

Article 50

COMMUNICATIONS

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Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

This Article establishes policies and procedures to be followed in Teleservice Centers (TSCs) and Mega Teleservice Centers (Mega TSCs). These policies and procedures apply to employees of the Field Operations Component working in TSCs and Mega TSCs. Hereinafter, both the TSCs and Mega TSCs will be referred to as “TSC(s)”.

Section 2 –Telephone Policy

A. The parties recognize that it is not possible for an employee to complete certain calls due to the complexity of the call and it is understood that employees will not be adversely affected as a result thereof.

B. The Agency recognizes that the TSC Operating Guide provides for extensive inputs, research, programs and policy as well as interviewing regarding many SSA programmatic areas, therefore, TSRs may go into “WRAP UP” status to complete work after a caller hangs up. The Agency

23 also recognizes that both “HOLD TIME” and “WRAP UP” time during many
24 of these complex calls may be lengthy.

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26 C. “SIGN-OFF” will be used for training, meetings, use of restrooms, lunch,
27 breaks, leave, authorized release from telephone answering, and at the end
28 of a shift. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive of reasons and
29 instances for SIGN-OFF.

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31 D. 800 number callers using offensive, abusive or threatening language may
32 be warned by the employee that further use of such language will result in
33 termination of the call. The employee, at her/his discretion, may hang up on
34 the caller for subsequent use of such language. Employees who hang up on
35 a caller after the second or subsequent instance of such language will not
36 be subject to counseling, oral warnings, disciplinary or adverse action, or
37 negative documentation regarding performance.

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39 E. An employee who takes calls will not be considered to have been
40 discourteous based solely on the “tone” of his or her voice, and any incident
41 of alleged discourtesy will be brought to the attention of the employee
42 expeditiously in a meeting (no later than the next business day when
43 possible), and before any conclusions are drawn about the allegation. The
44 employee will be presented with evidence of the allegation prior to this

45 meeting, and will be advised in advance that he/she may exercise his or her
46 Weingarten Rights.

47

48 **F. The use of scripted answering techniques, such as “CHIP” and “PHONE**
49 **PRO” will be optional on the part of journey-level teleservice center**
50 **representatives.**

51

52 **G. Capabilities for observing or monitoring work activities or non-work**
53 **activities of bargaining unit employees will not be implemented in new**
54 **telephone systems until notice and bargaining in accordance with this**
55 **Agreement.**

56

57 **Section 4 – Automatic Call Distributors Equipment (ACD)**

58

59 **A. The Agency will use traditional non-electronic methods to observe**
60 **employee adherence to Agency rules and policies regarding reporting**
61 **to and from work and taking lunch, breaks, and excused absences.**

62 **When observation by these methods indicates that there may be a**
63 **problem in one of these cited areas, the employee will first be**
64 **counseled verbally, in accordance with this Agreement.**

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66 **B. Calls will normally not be interrupted by supervisors or Management**
67 **officials, in person or remotely, based on observation of length of call**

68 **time, hold time, or wrap up time based on the monitoring of ACD**
69 **equipment data.**

70

71 **C. Instant message technology or pop-up messages will not be used to**
72 **correct or point out errors or concerns during service observation or**
73 **when a management official is monitoring ACD data.**

74

75 **D. Every TSC employee will be provided with individual voice mail, and**
76 **will have the right to devise and enter his or her own personal**
77 **greeting.**

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79 **Section 5 – Communication of Personal Telephone Messages and Personal**
80 **Use of Phone**

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82 **A. Management will make every effort to ensure that TSC employees receive**
83 **personal telephone messages in a timely manner. Emergency messages**
84 **shall be communicated to employees immediately upon receipt.**

85

86 **B. Employees may place and receive brief personal phone calls during duty**
87 **time pursuant to the SSA personal use policy, and use Agency telephone**
88 **equipment that is not subject to service observation or other monitoring.**

89

90 **C. Employees are permitted to carry and use cellular phones and other**
91 **personal communication devices.**

92

93 **D. Employees only need to notify a supervisor about a personal call if the**
94 **call will not be brief. An employee does not need to provide specific**
95 **information about the nature of a personal call.**

96

97 **Section 5 - Technical Reading Time**

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99 **A. TSRs will be provided a minimum of thirty (30) minutes of technical**
100 **reading time at the beginning of each day, prior to signing in to take**
101 **incoming calls. This time does not include time for training sessions, staff**
102 **meetings, or the performance of other non-telephone duties.**

103

104 **B. Following an absence from work, Management will, at the earliest**
105 **opportunity, provide additional technical reading time equivalent to the time**
106 **missed due to the absence.**

107

108 **C. Additional technical reading time will be made available at every**
109 **reasonable opportunity, such as when telephone calls and other assigned**
110 **workloads are less demanding, to ensure that TSRs have opportunities to**
111 **keep up-to-date with technical materials and changes.**

112

113 **Section 8 – Intra-Component and Inter-Component Details and**
114 **Developmental Opportunities**

115

116 **A. It is agreed by the parties that TSC employees have limited**
117 **opportunities to add variety to their work, to learn about work in other**
118 **Field Operations facilities and in other components outside of Field**
119 **Operations, and to be given fair consideration for details,**
120 **developmental assignments, and temporary and permanent**
121 **promotions available throughout SSA. The Agency and the Union are**
122 **committed to creating more opportunities.**

123

124 **B. Within 60 days of the effective date of this agreement, SSA will meet**
125 **with AFGE to establish national policies and procedures for expanded**
126 **intra-component and inter-component details and developmental**
127 **opportunities for TSC employees.**

128

129 **Section 9 – Service Observation**

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131 **A. General**

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133 **TSC employees shall not be disadvantaged as compared to other**
134 **employees, either in terms of undue scrutiny or basic employee rights,**

135 **due to the opportunity for SSA to monitor calls or because of the nature**
136 **of the work.**

137

138 **1. Telephones subject to service observation will be clearly labeled “This**
139 **telephone is subject to Service Observation.”**

140

141 **2. Employee use of such a phone will not be construed by SSA as**
142 **consent to being service observed.**

143

144 **3. The Agency will fully comply with all applicable Federal and State**
145 **statutes and regulations in conducting service observations.**

146

147 **4. Service observation is conducted to identify training needs, provide a**
148 **basis for retraining, monitor the accuracy of information provided,**
149 **monitor the courtesy and conduct of employees, improve employee**
150 **and Agency performance, and gather statistical information regarding**
151 **calls received.**

152

153 **5. Only business calls will be observed. As soon as a call is identified as**
154 **personal or union, observation will end and all documentation**
155 **concerning the call will be destroyed.**

156

157 **6. Only incumbents of positions identified to the Union in writing as**
158 **authorized to conduct service observation will engage in this activity.**

159

160 **B. Service Observation by Supervisors (Tier 1)**

161

162 **1. A Service Observation Evaluation of Interview Form that clearly**
163 **identifies the criteria to be used in determining whether there is an**
164 **error will be utilized by Management to advise the employee whether a**
165 **call was handled appropriately. If Management determines that a call**
166 **was not handled appropriately, the employee will be provided an**
167 **explanation, recommendations for improvement, and specific**
168 **references to manuals and other applicable guides.**

169

170 **2. Management will make every reasonable effort to provide an employee**
171 **with a copy of the Form on the same day that the call is observed, or**
172 **will furnish it the following work day if that is not possible. If two or**
173 **more courses of action would have been equally appropriate, any**
174 **feedback regarding an employee's exercise of discretion will be**
175 **informational only, and not considered an error. The employee will be**
176 **advised of the opportunity to prepare a rebuttal on duty time, and that**
177 **the Form and any rebuttal will be filed in the SF-7B extension file.**

178

179 **3. Each employee will receive a schedule and written advance**
180 **notification of the purpose, frequency, number of observations, and**
181 **beginning and ending dates of each period of service observation.**
182 **Journey level employees with one or more years of experience in the**
183 **position will normally be observed during one week per month, with**
184 **up to 15 calls observed. Others may be observed any week in a**
185 **month, with up to 40 calls per month monitored. Before the frequency**
186 **or number of calls to be observed will be increased, or the period**
187 **extended, the basis for the increase and the details of the revised plan**
188 **will be provided in writing to the employee, with a copy to the Union.**

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190 **4. Service observations will be conducted in a fair, objective, and**
191 **equitable manner, and observation will not be used in lieu of**
192 **disciplinary action. They will normally be conducted by first-line**
193 **supervisors, not by Technical Assistants or other Teleservice**
194 **Representatives, and used primarily to identify and respond to**
195 **training needs.**

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197 **C. Installation Level Observations (Tier II)**

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199 **Installation or facility level observations are conducted for the purpose of**
200 **collecting aggregate data, and will not be used to obtain individual employee**
201 **level data.**

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D. Service Observation by OQP (Tier III)

- 1. The purpose of OQP service observation is to assess overall system-wide payment, decisional, and service accuracy, not to document individual employee performance or conduct.**

- 2. If the Agency decides to use OQP processes or data to assess individual employees, there will be advance notice and bargaining in accordance with this Agreement.**

E. Union Rights

- 1. Within 30 days of their issuance, AFGE will receive copies of all written analyses and reports produced in connection with service observation, on an ongoing basis.**

- 2. AFGE neither endorses nor otherwise agrees with the Agency's use of service observation to assess individual employee performance or conduct.**

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