

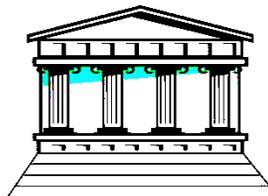
OFFICE OF APPELLATE OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S BROADCAST

Volume 3, Issue 3

February 3, 2012

Executive Director: Judge Patricia A. Jonas
Deputy Executive Director: Judge Gerald Ray
Executive Officer: Vanessa G. Butler

OAO staff may submit suggestions for consideration to:
|||ODAR OAO Admin Services.



THE FOUR PILLARS OF DISABILITY ADJUDICATION AND REVIEW

- Due Process of Law
- Factual Accuracy
- Policy Compliance
- Timely Service

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Mentoring New Analysts Produces Benefits for Mentors, Too

[This is Part 1 of the mentoring series; Part 2 will run Feb. 17.]

At any given time, up to 50 OAO staff members – experienced analysts, TAs, branch chiefs, AOs and AAJs – serve as mentors to new analysts. While continued training and guidance forms their primary goal, the mentors contacted by the OAO newsletter staff agree that the experience combines various degrees of challenge, education (learning something new themselves or refreshing what they know), stimulation, exhaustion and fulfillment.

"We're a learning organization – that's our mission statement," comments Dennis Keefe, a mentor for Division of Quality analysts and an appeals officer since 2008. "That's the fun part of mentoring – passing the information along and helping people learn."

[Editor's Note: Experienced analysts interested in volunteering to mentor new analysts should contact their branch chiefs.]

2011 Deputy Commissioner for Operations Honor Awards went to Division II Director **Paul Casey** and Division of Civil Actions Chief AAJ **Kelly P. Salzmann** for their roles in termination of the Decision Review Board (see [OAO newsletter 5/6/11](#)). DRB members and Division V staff (see [OAO newsletter 1/6/12](#)) also contributed significantly, noted OAO Executive Director Patricia A. Jonas. Branch 30 Chief **Larry Singh** received a DCO Honor Award for his support in the non-medical appeals project to assist the hearings level in more effective and timely processing of non-disability cases.

Maria Riegger, an analyst since 2007 and now a technical assistant in Crystal City's Branch 41, admits that she's enjoyed mentoring more than she expected. She likes walking new analysts through different ways to approach cases, and appreciates the break that interacting with them provides from the insular nature of analyst work. James Nunn, in Baltimore's Branch 23 and an analyst since 2000, reluctantly volunteered in 2010 to mentor new analysts in

(See Mentoring . . . on page 3)

Hatch Act Reminder: Smart Phones, Tablets

Personal cell phones and tablet computers providing Internet access offer a convenient way to access e-mail, social networks, blogs and websites anytime, anywhere.

Using your smart phone or tablet to engage in political activity, however, could risk a Hatch Act violation even though your device isn't SSA equipment.

The key factor is whether you're on Federal property – if you are, smart phone or tablet use for partisan political purposes would constitute a Hatch Act violation [(5 U.S.C. 7324(a)(2)].

Non-compliant activity would include sending or forwarding partisan political e-mails to others (see U.S. Office of Special Counsel [FAQs E-mail and Blogging section](#)), or expressing support or opposition to political parties or candidates on blogs or social networks (see OSC [FAQs Regarding Social Media](#), 1 & 3) while on duty or in a Federal building.

When off Federal property and off duty (unpaid [meal breaks](#), for example), you can engage in partisan political activity within provisions of the Hatch Act for [less restricted](#) and [further restricted](#) employees.

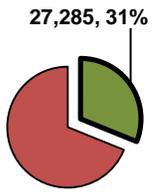
The ODAR Office of Appellate Operations publishes the Executive Director's Broadcast generally every other week. To see past issues, go to the OAO newsletter searchable [archive](#) on the SSA Intranet.

In our next issue:

- 10 Tips from Mentors for Meeting OAO Case Analysis Challenges
- Plus much more



Progress Towards FY 2012 Goals (2nd Quarter FY 2012)



OAO on track - 31% of baseline closed in 32% of FY 2012!

Comparison of baseline of pending projected 545+ days aged cases to projected 545+ aged cases that we have closed so far in the 79 workdays of FY 2012 as of 01/27/2012.

- Projected 545+ days aged cases that we have closed so far
- Remainder to close from the baseline of pending 545+ days aged cases

Note: The standing baseline does not include, but the closures may include, projected 545+ aged cases pending that were added after the baseline of 10/01/2011.

“SSA Critical Competencies” Provides Career Resource



OAO staff members seeking to advance their careers can take advantage of a blueprint to skill improvement developed by the SSA Office of Learning. The “[SSA Critical Competencies](#)” website shows employees the skills they need to prepare for SSA responsibilities as supervisors, managers and executives, as well as the skills needed by all employees. The website also links to resources such as interactive video training, online lessons and workshops.

For example, individuals interested in obtaining a supervisory position will see that SSA competencies they will need range from learning conflict management to developing others. The website explains that “develop others” means developing “the ability of others to perform and contribute to the organization by providing ongoing feedback and by providing opportunities to learn through formal and informal methods.” The website also lists competencies, such as decisiveness, recommended by the White House Office of Personnel Management. Among training resources, the website links to online management workshop lessons on the role of managers and administrative functions.

Career Path Case Studies

This is a continuation of the multi-article series.

After graduating from law school in a difficult job market, AAJ **Sunmee Jo** was fortunate to find a staff attorney position with Legal Aid of Michigan, a non-profit law firm specializing in civil legal services for low-income and elderly clients. For five years, she represented clients in a full range of administrative and general civil legal matters in state and Federal court, including disability cases. “My foundational experience at Legal Aid prepared me well to work in government, where law and public policy intersect,” she says. Later she sought a position through USAJOBS as a Federal attorney in the D.C. area. “I took a leap of faith in May 2001 to move from Michigan to Virginia” where she began serving as an attorney with the OCALJ’s then-Division of Medicare, assisting its ALJs who heard appeals of Medicare claim denials (a responsibility assumed by the Health & Human Services Dept. in 2005).

After a couple years, she joined the OCALJ Division of Field Practices and Procedures (now the Division of Field Practices), gaining exposure to a management component, learning about hearing office and regional office operations, and executive decision-making processes. She also learned essential multi-tasking and time management skills, people skills, and how to work effectively with other parts of the agency. Next, she was selected as a Federal reviewing official (FedRO) for the now-terminated Disability Service Improvement (DSI) program.

The FedROs were made appeals officers in 2008 and “had the benefit of unique hands-on training that taught us to appreciate and learn the job from the analyst’s perspective, working aged cases and Decision Review Board cases from scratch,” Judge Jo says. As an AO, she worked in several disability program branches and in the OAO Executive Director’s Office. She became an AAJ in October 2011. Drawing from her experience, Judge Jo offers this career advice:

- Don’t be afraid to try new things. Take that leap of faith. Apply for details and if opportunities are offered, take them. “My career has gone back and forth between actual case work and details in management components which offered different perspectives and learning opportunities,” she says.
- Wherever you are, make things better: Always contribute, be proactive, suggest and share ways to improve processes, and step in to help even if it’s “not your job.” The people who go beyond their position descriptions often reap the rewards.
- Be courteous, responsive and helpful: Never underestimate the impact that you have on people by the way you interact with them and treat them. This is true of your colleagues and the public we serve.
- If you have a complaint or problem, become part of the solution. Be the change you want to see.
- Maintain a sense of humor and distance from the inevitable mistakes or absurdities you will encounter. Move on quickly, learn from mistakes and never repeat them. Cultivate a life outside of work.
- Never forget who you’re working for – the job that you are privileged to have is made possible because of the people we serve. Do a good job and work hard because the people expect and trust us to do the right thing.

Mentoring . . . from p. 1

the 3200 Lord Baltimore Drive office, but found the role to be one of the most enjoyable things he's done at OAO. Jack Leary, with Branch 7 in Falls Church and an analyst since 1983, has mentored new analysts off and on since the early 1990s and says the recent hires have amazed him by how fast they caught on to case analysis.

In FY 2009-FY 2011, OAO hired about 390 new hearings and appeals analysts, an unprecedented number to help meet its quickly rising workloads. The mentors agree that OAO's six-week training classes for new analysts gave them a solid foundation and a strong start for their analyst responsibilities. For the many new analysts who were law school graduates, mentors focused most of their attention on addressing the analysts' lack of Social Security program knowledge. Otherwise, they arrived with good critical thinking and writing skills, and proved adept at researching questions online and learning and using OAO and SSA electronic systems, the mentors say. "Nothing about electronic cases throws them," Leary says. Some mentoring is done remotely; see [OAO newsletter 3/19/10](#), p. 3.

Fortunately, their legal experience trained them to review and analyze documents, Leary says. The analyst job is well-suited for people coming out of law school, Nunn adds. "It was easy to train them," he says. "I've told people it's like teaching squirrels to climb trees. When you're talking about legal issues, they're smart. You can throw a tremendous amount of information at them and they say I've got it and they do."

Part of the reward of mentoring comes from enhancing the mentor's knowledge and experience. Riegger recalls assisting an analyst with a case in which the claimant's most severe medical impairment resulted from injuries he sustained during a robbery for which he was convicted. SSA rules prohibit a disability finding in this situation. "I knew of that rule but never had a case where the rule was implicated so I had to check the regs to make sure I was reviewing the case properly," she says.

Keefe also experienced that benefit of mentoring. When he receives a question about something off the main-stream, he checks regulations, rulings and HALLEX to refresh his memory and sometimes sees the issue from a different perspective. "Some things I do by nature," he says. "In the mentoring process, I have to ask myself, 'Why do I do that?' By explaining it, it helps me secure my reasoning in my own mind. It makes me a better reviewer. It's a great learning process."

Mentoring several analysts at the same time can be an intense experience ("the day goes by fast," Nunn says) because you have to stay focused and exercise care about everything you tell them. "By and large, these people really want to do a good job," Nunn says. "I've been proud of the people I've worked with and have seen them improve. It gives you a great deal of self-satisfaction to see that you were some small part of that."

[Editor's Note: See the Feb. 17 issue of the OAO newsletter for mentor guidance on analysts' common problems.]

OAO Staff Set Record for 1st Quarter RR Dispositions

In the first quarter of FY 2012, OAO staff processed 32,591 requests for review (RR), the most dispositions ever achieved in the first quarter of a fiscal year.

- The highest producing disability program branches (DPBs) in terms of total RR dispositions were, in order: 28, 34, 31, 33, 23, 44, 26, 40, 46, 36, 30, and 43, all with over 1,000 dispositions each.
- Branches highest in average analyst productivity were, in order: 15, 23, 39, 31, 34, 19, 40 and 26.
- Branches that led in first quarter goals for case completion were, in order: 33, 34, 35, 26, 36, 30, 40, 14 and 28, 31, 43, 44 and 19, 42, 23 and 39, all meeting more than 100% of goals.

Processing of aged cases remains a major OAO goal. For FY 2012, OAO plans to eliminate all cases that are 545 days old or older by the end of March. OAO started the fiscal year with 87,654 cases that would be 545 days or older if not processed by the end of FY 2012. Through the end of December, OAO processed 20,559 of these cases, which represents 23.28% of the starting total and 63% of total RR dispositions.

The following DPBs deserve kudos based on the total number of 545⁺-day cases processed through December: 26 (923), 23 (898), 25 (876), 24 (748), and 34 (734).

Another goal is to process all non-aged cases within 365 days. OAO started the year with 153,179 cases that would be 365 days or older if not processed by the end of FY 2012. Through the end of December, OAO processed 31,368 of these cases, which represents 19.5% of the starting total. About 96% of total RR dispositions fell into this category.

The branches that led in the number of cases they processed in the 365⁺-day category through December: 34 (1,266), 28 (1,258), 31 (1,186), 33 (1,152), 23 (1,060), 36 (1,044), 44 (1,035), 26 (1,015), 43 (1,014), and 30 (1,008).

OAO Staff Profile

Omar Rios serves as secretary in the Executive Director's Office and has provided invaluable assistance to the executive director, deputy executive director, and senior management in effectively scheduling meetings, reserving conference rooms, preparing management information reports, developing innovative tools, addressing ad hoc executive requests for technical assistance, and other administrative duties.

His dedication, experience with OAO's support staff processes, and professional teamwork approach have contributed to the overall OAO mission and removed an administrative burden from the executives and senior managers in a fast-paced and high-intensity work environment.