



THE VOICE

We can do great things together

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 8

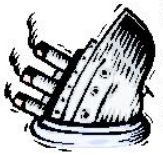
OF CHAPTER 247

WHO LEAVES A SINKING SHIP?

TITANTIC SHOWBOATER CHARLES WASHINGTON REARRANGES THE DECK CHAIRS

Austin Accounts Management Director **Charles Washington** is presiding over a massive reshuffling of his staff. To NTEU, Charles' old team just doesn't seem to have the juice it once had. Personal rivalries between staff members, as well as conflicts between Operations 1 (Toll Free/Phones) and 2 (Adjustments/Paper), appear to have undermined any unified approach to the challenges facing AM.

That could be a good thing, since **Della Thomas'** Toll Free seems to have made progress in recent months, while the "Just Say No to Everything" approach of **Anna Medlock's** Adjustments operation has served to solidify Op 2's reputation as the worst place to work among Chapter 247's employees.



Organizational shake-ups don't usually happen when all is peachy keen, and Charles' "restructuring" is taking place at a time when firstline managers are confessing their displeasure with the Big Man to NTEU. Last issue's critical analysis of AM management won admiring slaps on the back for chapter leaders from a number of managers uncomfortable with what Chapter 247 would describe as Charles' toxic brand of leadership.

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OPPOSITE APPROACHES TO EMPLOYEE STRESS

THE EASY WAY



NTEU AND ACS AGREE ON PLAN TO RELIEVE STRESS

Chapter 247 and the ACS operation have spent the past six months confronting the issues causing stress among ACS employees and constructing a program to tackle the problems head on. The effort goes beyond the traditional, superficial attempts at combatting stress, such as using motivational speakers and videos, and moves ACS ahead of other operations.

(Continued on page 4)

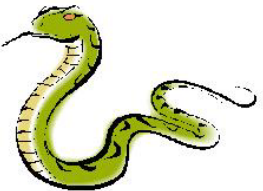
THE HARD WAY



Adjustments: THE SNAKE PIT

"It was not bad, not cruel...It was like the face of a statue, fixed, perdurable, a mere image of irresponsible and involuntary authority." - William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*

Operation 2 Manager **Anna Medlock** is the unsmiling face of AM today. Op 2 is in charge of training new employees who will become Contract Representatives in both Toll Free (Phones) and Adjustments (Paper), and that makes Anna responsible for their successes and their failures.



In a previous issue of *The Voice*, we cast a searing, bright light on the training of new hires in Accounts Management, Operation 2. We called the article, "The Wolf Is At The Door." We noted that, out of 107 new hires who started out in Adjustments training class in October of 2004, "Less than half of that number remain at the end of the season."

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COMMISSIONER EVERSON VISITS

NTEU Speaks to Power
See Account on page 9.

The Engagement Is Off?

NTEU Adopts Chapter 247 Slogan
See page 2.

"WORST MANAGERS"

Contest Revisited
Shocking Revelations on page 7.

THE GOSPELS OF DAVE, DICK, AND CHARLES

Presidential Remarks, page 14.

THE VOICE IS PREPARED AND PRODUCED FOR THE
SOLE PURPOSE OF INFORMING OUR BARGAINING UNIT
EMPLOYEES. *ALL OTHERS READ AT THEIR OWN RISK.*

The Engagement Is Off?

NTEU Adopts Chapter 247 Slogan For National Anti-Survey Campaign

IRS big shots are making a last gasp attempt to hoodwink employees into buying in to the renamed, re-worked—really, recamouflaged—**Employee Engagement Survey**. With “employee engagement” replacing “employee satisfaction” as buzzwords, management is signaling that it is in the data manipulation business big time.

The Agency spin doctors are simply not interested in enlisting employees in an effort to improve the operation of the Service. They are involved instead in an undertaking to save face—in front of employees, the union, and the Congress. Having lumbered far too far down the road in this con game, the embarrassment factor has entered into management’s calculations. The sad result of this desperation to avoid a humiliating comeuppance from disaffected employees is that the taxpayers will pick up the tab for the waste in money, time, and resources contributed toward running a sham survey.

As National NTEU President **Colleen Kelley** told employees, the changes by the IRS “have weakened the Survey, including removing verbatim comments that allowed employees to anonymously express critical concerns; eliminating divisional and functional ques-

“A decision was made to adopt Chapter 247’s slogan as the national rallying cry for NTEU’s resistance to the Survey.”

tions that helped identify specific problem areas; and abolishing a requirement to hold group meetings to review results.

“In addition, management has failed to correct serious flaws, the most alarming of which is that managers who score low are too often promoted or rewarded...”

Just as management has refused to seriously “engage” with employees, the Agency has refused to negotiate on the national level with the employees’ legal representative, NTEU, to make engagement a real concept instead of just a catch phrase.

During the planning of NTEU’s response to the 2006 Survey in Washington in March, **it was Chapter 247 that suggested “The Engagement is Off” as the theme for the union offensive.** A decision was made to adopt 247’s slogan as the national rallying cry for NTEU’s resistance to the Survey.

During last season’s boycott of the Survey, Chapter 247 successfully got the word out to employees. The employees of the Customer Service and South Tech buildings responded with one of the lowest participation rates in the nation.

In 2005, **Chapter 247 was the first chapter in the nation** to publish the drop in participation among its employees.

This year, everywhere that an employee sees one of management’s poorly designed “Get Engaged In Survey 2006” signs displayed, they will see NTEU’s countervailing “IRS Survey 2006” with a red line slashing triumphantly through it.

In order to end this charade, this monumental waste of taxpayer dollars—and to begin the job of really changing our workplace to be efficient, effective, and employee friendly—Chapter 247, together with all of the chapters of NTEU, is again asking employees not to take the Employee Engagement Survey.



THE VOICE

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COLLECTIONS SIGNS ON TO ASPECT

The Austin Compliance Services Collection Operation (CSCO) has been assigned to clean up the chaos caused by a series of decisions made not locally, but at the national level. In December, National Office (NO) sent out an alert, listing the nationwide refund hold phone number. It turned out that that toll free number belonged to Austin's CSCO operation. NO requested that employees outside CSCO transfer refund hold calls to the Austin CSCO number. Upping the ante, NO started issuing 2825C letters for the refund hold program in January, again with our toll free number on it.

Austin CSCO was not prepared for the avalanche of calls to come. The operation had four groups of employees on the dayshift, and two groups on nights to manage the entire nation's supply of refund hold calls. In addition, CSCO only had a certain number of ASPECT phones on hand and a limited number of employees trained. Moreover, NO expanded the refund hold program and increased the number of cases with a refund being held. It laid out the criteria for which returns needed to be secured. None of these developments were shared with local management in advance.

A scramble to handle the onslaught of calls began. The employees worked diligently trying to make sense out of the challenges that had been thrown their way. They offered suggestions to NO to relieve some of the burden placed on the taxpayers as well as on the employees.

NTEU has been working with management to deal with the issues of training and hiring, as well as the additional stress to employees and managers of being thrust into the

position of becoming a phone center overnight. NTEU provided relief to the nightshift when the operation was suddenly pulled in a number of different directions and forced to handle calls with a limited staff. At the same time, dayshift was struggling.

Overtime has been provided at NTEU's suggestion to help with answering some of the overflow of calls. With not enough phones available for the number of employees needed, Chapter 247 and management have attempted to overcome the issues that have arisen by sharing phones, even though employees do not share desks. The funding for phones has now been approved, but an additional ASPECT line will not be installed until July at the earliest. Now, CSCO is entering pre-assessed Installment Agreement peak, yet the phones still need to be answered. The result is more overtime, more stress, and more challenges for employees.

NTEU is currently working with management to achieve a sensible policy on the use of ASPECT phones. Chapter 247 continues to solicit the input of its members. NTEU knows that the best way to achieve results is through employees working together.

EXAM's Ears Are Ringing

Many Examination employees have been significantly impacted by recent changes, and Chapter 247 has been there to mitigate the impact of those changes. For example, the centralized filing system has been implemented, and one hopes that it will eventually bring the improvements anticipated by its supporters. In a national initiative, Exam is now being directed by the Joint Operations Center (JOC) out of Atlanta. As those on the phones already know, JOC masterminds call routing for the nation at large.

JOC tells each call center how many employees are needed to answer incoming calls.

This has created a hot issue for Exam employees. There is not an all-encompassing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to govern being on the phones as in the cases of Accounts Management and ACS. Therefore, lunches and breaks are being rescheduled for employees without their input. Employees are forced to juggle phone duty while still being held accountable for keeping inventory current. This task can be overwhelming when there isn't a set schedule so that one knows what to expect. Management has been put in the position of having to scramble to meet their phone coverage demands.

The hardships are not as insurmountable as they may seem to managers not familiar with the challenges created by phone demands. According to a review of the JOC schedule for Austin, the highest number of Tax Examiners needed on the phones at any one time is 23. How difficult can it be to make sure 23 people are on the phones?

NTEU is on the case.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Some Exam department managers are sinking to record low levels and "bribing" employees to take the Employee Engagement Survey (see the story on page 2). All managers are being directed to discuss the benefits of taking the Survey during team meetings. Groups having a 100% participation rate of taking the Survey will be rewarded with a pizza party for their units.

Is pizza really worth it?

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

There have also been issues with disparity of overtime between Exam departments. When management was alerted of this situation by NTEU, they worked with the union to eliminate the gaps.

NTEU AND ACS AGREE ON PLAN TO FIGHT STRESS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Convinced that stress can adversely affect both employees and business results, NTEU and management designated the ACS Advisory Council—consisting of employees selected by NTEU, teamed with managers—to undertake the challenge of reducing stress by directly attacking its causes.

The Advisory Council began its mission by creating and distributing a survey that solicited ACS Contact Representatives (CRs) for their opinions, and invited them to contribute solutions. The Council reviewed the surveys, debated the issues, and submitted recommendations that will be rolled out to all employees by NTEU and management, and implemented through a joint effort.

Six major areas were identified as the largest contributors to stress at the ACS call site.

1) Management Issues. CRs are concerned that some managers are not respectful in their dealings with employees. Some are considered to be overly critical and unreasonably demanding of perfection, yet unable to communicate effectively their expectations with employees.

To deal with this problem, the Advisory Council recommended that managers receive professional training with the theme of "Managing in a Stress Environment." They further recommended that each team devote a half hour a month during their team meetings to let team members express ideas to make the team function better and that Solicitation Interest sheets be issued to employees, so they can express their interest in different areas of development and advancement.

2) Work Procedure Inconsistencies. CRs noted that information on updates, local procedures, and DI inaccuracies is not always timely, and that there are many inconsistencies among different teams and call sites.



A Quality team has been commissioned to provide expertise on technical matters and dictate procedures to the work groups when necessary. These Quality Techs will review and present alerts and procedural changes, so that all advisories will comply with the IRM. The Quality Techs will constantly review and update Job Aids so everyone is on the same page on technical issues. They will be the only ones designated to issue Job Aids. They will also ensure that lead meetings are held as scheduled, and that any meetings which are cancelled will be rescheduled for the next available day, instead of waiting two weeks for the next scheduled meeting.

3) Overall Stress. Additional issues include the handling of stressful calls. The current practice is for the CR to notify the manager when he or she has received a call that is stressful, but there is some confusion over the action that should be taken.

The Council's recommendations included dispensing stress buttons to employees to use after stressful calls. After reviewing the CSOC MOU between NTEU and the IRS, however, Section 6, Auto Available

paragraph C, already provides employees the right to take a break from the phone if they determine the need as a result of stressful customer contact, e.g., interaction with an irate taxpayer. Another suggestion is an interactive class on stress management to be held during Development Day, monthly humorous flyers with stress management tips, and a stress-relieving tool to be provided by NTEU and the ACS operation, to be handed out during Development Day.

4) Leave Denials. Leave is difficult to obtain and this can lead to competition for leave days among employees. Although leave is granted based on EOD, according to the National Agreement, some employees are concerned that a few employees with early EODs request more leave than they intend to use, blocking employees with later EODs from having their leave requests granted.

The Council suggested that employees be encouraged to give back approved leave they realize they will not need to allow other employees a chance to have their leave granted. Management will distribute a calendar showing available days for leave.

5) Lead Issues. CRs have expressed concern that leads are not always available to answer questions. Occasionally, some leads are disrespectful of employees' questions, or tell them that they are too busy. Employees on the phone sometimes press the supervisor button and no one is available to address their questions. Leads may have left their phone on the wrong Aspect code, or they may not be signed on to Aspect.

The Council recommended that each employee be given a list of buddy managers and leads, so they have an alternate source of assistance. All leads should be signed on to the Aspect system and avail-

(Continued on next page)

NTEU AND ACS AGREE ON PLAN TO FIGHT STRESS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

able for questions, unless they are answering CRs' questions at their desks or on the floor. Managers should stay in idle on the Aspect system to allow rollover from lead to buddy lead and are expected to answer the rollover calls. Correct idle code usage should be made known to both managers and leads.

6) Read Time. CRs are inundated by the number of changes that take place in ACS and the short time that they have to absorb them. Employees do not have enough read time to learn all the changes for which they are responsible.

Employees will be informed in team meetings that they should request additional read time. Section 2 of the CSOC MOU states that "...additional read time will be granted by the employee's manager at a time that fits with workload considerations." The Council also suggested that a log be kept of read time to ensure employees receive additional read time. Managers will call the gatekeeper and request additional read time. The gatekeeper will keep a log and inform the manager of the best available times to be allocated to the employees. Technical issues will be covered at the beginning of team meetings to ensure that all important technical issues are addressed.

These six issues were the top stressors in the survey, but many more were listed. NTEU and management have made a commitment to easing stress on employees. Cutting back on unnecessary pressure in the working environment will contribute to employees' health and well being, and allow them to concentrate on their jobs first, rather than stress.

Adjustments: THE SNAKE PIT

IS ANNA MEDLOCK'S ACCOUNTS MANAGEMENT OP 2

PUTTING TAXPAYER DOLLARS AT RISK ?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Well, the Wolf has returned, and we may have been understating the horror of this grim tale when we suggested that AM was "making a meal out of new hire employees."

"Who breaks a butterfly on a wheel?" - Alexander Pope

Operation 2 has become a snake pit for employees, and new hires are most vulnerable. As probationary employees, they have less contractual protection, but they have far more than management would have them believe. One newbie with a target sign on his back was suffering from high blood pressure, but his manager seemed to always sock it to him with negative feedback at the end of the work week. The employee would spend every weekend stressed out. He was ready to accept a downgrade to escape continuing harassment from management, but the manager and his department head claimed that no jobs were available. When NTEU did the research and showed that a number of positions were open in other operations, management owned up. The manager approached the new hire, admitted that jobs existed, but said that he would not recommend him. As the newbie later recalled, that was the last straw, as well as the last words he received from his manager before the employee's blood pressure soared and he was hospitalized.

Just exactly what is the cost of training and then terminating an employee? Based on the amount of each new hire student's salary for the weeks of training, the expense of instructors, OJIs, 100% reviewers, etc., we have estimated that the bottom line for training a new employee is somewhere around \$13,000. If that employee is then summarily fired without being given a chance to learn an extremely complicated job that the prevailing wisdom says takes between three to five years to fully learn, we have to total in the outlay

for training the next poor new hire. Even if that one makes it through the gauntlet, they will not be at the same point in training (phones, mail, experience, etc.) that the first employee would have reached.

This pointless waste year after year might suggest why there is a chronic shortage of both Adjustments and Toll Free employees. AM management continually hires more employees, drives them away through mistreatment or targeting for termination, and then has to start the whole process all over again.

Anna Medlock's "Snake Pit" puts employees at risk, but how can the IRS defend the taxpayer dollars spent to train and discard new hires? Perhaps it is the taxpayer that is most at risk, when so-called public servants act in such a callous and cavalier manner!

THANKS FOR THE SUPPORT!

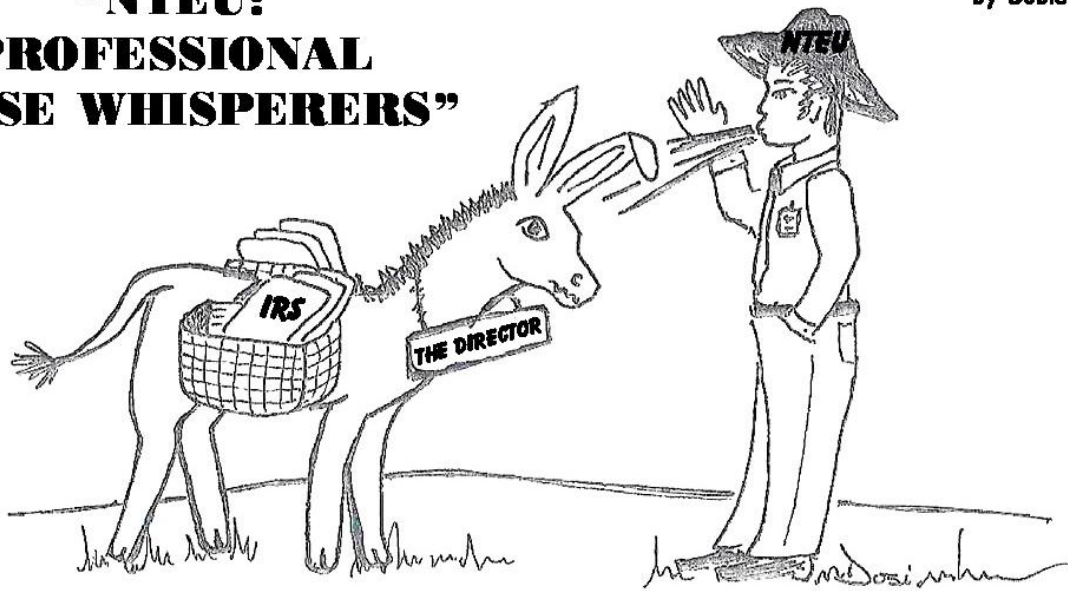
One of Accounts Management Director Charles Washington's department heads drove around town for several days with a NTEU license plate frame on the back of his car. Although this manager was not previously known to be much of a supporter of employees or NTEU, Chapter 247 appreciates the fact that he was willing to open his heart to make this display of solidarity, despite the subsequent ribbing of his colleagues.

Many firstline managers are members of NTEU. It's time that more of upper management were ready to stand up and be counted.

Charles, Chapter 247 will be happy to supply you with several NTEU bumper stickers upon your request. It is our hope that anyone can be redeemed. It's never too late!

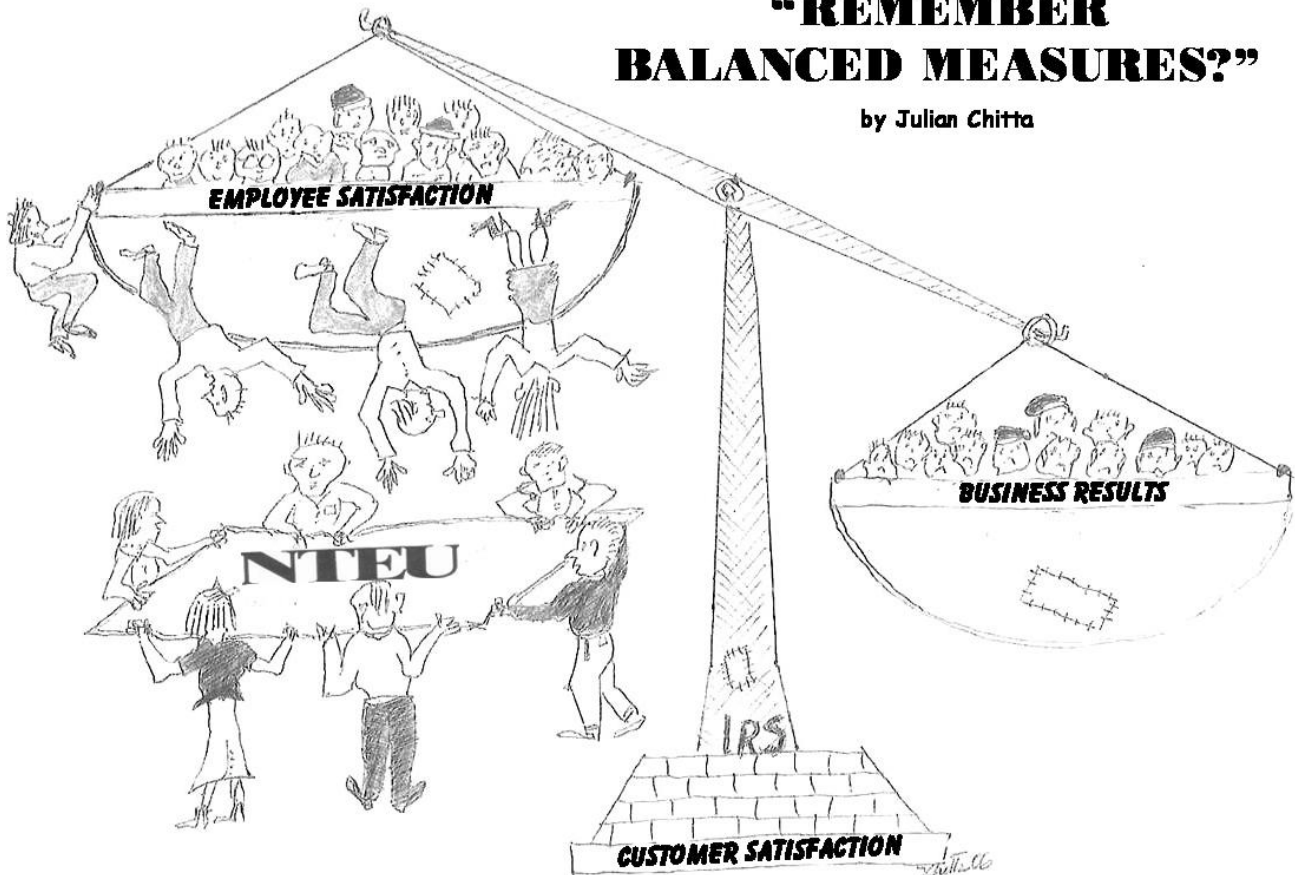
“NTEU: PROFESSIONAL HORSE WHISPERERS”

by Dobie Early



“REMEMBER BALANCED MEASURES?”

by Julian Chitta



“Worst Managers” Contest A Hoax? You Be The Judge!

Five chapter members won VISA shopping gift cards for their attempts to identify the “bad” managers purportedly disguised in these photographs, published in the last issue of *The Voice*. As promised, the winners will remain anonymous, particularly since they were so eager to label disliked managers as the “worst” that they projected unfriendly thoughts onto these noted celebrities, identified for the first time here as: One of our favorite actresses, the late, troubled **Shelley Winters**, the fictional yet deadly **Cruella DeVille**, the legendary clown **Oliver Hardy** of *Laurel and Hardy* fame; actress **Natalie Wood**, misunderstood and sensitive to criticism; and 1960s American Communist activist **Angela Davis**.

Chapter 247 was reluctant to print actual photos of managers, naughty or nice. Luckily for our contest, lots and lots of employees used their fertile imaginations to fill in the dots. Apparently, there are a substantial number of “bad” managers, doing bad things to good people. We promise to continue to work on that.

NTEU regrets last issue’s hoax. Or, hmm...*maybe this issue contains the hoax.*

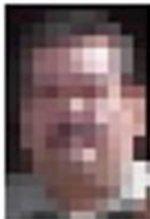


The disguised photos as originally published versus the real thing! Many employees mistook these famous people for Austin Service Center managers. Hard to believe!

Shelley Winters - Neurotic



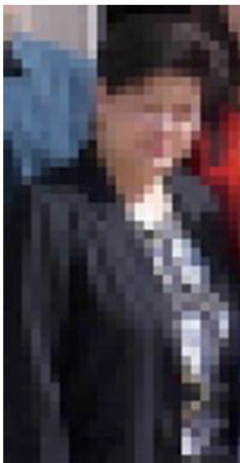
Oliver Hardy - Clown



Natalie Wood - Thin Skinned



Cruella DeVille - Not Very Nice



Angela Davis - Communist



LIFE'S THREE LITTLE RULES

My Dad taught me there were only three rules in life.

Rule 1: Life isn't fair. If you're getting what you think you deserve, you'd better look for the catch.

Rule 2: Everyone in life is a so-and-so. Some are just bigger so-and-sos than others; that included my Dad.

Rule 3: Never let the bad guys win.

How do the three rules apply to NTEU?

Rule 1: When work isn't fair, the Union is here to help. Look around you. Do you see things happening in your unit that are not in the Contract?

One aside here: you really should read and understand the Contract to know what should and should not be happening in your unit. If you don't understand the Contract, go straight to your Union office and ask.

If things are happening in your unit that you know are wrong, you should immediately see a Union Representative. It's not you, so it's not your problem? Wrong thought—it could be you next. The Union has

a voice Management must hear, particularly since we have a strong Union. If you have not already joined the Union, it is worth the money, especially when Management or TIGTA are on your case. The more voices a union represents, the louder the voice to Management's ears. If you have ten friends and nine of them tell you something, while one disagrees, to whom do you listen?

Chances are it's the nine who agree. If a union speaks with the voices of seventy, eighty, or ninety percent of the workers, management will listen.

Rule 2 really means that everyone puts his or her own best interest first, and others second, to a greater or lesser extent. Some are just a lot more selfish about it than others. The Union puts all workers' best interests first, and will stand up for and with you to Management.

Rule 3 should be self-explanatory. Do not read here that Management are "bad guys"—read that Management doesn't have its workers' best

interests at heart. Management has its own best interests at heart (see the explanation for Rule 2). Remember that Management will see anything the way it wants to achieve the goals it wants. We have all heard Management make statements contradictory to what we know to be true.

How many of you have taken the "Employee Engagement Survey," formerly known as the "Employee Satisfaction Survey," and seen any real, positive change? Sure, little things changed (read "bread and circuses"), but did the things that really matter change? Did things change which no one liked, but everyone went along with, because "the Survey said most employees" wanted them? That's called "spin," and it's what happens when the facts don't suit what others would have us believe.

Help yourselves. Help each other. Don't give Management anything to "spin." Don't take the Survey. Even better: Join the Union, *then* don't take the Survey!



HONEY, IT'S SOME COLLECTOR, ASKING YOU TO PAY THE IRS NOW, OR ELSE HE'LL BEAT UP YOUR MOTHER!

"OUTSOURCING"

by Julian Chitta



DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING EMPLOYEES SEEK DIGNITY IN THE WORKPLACE

When Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees were invited to instruct Sensitivity classes for their fellow employees in 2003 and 2004, the invitation came as the result of a legal settlement. The classes were helpful and enlightening for many employees who had not previously worked with Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees. The sessions served to foster mutual respect and sensitivity among all the attendees. It was not until after the first round of classes, however, when the instructors gathered to kick things around, and discuss improvements for future classes, that management's lack of sensitivity to the issues of Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees—which was the basis of the legal action to begin with—became apparent.

The debriefing was originally scheduled in 2004, while classes were still being held. When the instructors arrived for the recap, however, they were told that—since the attendees did not have communication pagers, and no interpreter had been provided—the meeting was cancelled. The debriefing was finally held on March 23, 2006. Chapter 247 and Chapter 72 both attended in support of our employees, along with the EEO officials who presided over the meeting. Only two managers showed up, although their contributions were appreciated.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees are proud of their abilities and professionalism. However, there are unnecessary obstacles in the path toward a fully productive and satisfying work experience. Instead of being provided with the tools to do their job at the time that it is needed, they are put through a confusing, cumbersome, and time-consuming reasonable accommodation process with little or no guidance. In order to receive the most basic equipment, the delays can take

many months.

Our Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees, some of whom are visually impaired, face an array of challenges. They have different levels of hearing loss, from mild to profound deafness—and visual loss, from extreme nearsightedness to total blindness. Not every deaf employee speaks sign language or reads lips, and not every employee with a cane or a dog is completely blind. However, new technology and equipment is available to enable our employees to do their very best. Unfortunately, many employees are being asked to do jobs, but are not being provided with the necessary equipment to perform those jobs.

For example, Hard of Hearing and Visually Impaired employees were told at first not to worry about being on the Aspect phone system, but then were thrown on the phones without proper equipment. The phone headsets can create problems with hearing aids, and cause pressure on some employees' ears or heads which results in pain. Some employees need large display screens. Others require ear tubes or ear molds, which can be very expensive. Since management will not provide these needs, employees have been forced to buy equipment themselves—even *having to work overtime in order to be able to afford the necessary tools*. The CIA and the FBI, on the other hand, issue hearing aids with a telephone switch for their workers. Their employees are not more valuable than our IRS employees.

Our Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Visually Impaired employees contribute to the Austin Service Center mission, just as much as any other employees. Management should recognize this fact by providing the resources they need when they need it, not after months or years of frustration.

COMMISSIONER EVERSON VISITS CAMPUS

IRS Commissioner **Mark Everson** met with NTEU Chapter 247 President **Eddie Walker** and Chapter 72 President **Dorothy Pistole** during his visit to the Austin Campus on May 5.

Eddie called the meeting "positive" and "productive." "NTEU promoted the concept of the union and management working together," said Eddie, "with the spirit of cooperation and give and take that existed before partnership fell out of fashion."

Commissioner Everson spent most of his visit in the company of management, but whenever he walked through an employee area, he lingered longer than his schedule allowed.

"I hope that the Commissioner will be able to meet with more employees next time," Eddie continued. "With Dorothy and me, he was very open and friendly, and employees need to see that."

CHAPTER SETS GOAL OF 70% MEMBERSHIP

Chapter 247's members are its mission. The reason that NTEU is so visibly active in the workplace is to ensure that every member is treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and that no member's rights are violated. The very word Union acknowledges that together we are strong, and when we act as one, we can accomplish anything.

So Chapter 247 works hard to reach out to all employees and to increase membership. The numbers help determine how seriously management takes the Union.

The chapter's current leadership has upped our membership from 42% to well above 60%. We expect to hit 70% membership by the end of the fiscal year! Stop in at the union office, and take a good look at our colorful membership-tracking chart. It'll make your day!

WHO LEAVES A SINKING SHIP?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

At press time, the two managers who were most criticized in the last issue of *The Voice*, Anna Medlock and her Op 2 Department Manager **Denise Lage**, were exiting their current positions—at least, for now—and being moved to areas that require less interaction with employees. Dubbed the “Queen of Mean” for the record number of grievances in her Operation 2, Anna and her protégé Denise (Denise could likewise be labeled the “Princess of Pain” for being the department chief most responsible for Anna’s high tally of grievances) will not—with any luck at all—grace future editions of this newsletter.

For those who prefer the appearance of gravitas in their leaders, the bad news is that Anna’s spot as Operation 2 Manager is being warmed by her Department 3 Chief and Charles Washington’s deputy, **Dago Gonzalez**. Deputy Dago infuriated nightshift AM employees during a briefing, when he refused to answer questions, rushing out of the room instead, leaving an incredulous audience of employees

outraged and confused.

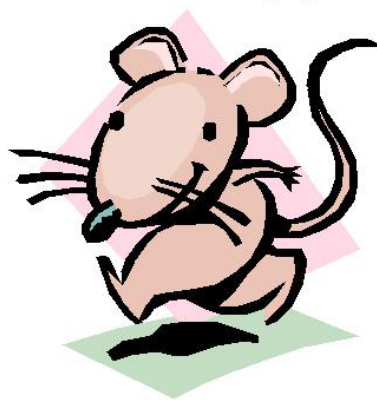
Perhaps now, Deputy Dago is ready for prime time. That seems to be the Director’s hope, at least. NTEU, for its part, has seen plenty of opportunities for Deputy Dago to step up to the plate on behalf of employees, but he has not done so. Despite our reservations, Chapter 247 is hopeful that Dago will grow in his new job.

NTEU is optimistic, if not sold, on the rest of the Accounts Management changes. Della Thomas will sit in for the retiring **Yolanda Jimenez**, as Chief of Planning and Analysis, and current Toll Free Department head **Jill Smith** will take over from Della as Operation Manager. The revamping will create room for some new Department Chiefs in both Ops 1 and 2.

Austin Accounts Management might be in the midst of a turnaround in more ways than one. In the face of Chapter 247’s relentless filing of grievances and other legal actions, management has given ground. Concerning its callous policy of denying leave for every man and woman (and child, if management could only get away with snatching employees’ children in the middle of the night) on “leave denial days, Charles and Company sought to lessen employee outrage by approving leave for all employees during Spring Break. This was a major concession, but management also increased the number of leave denial days from 14 in 2005—which included Spring Break—to 17 for the current season. Charles continued to deny leave for some employees on Good Friday, but he granted the religious holiday to some. (See more of this story on page 14.)

“Have you, at long last, sir, no sense

Who deserts a sinking ship?



of decency?” – Joseph Welch

The most shocking evidence that something is wrong is the bizarre behavior exhibited at the top of the Accounts Management food chain. On February 8, two NTEU stewards had just left a grievance meeting with a highly-placed management official when the man startled them by thrusting his hand through the door of their closing elevator and forced it open. Apparently, the manager had overheard a comment by one of the stewards that he imagined to be disparaging about him. According to the written statements of the two stewards, the steward denied the official’s interpretation. One steward wrote, “Mr. _____ was obviously furious and loomed in the doorway of the elevator.” The other steward recorded, “Mr. _____ appeared very angry and acted in a physically intimidating manner. I was shocked that a manager would behave in this way.”

According to the statements, the official accused the offending steward of not being “man enough to admit it.” He then promised to take action against him if he ever heard the steward say anything like



Who is this man? And why is he happy?

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CASE SOLVED

Chapter 247 Unravels The Mystery Of The Missing FEMA Applications

Following Chapter 247's petition of the government through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)—along with its information requests through Labor Relations—**Accounts Management poobahs have surrendered to NTEU** applications filled out by employees volunteering to help FEMA respond to Hurricane Katrina's deadly attack on the American Gulf Coast in August 2005 by relocating to disaster area command posts. After examining the applications, Chapter 247 believes that it has conclusively solved the mystery of management's curious actions as it ostensibly facilitated the application process for AM employees vying for the 2,000 available FEMA disaster recovery positions...but seemingly had an alternative plan in mind.

In its FOIA request, NTEU stated that its purpose for seeking copies of the missing applications was to establish to the public that Austin AM officials "have the highest ethical standards, and that they are not attempting to cover up ethical violations." In Chapter 247's view, *the applications did not establish that.*

As we reported in the previous issue of *The Voice*, Accounts Management Nabob **Charles Washington** promised NTEU leaders that his firstline managers would approve all FEMA volunteer applications and fax them up the chain of command, where the Business Operating Division would make the ultimate decision whether call site employees would be considered for positions. According to Charles, the BOD had already made a determination that "Phone Land" and AM paper employees were going to be busy picking up the slack for other IRS sites chosen to answer FEMA calls, and that those employees would be better utilized in their current positions on the home front than answering the far greater long distance calls to action on the Gulf Coast.

Chapter 247 believed that only a few employees would hear the call to volunteer—and that even fewer would be chosen—and that the national phone and paper operations would not be significantly hampered by the chosen few. 247 figured that the BOD would be more likely to change its mind in favor of the employees than Austin Accounts Management...better to keep the kinder and gentler decision making away from Charles.

Other NTEU chapters agreed with 247 on the justness of allowing call site employees to volunteer, and National NTEU President **Colleen Kelley** elevated the issue to Agency big shots. IRS Chief Human Capital Officer **Beverly Babers** wrote Colleen that the BOD had "reassessed its work load in the Call Site and Accounts Management functions" and "the decision has been made that we will be able to also include applications from employees in these organizations for the FEMA volunteer solicitation." The application window was thus reopened.

Chapter 247 President **Eddie Walker** forwarded the Babers E-mail to Charles, who responded, "Eddie, all managers have been requested to follow e-mail instructions." This cryptic message to NTEU was only the first in a series of epigrams that emerged from the ever puzzling Charles Washington's directorate in the days to come.

IRS management had extended the deadline for employees to apply for FEMA to September 21, and posted that update on the interagency website. All Austin AM managers were, coincidentally, attending a Leadership Conference off site during the week of the new deadline. As *The Voice* disclosed in last issue's installment, the Director's missive to Eddie was followed by a voice mail to bargaining unit employees who were assigned to sub for the missing managers.

"Chapter 247 believes that it has conclusively solved the mystery of management's curious actions..."

A copy of the voice mail was obtained by Chapter 247. On it, Charles, Operation 1 Manager **Della Thomas**, and Department Chief **Jill Smith** tag teamed the acting managers with a litany of confusing and sometimes contradictory points. Despite the E-mail from Beverly Babers, and the posting of a new deadline, Charles and Company appeared unsure as they relayed the following information to the acting managers on a single, long voice mail.

- "I don't know if there is a deadline." (Della)
- The deadline was September 22. (Charles)
- The policy was to "allow all call site employees to apply for FEMA [disaster relief positions]." (Charles)
- "Nothing has changed." (Charles)
- Firstline managers needed to review the applications and release or deny employees "based on workload."
- Firstline managers were required to discuss their decisions whether to approve employee applications with their department managers "prior to faxing." (Della)
- FEMA applications "must be held" and not considered until the firstline managers returned from the Leadership Conference on Friday, September 23. (Della)
- Every application "gets held till I get back [on September 23]." (Jill)

The voice mail was one careless, shaggy dog story—or was it deliberately constructed to confuse the acting managers? What was Charles' intention in sending this voice mail, and what was the likely result?

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Charles and Company were imposing a number of hoops for applicants to jump through, despite Charles' pledge to NTEU that his managers would approve all volunteer applications for higher review. But to Chapter 247, this point was moot. Management's voice mail guaranteed that no FEMA applications would be considered before September 23, and the IRS deadline for receiving applications was September 21. Therefore, *no employee of Austin Accounts Management Operations 1 and 2 would meet the deadline*, and thus would not have a chance to be considered.

With this information in hand, Chapter 247 brought Charles' handling of the FEMA solicitation to the attention of NTEU's national staff. Subsequent to that, IRS Chief Human Capital Officer Beverly Babers was alerted. Apparently, rattling out Charles had the desired effect, because management activity suddenly increased.

On Wednesday, September 21—in the midst of the offsite Accounts Management Leadership Conference—Charles was back on campus, engaged in what Chapter 247 interpreted to be damage control. According to NTEU's sources, an uncommonly quick and comprehensive survey of employees who were known to have applied for the FEMA positions was undertaken, and a combination of already-submitted and newly-completed forms were rounded up and transported to AM's offsite managers, who were *coached on how to fill out and sign the manager's portion* of the applications. The applications were shipped back to the Customer Service Building and faxed to the proper office under the wire.

Here's the sequence of events.

- 1) Charles promised NTEU that he would tell his managers to approve all FEMA volunteer applications and fax them up the ladder, but warned that the Business Operating Division would likely veto the use of Ops 1 and 2 employees.
- 2) The BOD "reassessed its work load" and made a decision to consider applications from employees in "the Call Site and Accounts Management functions." Chapter 247 notified Charles of that decision so that *he* knew that we knew of the policy change.
- 3) Charles assured NTEU that "all managers have been requested to follow e-mail instructions."
- 4) Charles and Company initiated a policy that would *guarantee that no FEMA applications from Austin Accounts Management would be received* by the official deadline.
- 5) Chapter 247 blew the whistle on Charles.
- 6) Charles acted to have all of the FEMA applications completed and faxed timely.

That should have been the end of the whole, unseemly affair, but NTEU, skeptical that Charles had properly followed through, sought to see the applications after the managers had completed and faxed them.

Management refused to provide the forms to either the applicants or Chapter 247 on the grounds that they didn't keep copies of the applications.

Could it be that Charles' managers actually believed that when a document is faxed that *it disappears*, never to be seen again? We hope not.

Maintaining that the employees deserved an explanation, Chapter 247 filed requests for information from Labor Relations and through the Freedom of Information Act. After months of resistance, the applications were delivered out of the blue to the NTEU office.

"Was Charles defying the wishes of his superiors when he took the actions that guaranteed that his employees would not be considered for FEMA?"

The results? Virtually all of the applications were marked "disapproved," thanks to some variation of "workload demand," and the overwhelming majority of them were signed by the manager and dated 9-21-05, the day that they were due. (Mysteriously, one approval squeaked through the system.)

Inquiries made by Chapter 247 revealed that one factor that would definitively disqualify employees for the FEMA jobs was workload.

Some of the applications had "Seasonal" scrawled on them. It is NTEU's opinion that the seasonal label was thought by management to be a disqualifier. The seasonal employees were also denied due to workload demand, although they were furloughed a few weeks later due to "lack of work."

Why were Austin Accounts Management officials so reluctant to release this information to the applicants and to NTEU? The evidence above demonstrates that Charles changed tactics a number of times during the application process, yet the goal remained the same: ***None of Charles' Ops 1 and 2 employees were going to be considered for FEMA positions*** (excepting the one cited above who somehow evaded the denial assembly line).

Charles' team underwent a lot of trouble to make it appear as if AM employees were truly going through a serious

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CASE SOLVED

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application process and not a charade. Yet what does the evidence show? It is up to you, the reader, to decide.

The IRS Intranet shared stories of some of the volunteers who were selected to assist FEMA in disaster response efforts. One said, "It made me feel good to assist other FEMA volunteers and have the supplies they needed to help others." Another enthused, "This was a wonderful opportunity and an experience I will never forget!" Still another said, "I will never forget the people I met, the victims we helped, and the stories that were told."

These life changing experiences were denied Austin AM employees, apparently due to the indifference of their management chain.

"If an employee refuses to implement a legal directive from his or her manager, it's called insubordination. If a Director does it, what is it called?"

One question that remains: Was Charles defying the wishes of his superiors when he took the actions that guaranteed that his employees would not be considered for FEMA? The evidence indicates that he had been forced to take additional actions to make sure that the applications were submitted timely. Since managers had been instructed *how* to fill out the forms—and those instructions ensured that those employees would not be considered—how does that square with the BOD's decision to "include applications" from employees in the Call Site and Accounts Management functions "for the FEMA volunteer solicitation?"

Was the BOD playing with words, its intention being that *including* applicants did not mean that they would actually *consider* those applicants? Or was Charles playing with fire, ignoring the BOD's intention to consider his operations' employees and thereby sabotaging the process?

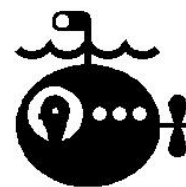
If an employee refuses to implement a legal direction from his or her manager, it's called insubordination. *If a Director does it, what is it called?*

Who is responsible for blackballing Austin Accounts Management employees from participating in the FEMA disaster recovery efforts? Was it Charles or someone higher up the food chain? Will anyone call management on this obvious manipulation of employees?

We just did.

WHO LEAVES A SINKING SHIP?

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that again. The amazing thing about this incident is that *it is not the first time*.

Nearly a year before to the day, on February 11, 2005, this management official entered the work area to mingle with employees for the only time in memory. Coincidentally, this was another period when Chapter 247 was exerting a lot of pressure on AM management. Again, according to the written statements of two employees, the manager misheard a comment from an employee and was enraged. Once more, the official approached an employee in order to confront him. Yet again, the manager accused the employee of not being "man enough."

After the incident in 2005, NTEU President **Eddie Walker** wrote the man's supervisor, to complain about the manager's actions.

According to Eddie, "Seeking reprisal against an employee for such a minor remark, a remark not aimed at [Mr. _____] (although he might have imagined that it was), is juvenile, vindictive, and clearly inappropriate behavior for...a leader."

It is no wonder that Accounts Management has been in turmoil for the past several years. Many employees believe that the Director and his staff have not been held accountable for their failings by the IRS chain of command, although that is hard to tell, considering that management has a longtime aversion to scrutiny by employees on the inside as well as by outside watchdogs. As Charles reshuffles the deck among his crew, NTEU is tempted to believe that *any* change that offers new opportunities for flexibility in the most intransigent directorate on campus is welcome. But even if Charles manages to escape accountability from the top, Chapter 247 will continue to hold the Director accountable to our employees.



did you know...

Employees are only required to provide a doctor's note verifying illness if they are ill *more* than three days, unless they are on a leave letter? No exceptions are made in the contract for heavy phone demand or "leave denial days." *National Agreement; Article 34, Sec. 3 (A) and (B).*

"THE GOSPELS OF DAVE, DICK, AND CHARLES"

Eddie Walker Chapter 247 President

Austin Campus Directors **Dave Boose**, **Dick Auby**, and **Charles Washington**, with the assistance of Site Coordinator **Brenda Ray**, have inaugurated a groundbreaking policy when it comes to free religious expression by employees—they're agin it.

The **IRS Gospel Choir**, made up of Austin IRS managers and bargaining unit employees, has performed at the Service Center for 25 years. This year, the Directors put the kibosh on the choir's celebration of **Black History Month** by banning them from the two Campus cafeterias.

Brenda Ray claimed to NTEU that it was her vigilance that resulted in management shutting down the celestial sounds. According to the Site Coordinator, "one or two" employees complained that they found the religious sub context of the Gospel Choir's program to be offensive. Those employees said that they had no alternative to eating in the cafeteria during the one day that the Gospel Choir would be performing.

Brenda's research of the issue led her to review the federal Guidelines on Religious Exercise. In her reading, policy prohibited any government endorsement of a public display of religion. If the Gospel Choir wished to sing, they would have to go underground like the Christians of old. They would be permitted to perform in cramped training rooms in the Submission Processing and Customer Service buildings, with bad acoustics and less accessibility to employees. According to Brenda, she had sought and received the "blessing" of the Directors for the new policy.

Chapter 247's view is that gospel is distinctly *American* music, and that the performance of the Gospel Choir as an event is more cultural than religious. Gospel is the historical basis for much of our secular music. Any inspiration that folks receive from the sounds of their fellow employees singing up a glorious storm is entirely their own business. Which is what freedom is all about.

The performance of the Gospel Choir would have been the centerpiece of the Austin Service Center's Black History Month celebration. Gospel itself celebrates the triumph of joy over adversity, a central theme of Black His-

tory Month.

Black History Month has been under attack here for a few years, ever since Accounts Management Director Charles Washington began consistently denying Administrative Time to employees to participate in BHM events.

In fact, Charles has one-upped the other directors on the issue of religious expression. For the past two seasons, he has included Good Friday on his list of "leave denial days." Charles' approach is to bar *every single employee* from taking off during his or her leave denial days, no exceptions.

In a meeting between Charles and his staff and Chapter 247 leaders this year, Charles gave ground on leave, granting Spring Break to employees. He opined long and hard in his distinctive style, however, that Good Friday did not merit special consideration for leave. In defense of Charles' position, an AM Operation Manager told NTEU that it was unfortunate that Good Friday had to fall at such an "inconvenient" time during the Peak Season. NTEU charitably held its tongue, although each chapter leader was secretly marveling at this statement and musing bitterly, "Yes, too bad that Christ had to be crucified at a time *inconvenient to your business needs!*"

Charles ended by promising NTEU that his management would consider Good Friday leave on a case by case basis. This resulted in some managers questioning employees about the address of the church where they would attend services, how many hours the services would last, etc.

Is there a hostility to religion that management has been harboring that is sometimes seen but not heard? Or is it that any thing that belongs exclusively to the individual—that resides in the individual's heart and mind alone—is subconsciously considered to be an intrusion on the right of management to control the employee's work life?

Most employees would maintain that it is our deep-seated birthright as Americans that management not stick its noses into our inner lives. NTEU says, "Amen" to that.

CHAPTER 247 OFFICERS

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Eddie Walker

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
Julia Miller

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT
Russell Bokelman

TREASURER
Karen Lorch

SECRETARY
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Ben Eureste (Days)
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Sal Macias (Swing)
X1058
Steve Conyers (Nights)
X0180



STEWARDS

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MONICA CAHILL X5435
CHRISTINA CASTRO X5727
ROBIN CHERRY X1559
DAVE DAVIS X0253
ARLENE FLORES X5466
TONYA JONES X0892
LADAN MAKKOUK X1549
BLAS MARTINEZ X5370
KARINA OROZCO X1638
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