

Curtain Call



I made my FAS AFSA VP debut halfway through the first term of the previous board. My recent posting to New Zealand is bringing down the curtain on that role. It seems appropriate to reflect back on some of the things we have achieved over the past two years.

In taking this position, a primary goal was to work closely with members to set an ambitious agenda and establish priorities while ensuring a member-driven process. Our human capital survey revealed that the top priority for FS employees was performance management. Employees lacked confidence in the ability of our system to promote high-performing FSOs with strong management and leadership skills. To address this concern, we set about working with management to create a system that rewards proven leadership and management skills and meets the objectives of the Presidential Management Agenda.

The AFSA Management and Leadership Working Group developed the FS Professional Competencies Framework, which identifies and defines the skills, attributes and behaviors that FSOs should develop during the course of their careers. Benchmarked at the junior, mid-level and senior thresholds, this framework should help provide greater clarity in terms of what is expected and what it takes to get from one level to the next. Supervisors will use it as a standard when assessing and evaluating employee performance. Employees can use it as a road map to proactively develop their skill sets.

The Performance Management Working Group, which we established in partnership with management, devised a system of work objectives and performance measures to foster goal-setting, improve communication between employees and supervisors and meet the PMA requirements. Building on the work done by AFSA's Management and Leadership Working Group, they used the new competencies framework to strengthen the FS promotion criteria, which should help to reward proven leadership and management ability. This group also created an assessment tool for selection boards to help ensure accuracy in the evaluation and ranking process.

What does all this mean for FAS FSOs? If the new system is implemented as expected in the 2006-2007 rating cycle, FAS FSOs will be evaluated on the basis of leadership skills, management effectiveness, operational effectiveness, interpersonal skills and communication and collaboration skills. (We define operational effectiveness as having the technical, problem-solving and decision-making skills necessary to develop and execute strategies and hold

others accountable for achieving desired results.) Selection boards evaluating and ranking employees for promotion into and within the SFS will also assess strategic focus, the ability to achieve results through people and organizational stewardship, which, among other things, refers to the ability to lead change.

We hope the new system will provide a performance-management system characterized by more precision in differentiating performance, meaningful rewards for strong leadership and management performance and, most importantly, more employee confidence in the system.

These enhancements would not have been possible without the sincerity and willingness of FAS management to improve the system and the hard work and initiative of many of our colleagues. While the individual names are too numerous to list, I would like to thank FAS management and our colleagues for their initiative and hard work. This was truly a membership-driven process and all FAS FSOs will benefit from it.

What remains to be done? Our human capital survey revealed that only 32 percent of FSOs felt they received adequate training as compared to 56 percent in FAS overall and 60 percent governmentwide. To address this, we are working with management to create and implement a comprehensive training and development program for junior, mid-level and senior FSOs that builds on the recently identified core professional competencies, leverages distance-learning programs, better utilizes detail opportunities and equips FSOs with the management and leadership skills necessary to lead people, lead change and achieve results. We are also working with FAS management to create a training program on the new FS Professional Competencies Framework and the new promotion criteria for selection board members.

Looking further ahead, there are many issues on the horizon, including the agency's realignment exercise, the Washington Placement Plan, pay for performance and new contract negotiations. However, the most pressing issue is finding the next FAS AFSA VP. If you are interested in playing this role, please let us know! You will have the opportunity to work with an active and, dare I say, "vocal" membership, and a cast of dedicated and motivated AFSA board members and talented and professional staff.

I have truly enjoyed working with FAS management, my colleagues and the AFSA team over the past two years. Thank you for the opportunity! □