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Inside The Fishbowl Official Newsletter of NTEU 280

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FROM THE CHAPTER 280 PRESIDENT by Jim Murphy

We've been hearing an abundance of opinions about what a wonderful idea merit pay is. It seems plausible. It's hard to argue that the government's most productive employees should not be recognized with bigger raises and higher salaries than the dead wood that just takes up space in the office. In theory, it's irresistible. It resonates well with Darwin's and Spencer's ideas of the survival of the fittest, and with the Protestant work ethic. It's difficult to say a negative word about it. But I'll try.

I'll say a discouraging word, because theory of merit pay and the application of merit pay in practice are often very different. Merit is in the eye of the beholder. Perceptions become self-fulfilling prophecies, as supervisors give the choice, meaningful, highly-visible assignments to a chosen few, and withhold them from those who are not in favor. Meaningful work is intrinsically rewarding, as Victor Frankl pointed out, but it also serves as a stepping-stone to advancement in the organization. Quarterly and annual awards and quality step increases (QSIs) frequently seem to go to the same people time after time.

This good fortune enjoyed by a select group of employees is, no doubt, performance-related. Seeing good work rewarded should inspire and energize employees. Unfortunately, if the other employees perceive that their managers are manipulating the distribution of meaningful and potentially meritorious work to a select few employees, it can lead instead to resentment and morale problems that undermine productivity. Federal employees are not drawn at random from the general population. They commence their federal service after a lengthy and rigorous selection process. This suggests that the capable employees should be many in number, rather than just a small, select few.

It's understandable that managers who are faced with demands from the Congress, the Courts and the public for rapid responses would turn first and most often to those employees in whom they have developed the most confidence. This may be one source of the "select few" phenomenon. Another possible (and less legitimate) dynamic is the insecurity of managers who need yes-men. The quality of leaders may be seen in their ability to value and benefit from subordinates who disagree with them. Organizations headed by those who need yes-men (and who do not value alternative suggestions) will be easily recognized when they implement merit pay. In these organizations, one will see a veritable Olympics of ass-kissing, and real merit will be a fortuitous happenstance.

NTEU DUES FOR 2003

The National Treasury Employees Union biweekly dues deductions for 2003 have (unsurprisingly) increased, but they remain in the neighborhood of the cost of a soft drink or cup of coffee a day. To some of us, this seems a good investment. NTEU is fighting for a fairer pay raise for federal employees, seeking 4.1% this year, rather than the 3.1% raise that is currently

proposed, and even that is higher than the 2.6% that was on the table earlier. NTEU got federal health-insurance premiums paid with pre-tax dollars, saving the average employee several hundred dollars a year. This would pay the year's Union dues with money to spare. NTEU uses a graduated scale of dues that depends on GS-level and -step, in 2003 starting at \$9.79 for a GS-1, Step 1, and progressing to \$17.02 biweekly for a GS-15, Step 10. Some examples follow. A GS-12 will pay \$13.42 at Step 1, \$14.00 at Step 5, and \$14.41 at Step 10. A GS-13 will pay \$14.15 at Step 1, \$14.50 at Step 5, and \$14.91 at Step 10. A GS-14 will pay \$14.58, \$15.00, and \$15.54, respectively, biweekly for these same levels. You should soon be seeing new numbers on your statement of earnings and leave.

REMINDER: EECO IS DEFUNCT. STOP PAYING DUES. ASK FOR REFUND

About five years ago, NFFE Local 2050 voted to become NTEU Chapter 280. Before that happened, there was an unofficial experiment in workplace democracy in which another union was created at EPA headquarters, called Environmental Employees Collectively Organized (EECO). EECO was never recognized by EPA or the Federal Labor Relations Authority. EPA refused to administer biweekly dues deductions for EECO, so EECO dues were taken from employees' pay as individual allotments, as if to a credit union account, for example. After a couple years EECO members voted at a membership meeting to disband the organization.

Repeated announcements in *Inside the Fishbowl* urged EECO members to discontinue paying dues to EECO. The EECO dues were less than NFFE dues or NTEU dues, but it makes no sense to pay dues to a defunct organization that was never recognized and has never been in a position to provide effective representation for its members. Some former members continue to pay dues to EECO by biweekly dues withholding.

We need EECO members to <u>terminate</u> their biweekly allotments of dues, and to <u>identify</u> yourself to Bernard Schneider (Treasurer of EECO and NTEU 280) or James J. Murphy (the last acting President of EECO and current President of NTEU 280), so that your dues can be returned to you. It would be most helpful to know also what period you paid dues to EECO (i.e., starting and ending dates), or give Bernie Schneider permission to seek information on your allotments from the banking institution that has been accumulating your dues for EECO. Again, this is deemed by the bank to be a private matter, and the union may not have standing to inquire into it.

BOOK REVIEW

Leadership, by Rudolph W. Giuliani, with Ken Kurson, 2002 (Hyperion).

Reviewed by Jim Murphy

More autobiography than textbook, this is a lively and touching collection of experiences and lessons drawn by Rudolph William Giuliani, former Mayor of New York City during the 9/11 crisis, former U.S. Attorney, and the man that fictional mob boss Tony Soprano wants least to see cloned. Tony Soprano is fiction, but the real people who populate this book sound like they just stepped out of a Damon Runyon story: Mayor Ed Koch, Yogi Berra, Placido Domingo,

Yasser Arafat, and examples of another kind of leadership: John Gotti, Fat Tony Salerno and Mattie the Horse.

Little is said of his marriage and children, other than discovering golf with his son, but his battle with prostate cancer is mentioned here and there, along with a plug for *The Taste for Living Cookbook: Mike Milken's Favorite Recipes for Fighting Cancer.* Yes, *that* Michael Milken. Men who choose radiation therapy for prostate cancer have Giuliani's example to follow. [Men who choose surgery can look to General Norman Schwartzkopf for their inspiration, but the General is not mentioned in Giuliani's book.] Giuliani had been besieged with questions about options for treating his prostate while he was campaigning for George W. Bush in 2000. The 9/11 stories and the prostate stories show Giuliani's human side. He had begun the book before 9/11/2001, and had been working on it with his co-author, Ken Kurson, but the aftermath of 9/11 enhanced Giuliani's credibility and name-recognition, and gave the book project new impetus after the emergency had subsided.

Chapter titles and subheadings form a compendium of maxims that are the essence of Mayor Giuliani's view of leadership. First things first. Prepare relentlessly. Everyone's accountable, all of the time. Surround yourself with great people. Reflect, then decide. Underpromise and overdeliver. Develop and communicate strong beliefs. Be your own man. Loyalty is the vital virtue. Embrace those who are attacked. Going to funerals is mandatory, going to weddings is discretionary. Stand up to bullies. Study, read, learn independently. Don't leave it to the experts. Organize around a purpose. Chart it and understand it. Bribe only those who will stay bribed [no, not literally].

Giuliani's devotion to graphical representation of data led to his being dubbed "Chart Boy" by his co-workers. Collect the data. Chart where things stand now. Try a new intervention. Then chart the new situation and see whether things improved, and how much. W. Edwards Deming would love the guy. It just sings Total Quality Management (TQM).

Giuliani takes a generally dim view of unions, based at least in part on clashes with municipal unions in New York City and union rackets during his days as U.S. Attorney. He points out that there is a big difference between an advantageous contract that results from savvy negotiation by a lawful union and one that results from violence and intimidation.

NTEU 280 LEGISLATIVE COORDINATOR

The appointment of Jacqueline Rose as Legislative Coordinator for Chapter 280 has been ratified by the Executive Board. Jacqueline is an architect, an engineer, and Chapter 280's Secretary. She serves on various labor-management committees for our Chapter, and attended last year's NTEU Legislative Conference. NTEU National maintains a staff of employees in its Legislative Department whose job is to advocate and track federal-friendly legislation in the Congress.

CHAPTER 280 ELECTION COMMITTEE

This is an election year for Chapter 280 officers. The three-year term of office (that sounded like a long time when compared to the previous one-year term) will conclude on June 30. A new

Executive Board will take office on July 1. The Chapter 280 Election Committee is made up of Union members who are <u>not</u> running for office. The Election Committee sees to it that the nominations meeting is held in April or May, the ballot is prepared in accordance with the local constitution (candidates for each office listed in random order) and mailed to members home addresses with voting instructions. The election committee meets, counts the ballots, and posts the results. Becky Jones has agreed to serve again as Chair of the Election Committee, a job that she has handled with distinction for NFFE 2050 and NTEU 280. Drs. Patricia Hilgard and Jack Kooyoomjian have agreed to join the committee. A couple more helpers would be welcome.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR FLUORIDE RESEARCH XXV CONFERENCE REPORT by Bill Hirzy

The Conference was held over January 21-24 in Dunedin, New Zealand and featured research reports and reviews presented by workers from Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. Abstracts of the papers, including the one I presented on Fluoride and Environmental Protection, can be viewed by going to <u>www.fluoride-journal.com</u>, clicking on Table of Contents and going to Vol. 35 No. 4, pp 244-263. Three papers struck me as worthy of detailed reporting here, one by Dr. Anna Strunecka', University of Prague on aluminum fluoride complexes and G-proteins, one by Dr. Hardy Limeback, of the Preventative Dentistry Department, University of Toronto on the role of topical fluoride in dental health, and one by Dr. Paul Connett of St. Lawrence University on effects of fluoride on bone and collagen. Here are the abstracts of their papers.

Aluminofluoride complexes. Intensive laboratory research on the mechanisms of signal transduction has produced experimental data that could change our understanding of the action of fluoride at the cellular level. After reflecting on these laboratory studies, we suggest that some of pathological changes are not produced by fluoride alone but by the synergistic action of fluoride and aluminum. Heterotrimeric G-proteins mediate the transfer of information from heptahelical receptors to effector molecules. The discovery of aluminofluoride complexes (AlFx) as a new class of phosphate analogues has been followed by demonstrations of their usefulness in laboratory investigations and their pharmacological efficacy. AIFx complexes interact with all known G-protein-activated effector enzymes. G-proteins take part in an enormous variety of biological signaling systems, helping control almost all important life processes. The family of cell-surface receptors that require coupling to G-protein transducers for functional signaling is vast and diverse. AlFx may clone or potentiate the action of numerous extracellular signals. It appears probable that we will not find any physiological process which is not potentially influenced by AIFx. The aluminofluoride complex acts as the first messenger triggering processes of neurotransmission and potentiating the action of various hormones. It is evident that AlFx are species that convey false information, which is then amplified by processes of signal transmission. Many human diseases have their origin in the malfunctioning of signaling components. Pharmacologists estimate that up to 60% of all medicines used today exert their effects through a G-protein signaling pathway. The synergistic action of fluoride and aluminum in the environment, water, and food can thus evoke multiple pathological symptoms. AlFx might induce alterations in homeostasis, metabolism, growth, and differentiation in living organisms. An awareness of the health risks of this new ecotoxicological phenomenon, an increasing load of aluminum ions and fluoride, would undoubtedly contribute significantly to reducing the risk of a decrease in intelligence of children and adults, and many other disorders in the 21 st century.

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Keywords: Aluminofluoride complexes, Aluminum, False information, First messenger,

G-proteins, Signal transduction.

Fluoride and dental caries: systemic and topical effects. A major paradigm shift has occurred regarding the mechanism of action of fluoride in preventing dental caries. The shift has been a slow one, taking nearly three decades. Nevertheless, it is now well recognized in the literature that the predominant, if not the entire, anti-caries effect of fluoride is a topical one, after the teeth emerge into the oral cavity. It appears that even a very small increase in intra-oral fluoride concentration, which can result, for example, from repeated exposure to fluoridated water or by the intra-oral release of fluoride from fluoride-rich dental fillings, has the effect of promoting remineralization of demineralized dental hard tissues. The end result is a remineralized white spot incipient lesion which is rich in fluorapatite but low in carbonate and magnesium. The latter two are apatite mineral destabilizers, while fluoride stabilizes the mineral phase. There is some evidence that fluoride in low daily doses may affect the metabolism of bacteria believed to be

responsible for dental caries, but this effect is a minor one. Exposure of the teeth to topical fluorides with high concentrations of various fluoride agents (toothpaste, mouth rinses, professional fluorides) appears to work by providing a deposit of calcium fluoride that releases fluoride in small increments each time plaque bacteria metabolize sugars to acids. The benefits of fluoridated water, however, if they even exist today, no longer seem to be of clinical significance, especially when placed in the context of the damage that fluoride ingestion from drinking water is doing to teeth. Ingested fluoride, from any source, during the developmental years in children, results in dental fluorosis in a dose-dependent manner. Not only is the incidence of fluorosis increasing at alarming rates, but so is the severity. The effect of long-term fluoride ingestion may be having similar effects on other hard tissues in the body. In this review a discussion of the systemic effects of fluoride ingestion will be limited to dental fluorosis, an area we are only now starting to understand more fully.

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Keywords: Dental caries, Dental fluorosis, Fluoridation, Systemic effects, Topical effects,

Caries prevention.

Water fluoridation and bone damage: a weight of evidence analysis. A very disturbing omission by those relatively few countries that promote and practice water fluoridation has been the failure to collect comprehensive data on the bone fluoride levels of their citizens as a function of the length of time of their exposure to fluoridated water. This unfortunate situation exists despite the fact that for many years researchers have been aware that approximately 50% of the fluoride ingested each day accumulates in the bones. Recently, a number of government sponsored reviews have re-examined the risks and benefits of water fluoridation (York Review, 2000; Medical Research Council (UK), 2002; and the Irish Fluoridation Forum, 2002). In each case one of the risks considered was fluoride's potential for damaging bones and making them more subject to fracture. However, each of these reports has been criticized because the authors failed to consider all the available evidence which pertains to this issue. A "weight of evidence" approach will be used, and the research in the literature which sheds light on the matter is examined. Biochemical studies, animal studies, clinical studies, case studies of workers exposed to fluoride in industry, and epidemiological studies of people drinking fluoridated water (both natural and artificial) will be included. The author will attempt to answer the following questions: 1 At what fluoride concentration in the bone does damage occur? 2 Is there any evidence that children's bones have been damaged from fluoride exposure? 3 At what cumulative dose of fluoride can we expect an increase in bone fractures in the elderly to occur? And, 4 Are people living in artificially fluoridated communities likely to exceed these cumulative doses with lifetime exposure to fluoride (from this and other sources combined)? By using the "cumulative dose" approach, the author hopes to avoid the pitfall of describing daily doses administered in clinical studies over short periods of time (1-5 years) as "high doses", and those administered over extended periods of time (50-70 years or more) as "low doses", as many commentators have done. For bone it is the total accumulation of fluoride that appears to be critical in the increase of frac-tures, especially in the non-vertebrae.

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Keywords: Bone damage, Bone fractures, Cumulative dose, Fluoride in bone, Fluorida-tion,

Weight of evidence analysis.

X-BYTES

by Dwight Welch

LOOKING FORWARD, REFLECTING BACK

The New Year is always a time to reflect back upon what we have accomplished and to look to the future with hope of a happy and productive new year. Looking forward does not look too hopeful at this point. We have an Administration hell bent upon halving an already undersized federal service (all the while increasing the size of government)-current Bush White House proposals would put even more federal jobs into the hands of private contractors, companies owned by political supporters, bringing back a spoils system which would increase government spending as well as waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement.

The veterans of past wars are being neglected, all the while a new war seems imminent, and while these guys are regarded as heros now, when it comes time to be compensated for disabilities, they can expected to be forgotten just as the Viet Nam and Gulf War vets were.

The attack on unions and unionism is also a cause for worry. Not only is unionism being barred from the new Homeland Security Department, but unionized employees are under attack in other arenas, including EPA, as well. The concept of "partnership" somewhat bogus under the last Administration (an excuse to radically cut federal employment, while contracting to friends, all the while appearing to be "good guys"), is all but dead now. The "U" word has this leftist, anti-American connotation, or at least that is what the Administration would seem to suggest.

One, Two, Three, You're Fired

If the Labor Relations Office is evaluated on their efficacy in firing employees, they rate an A. If this office is evaluated on their efficacy in undermining the Unions, they get a B plus. But if this office is to be evaluated on their problem solving skills, the best individuals get maybe a B minus, the worst an F, with an overall evaluation of a D.

Firings at EPA HQ seem to be proceeding at an unprecedented level. Generally, one or more of four tactics is used:

Alleged non-performance. Performance Assistance Programs (PAP) and Performance Improvement Programs (PIP) are supposed to be used to help an employee improve performance. Rather, in most instances, they are a step-wise program to get rid of employees with no thought of performance improvement. Management is often NOT interested in performance improvement, just getting rid of the employee. Rather than the old fashioned way of retaliating against an employee by hauling off and firing them, this step-wise method establishes a case which is more difficult to refute due to its methodical establishment of an alleged pattern of non-performance. Ideally, even in cases of true non-performance, and there are some, employees should be given training, mentoring, and other forms of support intent upon truly trying to improve their performance. Rather the current system is a cynical system of ostracizing and isolating the employee. Employees who truly have non-performance problems need to buckle down and concentrate on improvement. Employees who are unfairly the targets of retaliation need to be sure to meet all deadlines, document, document, and ideally try to get peer reviews of your work which you keep "in your pocket" until you need them to confront the unfairness at a formal meeting such as a PAP or PIP meeting. And whether you deserve the unsatisfactory or not, you need to focus, forget your personal animosities towards the supervisor, and achieve your set goals. <u>In all cases, if you are the subject of an unsatisfactory performance evaluation, PAP, or PIP, contact your union IMMEDIATELY. These folks have gotten very efficient in getting you fired.</u>

Alleged Time and Attendance Abuse. Like non-performance, if the complaint is legitimate, it is a problem which management must deal with. If you are cheating the government out of time, straighten up very quickly or they will get you. But what about the many who are targeted unfairly. Suppose you are getting your job accomplished, but you still have a T&A problem? While T&A is generally loosey-goosey here at EPA, it matters not whether others are doing the very same thing you are and are not getting dinged. What others are doing doesn't justify your behavior and complaining about them may provide management with an opportunity to turn your coworkers against you. You need to keep a low profile, knuckle under, and adhere to their Time and Attendance or Leave Restriction letter to a tee, for the duration of the proposed restriction. If the T & A letter is a result of retaliation, you must deal with the retaliation separately, but in the meantime give them no excuse to get you, because get you they will. As an example, when they played this game on me, I was flexing late to avoid traffic and live 45 miles South of EPA. In 45 miles, a lot can go wrong. Thus for the duration, I left an hour earlier, even though it meant an extra hour or two of commuting time. <u>As with non-performance, if you are targeted, contact your union immediately.</u>

Alleged Behavior Problems. While people truly have behavior problems with which management must deal, unfortunately others, who are merely outspoken in their views are targeted. The drill here is to first reprimand you, then suspend you, and finally fire you. Doing it this way, rather than firing as a first resort, allows them to lay a history which will make it more difficult to get back in the government. If you truly have a behavior problem, request and get counseling immediately. If you are the target of retaliation, you should try to keep a low profile during the period of your reprimand; they generally are expunged from the record after two years. In either event, again, contact your union immediately.

Alleged Travel Card Abuse. There are a high number of employees getting dinged for their travel card use. Most employee advocates claim that the rules are not uniformly enforced, they let their friends slide, but may decide to fire you for the same infraction. No matter. While unequal treatment may be a mitigating factor to reduce penalty, one must be absolutely scrupulous in using your government credit card. NO PERSONAL USE EVER! And yes, sometimes reimbursement is slow and you must pay your bill before you get reimbursed. DO IT. Pay your bill. Otherwise if they are out for you, they will get you.

An Agency Without Compassion

One disturbing trend I noticed this past year is the unusually high number of disabled people targeted for firing. Three were with NTEU and three that I know of were with AFGE (there may be more over there). All of the employees have what are often known as "invisible disabilities". Disabilities, not readily observed such as being in a wheel chair. Two were building related illness. In one case a formerly outstanding employee, forced out of the Agency, is receiving great resistance from getting back in. In the second case, a person applying for Alternative Workspace

was denied his request. This request was denied even though the AWS committee consisting of a manager, an officer from each Union, and a Labor Relations person all supported approval of AWS. The request was disapproved despite the fact that the other employees in the four cubicle quadrangle were also experiencing building related illness problems and three of the four had air cleaners running on their desks. The employee left the Agency.

Another person targeted, as I wrote about in the last issue, is an HIV infected person.

The fourth person was a cardiac patient. Of the six, this is the only employee who is probably out of the woods. It took a letter to Morris Winn and an article in INSIDE THE FISHBOWL, but once Geoff Grubbs of the Office of Water got involved, the case is being taken care of. An interesting note here is that both our Union and Geoff agree on the accommodation. Where the interference is coming from is from Labor Relations, citing a convoluted, double-think, interpretation of the travel regs in regard to Reasonable Accommodation! Geoff thinks he can jump through this hoop, but here is a clear example of how Labor Relations is not about solving problems, but rather about creating them.

The last two are particularly disturbing. Two firings have come from the same OSWER Division Director. The first was a diabetic, having trouble regulating her insulin. When insulin regulation in a diabetic is off, their behavior can be rather aberrant. Indeed, every year many drivers arrested for drunk driving, turn out to be not drunk at all, but rather diabetics who needed to eat a candy bar, having too much insulin in their bloodstream. Our Union thought we had an agreement with the Division Director, that the employee would be given another chance after being trained to properly regulate her insulin, but we were double-crossed and the employee was fired.

In the second case, a hearing disabled, somewhat mobility impaired employee with yet another problem which the employee would prefer I not discuss, was targeted for non-performance. This Division Director even stated that her past performance had been good, but had fallen off in the past year. Rather than working with her to constructively improve and/or to get at whatever the root problem is, she received a by the numbers, PAP, PIP, and is currently proposed for termination.

Quite often disabilities can be hard to accommodate. Those with disabilities that involve chemical imbalances can be especially hard to deal with. What is needed is compassion and problem solving which may have to occasionally go outside the box. What is not needed is a cold and heartless, by the numbers, firing strategy.

Pithy Points

Five Dysfunctions Of A Team

Wiley Publishing recently revealed the following dysfunctions of a team:

- Inattention to Results
- Avoidance of Accountability
- Lack of Commitment
- Fearful of Conflict
- Absence of Trust

Many of us would have never recognized these since we live with them every day and have become accultured.

ORD Conducts a Leadership Summit

January 12 - 17 2003 in Baltimore, Maryland

"Igniting leadership at all levels: ORD working together to ensure the earth's vitality" will be an appreciative - inquiry based process which will strive to change the culture of ORD and create an organization that encourages and develops leaders at all levels, according to Henry Langest, ORD DAA for Management in a November 15, 2002 email. The four step (4D's) of appreciative Inquiry are:

- Discovery identifying the best of what is.
- Dream Establishing a collective vision of what might be.
- Design Determining what it will take to get there.
- Destiny Determining how to sustain the change.

Hopefully, one of these days, management will get tired and disgusted with surveys and processes and simply use their good judgement and experience to get something done. We think that's called "bold leadership". We hope a Risk Assessment won't be necessary.

Future Schlock

Many are generating new definitions for our 401(K) TSP Retirement Programs. "TS" has always been generically understood. The Oxford Dictionary defines schlock as trash or inferior goods, and the word has been appropriately applied to Wall Street advice in recent years. But don't think that future advise will be pristine simply because several major brokerage houses recently agreed

on a settlement stemming from complaints about deceptive recommendations. Perhaps the "Guru's" who give advice will now refrain from deliberate deception, but it would be a mistake to assume that their honest efforts will ensure any degree of success. A healthy dose of skepticism should greet any advice coming from Wall Street.

Employee Solutions Office Kick-Off. From Left to Right Past AFGE 3331 President Carolyn Lowe, OHROS Director Rafael DeLeon, OARM Assistant Administrator Morris Winn, NTEU Executive Vice President Dwight Welch, and AFGE 3331 Vice President for Civil Rights Selwyn Cox

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

"EMPLOYEE SOLUTIONS OR EMPLOYEE DILUTIONS - Mr. Morris Winn has established a new Employee Solutions Office to handle employee complaints in early stages. Some Union officers fear that this might be a means of by-passing the Unions, causing employees to miss deadlines for grievances, EEO complaints, etc. Still other Union officers feel that the office may be a boon, depending upon Union involvement in the process: it may offer an additional step to resolution by-passing involvement by the Labor Relations Office, which, with a few notable exceptions, tends to exacerbate problems rather than resolving them. Executive V.P. and VP for Civil Rights, Dwight Welch has submitted a suggestion to Morris Winn to resolve Union concerns, but will his suggestion be ignored. Find out and read more about the pros and cons of Employee Solutions in the next issue of INSIDE THE FISHBOWL.