

THE UTE LETTER

241 Edition of the Nebraska City Utilities News

January 2019

FROM THE DESK OF JEFF KOHRS:

I hope everyone was able to enjoy the holidays.

I have visited with all of our Superintendents recently about planning for the future concerning our work force. As our workforce continues to age, we will have retirements that will need to be addressed. I've asked our Superintendents to visit with their respective staffs to gain an understanding of future plans. We need to put together timelines if possible so that we can develop a plan on promotions and hiring new employees to fill vacancies created by those retiring. We'll be addressing this going forward.

We recently experienced a pretty good round of snow, with more in the forecast. Please use caution while working and driving around under these conditions.

Bryan's guys have been dealing with a number of water main breaks this winter. Thanks guys for getting those fixed quickly. I don't believe we've had any major electric outages this winter, let's hope that continues.

The 9th Street lift station project is nearly complete and should be put into service soon. That will be a good project to close out and will be one that should provide reliable service for that area of town for many years to come.

We are still waiting for the road and field conditions to dry out or freeze to allow access for some test well sampling to explore a potential new well field to serve the future needs of Nebraska City.

Here's to a great New Year! Please remember to work safe and let's be careful out there.

ELECTRIC DEPT:

Carl Abbott

I hope everyone was able to enjoy the holidays with their families. The weather has been much better than the first couple of snow and cold spells indicated what the winter would be like. I know the winter can still turn and get worse and it most likely will, but at least every warm trend will make it hopefully shorter.

The crews have been very busy getting a lot of the equipment washed, waxed, and inspected on days they have not been favorable for outside work. Mark's crew has been plugging away at the Senior Housing development with all of the conduits now buried, and 3 more services to install for the completion of that project. Stuart and his crew have most of the NCU share of the work at Sub 904 at Syracuse completed. We have had several work orders submitted already for next spring, along with several projects developing. It appears the heavy work load has no signs of slowing down. Keep up the good work guys.

We will all be completing our CPR, AED, and first aid certification soon. Inventory is scheduled for Monday February 4th and Sharon has let bids out for the testing of all the digger derricks and aerial basket trucks. We will be scheduling the testing of all the rubber line hoses and cover-up material. We be waxing and testing all the fiberglass tools on the next cold spell as time allows. We still have a lot of construction projects going, a lot of maintenance, and plenty safety and personal protective equipment inspections to complete.

We all recognize the efforts of everyone to practice safety. If anyone has any safety ideas or suggestions drop them in our safety boxes.

SERVICE DEPT:

Mary Lynn Hall

I hope everyone had a very Merry Christmas & I hope that the New Year 2019, provides many blessings, happiness & prosperity for our NCU employees & their families. Service work slowed down most of December but has increased in January. It has been a mild January so far which is OK with us. We will see what February and March will have to offer.

GAS & WATER DEPT:

Bryan Turner

Well Snowmagedon 2019 Arrived this past weekend and it looks like we may get part 2 soon. The crews have been busy with valve maintenance, turning water valves, repairing valve boxes, and repairing above ground gas leaks John found on a Business Leak Survey. We have repaired two water main breaks. We are going to tell Shawn to knock on wood the next time he comments about water leaks seeing as he was on call for both of them. Even with the weather Brad has been busy with locates, working on the maps, and doing some reorganizing in his office and the map room.

The South 9th Street lift station is getting closer to completion, but I'm sure this snow is going to slow that up. We are really looking forward to its completion. I want to thank Marks' crew for getting the electric run to the new station. Tommy and Derek have been working a lot on the Chaney lift station lately. We are hoping to do a thorough cleaning of it soon, but again all the white stuff is pushing that back. With all of the cold weather and slick conditions be sure to take extra care working and driving. Let's stay safe and report any issues you see out there.

WATER PLANT:

Mark Lant

Hello and Happy January to everyone here at NCU. We hope that you all enjoyed your Christmas and New Years and were able to spend it with your friends and family.

The New year has us here at the Water plant keeping busy with paperwork and Maintenance planning. We will be draining out our B-upflow unit soon for cleaning and inspection. Following that will be the A-upflow for cleaning and some updates on a de-aeration box. Well #2 is still out of service as we are awaiting approval on plans for its rehabilitation. A special thanks to all of Bryans' crew who are involved in replacing the gate valve, check valve, and new flowmeter in Well #2's Pit. Have a wonderful January everyone, stay safe and Be Blessed! This message from us boys at the water plant to you.

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS:

Ronald Heng 2-19-65
Machelle Van Renan 2-06-61

FEBRUARY WORK ANNIVERSARIES:

Stuart Abbott 2-13-06
Gary Bohlin 2-25-08
Elaine Boyer 2-10-14
Todd Chaney 2-22-85
Travis Conner 2-15-08
Jeff Kohrs 2-06-84
Kathy Lechner 2-13-08



FrontLine Employee

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EMPATHY = Happier customers, less stress

Direct customer service is known to be stressful. But there are customer service “tools” (ways of thinking and communicating) that can make this job easier and more rewarding.

Upset customers, no matter the cause, have one thing in common: They want the pain to stop. The problem or need, even if unresolvable, always has another part — customer’s anger, agitation or disappointment. Intervention calls for the skill of empathy.

Empathy helps those with whom we interact feel heard. The more deeply heard, the quicker the return to a prior state of calm. This emotional relief is your reward and theirs. Empathetic responses are classified by “levels.” The higher the level, the greater the calming effect.

SOCIAL MEDIA linked to depression

There has been quite a bit of research on the adverse impacts of social media on well-being. The most recent research focused on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. With more social media use, symptoms of depression are likely to occur. And those who are already depressed can expect the condition to worsen with more social media use.

Researchers don’t advocate giving up social media, but they do strongly suggest limiting screen time to improve mental health. This free time should be used to reduce loneliness by socializing and interacting with friends offline.

For example, imagine a customer was agitated about a \$10 service charge. The following levels of empathy would likely have increasingly positive benefits for the customer.

Level 1: (Lowest and least helpful): “Easy does it, this is not my fault.”

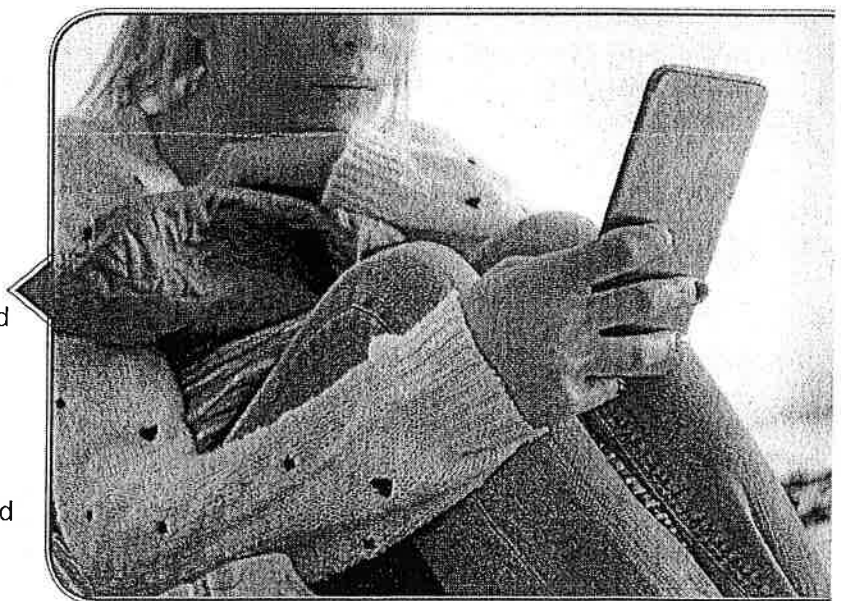
Level 2: “I’m sorry, but the invoice does say a \$10 service charge applies.”

Level 3: “I apologize if you are only finding out about this now.”

Level 4: “I agree the charge can be easy to miss.”

Level 5: “You feel blindsided and taken advantage of, and for that I’m sorry.”

Experiment and role play with your team. Try to hit Level 5 responses with customers. Before long, you’ll be a customer service dynamo and enjoy your job much more.



Resolving relationship problems at work

Are you tolerating a difficult workplace relationship? Thorny relationships are often tolerated because switching job functions or leaving is not an option. If this sounds like you, it's time to talk with an EAP professional. People conflicts are the most common complaints of workers, but the fewest for which help is sought. **The reason: *Thinking it's hopeless.***

Numerous strategies exist for resolving workplace conflicts. Whether it is learning different responses to triggering comments or behaviors, or discovering the mechanics of turning the relationship around entirely, get out of the rut and explore the options with a pro. Abraham Lincoln once said, "I do not like that man. I must get to know him better." Perhaps this might be the approach that works for you.

Free the clutter THAT BINDS YOU

Everyone reacts to workspace clutter differently. Some employees even report working more effectively around a bit of it. But if that is not you, realize that research exists to explain clutter's effect on productivity, and it's not good. Clutter distracts.

All that stuff around you — mail, sticky notes, scattered supplies, food, gadgets, personal items, files — they all compete for your attention even if you aren't engaged with them. They contribute to distraction, cause defocus, make it harder to get back on task, create irritation and increase your stress.

To declutter your space, end your day with a five-minute decluttering ritual. Over ensuing days, notice the impact of how you feel arriving at your workspace. Do you have more energy? Do you feel more in control? Has your ability to concentrate increased? Do you feel less depressed, more engaged, and/or more positive about your job?

Source: www.paw.princeton.edu [search: "clutter research"].

New physical activity guidelines

The U.S. Office of Disease Prevention has released its updated "Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans." **Only 26 percent of men, 19 percent of women and 20 percent of adolescents meet these recommendations.**

For adults, that's 150 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity and two days of

muscle-strengthening activity. Will you have a New Year's resolution focused on wellness? If so, use a coach, gym resource, motivational videos, or even your EAP to keep yourself on track if motivation slips. Fact: Half of all American adults have one or more preventable chronic diseases, and 10% of all premature mortality is associated with failure to meet recommended levels of aerobic physical activity.

Source: www.health.gov [Search: physical activity guidelines"]

Enthusiasm IS CONTAGIOUS

We all want to work around people who are enthusiastic. Like all attitudes — *even negative ones* — enthusiasm is contagious. Enthusiasm's ability to buoy others makes it a soft skill valued by employers.

You can't fake enthusiasm. So how do you maintain real enthusiasm when stress & job strain rule?

Don't see enthusiasm as a temporary state of mind or dependent on others. Instead, recognize enthusiasm as a part of your personality and a resource that helps you cope with stress and positively influence your environment.

To stay enthusiastic, develop your passion by pursuing your dreams and ideas. Doing so will build resilience and help you take action early to intervene with factors and influences that could undermine it.