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Vol III, No. 35



5 September 1995

**FURLOUGH:  
To BE  
OR  
NOT To BE ?  
(U)**

(U) The word "furlough" has cropped up frequently during the past few weeks, not only in the open press, but also in many conversations around the Agency. While NSA has received no official notification from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) that there will be a furlough on 1 October, in this article we want to provide some information about furloughs in general and the potential impact, if any, a furlough would have at our Agency.

(U) First, for those of you who are unsure of the exact meaning of the word, OPM defines furlough as "the placing of an employee in a temporary nonduty, nonpay status because of lack of work or funds, or other nondisciplinary reasons." Secondly, OPM categorizes furloughs as either "emergency" or "save money" furloughs. It's important to understand the distinction between the two. An emergency furlough occurs when an agency no longer has necessary funds and must shut down those activities which are not exempted by Office of Management and Budget standards. A save money furlough is a planned event designed to absorb reductions necessitated by downsizing, reduced funding, lack of work, or any other event which requires an agency to save money.

(U) The type of furlough that we've been hearing about is an **emergency furlough**. It is not in any way associated with a RIF or downsizing efforts. If Congress and the President have not approved one or more of the 13 appropriations bills by 1 October, the beginning of the new fiscal year, government agencies may be forced to furlough employees in positions that aren't considered "essential." Congress can enact a continuing resolution to keep the government open and has often done so in the past. But if that measure isn't adopted because of political concerns (as may be the case this year), employees who are sent home or asked not to report to work will not be paid. Congress has the authority to retroactively approve payment to employees for lost workdays after a budget agreement is reached, but this is not guaranteed. When the last government shutdown occurred in 1990, NSA was exempt for national security reasons. Federal employees at other agencies who were affected were paid retroactively.

(U) What does all of this mean to NSA employees? Although we have not received official notification of a government wide furlough, all agencies have been advised to make contingency plans for a possible furlough in case the budget isn't approved in time. The Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence will review contingency plans in mid-September. Historically, a furlough has never occurred here and we are again vigorously pursuing an exemption; however, no decision has been made yet as to how we will fare this year.

(U) A furlough fact sheet will be issued shortly to answer specific questions which you undoubtedly have. There will also be periodic updates to the work force as events unfold and you will be immediately informed once a concrete decision is made regarding the furlough.

**“PROMOTABILITY”  
REVISITED  
(U)**

(U) In the past we've published several articles designed to increase your awareness of the promotion process and improve your advancement potential (see Vol. III, #7). At the conclusion of the recent promotion cycle, the Chairs of the Agency GS-14&15 Promotion Review Boards (PRBs) briefed the Director on their experiences and perceptions of the process. Following are some of the key observations they would like to share with the work force. While some themes are familiar, they should serve to clarify or reinforce some aspects of the process which may not be understood and possibly impact your potential for promotion.

***Times are tough! (U)***

~~(FOUO)~~ A fact abundantly clear to all in this era of downsizing is that there are fewer promotions being awarded. Only  of the eligible candidates for promotion to Grade 14, and only  of the eligible candidates for promotion to Grade 15 were, in fact, promoted. In the opinion of both Boards, however, many other qualified candidates exist and as a result final decisions were extremely difficult.

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***The process is fair! (U)***

~~(FOUO)~~ The Agency directs considerable attention to selecting members to serve on the PRBs in order to ensure good cross representation of experience, disciplines, technical and managerial backgrounds, gender and diversity. Although there are “officially designated” female and minority representatives on these Boards, each member has an obligation to ensure that every candidate for promotion is equally considered. It is also important to emphasize that each PRB member is charged to act on behalf of the Director, and specifically not as a proponent for candidates from their respective Key Components.

~~(FOUO)~~ The first activity in which the boards engage is a discussion of the criteria for promotion.

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~~(FOUO)~~ The single driving factor is that the process must be equitably applied to all eligible candidates. Also, a “zero-based review” must be a component of the process. That is, records of all eligible candidates must be thoroughly reviewed. Due to the extremely large numbers of eligible employees, each board member is assigned a segment of the alphabet to review. It is current policy that all females and minorities receive a second review by another PRB member. The result of this extensive review is the identification of a set of nominees, or “add-ons,” to be further considered as

candidates for promotion. Each of the nominees is evaluated against the criteria and a vote is taken. The names of those selected are forwarded to their respective Key Components or Field Chiefs for appropriate testimony. Concurrently, each Key Component and field site submits a prioritized list of individuals they are recommending for advancement. In this manner the Boards arrive at a set of candidates for promotion and conduct further review and receive testimony on each. The PRB then votes to derive its recommended list and notifies those who gave testimony of the results of its deliberations. Following any reclamation, the recommendations are forwarded through Chief, M and DDS to the Director for approval.

***Everyone must help! (U)***

~~(FOUO)~~ All individuals eligible for promotion are responsible for reviewing their own records for completeness and accuracy. Records should be current and personnel summaries should accurately describe present job responsibilities and be no more than 9-12 months old. Although each Board may develop its own "personality," the following guidance for employees and supervisors should be applicable from Board to Board:

▶ Ensure promotion write-ups and personnel summaries enumerate specific accomplishments and their impact on mission. Supervisors should review their words carefully, asking themselves "is it clear what this person has done?" and "is it clear why this work was important?" Keep in mind that it is highly probable that any given PRB member will not know the individual on a firsthand basis, but rather will formulate a perception based on the text of the write-up and personnel summary.

▶ Ensure that recommendations are written in a commonly understood language. The technical community (and its subgroups, e.g., cryptomathematicians, computer scientists, electrical engineers, linguists) often make the mistake of writing a justification which can only be understood by someone else in the subgroup.

▶ Don't ignore anomalies – explain them! If a person has unusually few professional training courses in recent years, explain the mitigating factors and the impact, if any, on the candidate's readiness for promotion. Also focus on any positive anomalies which make the individual particularly deserving of promotion.

▶ Allow sufficient time to generate write-ups! Promotion cycles occur at regular intervals so plan accordingly. If the nominee is relatively new to the organization, coordinate NOW with previous supervisors. Maintain adequate contact with subordinates to know exactly what he/she has done, is and will be doing.

***The Process works without specific attention to demographics! (U)***

~~(FOUO)~~ Stated alternatively, the PRBs FIRST selected those believed to be the best candidates for promotion. The Boards then generated various statistical "sanity checks" on distributions of the proposed set of promotions by organization, COSC, age, gender, cultural diversity, education, time-in-grade, management versus technical, etc. To the pride and satisfaction of the PRBs the process had worked! EEO objectives had been accomplished without targeting specific groups for consideration.


~~(FOUO)~~ As stated many times, it is the employee's responsibility to ensure that his/her promotion file contains timely and pertinent documentation. M09 maintains the Agency-level GS-14&15 promotion board files in OPS2B, Room 4132. To schedule an appointment call 963-1677s.

**Postscript File**

(U) 1. Effective 11 September 1995, the OPS1 Medical Center will extend its hours of operation. The new hours from 0700 to 1700 will allow more customers, particularly shift workers, to be accommodated. For more information, stop by the OPS1 Med Center, 1C059, or call 963-5420s or (301) 688-7263b.

(U) 2. With the theme "Get a Grip on Your Health," the Office of Occupational and Environmental Health Services and the Civilian Welfare Fund (CWF) are sponsoring the 15th Annual Health Fair on 15, 18-20 September from 0730-1030 in the OPS 1 N. Cafeteria Party Rooms. For a \$16 fee individuals can receive a full blood chemistry with cholesterol, HDL, LDL, and triglyceride results. Male participants over the age of 40 have the option of paying an additional \$16 for a Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) screening for early detection of prostate disease. As usual, the program will also offer health screenings consisting of blood pressure, glaucoma, visual acuity and tuberculosis screening. Computerized body composition analysis will also be available for a \$10 fee. Appointments may be made at all CWF locations.

(U) As an additional service, the Health Fair will be expanded to include an exposition on 26 and 27 September in the OPS 1 N. Cafeteria Party Rooms, from 0930 to 1330 hours. The "Expo" will feature medical, psychological, safety, and environmental professionals from various areas of employee services. This year's interactive wellness exhibits also include alternatives in complimentary medicine, "Appearances Count," food tasting, and much more! For further information concerning Health Fair and Expo '95, contact the CWF on (301) 688-7337b.



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