up a homework assignment?*”

According to **Policy and Procedure (P&P) 253.4**, “IT resources may only be used for authorized purposes.” However, according to Departmental Regulation (DR) 3300-1, dated March 23, 1999, “limited personal use of Government office equipment by employees during personal time is considered to be an ‘authorized use’ of Government property”. In ARS (and other REE agencies), “limited personal use” “involves minimal additional expense to the Government, is performed on the employee’s personal time, and does not interfere with the mission or operations of the agency."

P&P 253.4 addresses Acceptable Personal Use as well as Unacceptable Personal Use and how it pertains to telephone, email, Internet, Fax, Copier, and Printer use.

Acceptable use includes the use of the above services *IF* the use does *NOT* interfere with official business, involves minimal expense, and is on the employee's personal time (before duty hours, during lunch, or after duty hours). It also is limited to situations where the equipment or service already exists.

Unacceptable use would include any use that:

- Generates additional expense.
- Causes congestion, delay or disruption of a service, i.e., forwarding "chain" email messages, downloading video clips, sound, or large files that could, potentially, degrade the network's performance.
- Is offensive to the public or be illegal activities, including pornography, hate speech, or material that ridicules others.
- Is for commercial purposes or "for-profit" activities such as outside employment or to support a private business endeavor.
- Engages in any outside fund-raising activity, endorsing a product or service, or participating in lobbying activity or prohibited partisan political activity.

Now, you may ask "how does this affect me and my use of the Internet?" Prior to using the Internet, get your supervisor's approval to use these services as they have "management authority and responsibility to ensure appropriate use of resources within their organizations."

Make your supervisor aware that you may be working on your homework during lunch or before or after work. Also, let them know that your mother may send you an occasional email (and, take the responsibility to make sure that it *IS* occasional, and that Mom understands the rules, also!)

For your own protection, make sure you do NOT use the internet for:

- Viewing or downloading sexually explicit material.
- Viewing or downloading materials related to gambling, weapons, terrorist activities, or any other illegal activities.
- Posting agency information to external news groups, etc., without prior approval.
- Unauthorized acquisition or use of computer software or other materials protected by copyright laws, trademarks, etc., including music or videos.
- Participating in chat rooms or on-line, real-time chat software such as AOL Instant Messenger, MSN Messenger, etc.
- Using web browser add-on features to listen to radio broadcasts or music for entertainment that may overburden the telecommunications system.

Finally, for more detailed information, please take the time to read P&P 253.4.

TIPS & TRICKS

By Sandy Groneberg, Morris, MN

1) Have you had trouble getting items returned to you, when you have to give them to someone for signature or review? In our office, we use colored folders that are clearly labeled "Return to *Secretary's name*". I use red folders and the Office Automation Assistant uses green folders, so everyone immediately knows to whom the folders should be returned. If you really have a problem with this, get pink folders. Men will return pink folders very quickly!

2) Do you have trouble remembering? Many e-mail programs have the capacity to type in a message now to be delivered at a future date. If I want to be sure to remember something on a future date, I send myself an email reminder with a future delivery date pertinent to the deadline, and then I can forget about it until I read my email. (Be sure to date the message early enough so that you have time to actually accomplish whatever needs to be done!)

3) How to keep track of dates: Our lab set up a calendar on an "intranet" site that may be accessed by all employees. I keep it up to date with meetings, seminars, travel schedules, leave schedules and deadlines that must be met for reports, awards, etc. Employees can put an icon on their desktop to easily access the calendar. This is one way of ensuring everyone knows what is happening at your lab. (This relieves you of answering repeated questions about "*When is....?*")

4) How to assist your supervisor with mail: When your supervisor is away from the office, you can make his/her return to the office less stressful by the way you handle the incoming mail. Here are some tips:

- Date stamp all mail with the incoming date, but also *scan the item for any action deadlines or RSVP dates*. If the item requires action, I put it in the "Urgent" file, with the closest action deadline item on top, working down to later deadlines. Your supervisor will know that he/she needs to deal with this information first upon return to the office. It is far less stressful to deal with a small folder of items than to have to go through a stack of mail.
- Mail that doesn't require action, but is job-related can go in a "Routine" file, and mail that is of lowest priority can go into a "Future Reading" file. Again, I would organize each file from highest priority to lowest priority. These files can then be read by the supervisor at his or her leisure, having full confidence that they haven't missed any urgent deadlines.

5) If you are going to take a PowerPoint presentation on the road, the best thing to do is to run the "*Pack-and-Go*" wizard (File/Pack and Go). This will bring along fonts and linked files necessary for the presentation.

- Open the presentation you want to get ready for a different computer.
- Create a new directory somewhere on your C: drive.
- In PowerPoint, choose File/Pack and Go.
- Follow the prompts, giving the newly created directory as the target.

- This will create an executable file which includes the items needed for the presentation. When you run the executable file, it runs the presentation automatically.

REMINDERS

Time & Attendance

Time and Attendance logs should be completed in pen. Those employees who prefer to complete the log in pencil should photocopy their log and give the photocopied sheet to the person who enters the information into STAR. Also, employees should initial next to any changes or white out they've done on their timesheet. These practices are to ensure that all time and attendance information is accurate and that no one except the employee has made changes on their log.

Time-Off Awards

As timekeepers, it is good to remind employees who receive time-off awards that if the time-off award hours are not used in a year, *the time is lost*. Also, if they leave the agency, the awarded time is lost. A time-off award is never converted to cash, nor is the time added to annual leave. The only time they receive money for the hours is when they actually take the time and it is coded in the database.

When an employee receives a time off award, the timekeeper needs to have the LAO access IRIS 143 to be sure the leave has been processed. If the award is in the NFC system, it can be added to STAR. The timekeeper adds the time-off award in the leave account as follows:

- Open STAR.
- Click on Employee Maintenance.
- Highlight the employee's name.
- Click on LA (Leave Account).
- Type in TOFF (you can not pick it from the pull down menu).
- Type in the number hours for the award in the FORWARD area.
- Click on ADD.
- Close the door.
- Click on bi-weekly and complete the T&A in the usual manner.

Once the award has been added into the leave account in STAR, the employee can use the time by coding it as 61 prefix and 66 TC. It will show time off used. Make sure the week adds up correctly and then verify.

IMPORTANT: If the employee tries to use the hours before it they are entered into the system, NFC will take the hours out of their annual leave balance or any other available balance if annual leave is depleted. The "*time-off*" balance shows on the STAR print-out, so the timekeeper and award winner can tell at a glance if there is additional time to be used from an award.

Foreign Research Associates

Visiting Foreign Scientists must have Area approval prior to the visit. Please use the following procedures:

- Send an E-mail to the Area Director's Office via proper channels to request to become involved with a Foreign Research Associate. Include the details of the proposed, work, time frame, sponsorship, funding, etc.
- The Area Director's Office will reply to the requestor, indicating approval or denial.
- Upon receipt of approval from Area Director's Office,

IMMEDIATELY have the non-citizen complete the ARS-230, Non-Citizen Data Sheet.

- Forward via proper channels, the completed ARS-230, Non-Citizen Data Sheet, to Marie Bishop at bishopm@mwa.ars.usda.gov or fax 309-681-6683.
- Marie Bishop will forward the completed ARS-230 to the ARS Office of Homeland Security and request a name trace.

Frequently review any ARS-230 to update to reflect any changes.

REE Directory Updates

Do you have a new employee in your unit? Has your RL retired? If so, then you need to update your Unit Details in the REE Directory. Any change in your unit's roster information (new phone number, new title, new employee, retired employee, etc.) should prompt you to update the information.

To make changes in the REE Directory, access the system at http://isbprod.ars.usda.gov/dir2/viewemp$.startup Then click on the menu option "*Update for Authorized Personnel Only*" and enter your user name and password when prompted. Then you may search for the appropriate employee to update.

If you need a copy of the "*Guide to Updating the Directory*", please send your request to Missy Stiefel at stiefelm@msu.edu.

CALENDAR

September

- Annual ethics training takes place in early September.
- Prepare requisition AD-700s for Research Support Agreements (RSAs). Update related documentation.
- Prepare Blanket Travel Authorizations for next fiscal year.
- Prepare new files for travel vouchers and other fiscal year filing.
- Update investigator/SY time on projects in ARIS.
- Inquire with your scientists if any of them are preparing NRI grants.

October

- Update mission statement in ARIS.
- Make sure all Category 5/7/8/9 employees have had mid-year performance reviews completed.
- Fall Cleanup of 425s only.

November

- Funded post-docs announced.
- Print out Detail by Author reports to update publications.

HELPFUL HINTS

Online Dictionary

Here's an online dictionary web site that may be of interest: www.OneLook.com. OneLook.com functions as a search engine offering users a means of finding word definitions from many different dictionaries at the same time. Just type in the word you are looking for and you'll get a listing from different dictionaries.

"A Commitment to Excellence PASTG for the 21st Century!"

NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS
By Sherri Buxton, MWA Office, Peoria, IL, and Melissa Stiefel, Lansing, MI

"*DISCOVER TOOLS*" CONFERENCE A SUCCESS!

The MWA Program Administrative Support Meeting, Discover Tools to Build a Better You, held in St. Louis, MO, October 19-21, 2004, was enjoyed by ARS Office Support Professionals from the Midwest Area and members of the National Advisory Council for Office Professionals. The PASTG would like to thank all the participants, speakers and especially Dr. Adrianna Hewings, Dr. Terry Nelsen and Diane Strub for their involvement.

What you thought about the meeting…

Sandra Johnson, Ames, IA
The speakers were very good with their mixture of good information and humor! The hotel and the meeting facilities were very nice. I had a great time and I am glad I attended the meeting. It was very uplifting! We are fortunate Dr. Hewings supports us!

Nancy Sanders, West Lafayette, IN
A valuable item I learned at the meeting was how to improve my performance write-up. The other important thing I learned and appreciated about the meeting and speakers was that maintaining my standards and integrity are important to my spirit and job performance.

Karen Burianek, Ames, IA
I appreciate the opportunity to be able to attend such a professional meeting and have the opportunity to meet the faces that belong to the voices I talk to every day. I feel very fortunate to be in an area where the administrators support such activities and give credibility to our positions.

Marva Nesbit (Speaker), Newcastle, ME
What a nice meeting! Beautifully done. I know the participants had to have been pleased. I appreciate being invited to be a part of the meeting. It's always great to renew old acquaintances.

Lonajean Strickland, West Lafayette, IN
My experience during the PASTG Conference "Discover Tools to Build a Better You" held in St. Louis, MO was a very valuable one - personally and professionally.

Dave Carter (Speaker), Beltsville, MD
Thank you for inviting me to be a part of your Midwest Area conference! I really enjoyed the whole event, and had a lot of fun speaking to everyone on Wednesday.

Favorite photos…

The "Gateway to the West", St. Louis, MO.

Participants listened…

The IT Queens loved their new accessories.

Discussed…

The meals were always a hit!

And acted…!

Traci Lynn demonstrates how to interact with a "tough" boss.

Cathy Lonaberger and the National Advisory Council for Office Professionals explained their roles and current activities.

INDIANA STAFF FORMS SUPPORT GROUP

By Stephanie Brennan, West Lafayette, IN

The conference "Discover Tools to Build a Better You" allowed many individuals, including myself to walk away from the conference excited about the possibilities within our job description. I no longer felt compelled to stick to the confines of my performance standards. The individual speakers stressed the importance of attitude, going above and beyond the call of duty, and thinking outside of the box.

On my trip home to West Lafayette, IN, the discussions in the vehicle led each of the secretaries to believe that we would greatly benefit by a unified group. This group could then share ideas, offer support, and most importantly share a meal together (food is the highlight of my life). So, it was established that the West Lafayette, IN secretaries would meet on the first Wednesday of each month at a local eating establishment to converse.

Our first meeting was most productive because we had applied the knowledge obtained from the conference and put it into practice within our individual units. Some of the topics that were discussed at our first meeting were job practices that make work flow better and how we can be more productive. We also discussed the uses and advantages of an in/out board as well as calendars for all unit members to use as a central appointment system. Being a valuable asset, effectively conducting, and participating in the unit's meetings was another topic of our discussion. We collaborated on how we can avoid duplication and receive up-to-date information in regards to personnel actions that circulate between secretaries and the location administration office.

Probably the most significant piece of information that we learned from our first meeting of the West Lafayette Secretaries, was to not eat at an establishment with the word "belly" in their name as we all came down with a case of food poisoning! Despite the sour ending, I would like to encourage all locations to set up a meeting time as the information and support you receive is invaluable.

COLOR-CODED ORGANIZATION

By Kit Mernick, Peoria, IL

In addition to keeping and checking a "To Do" list, project folders are my preferred organizational tool. Transparent color coded folders speed collection and retrieval of paperwork rather than shuffling through stacks of white papers.

Project folders usually come in assorted color packs. Because several of our projects take time to pull together and complete, the color-coded folders provide an easily identified collection location.

Tips for using transparent folders:

1. The clear folders prevent the need to label or open a folder to read contents.

2. The top page of the papers you are collecting can be easily read through the plastic. Put an identifiable paper on top or write in large letters one word that will quickly identify the contents like, CATS, ARIS.

3. Circle the due date or write it on the top page for quick reference.

4. Assign colors by priority: Red – "A" High Priority, Blue – "B" soon to be a priority, Yellow – "C" Important only to me, Gray/Clear – "Waiting" for response.

5. Have a location for each type of priority. Clear/gray for "waiting" for a reply is located on the edge of my desk.

6. Shuffle through the "A" folders each morning and after lunch to make sure you do not forget the immediate tasks. Look through the lower priority folders to make sure they haven't changed to a higher priority.

7. As soon as you print an email or receive a new task, put it in a folder. You can add the task to your "to do" list when you have time.

THE FINE ART OF PERSUASION

By Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, MI

As ARS support staff, we rely on scientists, technicians, research leaders, LAOs, and others to provide accurate information with which we can successfully perform our duties within given deadlines. We don't supervise these individuals directly, so sometimes it becomes a challenge to shake them down for the information we need. By learning effective persuasion techniques, we not only make our work lives easier, but may also make our personal lives simpler as well.

Many people see persuasion as manipulative and devious or even beating someone over the head until they acquiesce. Here are just a few misconceptions that are commonly held regarding what persuasion is or should be. *Misconception #1*: Powerfully stating your position at the beginning and then relentlessly pushing your idea until your colleagues change their minds. *Misconception #2*: Never compromise; it's a sign of weakness. *Misconception #3*: The argument alone will win approval. *Misconception #4*: You have only one shot to present your argument and it had better be good or nobody will accept it.

Persuasion is not an act of coercion—it's an opportunity for both parties to learn about each other's needs, wants, and expectations. Because each party learns about the other, persuasion is also a powerful negotiating tool. Effective persuaders learn to test and revise their ideas, taking into consideration their colleague's concerns and expectations. More importantly, an effective persuader will always be open-minded to consider others' ideas and possibly incorporate the new ideas into the original plan. Persuasion involves some basic steps that are outlined below, and learning to master these steps will take time and patience.

Establish your own credibility.

In order to be an effective persuader, you must first establish your own credibility. For example, if my dermatologist told me I needed heart bypass surgery, would I find him or her credible—knowledgeable of the subject at hand? I don't think so. Credibility is established two ways: your *expertise* regarding subject at hand and your *relationship(s)* with your audience. In order to increase your expertise, you need to prove yourself knowledgeable and well-informed on the subject, *and* display a history of good judgment when using this knowledge. By establishing your credibility, your audience will see you as trustworthy and helpful.

Identify mutual benefits and interests. Your position must appeal to your audience by showing the benefits they can derive by supporting you. In order to appeal to your audience, you need to know *them—what they want or what they expect.* Ask them questions; learn what makes them tick. After all, who would go along with an idea if it would cause more grief than good!

Reinforce by providing evidence for your position.

Ordinary evidence will not suffice when presenting your idea. Stories and colorful language can captivate your audience, and research shows that listeners react more positively to what they perceive as compelling evidence.

Demonstrate an emotional connection with your audience.

Good persuaders will connect with their audiences in two ways: 1) they show their own emotional commitment to the position, and 2) they are in tune with the audience's emotions. Too much emotion, however, will leave the audience questioning your rationality. As any good speaker does, adjust your actions (tone of voice, hand gestures, etc.) to the audience at hand—a roomful of executives from Fortune 500 companies will connect to a bold voice, forceful hand gestures, etc. Quite the