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REVENEWS

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Divisional Corner

Michael Hyman, Assistant Commissioner, Tax Policy

The Office of Tax Policy is a small division, but we strive to provide invaluable internal support services for other Finance divisions, detailed analysis for City policy makers and accurate information about the City's tax system for the public. Our core functions involve extensive data maintenance and analysis. In recent years, the increased flow of data has made our jobs both more rewarding and challenging. The data includes Federal, New York State and New York City tax return information, agency operational data and in-house sample databases.

We recently completed an exciting legislative session where we were asked to analyze a myriad of tax policy options, including simplification of General Corporation Tax filing for tens of thousands of taxpayers, tax relief for small business taxpayers and a substantial revision of combination treatment under New York's corporate income tax law. The latter option was not enacted for NYC this year, but it will be revisited next year. Given that policy is as much formulated by the agency's administrative actions as by statutory provisions of law, Tax Policy interacts frequently with other Finance divisions, in particular, Audit and Legal Affairs, in our joint efforts to clarify and streamline City policy guidance to taxpayers and tax practitioners.

Inter-divisional projects are also ongoing in other areas. We are currently working with Collections and other divisions on cleaning up the pool of receivables on the agency's books in order to maximize agency efforts to resolve outstanding debt owed the City. We have a joint results team with the Audit and Collection Divisions that is working to streamline and clarify "Program to Eliminate the Gap" (PEG). The PEG includes enforcement-related revenues collected by the agency. Tax Policy is also working with Payment Operations and FIT on the Federation of Tax Administrators' 1120 e-filing project, which develops standards on the use of new technologies for corporate e-filing. And the Property Division is our best friend during the second half of each calendar year as the tax roll for the next fiscal year is being prepared – the steady flow of information Property provides is essential for City budget forecasting.

Tax Policy, as is each Finance division, is a highly regarded team that is reliant on high-quality data to make informed decisions. We use many of the databases maintained by the agency and are in a unique position to monitor any quality issues. By working with other agency divisions and agency data processors (e.g., Bank of America), we help improve the data quality controls.

A core of veteran Finance employees manages Tax Policy. Karen Schlain, the Director of Research, oversees the division's data analysis work. Karen works closely with the IRS analyzing data to help identify eligible filers who aren't claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit. Karen also acts as the division's quasi-official baker, providing baked goods for staff meetings. She and her daughter, Naomi, recently tried their hand at home-baked chocolate-covered pretzels, and though there was something about the sprinkles that didn't quite work, the pretzels covered in chocolate made it happen. Richard Carroll directs the accounting work. In his role, Rich interacts with staff from other agency divisions, including the Comptroller's Office and OMB, on a regular basis. He particularly enjoys the dozens of calls a week from OMB staff.

David Ho, working with Deb Bagchi, oversees Tax Policy's business income tax modeling unit. The internal samples used by our division for modeling tax policy option, would not be useable if not for the work of the sample data-cleaning group supervised by Rachel Odes and Larry Sporn. The team includes Valerie Henry, Ranjit Vaghela and Michael American. Sherill Rigual mines the agency's business *(Continued on page 2)*

SMART CORNER

The Soul of SMART
By Chuck Lofy

SMART pivots on a single word.
That word, in the Department's mission statement, is "help."
"Help" - not: "make."
The astonishing shift is from "making" people pay the right amount on time
to *helping* them pay the right amount on time —
a shift from the monolith of control and coercion
to support and service:
Helping!

And how is that helping shown?
By the way we treat others:
our customers and compliers
and one another; and even, and perhaps especially,
by the way we understand and treat *ourselves*.

How do we help people pay the right amount on time?
By treating our customers and compliers,
one another and ourselves *fairly*,
justly, as we ourselves want to be treated,
as we would want our own family members to be treated.

How do we help people pay the right amount on time?
By treating our customers and compliers,
one another and ourselves *transparently*,
without guise, deceit, or manipulation;
that is, authentically, honestly, openly,
compassionately,

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How do we help people pay the right amount on time?
By treating our customers and compliers,
each other and ourselves *efficiently*,
being respectful of our time and others' time,
using time carefully.

How do we help people pay the right amount on time?
By treating our customers and compliers,
one another and ourselves *objectively,*
that is, without prejudice or bias,
challenging our assumptions with evidence,
making our decisions based, not on hunches,
but on data, on real facts as best we know them,

In all this, through all this, we in all things
Value our customers and compliers,
each other and ourselves, and
demonstrate that we value them
in *fact*, through fair, authentic, timely, unbiased actions.

The soul of **SMART** is nothing more than the Golden Rule:
doing to others what we would want done to us,
and, perhaps more important, *not* treating others
in ways we ourselves do not want to be treated.

So when someone asks or wonders how **SMART** applies to
his or her work,
the response should be: how does it *not* apply?
It applies in *little things*, in every day actions:
in how we interact with others all through every day,
in how we value ourselves: our instincts, our insights,
our questions, our strengths;
in how we value each other and listen to each other
and show respect to each other,
in how we actually look at and see each other.

Someone once wrote that love is the result
of the long arduous struggle
through which we eventually come to the realization
that the other person is *real*
and therefore different from us
and from all others:
in other words, unique,
and then treat that person accordingly.

That is why **SMART** is not an initiative
but a way of life,
a way of being,
aimed, in this instance, at *helping* people pay the right amount
on time.

Chuck Lofy is member of the Public Strategies Group. At Finance, Chuck has led Learning on the Go and Learning Circles and has done coaching and **SMART** consultations. He has been a consultant for 25 years and worked in the public sector in higher education as administrator and professor. He authored, with his wife and business partner Mary Lofy, the book, *Vitality: Igniting Your Organization's Spirit.*

(Divisional Corner Continued from page 1)

taxes population data, while Steve Robinson, Deepika Saluja, John Sarich and Charles Danielsson provide invaluable services analyzing property tax, sales tax, and personal income tax data. Louis Pereira is our parking revenue specialist, as well as our in-house specialist for the preparation of reports. Kathy Nixon provides a variety of important services as office manager, divisional administrative liaison and my Executive Assistant. We are always looking to recruit new talent to Tax Policy. The mixture of experience and new insights makes for an exciting work environment.

My own background as a trained historian has taught me the value of applying rigorous research and analysis to policy issues. I joined the agency nearly twenty years ago because of a desire to apply my training to current-day public policy issues and to help influence policy decisions. (I also did not want to relocate to Las Vegas or Iowa City for a tenured-track teaching position.) While public sector work has its trials and tribulations, the rewards of public service far outweigh any negatives.

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS MEET FINANCE DEMANDS

How does Finance's Information and Technology Division meet the agency's demands to be up-to-date with today's fast-changing technology? The answer lies within one of the Division's most invaluable units – the Technology Solutions Group. This team of 100 dedicated workers fulfills many roles for Finance including managing the IT applications that Finance employees use to perform their work. The Technology solutions team maintains, enhances, and builds new applications or, when it proves to be the most effective strategy, they hire consultants to build a solution or buy a commercial solution.

To help the Technology Solutions Group perform at its best, the unit is divided into four distinct teams. Nancy Feinberg heads our Client Relationship Management team. This unit serves as the primary liaison for our users. Our Capacity Building and Compliance team, led by Florence Miller, ensures that we grow and mature as an IT organization. The team accomplishes this by making sure industry practices are utilized, by measuring our effectiveness, and by taking steps to improve. Chris Hudson is our team leader for the Systems Analysis unit. This team is responsible for troubleshooting problems with our applications and for guiding the technical design of new applications. Currently sharing leadership of our Software Engineering team are Hudson and David Cottes. This team is responsible for maintaining the operations of current systems. Members of this team, Pat Sammut, Karen Haskett, Mickey Griffing and Rich Gans, are relied on to manage and upgrade the system. They are also responsible for creating new applications.

These four units, which are also divided into separate operating sections, are organized to work with a specific Finance division. This is one way in which IT assures their work has a strong customer or user focus.

The Technology Solutions team utilizes a diverse toolbox of technology to provide Finance with essential services. This toolbox is comprised mainly of software development and productivity tools that operate in several distinct computer environments, including a mainframe computer, several client server environments, and a suite of desktop platforms.

The team strives to deliver the best technology solutions and information possible to help Finance maintain its mission to help customers pay the right amount on time. There are approximately 1,000 projects our team has in progress, or that await our attention, to help us in this goal. This technology takes time to create, and the ability to build effective tools requires the participation of our users. By describing problems or difficulties, the Technology Solutions team and our users work together to produce technology that is both effective and efficient.

Our users are an integral part of the process to bring new systems solutions to fruition. Their timely decisions and detailed answers during the Solution Group's development effort help provide the final product. The system's original requirements and specifications are used as a guide while employees are trained and solutions are tested which assures a quality product for the agency. All of these factors help the Technology Solutions Group perform their jobs more productively and give Finance employees the productive services this agency deserves from this indispensable unit.

FIESTA TIME FOR REFUNDS AND ADJUSTMENTS

Standing from left to right in the photo are Diane Bradley, Duane Posey, Jenny Leung, Karen Cochran, Bharat Shah, Zhi Li, and Maurine Thompson.

The 22nd floor of 59 Maiden Lane recently became a place of celebration and recognition when the Refunds and Adjustments (R&A) Unit threw a party—for themselves! The Unit held its annual Employee Appreciation Day on August 10, 2007, to recognize the efforts and accomplishments of its staff while also partaking in some good food and fun.

Initiated by R&A Director Grace Wong, this was the second year the unit had an Employee Appreciation Day. This special day allows the unit to recognize high performing peers and to celebrate their accomplishments. Several events are held throughout the day to promote teamwork,collaboration, and communication. This year's events included a fiesta-themed luncheon (catered almost entirely by the staff), games, and an awards ceremony. The ceremony featured productivity awards in 16 different categories as well as six peer recognition awards, where staff members were given the opportunity to nominate their coworkers. Award categories included; Customer Service, Unsung Hero, and Team-work. Listed below are the six peer recognition award winners.

- Customer Service: *Milagros Perez*
- Helping Hand: *Zhi Li* and *Duane Posey*
- Lifesaver: *Bharat Shah*
- Teamwork: The Parking Refunds Group: *Diane Bradley, Maurine Thompson, Daphne Clifford, Karen Cochran, Sara Katz, Zhi Li,* and *Bharat Shah*
- Unsung Hero: *Jenny Leung*
- Shining Star: *Karen Cochran*

All winners were given certificates. The peer recognition award winners also received special recognition gifts chosen by employee volunteers who helped the management team plan the special event.

LEARNING CIRCLE MEMBERS LOOK TO BECOME WELL-ROUNDED MANAGERS

Continuation of last month's conversation with Learning Circle members.

What is it about the Learning Circle that Finance managers find helpful? How does this group meeting, known for its innovative format, help employees who are in decision-making positions to perform their duties?

"I thought it would be a unique opportunity to meet regularly with some of my colleagues from other divisions and to hear from my peers. It helps to get feedback from people who are experiencing the same situations," said Grace Wong, Director of Refunds and Adjustments. "I was a new manager and I was looking for a way to network with other managers and different people. They were recruiting volunteers and it was something new and interesting."

"The Learning Circle made me feel like I'm not in this alone," said Reasa Semper, Director of Training and Special Projects. "Some of the challenges that I face are also faced by my peers. This was an opportunity to meet regularly with my colleagues from other divisions. I was motivated by this opportunity for team-work – it's energizing."

Understanding **SMART** concepts is another determining factor for managers who decide to become involved with the Learning Circle. "It helped me understand the process of change and realize that change involves upheaval and chaos. Many of us want change to happen quickly and smoothly, and we get frustrated when it doesn't happen that way. The Learning Circle has helped me understand that a successful transformation can only happen with time," said Wong.

Each Learning Circle contains a group of approximately eight to ten managers who are free to discuss any topic and express themselves openly without the fear of professional reprisals. Once you are in Learning Circle you are on equal footing with your peers.

"Most of the topics of conversation were centered around business," said Wong. "It was helpful to learn about things such as how to handle a difficult employee. When we veered off the topic, it still related to our professional lives."

Both Wong and Semper believed everyone involved in the Learning Circle benefited from the discussions whether the topics centered on subjects inside or outside of the office. This sharing of information between managers is a key factor for participants. "By developing the connection as peers and getting to know each other as colleagues I began to learn about them much better. The feedback from the group helped me so much," said Semper.

"The meetings also helped me realize that although many of my customers are Finance employees, when they are involved in training, they may not consider themselves 'customers.' Some people may be offended," continued Semper. "They may say: 'I'm not your customer but a co-worker.' I need to be mindful that my customers are my colleagues also and to treat my relationship as such. It seems like a small thing but it can be a big matter for some people. These are people I work with daily, and trust is key because this is an ongoing service relationship. Discussing this in the Learning Circle gave me insight that not everyone has the same views of a particular wording or phrase."

"Having the feedback from different divisions is definitely worth it," said Wong. "It was a rewarding experience and I'm definitely glad I got involved." Though the Learning Circle sessions either have already or will shortly come to an end, some of the groups will continue the discussions on their own. "There was a unanimous decision to continue another session this month," said Wong. We will continue it ourselves without Public Strategy Group facilitators." This enthusiasm is undeniable proof that managers at Finance are benefiting from these sessions as well as embracing the Learning Circle's unique format.

HOW SMART ARE YOU? CONTEST RESULTS

Thanks to all who entered August's contest. No one answered all ten questions correctly. However, we have one runner-up.

Congratulations: *Nell Ramsami*, Collections Division

Correct Answers:

1. Commissioner Martha E. Stark – The goal of **SMART** is to transform Finance into a more results-oriented and data-driven organization
2. Any two of the following: *The Mummy Meets the Invisible Man, The Unified Team, The Attitude Virus,* or *The Dashboard*
3. March 2007
4. Someone who is required to provide something to the Department of Finance, such as a payment or piece of information
5. PSG stands for Public Strategies Group. (PSG is Finance's partner charged with providing expert advice and support to succeed in our transformation process)
6. Monday, October 22nd through Friday, October 26th
7. On the intranet site at: **http://financenet - SMART**
8. Any one of the following: 1) satisfying our customers; 2) treating our compliers fairly; 3) engaging our employees; or 4) operating efficiently
9. Fairness, transparency, efficiency, data-driven decisions
10. Any one of the following: (1) how a division helps people pay the right amount on time; 2) customer satisfaction or complier treatment; 3) employee engagement; and 4) unit cost

GOOD-BYE TO OLD FRIENDS

After many years of devoted service to Finance, the following employees have recently retired. We honor them for all their contributions to our agency. We wish all our former colleagues and friends the best of luck in their future endeavors. They have helped make Finance a wonderful place to work.

Name	Division	Years of Service
Maria Beltran	Audit	20
Lawrence Brandwein	Audit	34
Mulina Chan	Audit	20
Carolyn Green	Payment Operations	21
Charlene Green	Treasury	19
Hassan Hawana	Property	23
Daniel John	Customer Assistance	21
Soo Kim	Audit	20
Elaine Lockit	Audit	35
Anthony Mazze	Communication and Government Affairs	22
Eamonn Newman	ISS	20
Erlinda Sia	Audit	17
Richard Skodacek	Audit	24
Rosie Woods	City Register	22
Peter Yiotis	Audit	20

A BIT OF NEW YORK BASEBALL HISTORY

This month marks the 50th Anniversary of last time the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants played home games in New York before moving west. **The Dodgers** played their last game at Brooklyn's fabled Ebbets Field on September 24, 1957 in which they defeated the Pittsburgh Pirates 2-0. **The Giants** played their last home game at the Polo Grounds on September 29, 1957 in which they lost to the Pirates 9-1.

ENTER!

Quick Contest Question:

Who was *"the voice"* of the Dodgers for 57 years? *First* correct answer faxed to 212-232-1775 wins a Finance Prize. Please include your full name, division and phone number.

Effective September 1, 2007, clothing and footwear are exempt from the 4% New York City local sales and use taxes, regardless of the cost. Clothing and footwear costing $110 or more were previously subject to local taxes but will now be subject to State taxes only.

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