



Peace Corps

Joint Labor-Management Committee

Thursday, September 24, 2020 10:00am-10:50am

Chair – ELR

Attendance:

- I. HR**
 - a. Traci, Tina, Chip, Evester, Antoine, Lisa
- II. Union**
 - a. Mathew, Harris, Sarah, Mike B, Jubal

Agenda Items:

- I. Share Union election results from last week**
 - a. Officers
 - i. President = Mathew Crichton
 - ii. VP = Ben Simasek
 - iii. Treasurer = Jubal Fairagan
 - iv. Secretary = Michael Black
 - v. Additional Executive Board Members = Genevieve Locksley, Harris Javed, Kyle Uhlmann
 - vi. Board of Trustees = Sarah Watson, Ben Simasek, Kyle Uhlmann
 - b. Stewards
 - i. Chief Steward = Harris Javed
 - ii. Full Roster = Harris Javed, Anthony Muron, Genevieve Locksley, Sarah Watson, Ben Simasek, Jubal Fairagan, Michael Triozzi, Michael Black, Mathew Crichton, Emily Skeels, Kyle Uhlmann
 - c. Results have been communicated to AFSCME Council 20 and ELR
 - d. Traci said that HR was happy to receive the new officers/stewards list, Evester will be giving notification to the Director and Management team
- II. COVID-19 Return to the Office Updates**
 - a. Phase 1: How is the week going? What % of overall staff were approved to go back?
 - i. The Union shared that no major issues reported to us by our members so far regarding Phase 1. So far so good.
 - b. Phase 2: Is the Agency waiting at least 1 month between each phase? Any additional info to share at this time with CBU members?
 - i. No specific timeline for how quickly we move to the next phase. Lots of specific metrics from HR and S&S are taking into account to make decisions
 - ii. No employees should be being asked to come into the office by their managers unless they have a specific business reason and are approved to do so by the Agency through official channels.
 - iii. If any employees are feeling pressured to come in before they are ready, please bring it up to HR immediately
 - iv. Everything about the return is outlined on the Peace Corps Everlasting document which is hosted on the “Return to Facilities” page
 - 1. Lots of specific guidelines there that employees should follow



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2. Basically, everyone should stay home unless they have a business reason to head to the office
- c. The Union shared that the “Return to Facilities” Workspace website has been very helpful and we have been pointing CBU members there as they come to us with questions
 - i. Traci asked the Union to encourage our members to take the return/safety training if they haven’t yet

III. Delayed career ladder promotions

- a. Evester held a meeting on 8/21 with Sarah/Harris/Ben and brought up this topic asking us to bring to ELR any instances of this happening to our members
 - i. Traci said that since ELR has started this work about 3 months ago, they have helped many folks who were past their eligibility periods get promoted
 - ii. Once an employee is hired into a career ladder, employees/supervisors should have discussions within a few months to make sure they are on the right track to be promoted when the time comes and they are both ready.
 - iii. Setting expectations and ensuring clear communication between employees/supervisors is key.
 - iv. Chip added that some of the responsibility should be placed on the employees as well. This should be an ongoing dialogue. At the 6 month mark, employees should know feel comfortable/empowered to speak to their supervisor about this. Employees shouldn’t be completely silent on this until the time for promotions has passed for them.
 - v. Performance at grade question from Sarah about how the Agency knows when an employee is ready for a promotion = Traci said that PC has a weak grade management system. Employees must 100% be meeting the standards of their current grade to be eligible for promotion. They also must be working towards demonstrating superior performance (which isn’t captured in reviews). The amount of work alone isn’t enough, as it’s more about the higher levels of harder work and doing one’s work with less supervision. PC still has to do more on this as the Agency hasn’t been doing enough to hold everyone accountable.
 - vi. Lisa added that ELR is speaking to supervisors about the requirements of how the career ladder works. ELR will keep working with management on this. Employees just doing their job isn’t enough, as they have to show that they can work at a higher level as well.
 - vii. Evester added that in some instances employees are performing two jobs (their current role and the higher level job too). This doesn’t happen in other parts of the Federal government and shouldn’t be happening here. Their time shouldn’t be 100% spent higher level work if they aren’t at that grade. Their work must match their current position and its responsibilities.
 - viii. Chip said that employees have to be fully performing their current grade level and also demonstrate an ability to perform at a higher grade level. There is subjectivity involved and that’s why we need open and continuous dialogue between employees and supervisors on this throughout their work.
- b. We have found two recent examples where supervisors weren’t promoting employees who qualified and were performing at/above standards for over a full year in their position



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- i. Traci shared that it's not an entitlement that after 52 weeks employees will be promoted. Employees must demonstrate that they are ready to do work at a higher level.
 - ii. Some managers are putting their own requirements over and above those of HR. Managers have received a list of folks that are overdue promotions. HR wants to know why they haven't yet and are working to either promote them or receive documentation about why not. If employees aren't being promoted as expected, managers have to offer training and support to help them get there.
 - iii. This is also a morale issue at Peace Corps. We shouldn't be moving people from office to office grade chasing. Promoting them within their team up the ladder and to higher positions within their offices is better for the Agency as a whole and better for employees' careers
- c. How should we advise and work with employees and ELR to rectify issues like these? All issues the Union knows about have existing email threads with ELR.
- i. Traci said that the Union and others can continue to help here. Peace Corps needs to stop coming up with their own personnel interpretations. HR should be the source for information on these topics. When people have an issue, the office they should be communicating with is HR.
 - ii. We should be going to Evester's team to engage with them about specific instances where issues. Employees should stop going to them and come to us instead.
 - iii. Each office cannot interpret HR policies as they see fit.
 - iv. The HR office and OGC are the main sources for correct information. People may not like the official answer, so they try to make their own deals.
 - v. Continue working with Tina and Evester. A new ChiCO will be onboard in the next 4 months. Peace Corps is its own problem. We all have to follow the same rules.
- d. Once employees receive their overdue promotions, will they still need to wait a full year in grade before applying for a higher graded position or ladder promotion? Some have been overdue a promotion for 6+ months. How do we help these employees be made whole?
- i. They are not getting back pay or shortened promotion timelines
 - ii. Employees should take responsibility for their part of this work. They shouldn't try to be the ones dictating the terms of their promotions to their managers.
 - iii. Entry level employees should know that they won't become a manager in 2-3 years within joining the federal workforce. Traci has concerns about PC employees leaving the Agency for elsewhere and not understanding the expectations of the rest of the federal workforce.
- e. How quickly and well are new supervisors trained on how to facilitate promotions? Some members have expressed concerns to us that their supervisors have shared very different thoughts with them on how the promotion process works. This is especially true for instances where an employee has a change or many changes in supervisor.
- i. A member present asked about his situation concerning his supervisors. He's had 3 different first-line supervisors in 9 months and a 4th is coming soon. He has heard different information and guidelines from each of them about promotions. The average employee doesn't know exactly who they should be



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going to. The Union can help provide them guidance and tell employees to go to HR to work through this with their supervisors.

- ii. Traci said that this person's example is a powerful one and thanked him for sharing. This is accurate. Evester said that it is important that we bring issues to ELR's attention for cases like this.
- iii. Mathew asked about employees who encounter a new supervisor who doesn't think they are performing at/above standards, but their previous long-term supervisor thinks they were doing great and were due a promotion. Traci said that outgoing supervisors should be writing up how their employees are doing before they leave and that that write-up should be weighed alongside the new supervisor's remarks and weighted appropriately.
- iv. Traci also wanted to shout out ELR (Evester, Lisa, Antoine) for all of their hard work. Antoine is launching a big supervisory training next month to focus on more regular and reliable training. As a government Agency, there are set rules for how new supervisors can evaluate employees and how long they have to manage before they can write reviews. Everyone should follow the rules regarding this.
- v. Evester has asked for clear documentation from supervisors on reviews/promotions to understand the context for specific cases. Managers often talk about what they'd like to see and that is in contention with what the standards for the job requires. Whatever the manager deems as an issue has to link up to the performance standards. It really involves a lot of communication and review of documentation between the old and new managers. This doesn't always happen.
- vi. Traci said that having issues with promotions doesn't preclude employees from doing their job. The Agency and its employees must follow the rules. We are exercising the maximum amount of flexibility right now and encouraging it from HR. Peace Corps work is a full-time job being paid for by taxpayer dollars. Everyone has an obligation to do their jobs. The Union needs to understand that this isn't us vs. them. It's also not part of an activist movement. This is a professional workplace with set rules and expectations. We are a better Agency when we have clear and open communication. We should all follow the rules and the Union can/should provide input on the process. When ELR has evidence and examples, we can take action.
- vii. Evester added that ELR had an issue with COVID-19 leave last month, and HR created and set requirements for documentation required for that leave. For the individual case that was brought up to ELR by the Union, that employee received their leave back.
- viii. Mathew shared that we agree and that the Union can do a lot to help empower and build trust between employees. We will share information when we receive it, and we will strongly encourage employees to come to us with their concerns and then go to ELR with them to see those issues resolved. We all have a role to play in the process, and the Agency will benefit from a stronger and healthier relationship between employees and managers, the Union and HR.



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IV. Social Security Withholding Issue (added by Traci)

- a. It's a deferral, not forgiveness, and employees cannot opt-out of it. This money will need to be paid back when Jan 1st, 2021 comes as double the amount of SS taken out to make up for the loss over the following months.
- b. Traci asked that we help employees understand that more money will be taken out (12.4%) to make up for the 6.2% temporary increase they are seeing from Sept through Dec 2020
- c. Mathew shared that the Union has heard many questions on this, and we properly guided employees to the correct information online and to wait for HR's email, which came within two weeks of the holiday starting. We will continue to share that official HR notification with employees who come to us going forward.

V. What Can the Union Do in the Coming Year

- a. Mathew asked for Traci and other's on the call for their opinions of how we've been doing and what we can improve upon with our work and with ELR going forward this coming year
- b. Traci said that a Union has a role in every workplace, and that Sarah and Violet have been great previous Presidents that helped establish a professional relationship. Violet was an amazing employee and spent a solid amount of time working for the Union. We should work with the Director to do something for her that involves the entire Agency. Mathew shared that the Union has already commemorated her within our ranks, but we agree that a more Agency-wide communication led by the Director would be great to see.
- c. Traci suggested we stay collaborative and professional and a lot of good work will be done.
- d. The Peace Corps is a federal agency and we all should understand that it has to follow the rules. The access that employees have to the ChiCO and OGC is unique and should be valued. The Union shouldn't give grand proclamations about the Agency being terrible. Mathew clarified that we don't do that and promote Peace Corps as a good place to work. Traci shared that HR is here to protect the Agency from litigation and also protect all of its employees from those who break the rules.
- e. Evester is the person in ELR staying on with Lisa/Antoine on the frontlines. Evester said he supported the idea of regular communication being key. The Union is the eyes/ears of the Bargaining Unit, and we can help make HR aware of problems and where we all can improve. During the COVID period, immediately after we went on telework, ELR didn't hear much from the Union about its members voicing concerns or problems. The Union clarified that we heard overall good things from employees during this time. While the transition was fast, it was necessary and went fairly well. Going forward, ELR would like to hear more from the Union regularly and use that input to work on future projects together.
- f. Tina wants to see the Union continue to work with ELR. Being open and transparent is key.
- g. Traci said that all employees need to follow the Hatch Act. Stay above board and don't use government equipment to act out. Use leave to participate in protests if people want to. Stay engaged and take time off if needed. There are rules, but we can and should support people to be heard and participate in these movements.



VI. Diversity & Training Initiatives

- a. Evester added that HR has increased its communication with managers about diversity and inclusion trainings. OCRD has been very helpful to offer mediation within offices on this topic. This is a big issue for ELR and the Agency. Managers have contacted ELR recently to ask for more info.
- b. Traci said that John Burden in OCRD is a consummate professional. Matthew and Connor on his team are both well-versed in the rules.
- c. A member brought up that their office has recently communicated that D&I trainings have been put on hold. Traci asked for this person to send her that email from VRS management. She said that they shouldn't have sent anything out until they heard official guidance from Jodi, Michelle, and HR on this. Traci asked them to forward her the email directly and he did.
- d. Traci shared that HR always does a lot of statistical analysis of applicant flow and hiring. There is a new directive from OMB to hold off on doing training until they are approved/reviewed. Jodi has been very clear on her commitment to the Task Force, but because of the OMB guidance things are on pause.
- e. Chip said that the Agency doesn't yet have clear guidance from OMB. The most recent communication from the White House this week was a supplemental executive order about this same topic as the earlier memo.
- f. Tina will continue doing an outstanding job and keep things running smoothly. She needed to be brought in and get up to speed, and that's why she's here today in this meeting. Traci said she thinks the Union is in a good spot. Traci appreciates the productive activity and continuing to demonstrate that the Agency has been working well while teleworking. That is great to see!
- g. Everyone expressed thanks and gratitude for the discussion and the points covered, and the meeting was ended at 10:50am.