INSPECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
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JUL 14 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES ASSIGNED TO OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Completed Staff Work

Purpose: To "teach and train" principles of completed staff work.

Policy: The attachment is general policy.

Effective Date: Immediately.

Joseph E. Schmitz

Attachment

COMPLETED STAFF WORK

Completed staff work is the study of a problem and the presentation of a solution by a staff member in such form that all that remains to be done on the part of the boss is to indicate his approval or disapproval of the completed action. The words completed action are emphasized because the more difficult the problem is, the more the tendency is to present the problem to the boss in piecemeal fashion. It is a staff member's duty to work out details, no matter how perplexing they may be. The product, whether it involves new policy or affects an established one, should, when presented to the boss for approval or disapproval, be worked out in finished form.

The impulse which often comes to the inexperienced staff member to ask the boss what to do recurs more often when the problem is difficult. It is accompanied by a feeling of mental frustration. It is so easy to ask the boss what to do and it appears so easy for him to answer. Resist that impulse. You will succumb to it only if you do not know your job. It is your job to advise the boss what he ought to do, not ask him what you ought to do. HE NEEDS ANSWERS, NOT QUESTIONS. Your job is to study, write, restudy and rewrite until you have evolved a single proposed action – the best one of all you have considered. The boss merely approves or disapproves. Alternate courses of action are desirable in many cases and should be so presented. But you should have your recommendation stated as to which you think is best.

Do you worry the boss with long explanations and memoranda? Writing a memorandum to the boss does not constitute completed staff work, but writing memoranda for the boss to send to someone else does. Your views should be placed before him in finished form so that he can make them his views simply by signing his name. The statement should be resubmitted with supporting documents, as appropriate. If the proper result is reached, the boss will usually recognize it at once. If he wants comment or explanation, he will ask for it.

The theory of completed staff work does not preclude the rough draft but the rough draft must not be a half-baked idea. It must be completed in every respect, except that it lacks the required number of copies and may not be neat, but a rough draft must not be used as an excuse for shifting to the boss the burden of formulating the action.

The completed staff work theory may result in more work for the staff member, but it results in more freedom for the boss. This is as it should be. Further, it accomplishes two things: 1. The boss is protected from half-baked ideas, voluminous memoranda and immature oral presentations. 2. The staff member who has an idea to sell is enabled more readily to find a market.

When you have finished your completed staff work, the final test is this: if you were the boss, would you be willing to sign the paper you have prepared and stake your professional reputation on its being right? If the answer is in the negative, take it back and work it over, because it is not yet completed staff work.

Attachment