



National Weather Service
Employees Organization

Workplace Wellness

Keeping NWSEO Members
Safe, Happy & Healthy

August 2018

intro

Welcome to the first issuance of the NWSEO Wellness/Diversity Newsletter! My name is Jason B. Wright, NWSEO Steward at NWS Nashville, TN, and chair of the NWSEO Diversity Team. This is a newsletter that will be provided periodically for all NWSEO members. It will particularly though focus on the unique needs and challenges of rotating shift workers. As the editor of this newsletter, along with mine below, I would like to thank NWSEO members DeLyne Kirkham, Linda Engebretson, and Michael Ottenweller for their article contributions. For any questions, comments, or feedback on any of these articles, contact Jason B. Wright at JasonBWright3@gmail.com.

mental health & awareness

My interest when it comes to helping out my fellow NWSEO members is mental health awareness. There are several things one can do to improve their own state of mental health. In this issue, let's address two specific areas.



The picture above was taken at my completion of the 2018 St. Jude Rock' n' Roll Nashville Marathon in late April. I am the man in the middle behind the fence. Those two young men on the other side of the fence and on either side of me are my two sons. As you look at the picture, my son Barrett Wright is on my left and my son Benji Wright is on my right.

I enjoy physical exercise a lot, mainly running, limiting weights, and aerobic water exercises. Regular physical exercise has so many benefits, especially relieving stress, and for me personally, providing thought clarity. I know that regular exercise is hard sometimes when one has to work rotational shift work, but striving to do physical exercise helps out with so many quality of work and life issues. I actually have some of my best runs, workouts, and aerobic water exercise sessions before I come in for a particular midnight shift on the string of seven midnight shifts that we work at my office. I personally recommend visiting on Facebook and becoming a member of the **NOAA/NWS Employees Running, Fitness, and Nutrition Group** initiated and currently administered by NWSEO member Ryan Ellis. A lot of good information and success stories are shared there! For more information on how physical fitness will benefit you, visit the President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition at <https://www.hhs.gov/fitness/index.html>.

As you are reading this newsletter, it is likely that my heart is breaking over the loss of my favorite four legged friend, Hugo B. Wright, my families Catahoula Lab Mix dog. He is dying of cancer, and if he has not gone to the dog Valhalla yet, he will in the next few days to weeks. What a great buddy, always there to love me and my family unconditionally no matter what was happening during a particular day. I nicknamed him "Mr. Shotgun" when he rides in the front seat of my car with me during our ride excursions.



So why am I mentioning him here? If you have a favorite pet, you may understand where I am coming from. Pets are very good to help out with improving your mental health too! Yes, they can be expensive and can cause some stress at times. One time Hugo decided to launch himself one night at our family's crockpot full of cooking meatballs. He knocked them over, destroyed our family crockpot, and then commenced eating as many small meatballs as he could digest. I was working a set of day shifts, which for me means that I feel real tired when I get home. However, when I try to lay down for bed, it is still hard for me to go to sleep. So a few more hours of getting tired doing the cleanup and being sure that I take Hugo out periodically to do all of "his business" he needed to do in the aftermath. But overall, pets are great stress reducers!

For more information on how pets can be a blessing to your lives, please visit the **Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Healthy Pets, Healthy People Website** at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/health-benefits/index.html>.

aging & stereotypes

Written by NWSEO Steward, DeLyne Kirkham, Elko, Nevada

Age and Stereotypes: How True (T) or False (F) Are They? Do YOU, your Coworkers, or your Supervisor have an AGE bias?

True or False:

- Older workers resist change
- Older workers are less motivated
- Older workers perform at a lower level than younger workers
- Older workers are less able to learn
- Older workers are less adaptable and flexible
- Older workers are more dependable than younger workers

1. Older workers resist change

Older workers are just as adaptable once they understand the reason for changes. They are more likely to ask why, because they have often seen past changes in processes and procedures abandoned when they didn't bring expected rewards quickly enough. Proactive older workers also may behave differently from proactive younger workers. They may be less focused on advancement and on learning new skills. Older workers may be focused on other issues such as maintaining their skills and the interpersonal aspects of their work.

2. Older workers are less motivated

Research shows that older workers appear just as motivated as younger workers, but their motivation likely is different from that of younger workers. Older workers generally find more intrinsic reasons (intangible, e.g. personally rewarding) often to continue working, rather than extrinsic (tangible, e.g. financially rewarding). They additionally tend to report higher job satisfaction.

3. Older workers perform at a lower level than younger workers

Age is less important than individual skills. There is more variability in work performance within age groups than between age groups. Age was generally unrelated to core task performance. Productivity can actually rise due to greater worker accuracy, dependability and capacity to make better on the spot judgements. Older worker's production rates are steadier than other age groups. Older workers were less likely to participate in counterproductive work behavior and less likely to be aggressive.

There are some possible concerns:

- i. Performance may decline in jobs where certain skills are needed (e.g., fine motor skills).
- ii. Performance could decline in some executive functions (e.g., cognitive flexibility).

4. Older workers are less able to learn

Studies show only negligible loss of cognitive function of people under 70. While older workers take longer to absorb completely new material, their better study attitudes and accumulated experience lower training costs. Older workers performed very slightly lower in training ($r=-.04$). Training that is delivered less time-intensively may be more effective for older workers (e.g., training over 1 week vs. over 1 month.)

5. Older workers are less adaptable and flexible

Eighty percent of the most workable and worthwhile new production ideas are produced by employees over 40 years old. Age was generally unrelated to creativity. Older workers may generally be more positive with lower neuroticism.

6. Older workers cost more

Not necessarily true due to performance differences. Investing in older workers may lead to a greater Return on Investment (ROI) because they are less likely to quit. Older workers have more positive work performance in safety, and less counterproductive costly work behavior in areas of aggression, absenteeism and tardiness.



7. Older workers are more dependable than younger workers

There is some evidence that this is at least partly true.

- a. Older workers were slightly more likely to help other employees, the organization, etc.
- b. Older workers were more likely to comply with safety rules.
- c. Older workers were less likely to experience work injuries.
- d. Older workers were less likely to participate in substance abuse.
- e. Older workers much less likely to be tardy and to be absent, although they are slightly more likely to have sickness-related absences.

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women's issues in the NWS

written by NWSEO Steward, Linda Engebretson, Duluth, MN

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the NWSEO Wellness/Diversity Newsletter! My name is Linda Engebretson, NWSEO Steward at NWS Duluth, MN. I have been asked to provide my perspectives and experiences on being a woman in the National Weather Service, and what issues women face in our workplace. I have plans to write on many subjects, including shift work and family balance, what we can do to increase our representation in the NWS, whether the "pay gap" exists for us, and the #MeToo movement, among many other ideas.

My interests in women's issues in the NWS started in the mid 1990s, when I was first hired on as a COOP student during my last year of earning my bachelors degree. I joined an office of 5 men and one woman as a COOP student while I was finishing my bachelor's degree. I remember my MIC telling me the COOP program was aimed at hiring more minorities into the NWS, and I was one of the few who had applied- an affirmative action of sorts. That office hired on several women in this manner over the years, some of which are still here. I wondered then why they were having to do it- where were the women?

The Meteorology degree programs at my university had no more than one or two women in each of the year programs that I knew of, and we had class sizes of less than 15 usually. There just weren't that many of us to start with, and the other woman I graduated with went into the media. In my 25 years of full time employment with the NWS in five different offices, I have never worked with more than a small handful of women at a time, and at one office it was only me and the ASA. I met other women along the way by visiting other offices, them visiting mine, attending courses at the training center, and going to conferences. Each of those women stand out in my memory as strong, intelligent, inspirational women who have helped me in many ways. They helped me learn how to fit myself into our male dominated workplace, succeed and earn promotions, balance the needs of work and of my growing family, and cope with the periodic bouts of ignorance, bias, and even outright misogyny on the part of my male coworkers. I hope that I have helped those women as much as they helped me.

My personal experiences I'm sure, echo the experiences of other women in the NWS. We are significantly underrepresented in the National Weather Service, being less than 20 percent of the NWS workforce. Of those, only 40 percent are in leadership or management roles, in GS 13, 14 or 15 positions. Of 1340 Meteorologists, only 15 percent. These numbers haven't changed much from when I joined. The total complement of NWS women in 1995 was 779, and while that number has actually gone down since then, so has the total workforce, and the percentage of women has remained fairly stable between 15 and 20 percent since then.

Numerous studies have shown that women do better when they have a mentor to provide career advice, help develop leadership skills, sponsor them to interesting projects, or serve as references when it comes time for promotions. Various formal mentorship programs in the NWS and DOC are available, and it is worth your time to seek one out. Mentors do not have to be women, so do not overlook men when searching for a mentor.

What can women do for themselves to succeed in the NWS? Here are 4 ways:

1. Connect with other women working in the NWS. It's great to have a group of women in the same situation you are to ask questions of, but less formal than mentorship. Get to know the women working in adjoining offices and meet up with them if you can. We have facebook groups that can be a great resource in this way too. Here are three closed groups you will have to request to join.
 - a. [NWS Women in Science](#)
 - b. [NWS Women Health & Fitness](#)
 - c. [NWS Women's New Mom Page](#)
2. Speak up. Ask for opportunities and what you have to do to advance in our organization. I found this out the hard way, by missing out on important training that I then had to wait another 6 months to participate in. This is also true of other career advancing opportunities, like attending conferences, meetings and training courses. Don't assume there is someone else in charge of your career and training, take charge of it yourself.
3. Happy hour- Every time I attend a conference or go to NWSTC training, nearly everyone goes out for dinner/happy hour afterwards, often accompanied by a few beers. Join them, even if you're drinking something else. If you're not invited, invite someone out. There is often more networking that happens at these informal gatherings than back at the conference/classroom.
4. Don't develop the habit of being the office party organizer, fridge cleaner, or meeting donut bringer/coffee preparer. If you act like someone's assistant, this job will keep landing in your lap, keeping you from participating in other more career advancing opportunities.

I'm certain that there are many other things that help, but I have found that these serve me well. I look forward to providing further articles on women's issues in the NWS.

season affective disorder

*written by Michael Ottenweller,
NWSEO Steward, Anchorage, AK*

Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD, is a type of depression that is related to the change of the seasons. This type of depression can be especially pronounced when you couple it with high latitude locations and rotating shift work. Certainly a strong number of NWS employees face the challenges of rotating shift work. Add in a high latitude environment, such as Alaska, and you've got many of the ingredients to feel the real effects of SAD.



One of the keys to mental health and overall wellness is to pay close attention so that you can recognize signs and symptoms as they develop. Often people will write off the signs of SAD as the “winter blues” or just feeling “in a funk” for a season. This can be especially true for rotating shift workers as our body signals (circadian rhythm, metabolism, etc.) may already be muddled. Thus, it can be rather difficult to locate a healthy, strong baseline. So let's look at some real medical symptoms associated with SAD:

- Hypersomnia
- Having low energy
- Overeating
- Weight gain
- Craving for carbohydrates
- Social withdrawal (feel like “hibernating”)

Most of these sound like symptoms that all of us at one time or another have experienced. So what's the difference? The National Institute of Mental Health defines it as “people must meet full criteria for major depression coinciding with specific seasons (appearing in the winter or summer months) for at least 2 years.” Additional risk factors include: being female (diagnosed four times more often than in men), living far from the equator, and having depression or bipolar disorder.

So if you are a rotating shift worker, perhaps female, at a high latitude, what can you do to combat SAD? Besides medication, a few other varieties of treatment seem to be rather effective:

- Light Therapy: Sitting in front of a light box (often referred to as a “happy light”) for 20-60 minutes of exposure to 10,000 lux of cool-white fluorescent light (about 20x brighter than an ordinary indoor light).
 - Vitamin D supplements: Even a healthy diet and standard multi-vitamin is likely not enough to offset the deficit. The best way to check your Vitamin D levels is to request it as a part of your blood test from your doctor.
 - Regular Exercise: Even just the standard 20 minutes a day can provide a big lift to your mood and help you relieve stress and anxiety. Being in better shape can also make you feel better about yourself and start a positive feedback process within you.
1. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651>
 2. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/seasonal-affective-disorder/index.shtml>
 3. <https://www.webmd.com/diet/guide/vitamin-d-deficiency#1>