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REVE NEWS

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Commissioner's Corner



When we launched the SMART initiative last year, I knew there would be challenges. Moving from a culture that focuses on what we do to one that focuses on the results we want to achieve for the people we serve is not easy for any of us – including me. But I knew that this initiative would help unleash the incredible creative energy pent up in this great agency, and lead to more involvement from staff, interesting discussions, and ultimately better customer service.

We're beginning to see some fruit from our labor. We are now in the process of reviewing the data that was collected on the 3rd Quarter Operational Review Day. But data aren't the only indicators of change. Units all across the agency have begun to make changes both big and small, all with an eye toward achieving results. This edition of **ReveNEWS**

is one example: As a result of getting Finance employees more engaged, the newsletter will now be a monthly publication with a new format and a new focus that will be determined based on more feedback from you. We plan to invite staff to participate in focus groups that will help develop future content.

The "Commissioner's Corner" will become the "Divisional Corner," so that we can hear directly from a variety of sources. Of course, I will still jump in from time to time with thoughts, ideas and updates and *First Deputy Commissioner Rochelle Patricof* and I plan to meet with groups of you every few weeks so you can provide us with your feedback directly and ask us questions. This issue focuses on SMART, and I urge you to read what your colleagues are saying.

To increase **fairness, transparency, and data-driven decisions** and to fuel our fire for continued performance improvement requires a concerted effort. On April 26th, we saw this effort materialize. I look forward to working together, discussing our challenges and planning for the future based on real lessons learned and continuing on the road to becoming a world-class service organization designed to provide maximum value to those who do business with the City of New York.

The SMART Thing To Do

The SMART initiative is clearly making an impact on Finance. For those readers who have not been directly involved in SMART, the program is designed to transform Finance into a world-class customer service organization that measures our results and uses the results to improve and learn.

A key component of SMART is the Quarterly Operational Review meetings. The most recent Operational Review day was April 26, 2006. For the second time since SMART was introduced about a year ago, the agency set aside an entire day for units and divisions to look at what they have been doing since the last Operational Review meetings. Meetings were held in every unit and every division — to review data gathered from employees and the public since the last quarterly meeting, discuss improvements and make concrete action steps.

ReveNEWS staff wondered how Finance employees feel about SMART and the Operational Review Meetings, so we went to many divisions to talk to some people who participated.

How did people feel about the SMART initiative? What do they think about the recent Operational Reviews? We had no idea what we would hear. We didn't even know if anyone would want to talk to us. We were pleasantly surprised. Fourteen staff members shared their thoughts, and we would like to thank them all for their time and their input. Our thanks go out to: *Glen Adone* (ISS); *Ira Elias* (Audit); *Rose Heil* (Treasury); *Steve Henriquez* (Executive); *Juanita Lewis* (City Register); *Penny Lewis* (Enforcement); *Andrene McDonald* (Property); *Alfredo Raimondo* (Executive); *Sherill Rigual* (Tax Policy); *Rodney Simmons* (Collections); *Ward Tierney* (ISS); *Grisel Vias* (Sheriff's Office); *Sheryl Williams* (Payment Operations); and *Tina Williams* (Sheriff's Office).

The conversations were open and free ranging and yielded the following ideas. We hope you enjoy reading about how some of the participants feel about SMART.

It appears that many Finance employees still fear repercussions and are afraid to complete the SMART surveys that are distributed via e-mail or to voice their opinions at the quarterly meetings.

Employees described their reactions as "skeptical," "nervous," "challenged," and "frustrated," but also, "hopeful," "encouraged" and

"positive." Some are using SMART and the Operational Review Day to try to figure out how they fit into the mission of "helping people to pay the right amount on time."

Some see SMART as a fantastic opportunity to change the way things are done, while others are taking a "wait and see" posture to find out if "if the program will be continued or just fade away." SMART was described as an "eye opener," a "particularly good idea," and a "good start."

Despite being a bit nervous, the participants were eager to continue the SMART conversation. They pushed beyond their concerns and dug down deep to give voice to the hope that Finance will achieve its SMART goals.

Typical of their reactions were: "We learned a lot about what we think about our work and about each other." "Lines of communication were opened" as people discussed their frustrations about the "physical condition of the workplace" or the "need for more support from managers." "Issues were openly discussed," although it was "difficult to sit in a room – often with managers – and share frustrations and concerns while someone wrote it all on a flip chart." Some did it because they had to, but "most did it because we don't want this program to fade away."

We also learned of some concrete examples of changes and satisfied requests for equipment and training since previous review meetings.

Enthusiasm is contagious, and the participants repeatedly said, "everyone – or at least almost everyone – has to get on board with SMART if it is going to work." One staff member suggested that Finance could have a "SMART committee or some other follow-up mechanism to make this a staff-driven effort rather than a management directive." To make this work we need to have people who "believe things will change even though we know change is a process that takes time and effort."

Because there is the tendency to resist anything that's new, staff expressed the hope that managers and supervisors will demonstrate their support for SMART and help their staff gain the skills and training necessary to be able to participate fully. The message couldn't have been clearer — "if managers don't support SMART, the staff won't."

For some, SMART is seen as "proof that people will listen to us," and some staff believes that will lead to a sense "that our opinions do matter."

We all work hard every day and are doing a good job, but SMART "can guide us on a path to even better results."

There was a sense that more is still needed. "We need to be better trained and prepared to take advantage of the SMART tool." And "we need to commit ourselves to the task." "After all, it's up to us to make this work" – "more staff need to take turns and participate."

People want to know what will help us achieve our mission. "It is important to keep talking about that, about what SMART is and what more is needed." "Finance is unique in that our customers must pay and some, as is human nature, are reluctant. Our job – using SMART – is to make the system easier and more conducive to paying on time." "Communication and active listening are keys to SMART's success."

It was fantastic to have so many people who were willing to take time from their busy day to share their ideas. When it was all said and done, we tapped over 150 years of institutional memory!

We wanted to know what our colleagues felt and we found out. Although some staff is still

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Finance To Participate In NYS Program \$100,000 Grant For Testing Hand-Held Assessing Device

The New York State Office of Real Property (ORPS) recently held a statewide competition, and Finance was awarded a \$100,000 grant that could greatly enhance the accuracy of property valuation. Assessors in the field who specialize in new construction will take advantage of state-of-the-art technology by testing a hand-held device that combines global positioning and customized geographic information systems. These devices will allow our assessors to access computer data from the field, capture fresh information – including photos, and update that information, based on their field observations. Once completed, the results of the study will be shared with other taxing jurisdictions throughout the State.

The SMART Thing To Do Continued

concerned about retribution issues, the April 26th Operational Review Day offered a sense of hope — “hope that what was discussed and reviewed would be addressed and resolved.” We can make this work and if we do, it will last and we will thrive.

The employee engagement surveys are anonymous. The University of Texas administers them. They compile the data and submit the results to the Strategic Initiatives Group and the results are posted on the Smart Bulletin Board for staff to review. They serve as the basis for some of the discussion at the quarterly operational review meetings.

March Of Dimes – WalkAmerica Finance Helps Raise Much Needed Funds



On Sunday, April 30th the March of Dimes held WalkAmerica 2006 and Finance joined with 10,000 other New Yorkers walking from Lincoln Center to Union Square and back. Committed to raising funds to fight premature birth – a growing national crisis affecting over a million babies in the US every year – Finance fielded a team of over 50 walkers. *Commissioner Martha E. Stark* was there to cheer the team on and keep them updated with a running tally of the total amount raised.

Joined for part of the 10K walk by former New York Jets *Joe Namath* and *Dave Herman*, the team raised over \$23,000 in the fight against premature births and birth defects. It was a gorgeous day in NYC – bright blue skies and sunshine – made even better by the warmth and generosity of the participants.

Special thanks to the Finance committee that coordinated the effort: *Quentin Brown* (Property); *Susan Cheung* (Treasury); *Sharon Chew* (Tax Enforcement); *David Cotes* (OTS); *Sheila Dallas Williams* (Administration); *Allison Fulford* (Adjudication); *Doreen Fulton* (Collections); *Daphne Harris* (ISS); *Myrna Hines-Smith* (Audit); *Vivian Lock* (Sheriff's Office); *Joann Maya* (City Register); *Collette McCain* (City Register); *Jacqueline Morrell* (Executive); *Anita Mullin* (Property); *Kathy Nixon* (Tax Policy); *Portia Perkins* (ISS); *Pat Roman* (Tax Enforcement); *Mary Scheman* (City Register); *Laura Salamon* (City Register); *Reasa Semper* (Administration); *Zena Spence* (Sheriff's Office); *Della Stille* (Legal Affairs); *Howard Walwick* (Communications); *Sheryl Williams* (Payment Operations); *Susie Yuen* (ISS).

Once again, Finance stepped up to make a difference in the lives of others.

Finance Employees Above And Beyond The Call Of Duty



ReveNEWS congratulates all the winners honored at the 22nd annual Employee Recognition Ceremony. The ceremony, a joint effort by Finance and DC 37, is designed to recognize the contributions of Finance employees to both the Department and the City of New York. On May 8th, DC 37 headquarters in Manhattan was decked out in orange, blue and white balloons. *Kevin Burke*, Payment Operations, the Quality of Work Life Labor Co-Chair for the Employee Recognition Committee and *Craig Woodall*, Refunds and Adjustments, the Management Co-Chair, co-hosted the event. The over 400 honorees this year was up from last year's 340.

Featured speakers included Finance *Commissioner Martha E. Stark* and *Executive Director of District*

Council 37 Lillian Roberts. *Peter Sammarco* (Sheriff's Office) was there in full uniform and was honored for his recent service in Iraq. *First Deputy Commissioner Rochelle Patricof* read his citation, and the audience erupted in a standing ovation after Martha pinned the medal on him.

There were 314 employees who earned Service Awards for career service from 15 – 35 years. This year, the highest career service award category recognized was the 35-Year group, who were presented with engraved clocks by Martha and Director Roberts.

Sixty employees won Perfect Attendance Awards for no use of sick leave for periods from 1 – 14 years. *Frank Lupo*, Payment Operations, won a Perfect Attendance Award for 14 years of perfect attendance! *Joseph Gabriel* (ISS); and *Peter Sammarco* (Sheriff's Office); won for 12 years of perfect attendance each! *Julien Giraud* (Sheriff's Office) and *John Schwartz* (Sheriff's Office) each won for 11 years of perfect attendance! Wow!

Twelve employees won Community Service Awards for work with Community Boards, volunteer fire departments, youth organizations, veterans' activities, the Boy and Girl Scouts, and other organizations. Additionally, eleven employees won Educational & Professional Achievement Awards for attaining graduate, undergraduate, and associate degrees and professional certifications.

A complete list of all award-winners is available online at <http://dofweb/>.

A New Generation At Work

April 27th was “Take Our Children to Work Day.” What started in 1993 as a program for daughters has evolved into a national family affair that includes girls and boys, moms and dads, aunts, uncles and grandparents. This year, approximately 160 “Finance” children from around NYC participated in the program.

Guest speakers from across the Department met with the kids.

Commissioner Martha E. Stark made the rounds to different locations meeting with the kids and answering questions. When the kids asked about her salary, Martha turned the tables on them and had them do the calculations. Challenging them to use math to figure out the answer and rewarding those who came up with the right answer, the lesson for the day was clear – “If you do the work, you earn the money.”

The kids in the Bronx office got to know each other by playing a memory game before “report-

ing to work.” Rather than just introducing themselves by name and describing their interests, each of the children had to remember what all of the children preceding them said – quite a challenge for the one who went last. But they all did amazingly well, and when they joined their parents at work, they sat in on a staff meeting and

actually assisted with copying documents and other daily work responsibilities.

The most important part of the day was that most of the children were able to observe firsthand what their par-

ents and other family members do during the workday. They were able to see the value of getting a good education and the need to start planning for the challenges of balancing work, family and personal responsibilities. There were presentations, office tours, and mock hearings. At the end of their day “on the job,” the kids were given certificates to keep mementos.



Did You Know...?

There is no deadline, and it's easy to nominate a coworker for a Star of the Season Award.... Established to recognize Finance employees for their outstanding contributions to the agency and to the citizens of New York City, this award is part of Finance's Labor-Management Quality of Work life (QWL) program. Nomination applications are available on the Finance Employee Intranet at <http://dofweb/>.

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