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As a government organization with assets all around the Western U.S., WAPA has the distinct pleasure of working directly with Native American Tribes. Recently, Lands Management, the Office of General Counsel and other offices came together to accomplish something with a huge operational impact to WAPA.
On Aug. 31 and Sept. 15, 2021, Lands Management received a renewed grant of easement for its Yellowtail-to-Custer 230-kilovolt transmission line for Upper Great Plains and the Lovell-to-Yellowtail #2 115-kV transmission line for Rocky Mountain, both in Montana. This effort is more involved than it seems; WAPA has been working with the Crow Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs since 2010 to reach an agreement on these renewals, specifically including the transmission lines and access roads.

The team consisted of Electrical Engineer Audra Coppa, Natural Resource Specialist Christina Gomer, Right-of-Way Surveyor Judd Hopkins, Archaeologist Brian Joseph, Archaeologist David Kluth, Lands Manager Heidi Miller, Realty Specialist Ivett Nagy, Realty Clerk Tracy Rogers, Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist John Russell and Administrative Assistant Nancy Stam.

Getting to know the Crow Tribe

The Crow Tribe, also known as Crow Nation, is translated from the words Apsáalooké or Absaroka, meaning “children of the large-beaked bird.” It is a Plains Tribe currently residing in the south-central part of Montana with written history dating back earlier than the 1600s. The Tribe has been diligent in keeping its Crow language active; an estimated 3,000 Tribe members spoke the Crow language in 2007.

Many people do not have experience working with Tribes, and may have a few misconceptions about what these relationships look like. While Tribes have distinct cultural heritages, the U.S. government doesn’t meet with them simply as groups of stakeholders that own the land. Some may have heard that Tribes have their own governments and equate that to a local governmental organization, such as a city or county government, but this is also untrue. Tribes are sovereign governments and recognized in the U.S. Constitution as one of the four sovereign governmental entities, and the U.S. government’s relationship with Tribes is considered a government-to-government relationship.

The Crow Tribe has three branches of government: the executive branch, legislative branch and judicial branch. The executive branch consists of the chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and vice secretary. The legislative branch consists of three members from each of the six districts on the Crow Indian Reservation: the Valley of the Chiefs, Reno, Black Lodge, Mighty Few, Big Horn and Pryor Districts. The judicial branch consists of an elected chief judge and two associate judges.

A renewal more than 10 years in the making

At the time this process started, the Crow Tribe’s legislative and executive branch wanted to explore 20-year renewal terms. As the years progressed,
WAPA was able to negotiate a 50-year renewal.

Though WAPA pursued renewals four to five years prior to their expirations, the process lasted longer than expected and the rights expired in 2014 and 2015. When this happens, contractually speaking, the organization is considered in trespass status even though the process was initiated years prior to expiration.

This was primarily due to the Tribe’s backlog of easement requests from other organizations, organizational handover within the Crow Tribe and the onset of COVID-19 in 2020.

Through coordination and renewal with the Crow Agency, WAPA was able to build relationships with the regional BIA, which also contributed to the successful right-of-way grant.

**A complicated process**

The Yellowtail-to-Custer easement is 125 feet wide with 13 miles of transmission line and 5.66 miles of access roads. The Lovell-to-Yellowtail #2 easement is 75 feet wide with 12.66 miles of transmission line and 26.65 miles of access roads.

One of the factors at play in obtaining an agreement was that 51% of allottees needed to consent to the easement. This is an extremely complicated process, as oftentimes land is passed down through generations to more than one individual in a family, which can result in one piece of property being owned by several hundred people.

At the time this process started, there were more than 2,000 allottees. However, over the years, the Tribe bought back much of the land in the contract, paring it down to approximately 800 allottees.

The chairman elected to represent the Crow Tribe had to agree to the terms of the resolution. It then went to the Tribe’s legislature to be voted on, which was completed and approved Jan. 21, 2021. The chairman was then authorized to sign the Right of Way Consent and Settlement Agreement, which occurred April 21, 2021.

WAPA then signed and compiled the applications for the renewals, which were sent to the BIA, including all signed consents from the allottees, the signed agreement with the Tribe, the Tribal Resolution from the legislature and other related documents. WAPA submitted these in May 2021.

Now that WAPA has the land rights secured, RM plans to rebuild its Lovell-to-Yellowtail #1 and #2 transmission lines with the construction contract awarded this year.

Due to the many factors involved, Miller attributes the agreement’s success to the relationships built with the Crow Tribe, the team’s perseverance and constant communication with the Tribe’s leadership, allottees and other involved parties.

This success has paved the way for updating equipment and assets to continue fulfilling WAPA’s mission. The team appreciates the amount of work and the decades of government-to-government relationship building that went into making this possible.

*Note: The author is a leadership development specialist.*
APA employees are likely familiar with the term “psychological safety,” and will have heard it many times. Do they understand it, however? Do they know how it applies—or should apply—to them and their interactions in the workplace?
If there isn’t the respect and comfort necessary to be able to speak up and say, ‘I have a different idea,’ then you don’t have psychological safety, and that means that inclusion isn’t happening.

“It’s almost ironic that people might not know what psychological safety is, but not feel comfortable enough or be too afraid to ask the question,” said Equal Employment Manager Charles Montañez. “Part of what psychological safety means – one way to tell that it’s in place – is that people feel comfortable asking a question, or saying, ‘I really don’t know what that is. Can you explain it to me?’”

He explained that during the past two years, with the rise of virtual meetings, many people became less comfortable with stepping up and asking questions because they may feel that their supervisors will already expect them to understand what’s being discussed.

“The pandemic gave prominence to those in meetings who contribute the most and who have their cameras on,” he said. “That works fine for some people. Others feel as though they may not want to talk or feel like what they want to say is unimportant. They feel as though they may be shunned if they do, and they become even less confident in asking for clarification or sharing their thoughts. In those cases, these people do not feel psychologically safe.”

“Psychological safety is the idea that you can speak up, you can fail and, regardless, you will not be punished or humiliated for that,” explained Equal Employment Specialist Peggy Wooten. “If there is fear of failure to the point that people won’t ever try anything new, your team will struggle. But if you can embrace learning from failures, people will be a lot more willing to think outside the box.”

The term psychological safety was coined by researcher and Harvard professor Amy Edmondson. In her 1999 article “Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams,” Edmondson referred to psychological safety as “a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.”

In the years to come, the concept became the subject of much focus and discussion at workplaces and organizations around the world.

“Psychological safety means that people are allowed to bring their full, genuine selves to work,” Montañez explained. “It means that you can attend a meeting and see people raising their hands to ask questions. It means feeling like you are an important part of a team, and that your contributions won’t be rejected or mocked for speaking up or asking questions.”

In her research and her career, Wooten has seen many times what happens in the absence of psychological safety.

“When you don’t have psychological safety on a team or in an organization, there is low motivation, there is less engagement, there is less innovation and there is greater opportunity for unhealthy conflict,” she explained. “If there is unhealthy conflict, then you’re not going to have psychological safety, and unhealthy conflict that is not resolved can be the first step toward something going wrong.”

**Inclusion is key**

Understanding psychological safety, according to Montañez, necessitates an understanding of inclusion.

“Psychological safety requires people to be able to ask questions and contribute,” he said. “That’s also a very important part of inclusion. If our colleagues don’t feel psychologically safe, then we aren’t being inclusive. And if we aren’t being inclusive, then they won’t feel psychologically safe.”

He emphasized that being “mandatory” inclusive is not the solution, either.

“Oftentimes people don’t want to talk or be included or ask questions, especially in open meetings, or on camera,” Montañez said. “That’s okay. Different people have different levels of engagement, and we need to allow people to just be present. Not everybody will speak up all the time, but when they wish to speak up, or contribute in their way, in their own time, we need to make sure that they feel psychologically safe enough to do so.”

Employees, in other words, should not feel obligated to speak up when they have nothing to add to a discussion; they should instead feel empowered to speak up when they do.

“You can’t have a mature culture of inclusion if you don’t have some level of psychological safety,” stated Wooten. “You can have a diverse team. They can be diverse in their identities, backgrounds, experiences, cognitive diversity and so on. But if there isn’t the respect and comfort necessary to be able to speak up and say, ‘I have a different idea,’ then you don’t have psychological safety, and that means that inclusion isn’t happening.”

“In the Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity and Inclusion side of the world, we may hear from people who felt they were being discriminated against because they were not able to participate in a meeting,” Montañez said. “We may also hear from people who feel singled out in meetings. There needs to be a feeling of psychological safety so that all employees can speak up when they have something to share.”

Montañez emphasized, however, that this is an opportunity for colleagues to support each other and help develop psychological safety within their teams.

“Sometimes somebody is shy or not confident enough to bring up their ideas or questions to a supervisor or manager, but they’ll bring it up to their colleagues,” he said. “If that happens,
you can help. Let that person know that you’ll be happy to share their idea in the meeting, if they’re comfortable with that. Let them know that you’ll propose the idea and give them the credit. Or you could even encourage them to share it themselves during the meeting. Don’t call them out, but do encourage them to speak up and share with the group.”

“The reason we argue inclusion is important is that when you have a diverse, inclusive team, that is when you can get to innovation and mission success at a different level than the status quo,” said Wooten. “But you have to have both.”

“If employees don’t feel included and don’t feel safe to ask questions and share, then where is inclusion?” Montañez asked.

What it isn’t

Montañez took the opportunity to dispel a few misconceptions as well.

“It’s not only managers and supervisors who are responsible for psychological safety, and that is an element that we often forget,” he said. “It is everyone’s responsibility to work on our relationships with coworkers. It’s up to us to say, ‘I know you have some great ideas you can share with the group.’ It’s easy to feel like supervisors and managers are the only ones responsible for setting the tone, but that responsibility belongs to everyone.”

He also stressed that psychological safety does not suggest a culture in which agreement must be reached.

“There’s a misconception that a psychologically safe environment means that everyone agrees with everything,” he said. “That’s not psychological safety. That’s good manners, possibly, but it’s not psychological safety. However, if everyone reaches an agreement, and they all feel like they have been given the opportunity to be heard, and contribute, then psychologically safety is at work!”

The mark of psychological safety, in other words, isn’t universal agreement; it’s open and respectful discourse when there is disagreement.

“Another thing is that, sometimes, people think that psychological safety means they should just be able to blurt things out and expect somebody to embrace whatever they said,” added Wooten. “It doesn’t mean that. If you have a dissenting opinion or you have a different approach, you still have to think it through and you still have to deliver it with respect and be organized in your thoughts. It’s not just standing up and saying, ‘I don’t agree with this and I’m letting you all know that.’ You need to have and demonstrate respect for others.”

“Psychological safety should be reflective of an environment that supports respect, and there are standards that should be reflected in a meeting,” Montañez said. “We shouldn’t have meetings just to have meetings. We should have them to accomplish goals and get things done, and in order to do this, people must feel comfortable saying, ‘I don’t understand.’ If we want meetings to have any value, everyone must feel psychologically safe.”

Like diversity and inclusion overall, psychological safety must be practiced on a regular basis. It’s not a one-time adjustment.

“Don’t just talk about it and then wait for the next meeting,” Montañez advised. “Practice it, and not just at work. Practice it with friends and family. Make sure that in the group, any group, everyone has offered the opportunity to share, speak, ask questions and know that there will be no judgment.”

Psychologically safe to the core

One thing that Montañez noticed soon after coming to WAPA is that psychological safety was already being discussed, practiced and displayed prominently.

“It is interesting to me that WAPA’s core values speak directly to psychological safety, and many may not recognize this,” he observed. “‘Listen to understand, speak with purpose.’ ‘Seek. Share. Partner.’ ‘Respect self, others and the environment.’ ‘Be curious, learn more, do better. Repeat.’ Psychological safety is already built into four of our six core values!”

This was more than an interesting coincidence; to him, it means that WAPA has already taken very important steps toward creating a psychologically safe workspace.

“If we have embraced these core values, then it is our obligation to embrace psychological safety,” Montañez concluded. “It’s already there, and we should be good practitioners of psychological safety for ourselves, our employees, our leadership team and our customers as well.”

What should employees do if they do not feel psychologically safe?

There isn’t one answer to this question, as it depends on the situation.

A team with a lack of trust among peers might benefit from team-building activities. If you have a good relationship with your supervisor, you can suggest that the team receives facilitated training in teamwork. If you feel that your team lead or manager is not encouraging trust, you can lead by example and maybe they will take the hint.

While leaders play a role in shaping their team’s culture, it’s up to each team member to contribute to a psychologically safe climate at work. The Center for Creative Leadership suggests that any employee can engage in informal leadership by:

- Asking colleagues powerful, open-ended questions and listening actively and intently to understand feelings, values and facts.
- Agreeing to share failures, recognizing that mistakes are an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Using candor, whether expressing appreciation or disappointment.
- Asking for help, and freely giving help when asked.
- Embracing expertise among many, as opposed to holding a single “hero” mentality.
- Encouraging and expressing gratitude, which reinforces team members’ sense of self.

Most importantly, positive interactions and conversations between individuals are built on trust. Give your team members the benefit of the doubt when they take a risk, ask for help or admit a mistake. In return, trust that they will do the same for you.
Get to know UGP’s regional manager

In July 2021, Lloyd Linke assumed the role of senior vice president and Upper Great Plains regional manager. In this capacity, he leads more than 340 employees across Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska and Minnesota in serving customers with cost-based federal hydropower. UGP markets more than 2,600 megawatts of firm federal hydropower in a six-state area with around 8,000 miles of WAPA-owned transmission line and more than 300 customers.

Closed Circuit sat down with Linke to get to know him better.

What brought you to WAPA initially?

Out of college, I went to work in the oil field as an engineer. The price of oil dropped within a couple of years and I didn’t survive the workforce purge.

This was late in the calendar year and most other entities were ending their fiscal year and wouldn’t be hiring for a few months. However, WAPA was just beginning its fiscal year and had direct hiring authority to hire engineers. The district office in Huron, South Dakota, had three engineering positions open and I was selected for one of them.

It may not have been my choice out of college, but I have never regretted going to work for WAPA.
I firmly believe that you learn more from mistakes than from someone telling you how to do something.

What has been your most rewarding experience at WAPA so far?

With all the time I’ve been with WAPA, there are a lot of them. Of course, being selected as UGP regional manager is one of them. However, the experience I’m most proud of is being part of the UGP team that negotiated the terms of our joining the Southwest Power Pool.

Being the first power marketing administration to join a regional transmission organization/independent system operator, we didn’t have a template on what membership should look like. Congress enacted criteria in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 on PMAs joining an RTO that required us to negotiate provisions that had not been in any RTO/ISO agreements and tariff.

After multiple false starts with previous attempts to create or join an RTO/ISO, it was really gratifying to have finally accomplished the task.

What are you reading right now? Do you have a favorite author?

I’m currently reading *The Lincoln Conspiracy* by Brad Meltzer. As far as favorite authors: David Baldacci, Steve Berry, Lee Child and Michael Connelly to name a few. I guess I like crime/spy mysteries.

My oldest granddaughter is into Harry Potter, so I have been watching the Harry Potter movies with her over the past few weeks.

What are your communication and leadership styles?

I like to believe that I have an open communication style and inclusive leadership, but only those who have worked with me will know whether or not it is true. My door is always open, and in today’s environment my email, telephone and Teams messaging are open.

I try to make sure that all the parties have a chance to express their views before making critical decisions. In fact, if I sense too much groupthink, I will take the opposite view just to make sure we are considering everything. I know this has surprised some folks when I make my decision and it doesn’t match the point of view I had been discussing.

I firmly believe that you learn more from mistakes than from someone telling you how to do something. I feel that my role is to make sure people understand the issues so they can make an informed decision, and that they will be able to recover from any mistake they may make.

Would you tell us about your coworkers at home?

My wife, Cindy, and I are sort of empty-housers. Both of our children are grown and on their own. However, our son and his family live in Watertown, South Dakota, and Cindy provides a lot of the daycare for our two granddaughters, Kielee and Hannah.

They are here a lot, so the house is not really empty. Some of you may have seen our other companion during a virtual meeting; she is a poodle named Kayti.

During WAPA’s period of maximum telework, what do you think is the most valuable lesson you’ve learned as a leader?

Communication is more important in a remote work environment. Without being able to meet people face to face, it requires more concentrated communications to establish relationships with new staff. This will continue as we re-enter the workplace, since it will very likely be that we have more people teleworking and teleworking more days of the week than before the pandemic.

The use of the tools provided by Information Technology will help. To begin with, I relied on the traditional methods of communication, within the constraints. That only left telephone, email and WebEx, if someone set it up for me.

As time went on, I began to see the value in the new tools IT had provided and started using them. They have become a vital tool for me.
Science Bowls endure as virtual events

APA is a proud supporter of the National Science Bowl and hosts a number of regional events each year. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused those events to be reimagined with a newer, virtual format.
The virtual format debuted in the 2021 Science Bowl season and it continued through 2022. Holding events virtually allows for teams to meet and compete more safely in academic competition, and with a few tweaks to the traditional format, the Science Bowl events have proven to work well in a virtual environment.

Previous years saw teams competing head to head in direct competition, testing both their speed on the buzzer and their knowledge of biology, chemistry, Earth science, physics, energy and math.

In their virtual incarnations, the format of these events sees the questions – as challenging as ever – being presented with an appropriately slower pace. This lessens the reliance on reflex, but it also increases the chance to think about the questions and respond with more consideration.

As a more unfortunate result of the pandemic, many of the events saw a reduction in participation by local schools. This is consistent with the 2021 Science Bowls, and participation will hopefully increase again when the inherent risk of gatherings is reduced in the future. As in 2021, due to reduced participation, WAPA did not host a Colorado Regional Middle School Science Bowl in 2022.

Victorious teams from this year’s five WAPA-hosted regional Science Bowl events advanced to the National Semi-Finals Virtual Tournaments on May 7 for middle schools and May 21 for high schools. The top eight teams will compete at the July 8-22 National Championship in Washington, D.C.

The Department of Energy created the National Science Bowl in 1991 to encourage students to excel in mathematics and science and to pursue careers in these fields.

Each year, more than 9,000 high school students and 5,000 middle school students compete in around 65 high school and 50 middle school regional Science Bowl tournaments. More than 325,000 students have participated in the National Science Bowl throughout its 30-plus-year history, and it remains one of the nation’s largest science competitions.

Closed Circuit extends its congratulations to the winning teams and its appreciation to all of the participants and volunteers who helped this academic tradition to continue through unprecedented times. Best of luck at the finals!
How would you fare in the National Science Bowl?
Test your knowledge with these actual questions from the 2019 National Science Bowl. How many can you get right? Would you have brought home the gold? Check your answers on the back cover.

Middle school questions

1) What planet was hypothesized to exist by mathematician Urbain Leverrier due to observed discrepancies in Uranus’s orbit?

2) Barchan and transverse are types of what geologic feature?

3) In millivolts, what voltage is needed to produce a current of 3 milliamperes over a piece of metal with a resistance of 2 ohms?

4) Four blue marbles, three green marbles, and three red marbles are in a jar. Two marbles are selected without replacement. What is the probability that the two marbles are the same color?

5) Scientists at Oak Ridge National Lab have used electron energy gain spectroscopy using a monochromated beam to directly observe the atomic vibration energies. What kind of device did they create?

6) You want to hide your gold in a bottle that you plan to let sink in a freshwater lake. If the bottle has a mass of 105 grams and a total volume of 1 liter, and the gold comes in nuggets of 10 grams each, what is the minimum number of nuggets you need to put in the bottle before it will sink?

7) If you see lightning and hear the thunder 15 seconds later, then, to the nearest whole kilometer, how far away was the lightning strike?

8) What type of ecological succession typically happens after a forest fire?

9) The specific gravity of a solid or a liquid is defined as its density compared to that of what substance?

10) What is the least common multiple of 14, 15, and 18?

11) What type of fossil, due to its wide geographic distribution and short period of existence, is used by scientists to compare the relative age of other fossils?

12) How many edges does a pentagonal prism have?

13) What river in North America has the largest drainage area?

14) In a group of pea plants, the tall trait is dominant over the short trait in a Mendelian manner. If two heterozygous plants breed and produce 24 offspring, what is the expected value of the number of tall plants within the offspring?

15) What is the term for the line that separates night from day on the Moon?

High school questions

1) How many different five-digit integers are palindromes that contain three different digits?

2) A 5-kilogram mass is dropped from rest. In meters per second, how fast is it falling after 2 seconds?

3) The skeletons of Chondrichthyans are composed of what structural tissue?

4) Consider a restaurant that sells pizza to each of five customers. If the probability that at most one purchases a cheese pizza is 0.43, what is the probability that at least two purchase a cheese pizza?

5) What is the most abundant gas in Mars’ atmosphere?

6) Two cars leave from the same spot, driving directly away from each other on a straight road, at 20 and 30 miles per hour, respectively. How many minutes will it take for the two cars to be 10 miles apart?

7) A disk is spinning at 950 rotations per minute. To the nearest 10 radians per minute, how fast is it spinning?

8) The nucleolus in eukaryotic cells is the site of the synthesis of the components of what organelle?

9) A pipe is carrying an incompressible liquid flowing at 8 meters per second. At a particular section, the center of the pipe is elevated by 3 meters. If the static pressure is unchanged, then what is the velocity to the nearest meter per second in the elevated section of pipe?

10) A sphygmomanometer is a medical device that measures what vital sign?

11) Researchers at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab are revisiting the BaBar collaboration to look for data pertaining to the material that is thought to compose 85% of the mass in the universe. What is the term for this material?

12) Two resistors of 12 ohms each are connected in parallel to a 3-ampere current source. In watts, how much total power is dissipated by the circuit?

13) What chemical element is in the chemical formula for dolomite, but not that for calcite?

14) A hollow pipe closed at both ends has a fundamental frequency of 100 hertz. In meters, what is the length of the pipe?

15) Based on modern taxonomy, how many domains of life are there?
Beware the dangers of multitasking

By Paul Robbins

Have you ever said or heard the phrase, “I am a good multitasker”? Many see multitasking as the new normal, a solution for their busy world, believing it to be an effective way to get a lot done at once. In fact, however, research shows something different.
Multitasking refers to performing two or more tasks at one time, switching back and forth while performing several actions in rapid succession.

Research demonstrates that the human brain does not multitask. It operates sequentially and quickly switches from one task to another. Multitaskers often think that they are doing well; however, a study showed that 70% of participants who thought they were above-average multitaskers performed below average.

Research also demonstrates that chronic multitaskers often overestimate their abilities and fall short, are easily distracted, show less control of decision making, exhibit more impulsivity, downplay possible risks and make more mistakes.

If your brain can only concentrate on one job at a time, then multitasking is a distraction and multitaskers are effectively distracting themselves by doing too many things at once. The brain manages multitasking through executive functions that control and direct cognitive processes determining when, how and in what sequence tasks are performed. This includes prioritizing one thing over another and interchanging sets of rules for separate tasks.

If you are constantly moving between tasks, your brain is continually shifting priorities and rules, which slows down completion of the tasks while increasing the opportunity for mistakes. It can also slow down reaction time, which can contribute to injury.

Multitasking impairs spatial awareness and the ability to limit errors or recognize and react to hazards. It can be even more dangerous at WAPA due to energized equipment, heavy machinery, working at heights, driving vehicles and other hazardous conditions.

Multitasking can also have consequences in an office or operations center, whether they be errors on switching procedures, engineering designs or other important documents.

The distractions of multitasking can affect all work settings.

If you are a multitasker, and most of us are to some extent, breaking the cycle might be challenging at first. Start by identifying and reducing the distractions around you while working on a project. Breaking the cycle of multitasking will get easier as you personally recognize distractions, consciously decide to focus and mentally commit to a task. Focusing on one task will strengthen and increase your attention span with practice.

Time blocking, also called “time chunking” is a technique of time management that involves blocking out a period of time for yourself to complete a specific task. For example, block out 50 minutes to complete a task and concentrate solely on that project. Then tell yourself that you will check your phone and emails in the 10 minutes that follow the project.

“This type of time management not only makes your to-do list more manageable, but it also gives you more control over your day and helps you prioritize your tasks,” according to Sherri Gordon at Verywell Mind.

“Time blocking also improves focus and deters procrastination.”

If you need to start smaller, use the “20-minute rule” by concentrating your attention on one thing for 20 minutes before switching to another task. Practicing mindfulness can also help when you are tempted to multitask, by helping you focus and pay attention to one thing at a time. In addition, plan out your day and schedule more challenging assignments early, while your attention is fresh.

Multitasking may seem like an effective way to get a lot done; however, research shows that we can be more safe, productive and successful when we focus on one thing at a time.

Note: The author is a technical writer who works under the Cherokee Nation Strategic Programs contract. Information in this article is adapted from that provided by verywellmind.com and the University of Utah Genetic Science and Learning Center.

Don’t multitask while driving

How many virtual meetings have you attended during which someone was driving their car?

Driving is one of the riskiest things that most of us do daily. Add the distractions of multitasking and hazards multiply. The National Safety Council estimates that eight people die and hundreds more are injured on a typical day during distraction-related vehicle accidents. Distraction can refer to various things: eating, talking to a passenger, adjusting the radio or, more and more often, phone use.

Multitasking while driving can lead to three types of distraction: manual, visual and cognitive.

Manual distraction involves doing too many things with our hands, such as driving while reaching for a ringing phone. Visual distraction happens when we divert our eyes from the road and look down at the phone to see who is calling. Cognitive distraction occurs when we answer the phone and talk to someone while driving. Cognitive distraction causes a type of tunnel vision that prevents drivers from seeing things in their periphery, such as traffic signals, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Texting is even more dangerous because it involves all three distractions simultaneously.

If you are driving, pull over when using the phone and do all you can to reduce other distractions.

Sources: University of Utah Genetic Science and Learning Center and the National Safety Council.
DSW, RM employees train in Fall Protection

On April 26-27, Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic Ed McComas and Electronic Integrated Systems Mechanic Rick Peterson led Fall Protection training for Desert Southwest and Rocky Mountain communication craft employees.

The training was held at Mead Substation in Boulder City, Nevada, from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day.

“Having the ability to work with another region is always helpful,” said Foreman II Electronic Equipment Craftsman Steven Louria, who participated in the training. “We are able to share information about current projects within our areas and learn what new or interesting techniques are being used in other regions.”

The participants practiced many skills, including self-rescue and the rescue of others, performed during training on a dummy.

“Completing our annual Fall Protection training allows us to stay up to date on new techniques and changes in the world of fall protection,” concluded Louria. “It helps us make sure that, in the event of an accident on the worksite, we are properly trained and comfortable to complete the rescue in a quick and safe manner.”

Maxiflex becomes permanent option for employees

In 2018, WAPA launched a maxiflex pilot, offering flexible work hours. On April 28, Administrator and CEO Tracey LeBeau announced that maxiflex would exit the pilot stage and become a permanent option for qualifying employees.

“Not only has the maxiflex program increased flexibility in work schedules and improved work-life balance for employees, but it also positioned us to adapt quickly to the COVID-19 crisis,” said LeBeau. “Maxiflex has proven its benefits, and we will continue to offer it alongside Alternative Work Schedule and the telework options within the Future of Work pilot.”

As defined by the Office of Personnel Management, maxiflex is “a type of flexible work schedule that contains core hours on fewer than 10 workdays in the biweekly pay period and in which a full-time employee has a basic work requirement of 80 hours for the biweekly pay period, but in which an employee may vary the number of hours worked on a given workday or the number of hours each week within the limits established for the organization.”

“Communication between the supervisor and the employee remains vital for this type of flexible work schedule to work,” said Senior Human Resources Partner Nikki King. “Employees must coordinate, in advance, requests to flex from their established work hours. The supervisor will consider these flexibilities along with mission needs. The key to continued success is communication.”

Employees who are interested in using maxiflex must obtain supervisor permission. Questions should be directed to the employee’s Human Resources Business Partner.
Rapid Recaps

UGP SCADA team member published by NIST

In April, Information Technology Specialist Alexis VanderWilt, a member of the Upper Great Plains supervisory control and data acquisition team, had an article published in the Department of Commerce National Institute of Standards and Technology newsletter.

The article, “Mathematics and the Cybersecurity Profession: An Important Foundation for Many Roles,” is part of their Academic Spotlight. NIST had seen her work elsewhere and asked her if she would be interested in submitting an article to them.

“I was honored when NIST reached out to me and asked me to author an article for their e-newsletter,” she said. “I think that people underestimate how useful math is, and it was exciting to be able to share how important math is in the cyber world. I am grateful to get to share my passion for math with the world and bring awareness to how math plays a part in our everyday lives.”

NICE eNewsletter Spring 2022 Academic Spotlight

Mathematics and the Cybersecurity Profession: An Important Foundation for Many Roles

By Alexis VanderWilt, IT Specialist, Western Area Power Administration

“We all use math everyday; to predict weather, to tell time, to handle money. Math is more than formulas or equations; it’s logic, it’s rationality, it’s using your mind to solve the biggest mysteries we know.”

Celebrate Pride Month

By Peggy Wooten

In June, we celebrate the valuable contributions of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer – or LGBTQ+ – community and their allies across America. Pride Month is both a community and a personal celebration of self-worth and dignity.

It is also a time to stand in solidarity to recognize the resilience and determination of trailblazing individuals and all others who have led, and continue to fight against, discrimination and injustice in order to live freely and authentically.

Do you know someone who is gay, transgender or identifies as non-binary, which means that they do not identify as either a man or a woman? Get to know someone who identifies differently from you and see what you can learn from the experience.

The best way to get comfortable with something that may seem uncomfortable is to face it with courage and an open mind. For those who are not already allies of this community, a personal experience is what often changes a mind. Remember, we are all human.

The WAPA Pride Month webpage has links that provide the history of the LGBTQ+ fight for civil rights. We have also provided links to articles on gender identity, the meaning of the rainbow flag, how to be an ally and other resources.

As an LGBTQ+ member or ally, whether you’re headed to your local Pride festival, gathering in your backyard with friends or spending some quiet time at home, happy Pride Month.

Note: The author is an equal employment specialist.

Visit WAPA’s Pride Month page at wapa.sharepoint.com/sites/economic-impact-diversity/SitePages/LGBTQ+-Pride-Month.aspx
Every month, WAPA’s Section 508 team will provide tips and tricks to help employees ensure that their documents and web content are successfully compliant and accessible for those with disabilities. Remember: Before any content can be made public, it must be Section 508 compliant.

June’s tips

Providing alternative text, or alt text, for images within web pages and documents ensures compliance with Section 508 requirements that all images have textual equivalents. Alt text is read aloud by screen readers to convey the meaning of an image or other non-text element to someone with vision impairments. Alt text is not meant to serve as a full description of the non-text element. When writing alt text, it’s helpful to ask yourself what information the image is conveying.

Images that require alt text include decorative and background images, images that function as links, text within images, charts, graphs, form image buttons and logos.

To add alt text in any Microsoft product, click on Review on the top ribbon and then click the down-pointing arrow next to the words “Check Accessibility.” Next, click on Alt Text and a dialog box will open on the right-hand side of your document. You will be asked to add one or two detailed sentences that describe the image or object.

When providing alt text, convey the intended meaning of the image rather than describing it. Be brief; you should rarely need more than a sentence. Also, don’t be redundant; avoid using the same text that is already in the body of the document.

Avoid using images of words. If you cannot avoid doing that, use the exact same words as alt text. Avoid phrases such as “image of” or “graphic of,” as screen readers provide that identification automatically.

Use correct grammar in your alt text, with proper capitalization and punctuation. Good descriptions of images are simple and straight to the point. Alt text is meant to convey why the image is included or what it relates to, contentwise.

Describing graphs is a little more complex, and the description usually includes categories, trends, data being shown, minimum and maximum values being represented and so on. The alt text must be descriptive enough for the screen reader to understand graphs as it reads from left to right, down the page.

Many designs can be described as “decorative image.” A decorative image is, for example, a swoosh or a line. These decorative items do not need detailed descriptions, but will be included within your scan of the document.

WAPA’s Section 508 Team

Launched by the Department of Energy, Public Affairs created a Section 508 team. This team identifies, establishes and provides guidance in Section 508 program management. The mandate under Section 508 enables the team to guide employees to conform electronic content to current Section 508 standards.

Note: The author is a webmaster who works under the Wyandotte Services contract.

Visit myWAPA, Departments, Public Affairs, Section 508 for resources to help you create, test and remedy the content you share online in compliance with Section 508 requirements. If you still have questions, contact section508@wapa.gov
Brief Transmissions

Reminder: Use new feature for requesting IT support

In the office, it is recommended that employees refrain from physically visiting the Desktop Support areas for help. Instead, and for faster service, use the new Request On-site IT Support feature.

This feature allows employees to request Information Technology “touch services,” such as asking someone to set up a workstation or replace malfunctioning or broken equipment, including monitors, laptops, docking stations, keyboards, mice and webcams. The new feature allows employees to request IT help and propose a day and time that is convenient for them.

For different types of IT support, continue using WAPA IT Call Center Chat or other Service Portal features.

Submit your pics to WAPA’s 45th Anniversary Photo Contest

WAPA’s 45th Anniversary Photo Contest is in full swing. This is an opportunity to join in the anniversary fun while sharing the great pictures you take at and around WAPA. It is also a chance to tell a brief story about your image. Some of your words may be used to describe and highlight the published photo.

The theme of the contest echoes WAPA’s theme for 2022: “Reflect, recharge, resolve.” Submit photos that fit into these three categories:

- Photos in the Reflect category may be images with historical meaning or then-versus-now comparisons of technologies, places or people.
- Photos in the Recharge category might include action shots of WAPA employees back in the office rebuilding connections, working in new ways or doing something new.
- Images in the Resolve category may showcase in an inspiring way the mission-critical work that has continued throughout the pandemic.

Your photo and its story may be the one that sparks a deeper understanding of our critical role to the nation we serve.

For more information, visit wapa.sharepoint.com/sites/public-affairs and click on Photo Contest

Complete FEVS by July 15

The 2022 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey is now open. Each eligible federal employee onboard as of November 2021 should have received a unique survey link in their email from evdn@opm.gov. Employees are encouraged to search their inboxes to ensure that they have not overlooked it. The deadline for completion is July 15.

The FEVS is an opportunity to provide confidential feedback on satisfaction, commitment and engagement in the workplace. This year, the Office of Personnel Management added questions piloted in 2021 for diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. The Department of Energy also added questions to learn about harassment, discrimination and retaliation.

For questions about the survey, contact fevs@hq.doe.gov

Answers to the National Science Bowl quiz on Page 11

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