

News You Can Use

by Haidee E. Allerton

DESKTOP FLYING

HHEY, temporary workers can now log frequent-flyer miles for the number of hours they spend on temporary assignments.

The staffing firm offering such a perk is Today's Temporary, based in Dallas. It gives one American Advantage Mile or Delta SkyMile for every assigned hour of work.

Actually, airlines say that frequent-flyer programs are fast becoming one of the most popular employee reward incentives.

DRESS CODE BACKLASH

EVIDENTLY, SOME employees think casual Fridays are an excuse to be sloppy. Many companies are concerned that the trend toward casual business attire is undermining their professional images. Still, they want to retain the increase in productivity and morale resulting from casual dress policies.

So, many companies are turning to image consul-



tants. Wells Fargo Bank is just one company that has hired the San Francisco-based consulting firm, Total Image Management. TIM provides seminars and other approaches for helping organizations sort out the terms *corporate casual*, *casual business wear*, and *casual Fridays*.

TIM's founder, Gwen Mazer, thinks that most people don't have a middle-of-the-road wardrobe and don't know how to interpret *casual attire*. Mazer designed a custom line of clothing for employees of Wells Fargo's banking centers located in such supermarkets as Safeway. The goal was to create a professional look that would define the bank's identity in a new marketplace and build customers' confidence in Wells Fargo. The bank also wanted to make sure that people distinguished its employees from workers in the supermarkets.

The line consists of tailored suits made of imported wool gabardine, "understated" blouses, colorful ties with designs inspired by images of the West, and other accessories.

THE DISENCHANTED

HERE ARE SOME thought-provoking—and sometimes seemingly contradictory—findings from a series of conferences sponsored by Princeton, New Jersey-based Blessing-White regarding what's happening in the American workplace.

- ▶ The culture of expendability created by downsizing has divided surviving employees into two groups: overworkers and the disenchanting. The first group uses technology to work everywhere; the second group does what it has to get by while looking for other ways to make a living, preferably working for themselves. Sixty percent of people in their twenties say that they never want to work for someone else.
- ▶ There is less willingness to take risks, especially among workers age 19 to 32.
- ▶ Employees now think in terms of winners and losers (people who make the effort are rewarded; the rest lose out); there's less tolerance for differences among people (despite calls for diversity awareness and appreciation); and more tribalism (cliques, special-interest groups, and so forth).
- ▶ There is more emphasis on family. Most Americans believe families are in crisis, with business as the main villain. More people aspire to have one parent at home, despite the economic sacrifice.
- ▶ More people distrust government and business, and are becoming self-reliant. In southern California, for instance, fewer than half of all employed people

How To

Or, perhaps, how *not* to. If you want to be considered a star performer, never say these things:

- ▶ *They didn't get back to me.* That implies that you dropped the ball. Instead, take the initiative.
- ▶ *I thought someone else was taking care of that.* Always ask questions to keep things moving.

▶ *No one ever told me.* Don't operate in a tunnel. It's up to you to seek information and stay informed.

▶ *I didn't have time.* Say that, and you are writing your employee obituary.

The cautions and tips are from *Communication Briefings*, Alexandria, Virginia.

work at full-time jobs.

▶ The new vision of success is control over one's time, money, and destiny. Time for family and friends is viewed as more valuable than raises and promotions. Reduced stress is more desirable than greater responsibility. Material greed has given way to spiritual hunger.

▶ Employees value non-monetary awards at work less than monetary ones. They're in it for the paycheck, not for recognition for unique contributions, responsibility for decision making, or flexible benefits. Employees are looking elsewhere for meaningful satisfaction.

Source: Madelyn Hochstein, president, DYG, New York.

CALLING MISSION CONTROL

LAPTOPS, FAX MACHINES, voice mail, e-mail, cell phones, information-sharing software, and other technologies are undermining people's productivity and lowering their morale, according to a study of *Fortune* 1,000 workers.

The study—commissioned by Pitney Bowes and conducted by the Institute for the Future, the Gallup Organization, and San Jose State University—found that 84 percent of the employees polled are interrupted more than three times an hour by messages; 71 percent say that they feel “overwhelmed” by the onslaught. Each employee in the survey said that he or she receives an average of 178 messages and documents every day. Because of the deluge of communications, many of the workers said that “real

work” often has to wait until after hours or weekends.

The study, *Managing Corporate Communications in the Information Age*, also found that new communication tools in the workplace are being added to existing methods, instead of replacing them.

To collect data, teams of anthropologists from San Jose State University made on-site visits lasting up to two hours to observe first-hand office communication practices.

The most frequent communication tools used by the *Fortune* 1,000 employees are:

- ▶ telephone (an average of 24 calls per day)
- ▶ interoffice mail (11 items per day)
- ▶ e-mail (nine messages per day)
- ▶ voice mail (nine messages per day).

Seven out of 10 workers (71 percent) use at least two or three communication tools regularly; 16 percent use four or more.

Which communication tool people use depends on the type of professional relationship (for example, whether one is communicating with a customer or peer); on the task; and whether certain tools are available to all parties. Telephone is the most frequent way to communicate externally, but e-mail is used more often for internal communication.

One interesting finding is that tools are being “bundled”; such vehicles as mail, fax, and phone are mixed and matched to ensure that messages get through.

As for the paperless environment predicted years ago, paper-based communication is increasing. In fact, high paper volume is being driven by new technologies.

Trend Watch

A “BLENDED” workforce—full-time and temporary employees—is helping companies attain operational and human resource goals, say all of the 76 U.S.-based companies in a study conducted by the William Olsten Center for Workforce Strategies, an arm of the Olsten Corporation, a staffing service firm based in Melville, New York.

The companies are in such industries as manufacturing, distribution, finance, insurance, retail, and technology. Many of the companies—56 percent—say the emerging trend has increased employee motivation, helped meet quality standards (47 percent), introduced process improvements (43 percent), and aided efforts regarding culture and core values.

The study also yielded these best practices for implementing a blended workforce effectively:

- ▶ Establish clear boundaries and skill requirements for contract employees.
- ▶ Develop human resource policies and practices to support a blended workforce.
- ▶ Implement parallel selection criteria for core and assignment employees.
- ▶ Establish an integrated communications program.
- ▶ Use an on-site manager.
- ▶ Integrate contract workers into company teams.
- ▶ Provide job training to assignment and contract employees.
- ▶ Establish measurements for success.

The study reveals that a new function, called mission control, is emerging to deal with the complexity of communication. Employees who identified themselves as responsible for mission control sort, filter, direct, and navigate people through a company's communication gridlock. Such workers range from high-level managers and professionals to clerical and support staff.

The study says that 69 percent of the *Fortune* 1,000 companies do not have a communications policy to guide employees on how to make decisions about using communications tools. Though the proliferation of such tools enables people to communicate at a

moment's notice 24 hours a day anywhere in the world, it has also added a layer of tasks to their work. They have to keep up not only with the number of messages they receive, but they also have to keep pace with expectations of faster and faster response times. The backlash is that workers want to maximize their access to others, but minimize others' access to them.

Here are some other findings from the study:

- ▶ Most—94 percent—of the employees surveyed rely on two or more communication tools a day.
- ▶ Administrative workers send the most messages daily, followed by professionals, managers, and executives.