Commemorate

Black History Month

Please join the Black History Month Committee as VA Central Office (VACO) observes Black History Month on Thursday, February 18, 2016, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230, at noon (ET). The theme for this observance is: “Hallowed Grounds: Sites of African American Memories.” VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald will serve as this year’s senior host. This event is sponsored by the Office of Diversity Inclusion. (Continued on page 3.)
**Training**

*Diversity News* videos, produced by ODI and the VA Central Office Broadcast Center for your education initiative, are available on the [ODI Web site](#). The January/February 2016 episode focuses on updates to VA’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Program; Workforce Recruitment Program; African American Employment Program; and Asian American and Pacific Islander Program and introduces the concept of the World Café on race relations.

**Section 508** training for VA employees is available. Contact the Office of Information and Technology Section 508 Program Office.

**Barrier Analysis Training** will be offered on Thursday, February 25, 2016, from 1 to 4 pm. The course covers all aspects of the barrier analysis process under Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Management Directive 715 to include analysis and interpretation of workforce statistics, trigger identification, barrier analysis investigation, preparing action plans, and following up on the action plan. This training will allow the participants to work through the majority of the process using VA specific workforce statistics. Attendees must register through the VA Talent Management System (TMS). For more information, contact Ms. Ryan Pugh.

**Conflict Management and Alternative Dispute Resolution Training** sponsored by the Office of Resolution Management Centralized Alternative Dispute Resolution Office will be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the HUB Centers for Collaboration. The following sessions remain:

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Target Audience</th>
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<tr>
<td>February 2-4</td>
<td>GS-13 &amp; above, individuals in LVA</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 9-11</td>
<td>GS-12 &amp; below</td>
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<td>March 1-3</td>
<td>GS-13 &amp; above, individuals in LVA</td>
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<td>April 19-21</td>
<td>Senior Executive Service</td>
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<td>April 26-28</td>
<td>Senior Executive Service</td>
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<td>May 10-12</td>
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These three day trainings provide an opportunities for participants to examine the factors that contribute to workplace conflict. It offers tools that managers can use to prevent these situations from escalating and diverting valuable time, resources, and energy from VA’s mission. This training also allows participants to become more familiar with the role a third party can play in assisting managers and employees in resolving workplace disputes at the lowest possible level.

While not asking you to become a professional mediator among your many other responsibilities at VA, it is hoped that by spending in-depth time studying, discussing, and trying the myriad of techniques and communication skills related to the mediation process, you will adopt new approaches, ideas, and skills in dealing with disputes. All of this will benefit you, all employees with whom you interact, and ultimately, the Veterans that you serve.

Each training session is limited to 30 participants; a wait list will be established after the first 30 participants have been confirmed. Those on the wait list will be contacted in the order the nominations were received by this office upon notices of cancellations. After receiving your supervisor’s approval to attend either the February 2-4 or February 9-11 session, register via TMS (course 3992423). The VA Learning University (VALU) is funding all travel associated costs for approved participants; VALU will not reimburse local travelers. For questions about this training (not relating to travel), contact Jeff Gangi.

**Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP)** created a series of online training modules to provide an introduction to CAP and brief overviews on the Assessment, Acquisition and Outreach Teams. While these trainings were created with CAP liaisons in mind, all individuals who work with CAP will benefit from viewing this series. For more information on VA’s Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program, including Reasonable Accommodations, visit ODI’s Web site.

**Corporate Employee Development Board (CEDB)** selects the best qualified employees from across VA to attend prescribed high-impact training and professional development programs/opportunities. Programs include the Federal Executive Institute and prestigious schools such as Harvard or George Washington University. If you think you have what it takes to be a leader in VA, now is the time to take the next step in committing to your career. Visit the CEDB Web page now to view the Call for Applications and complete a [Pre-screening Questionnaire](#) to find out if you are eligible to apply. The deadline for applications is February 5, 2016.

**EEOC’s Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace: A Conversation with Task Force Co-Chairs Feldblum and Lipnic Brown Bag Session** will be held February 11, 2016, from noon to 1:15 pm at EEOC HQ (131 M Street NE, Washington, DC). Bring your lunch and join EEOC Commissioners Chai Feldblum and Victoria Lipnic to share how your agency deals with harassment in the workplace and your ideas for preventing it. Seating is limited, so you must RSVP. For more information, visit the [Task Force Web page](#).
Black History Month celebrates the contributions of African Americans to American history and development. The month-long observance was the idea of distinguished Black historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson who established "Negro History Week" in 1926. Dr. Woodson chose the second week of February because it marked the births of both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, two influential figures in Black history. In 1976, President Ford issued the first Message of Observance of Black History Month. Ten years later, Congress designated February "National Black (Afro-American) History Month." (Source: BET)

The 2016 theme, “Hallowed Grounds: Sites of African American Memories,” pays homage to the history of African Americans and how that history has unfolded across the canvas of America, beginning before the arrival of the Mayflower and continuing to the present. From port cities where Africans disembarked from slave ships to the battle fields where their descendants fought for freedom, from the colleges and universities where they pursued education to places where they created communities during centuries of migration, the imprint of Americans of African descent is deeply embedded in the narrative of the American past. These sites prompt us to remember and over time became hallowed grounds.

One cannot tell the story of America without preserving and reflecting on the places where African Americans have made history. The Kingsley Plantation, DuSable’s home site, the numerous stops along the Underground Railroad, Seneca Village, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church and Frederick Douglass’ home—to name just a few—are sites that keep alive the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in our consciousness. They retain and refresh the memories of our forbears’ struggles for freedom and justice, and their belief in God’s grace and mercy. Similarly, the hallowed grounds of Mary McLeod Bethune’s home in Washington, D.C., 125th Street in Harlem, Beale Street in Memphis, and Sweet Auburn Avenue in Atlanta tell the story of our struggle for equal citizenship during the American century. (Source: ASALH)

From the 2016 Presidential Proclamation: America’s greatness is a testament to generations of courageous individuals who, in the face of uncomfortable truths, accepted that the work of perfecting our Nation is unending and strived to expand the reach of freedom to all. For too long, our most basic liberties had been denied to African Americans, and today, we pay tribute to countless good-hearted citizens—along the Underground Railroad, aboard a bus in Alabama, and all across our country—who stood up and sat in to help right the wrongs of our past and extend the promise of America to all our people. During National African American History Month, we recognize these champions of justice and the sacrifices they made to bring us to this point, we honor the contributions of African Americans since our country’s beginning, and we recommit to reaching for a day when no person is judged by anything but the content of their character.

From the Revolutionary War through the abolitionist movement, to marches from Selma to Montgomery and across America today, African Americans have remained devoted to the proposition that all of us are created equal, even when their own rights were denied. As we rejoice in the victories won by men and women who believed in the idea of a just and fair America, we remember that, throughout history, our success has been driven by bold individuals who were willing to speak out and change the status quo.

Refusing to accept our Nation’s original sin, African Americans bound by the chains of slavery broke free and headed North, and many others who knew slavery was antithetical to our country’s conception of human rights and dignity fought to bring their moral imagination to life. When Jim Crow mocked the advances made by the 13th Amendment, a new generation of men and women galvanized and organized with the same force of faith as their enslaved ancestors. Our Nation’s young people still echo the call for equality, bringing attention to disparities that continue to plague our society in ways that mirror the non-violent tactics of the civil rights movement while adapting to modern times. Let us also not forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could make our voices heard by exercising our right to vote. Even in the face of legal challenges, every eligible voter should not take for granted what is our right to shape our democracy...We have made great progress on the journey toward ensuring our ideals ring true for all people...Our responsibility as citizens is to address the inequalities and injustices that linger, and we must secure our birthright freedoms for all people. As we mark the 40th year of National African American History Month, let us reflect on the sacrifices and contributions made by generations of African Americans, and let us resolve to continue our march toward a day when every person knows the unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

For more information on VA’s African American Employment Program or the VACO observance, contact Ms. Tynnetta Lee, VA’s National African American Employment Program Manager and VA’s Special Emphasis Observance Coordinator.
MyCareer@VA
3 Tips for Effective Teamwork Across Different Locations

More and more often, technology allows people who work in different offices—or even different parts of the country—to work together. In fact, you’ve probably collaborated with teammates who work remotely on more than one occasion. New technology has opened up possibilities for communication and partnership with people outside of your building.

If you work on a team where your teammates are not located in the same place, you have probably experienced benefits, like differing perspectives and input from your coworkers in other areas. However, you may have also noticed that things can be more difficult when you and your coworkers aren’t all located in the same space. Even with the help of technology, physical separation can make it harder for team members to work together. Here are a few tips for working with teammates who are spread across different locations.

1. Connect on a Personal Level
To build camaraderie, it’s important to make an effort to see your team members as unique individuals as opposed to just coworkers. Try building strong interpersonal connections with your teammates by:

- Starting off meetings by briefly chatting with coworkers about events happening in their lives, their hobbies, or relevant topics in their area, such as sporting events or new restaurant openings.
- Scheduling in-person meetings when it’s possible, so you can get to know your teammates better.

Knowing your team members on a deeper personal level can help you correctly interpret their language and behavior, which can prevent misunderstandings.

2. Think Before Writing, Sending, or Saying
Effective communication can make working together across distances much easier. Consider the message you’re trying to convey before choosing how to deliver it. Different messages require different delivery methods.

When discussions may be complicated or personal in nature, understanding facial expressions, body language, and tone is essential. For example, if you need to discuss a sensitive topic such as performance feedback, you should try to have the conversation via video teleconference if an in-person meeting is not an option. However, if you’re sending information that isn’t sensitive in nature, such as a document template or a website link, instant messaging or emails may be fine.

3. Stay Ahead of Potential Conflict
Did you know that team members who are separated by location are more likely to experience conflict than those who aren’t? This can happen because it’s hard to interpret your teammates’ actions if you can’t see their day-to-day work environment. For example, you might get frustrated with a coworker if you’re expecting a quick response to an email and you don’t receive one. But, you may be more understanding if you know the delay is due to a fire drill happening at your teammate’s office.

Enabling and increasing spontaneous communication helps create better overall team awareness and reduces the likelihood of miscommunication and conflict. Here are some ways to encourage this type of communication:

- Send quick updates using instant messaging platforms.
- Encourage a culture where phone and video calls are the norm.
- Make sure all team members have equal access to information in a shared location, such as meetings notes and other important, relevant documents.

Get the new year started off right by encouraging positive communication among team members—you can help increase morale, productivity, and ensure Veterans receive the best care possible in 2016. Visit our What’s New page to explore career development topics with more team building tips you can start implementing today to help you achieve your career goals. And if you haven’t already, stay up-to-date with career advice and articles like this one by signing up for the MyCareer@VA Monthly Update.

Sources: