



## **IRS Messages Have You Confused? Here is Some Clarification**

The IRS just issued a couple announcements to bargaining unit employees and managers about some of the changes that were negotiated and will be effective on Oct. 1 in the 2019 National Agreement. Since the IRS messages were released, employees have raised a number of questions about telework.

NTEU is providing additional information to clarify the new telework provisions in the contract.

During bargaining, the IRS said it wanted employees to report for the full tour of duty to promote camaraderie, employee interaction, get questions answered, and allow long-serving IRS employees to serve as de facto mentors for new employees. The NTEU team was baffled by this given that in the past 6-8 years the IRS has pushed hard for fewer face-to-face interactions among employees in a whole range of areas, such as training and formal discussions, to reduce travel costs. NTEU pointed out that many employees are not co-located with their managers or even other coworkers. The IRS also made an issue of employees reporting to the office for a couple of hours and then traveling home during duty hours, which they claimed was improper commuting during duty hours. With pressure from the Factfinder, we reached a compromise on the reporting requirements as follows:

- All frequent teleworkers are not required to report to their PODs, as the Deputy Commissioners stated in their all employee memorandum. Mobile-workers, i.e., those whose work consists of routine and regular travel to taxpayer or other worksites meet the reporting requirement by performing field work in the locality pay area of their POD.
- Managers may also waive the reporting requirement, provided the waiver is in writing.
- If an employee is on leave for all or part of their scheduled reporting day, that day still counts toward the two-day reporting requirement.

As for the use of technology and more specifically, SKYPE, we agreed to substitute SKYPE for the outdated OCS method of communication because it has been retired. In agreeing that teleworking employees could be required to use SKYPE while teleworking, we also obtained an agreement from IRS to rules that are designed to protect employees from management abuses.

- Employees "may be required" to use online communication tools, just as they may be now.

- If required to use instant messaging, they may use all of the features of that SKYPE function, such as “busy” and “do not disturb,” for example, when they are working on a pressing matter that requires their undivided attention.
- Managers cannot use on-line communications tools to track or monitor employees, measure their productivity or as a time and attendance tool. We had the same agreement regarding OCS.
- Finally, the contract makes clear that the use of webcams is not required.

It is disappointing that the IRS has released messages and documents that are misleading or incorrect. If you have any further questions contact your local NTEU chapter.

**“...to ensure that every federal employee is treated with dignity and respect.”**