

IRS Contribution Limits Have Increased

Great News!

The IRS contribution limits for Tax Sheltered Annuity and Deferred Compensation plans have increased for 2012. The maximum amount an employee will be allowed to contribute is **\$17,000**. If you are 50 years of age or older you may defer as much as **\$22,500** in 2012.



Old Dominion University offers optional supplemental retirement plans that allow employees to tax-defer income, while investing for the future. The University offers several 403(b) plans and the Commonwealth's Deferred Compensation 457(b) plan. Both of these plans are open to all employees who may contribute the minimum of \$20 to a 403b plan or \$10.00 to the Deferred Compensation plan per pay period. Employee contributions will be matched at 50 percent up to a maximum of \$40.00 per month.

Virginia Credit Union

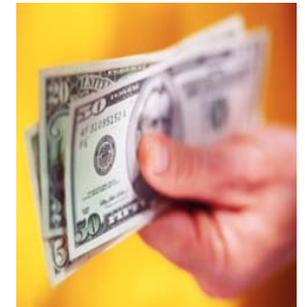
As a state employee, you are eligible for membership in the Virginia Credit Union. Some of the services that membership offers are:

- Free checking
- Online, mobile and text banking
- Variety of savings service and automatic deductions
- Affordable loans
- Savings on car and homeowner insurance
- Free financial seminars
- Savings on local theme park tickets and other member benefits

If you become a member of the Virginia Credit Union, you will have access to hundreds of locations and ATMs in Virginia and thousands nationwide. Find a location, information on credit union benefits and how to join by visiting www.vacu.org.

Late Fees Rescinded

Several years ago, ODU's Department of Human Resources was faced with spending hundreds of hours each year pursuing late classified employee evaluations and position description certifications - sometimes months after published deadlines. In addition, the University was not meeting policy expectations set by the Department of Human Resources Management (DHRM) in Richmond for timely completion of these processes.



HR reluctantly implemented late fees in an effort to improve supervisors' timely completion of these important communication processes. Once the fees were in place, we saw a steady improvement in the number of evaluations and certifications completed by the published deadlines each year. In addition, late documents have been submitted much sooner and have not required the persistent efforts of HR staff to bring supervisors into compliance.

It appears as though the culture has changed and as a result of the very significant improvement, Human Resources is happy to report the decision to cease assessing the \$50 late fee to departments not meeting evaluation and position description certification deadlines.

Thank you to all who have made the commitment to start and complete these processes timely!!

Financial Planning Sessions



The Department of Human Resources is again sponsoring a series of Financial Planning sessions to help you make the most of your money.

You may sign up for one or all of the sessions listed. Your selection is based on your individual needs. There is no cost for the session(s), however, if you are a classified employee you will need Supervisor approval for time spent away from your department to attend the session(s).

Dates	Class Title	Times	ODU Webb Center
1/31/12	Retirement Strategies for Women <u>Keyword:</u> ODU Retirement Strategies for Women	8:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.	Cape Charles/Isle of Wight
		10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Cape Charles/Isle of Wight
3/21/12	Estate Planning <u>Keyword:</u> ODU Estate Planning	8:00 a.m. – 9:30 am	Chesapeake/Portsmouth
		10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Chesapeake/Portsmouth
		1:00 p.m.– 2:30 p.m.	Chesapeake/Portsmouth
4/11/12	Tax Planning <u>Keyword:</u> ODU Tax Planning	8:00 a.m.– 9:30 a.m.	Cape Charles/Isle of Wight
		10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Cape Charles /Isle of Wight
		1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Cape Charles /Isle of Wight
9/19/12	Retirement <u>Keyword:</u> ODU Retirement	8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Cape Charles/Isle of Wight
		10:30 am. – 12:30 p.m.	Cape Charles /Isle of Wight
10/17/12	Cash/Risk Management <u>Keyword:</u> ODU Cash/Risk Management	8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Cape Charles/Isle of Wight
		10:30 am. – 12:30 p.m.	Cape Charles/Isle of Wight
		2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Cape Charles/Isle of Wight

If you have any questions about this program please contact Cheryl Foreman, HR Training Manager at 683-4316 or email at cforeman@odu.edu.

Please click on the link below to register and use the key words to search for individual sessions via the ODU Knowledge Center. <https://covkc.virginia.gov/odu/>. [Click here](#) for more information about registering.

Military Leave

Employees meeting the criteria listed below shall be granted up to 15 workdays of paid military leave during the entire **federal fiscal year (October 1-September 30)**.

- Current members of the armed services, including members of the reserve forces of any of the United States' armed services, who are called to:
 - participate in federally-funded military training duty or
 - report for a tour of active federally-funded duty.
- Former members of the armed services who are called to report for active duty.
- Members of the Commonwealth's militia who are engaged in training duty or state active duty approved by the Governor or his designee.
- Members of the National Defense Executive Reserve who are senior executives called to service with the federal government or engaged in training approved by the Governor or his designee.

For more information, please see policy 4.50 Military Leave at: http://www.dhrm.state.va.us/hrpolicy/web/pol4_50.html

The art of giving positive feedback: 7 simple tips

Giving feedback is an important legal and practical management task—and certainly not an easy one. Many managers make the mistake of dishing out feedback only when employees do something wrong. But praise can also be an effective motivational tool, if used correctly. Here are seven guidelines to follow:

- 1. Show enthusiasm.** Praise won't motivate if it sounds like you don't mean it, or you're saying it just because it's your job as a manager to praise periodically.
- 2. Be unpredictable.** When employees come to expect praise only at weekly staff meetings, this, too, will make it appear as though you're merely doing your managerial duty.
- 3. Be specific.** Saying, "You did a great job researching those corporations and writing a thorough proposal" means more than "Nice job on the proposal." This tells the employee what he or she did to deserve the praise, and what to do to earn it in the future.
- 4. Don't always use praise to buffer criticism.** It could weaken the critical message and future attempts to praise. Eventually, employees will ignore praise because they're waiting for the bad news to come. They may also find the praise insincere if they think you're just saying it to help wash down negative criticism.
- 5. Know your employees.** You'll discover how praise can be a more effective tool when you figure out how each employee prefers to receive positive feedback, and then act accordingly.
- 6. Know when & where to praise.** With personalized praising, one risk is the perception of inconsistency by other employees.

Suppose you praise Kevin to the hilt at a departmental lunch, and then praise Megan behind closed doors. Even if the two employees prefer those different communication methods, you could appear to be favoring one over the other.

What to do: Develop a standard method of praise, which you can add a personal touch to. *Example:* Write up both employees' accomplishments in the company newsletter (this way, Kevin gets to be put in the spotlight, while Megan avoids being put on the spot).

- 7. Use secondhand praise.** Pass on any compliments you hear about your employees, especially from higher-ups. Indirect comments can be even more powerful than direct praise.

Feedback methods to avoid

The best feedback either elicits a change for the better, or keeps good behavior steady. Watch out for the following trouble spots that will put a damper on achieving those results.

Feedback that embarrasses, punishes or demeans the recipient. *Example:* Monthly recognition of the lowest sales worker.

Feedback that covers something over which the recipient has no control. *Example:* Sales are down due to bad weather.

Feedback that comes too late to act on it. *Example:* Editorial comments made after a report is distributed.

Feedback that is focused on the wrong factors. *Example:* A procedure that strays from the departmental norm, but gets comparable results.

Feedback that is based on false information. *Example:* Rumors of an employee's poor attitude.

Avoid the 3 most common documentation mistakes

“Document, Document, Document.”

Employment attorneys say it all the time. In fact, they're incapable of saying that word only once because documentation relating to performance management and discipline is absolutely critical. The reasons are obvious. The quality of documentation goes to the heart of your credibility as a manager. The person reading your documentation should walk away knowing who, where, when, how and most important, the why behind any decisions ... and that you treated the employee consistently and fairly. Anything less and your documentation becomes Exhibit A for the plaintiff.

Mistakes, Mistakes, Mistakes

One big problem is getting each manager to actually document performance and disciplinary discussions. Not surprising, documentation—when it is created—is often too ambiguous, vague, biased and never actually puts employees on notice of any performance or behavior issues. Here are three common documentation mistakes and how you can avoid them:

1. Surprise!

No employee should ever be surprised when terminated for poor performance or a disciplinary reasons. Here is a common scenario: The manager has put Betty on “probation” for the past three years—but never tells her about it. Just recently, the manager decided he wants Betty terminated. In-house counsel reviews the personnel file before signing off. Much to counsel's surprise, Betty's performance actually looks pretty good. When asked why the file doesn't reflect his true opinion of Betty's performance, the manager says, “Well, she's sensitive, and I didn't want to hurt her feelings.” The

ambiguous documentation didn't put the employee on notice of the problems. Documentation must be direct, include expectations and the reasons the employee gives for not meeting the expectations.

2. Legally explosive words

Documentation is black and white. When third parties—say a grievance officer, judge, or attorney—read a manager's documentation, they can only go by what is written. Often, managers write absolute expressions such as “always” and “never,” as in “Hillary never turns in her reports on time.” In reality, Hillary informs you that she hit her deadline last month. Using absolutes without being 100% certain will undermine your credibility and hurt your case in court.

Choose your words carefully. If you want to highlight your concerns to Hillary, simply state the facts: “In the past three months, you turned in your weekly reports on time only once.” This way, you're more accurate and accomplish what you wanted in a more professional tone.

3. Lack of follow-up

Solid documentation must include regular follow-up discussions. Take this example: A manager informs Bob about his performance deficiencies and gives him a step-by-step improvement plan. Up to this point, documentation is solid. Unfortunately, Bob continues to struggle for the next six months. But the manager fails to document any follow-up with Bob. Now the manager wants to terminate Bob. *The problem:* The documentation is incomplete. The judge, jury or plaintiff's attorney who reads it will assume the manager put Bob on notice yet did nothing over the next six months to ensure Bob was getting the assistance. Proper documentation would include the coaching sessions, Bob's stated reasons for not meeting his goals and efforts by the manager to help Bob. Also, document that Bob knew he could be terminated if he did not meet the expectations.

Bottom line: At the end of the day, documentation must be accurate, state the facts, include the employee's explanation and show all the efforts the manager made to help the employee succeed. Anything less, well, you know what happens.

Tips for documenting

Be consistent. Don't write up one person for a behavior that you ignore in other employees.

Be specific. Example of poor documentation: “Employee was late twice in the past two weeks.” Better: “Employee was 30 minutes late on Sept. 28; reason given: traffic. Employee was 45 minutes late on Oct. 4; reason given: overslept.”

Be clear and factual. Note the policy or procedure that was violated. Date the document, including the year.

Avoid emotional content, including personal impressions (“I think ...”), labels (“He's a whiner ...”), adjectives (“very unproductive ...”) and drawing conclusions about the reasons. (“It's probably because of her divorce.”)

Ask the employee to sign and date the document to reflect that the conversation occurred. If the employee refuses, note that on the document.

Allison West, Esq., SPHR, is a former employment law litigator and the founder of Employment Practices Specialists, a training and consulting firm based in California.

Reprinted with Permission from The HR Specialist, June, 2011

W-2 Reminder

From the Payroll Office

Electronic receipt of W2's will be available for CY 2011 for all active employees on or before January 31, 2012. You must use Leo Online and give consent to receive your Tax form electronically. **If you have already consented to receive your W2 electronically please do not resubmit; if you have not consented, you have until January 13, 2012 to sign up.** Go to Leo Online; select from the Main Menu (1) Employee (2) Tax Forms (3) Electronic W2 Consent (4) Selection Criteria My Choice, click box (5) then click Submit.

By consenting to receive your W-2 electronically, you agree to return to this site between January 31 and October 15 of the appropriate year to print your W-2 form on-line. You may be required to print and attach your W-2 form to a Federal, State, or local income tax return.

Your consent will be valid for all subsequent tax years unless revoked by you, upon termination, or if this service is not supported in a future tax year. You may revoke your consent and receive a paper Form W-2 by accessing the site and un-checking the box to revoke consent, or providing written notification to the Human Resources or Payroll Office.

W2's for terminated employees will be mailed to the home address on file on or before January 31, 2012.

For more information click on: http://www.odu.edu/af/finance/facultystaff/disbursements_processing/payroll/electronicW2_CY2011.pdf

Managers not handing out praise? The 7 most common excuses

When it's honest and genuine, positive feedback can do wonders to improve an employee's productivity and morale. But some managers who are quick to dish out critiques are stingy with the congratulations. Check to make sure you're not guilty of any of these excuses:

1. **"I'm too busy."** Look for something to praise in every employee each week. Put it on your to-do list if that will help.
2. **"Someone else is taking care of it."** Never make that assumption, because "someone else" is assuming that you are doing it. Remember that you are your employees' first line of praise, and the buck stops with you.
3. **"They know how much I appreciate them."** They don't know unless you tell them.
4. **"If it was that important to them, they'd say something."** Most people won't directly ask for your kudos. Don't punish shy employees by ignoring their efforts.
5. **"I have more important things to worry about."** You must make praise important to yourself, because it certainly is to your employees.
6. **"Sometimes they deserve reprimands more than praise."** Then reprimand them. But don't let past confrontations with employees cause you to overlook present opportunities to praise because the anger still lingers from previous infractions. Follow the fresh-start rule: Wipe the slate clean every week and give at least one deserved compliment.
7. **"If I give an inch, they'll take a foot."** Do you fear that heaps of praise will cause employees to clamor for a raise? In fact, the opposite might happen. Employees may demand more money to make up for the lack of praise and recognition.

*Reprinted with Permission from **The HR Specialist**, June, 2011*

For Your Convenience The 2012 Holiday Schedule Is Re-printed Below

2012 Holiday Schedule		
Monday	January 2, 2012	New Year's Day Observed
Monday	January 16, 2012	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Monday	May 28, 2012	Memorial Day
Wednesday	July 4, 2012	Independence Day
Monday	September 3, 2012	Labor Day
Wednesday	November 21, 2012	Day before Thanksgiving, 4 hours (close at noon)
Thursday	November 22, 2012	Thanksgiving Day
Friday	November 23, 2012	Day after Thanksgiving
Monday	December 24, 2012	Holiday
Tuesday	December 25, 2012	Christmas Day observed
Wednesday	December 26, 2012	Holiday
Thursday	December 27, 2012	Holiday
Friday	December 28, 2012	Holiday
Monday	December 31, 2012	Holiday
Tuesday	January 1, 2013	New Year's Day observed