

Administrative professionals recharge and empower at NIEHS seminar

By Kelly Lenox

In celebration of Administrative Professionals Day, the NIEHS Office of Management honored clerical, administrative, secretarial, and technical staff during an April 23 event. The day began with a seminar, "Recharge and Empower Yourself as an Administrative Professional," by Sallie Dewar of the Human Resources Institute in Maryland.

Joellen Austin, NIEHS associate director for management, opened the event by sharing her memories of Secretary's Day, as it was called in the past, and introducing Dewar.

Recognizing accomplishments

Dewar began by asking participants to collect in small groups and review their accomplishments together. Each team then shared each other's accomplishments with the whole group. Stories ranged from the personal, like helping children succeed in middle school or earning a masters degree while working full time, to the professional, such as completing budget closeouts and planning international travel.

Dewar commented on how difficult it can be to come up with a list of accomplishments. "I'll bet you don't realize the impact you have in the organization," she said. "Most people won't be aware of what you do on a daily basis, until you share it with them."

Participation in these group presentations energized the attendees. According to Robbie Majors, administrative support in the NIEHS Genes, Environment, and Health Branch, that was an unusual, and important, part of the program. "We need experience talking in front of people," Majors said. "We know what's going on, and we need more opportunities to get up and answer questions."

Talking your way out of stress

According to Dewar, stress is a major epidemic, affecting people in all walks of life. "If you don't control stress, stress will control you," she said. Referring to the presentations they'd just made, one participant identified public speaking as a source of stress, generating agreement and hearty laughter across the room.

Dewar sought concrete strategies from participants, engaging even the shyest among the group. Suggestions ranged from walking away from the desk for a few minutes, to fishing and recreation, to writing and other creative outlets. Dewar also offered approaches aimed at altering the work environment, such as clarifying expectations with co-workers, making requests clear, and developing a sense of a working partnership with supervisors.

"R-E-S-P-E-C-T - find out what it means to me"

According to Dewar, earning and being treated with respect goes a long way toward relieving workplace stress. Quoting Aretha Franklin, Dewar noted that respect might look different to different people.

She urged participants to have discussions about respect, continuing her theme of focusing on actions that lie within each person's capabilities. Dewar left the group with plenty of food for thought. "What do you want to be known for?" she asked.

Celebration

The day ended with a cake and ice cream social, hosted by NIEHS leadership, giving them the opportunity to personally thank the administrative professionals for their hard work and dedication during the year.



Dewar underscored her message on the importance of respect by individually greeting participants as they arrived. She offered techniques to stay focused and positive, even in difficult situations; create winning partnerships with supervisors; and receive recognition for the important and hard work administrative professionals do all year long. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



After introducing Dewar, Austin participated in the workshop, as did other members of the management team. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Valarie Sims, left, and David Kinnamont enjoyed a lighthearted discussion. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



From left, Marsha Johnston, Cindy Gerrard, and Kristen Fisher discussed their group presentation during the workshop session. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



From left, Pinkney Wilder, William Boyd, and Ed Kang took turns sharing each other's achievements, with no shortage of humor. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Majors, center, shown with group members Diana Callender, right, and Rosemary Moody, appreciated the public speaking opportunity. "It was a good experience, and it was entertaining, too," Majors said, referring to the laughter and applause that many of the presentations generated. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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