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# Employee Relations Series

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# Employee Relations Series

GS-0230

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## SERIES DEFINITION

This series covers positions that involve the administration, supervision, evaluation, or performance of technical work concerned with establishing and maintaining employer-employee relationships that contribute to satisfactory productivity, motivation, morale, and discipline. Positions in this series are concerned with providing guidance, consultation, and assistance to management and employees on employee relations matters, and advising on grievances and appeals, adverse actions, employee discipline, and related matters. This work requires a knowledge of the theories, principles, practices, and techniques of employee relations; and a knowledge of the objectives, principles, and procedures of personnel management in the Federal service.

This standard supersedes part I of the classification standard for the Labor-Management and Employee Relations Series, GS-0230, issued in June 1966 as the Employee Management Relations and Cooperation Series, GS-0230.

## EXCLUSIONS

Excluded from this series are:

1. Positions combining employee relations work with work classifiable in one or more other specialized personnel series, other than labor relations, when no one kind of work predominates. Such positions are classified in the [Personnel Management Series, GS-0201](#). (See the classification standard for GS-0201 for additional guidance.)
2. Positions that primarily involve technical work concerned with establishing and maintaining effective relationships with labor organizations, negotiating and administering labor agreements, advising management on labor relations matters, and administering the Government-wide labor relations program. Such positions are classified in the [Labor Relations Series, GS-0233](#).
3. Positions which primarily involve providing specialized technical advice and assistance to supervisors and employees on one or a combination of the individual personnel specializations and which only secondarily involve advice on employee relations matters. Such positions are classified in the appropriate personnel series, based on the paramount qualification requirements of the work.
4. Positions that primarily provide clerical or technical support to Employee Relations Specialists by performing limited aspects of employee relations work, including work concerned with carrying out employee services programs (blood donor, parking space, allocation, charitable fund collections, housing assistance, etc.). Such positions are classified in the [Personnel Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-0203](#).

5. Positions requiring a professional knowledge of psychology, social work, or other profession concerned with human relations problems. Such positions are classified in the appropriate professional series.
6. Positions primarily concerned with promoting, advising on, administering, evaluating, supervising, or performing equal opportunity/civil rights work in such areas as employment, housing, education, business development, medical services, and social services. Such work is classified in the [Equal Opportunity Series, GS-0160](#). (Positions that involve providing advice and counseling on equal opportunity matters incidental to work in establishing and maintaining constructive employer-employee relationships are classified in the [Employee Relations Series, GS-0230](#).)
7. Positions responsible for Incentive Awards programs when general administrative, managerial, or promotional skills, rather than personnel knowledges are the paramount requirements for the work. Such positions are classified in the [General Clerical and Administrative Series, GS-0301](#). When Incentive Awards programs and positions are so integrated with personnel operations that they require general personnel knowledges which permit career progression within the personnel field, such positions are classified in the Personnel Management Series, GS-0201. (Incentive Awards programs can also be operated as a part of an overall program of positive action to build constructive employer-employee relationships. In such situations, incentive awards are regarded primarily as a tool for the recognition and motivation of employees. Such positions are classified in the [Employee Relations Series, GS-0230](#).)

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE LABOR RELATIONS SERIES

1. Positions primarily requiring the performance of work described in this standard are classified in the GS-0230 series, even though some of the procedures to be followed have been established through bilateral negotiations (e.g., the processing of a grievance through a negotiated grievance procedure). In contrast, positions that are primarily concerned with establishing such procedures through negotiations with unions and interpreting the intended application of their provisions are classified in the [Labor Relations Series, GS-0233](#).
2. While employee relations and labor relations positions require knowledges, skills, and abilities sufficiently different to warrant separate series designations, there is also sufficient overlap in the kinds of duties and responsibilities performed so that a combination of work typical of both series in a single position is not considered to be appropriately classifiable in the GS-0201 series. Therefore, combinations of work typical of the Employee Relations Series, GS-0230, and the Labor Relations Series, GS-0233, are to be classified in whichever of those two series represents the highest grade level of work and the paramount requirements of the position. If the work in each of these two series is of the same grade level, the principal duties and responsibilities will govern the series determination, i.e., the position will be classified in the series appropriate to the work that takes up a majority of the employee's work time. If the grade level and principal duties and responsibilities of the work in the two series are the same, the position should be classified in the [Labor Relations Series, GS-0233](#).

## TITLES

*Employee Relations Specialist* is the title for all nonsupervisory positions in this occupation.

*Supervisory Employee Relations Specialist* is the title for all supervisory positions.

## OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

Employee relations specialists are essentially concerned with working with supervisors and employees in preventing and resolving problems of individual relationships which arise out of or affect work situations. As problems can be resolved and relationships bettered only by the actions and decisions of the individuals concerned, much of the effort of employee relations specialists is devoted to the exploration with them of probable causes, contributing factors, and possible courses of action. For want of a better term, the technique described above is often referred to as employee or supervisory counseling. In performing this work, employee relations specialists may utilize "professional" counseling techniques, however such positions do not require full professional training. Employee relations specialists also work with and provide advice to supervisors and employees regarding matters of communication, rights, grievances, appeals, and the like; and regarding actions useful in building constructive relationships in the work situation.

Advice to supervisors and employees may take many forms and serve many purposes. In some activities, employee relations specialists render continuing advice and guidance to supervisors to develop in them an awareness of the human needs and reactions of employees, and the impact of such human factors on productive effort. They discuss communication and motivation needs and methods, actions which help to build morale or stimulate the exchange of ideas and information, the impact of everyday contacts in building constructive supervisory-employee relationships, the nature of job satisfaction for specific workers supervised, and like factors. In the majority of situations, employee relations specialists give advice to supervisors regarding methods of dealing with poor work performance or behavior problems. They inform them regarding regulatory and other requirements to be considered in effecting disciplinary actions, removals, suspensions, and in resolving grievances, and appeals. They assist supervisors in correcting individual instances of work deficiencies and poor performance by subordinates. Employee relations specialists encourage use of such techniques as informal discussions between supervisors and employees regarding progress, goals, achievements and deficiencies, and suggest constructive methods for dealing with problems arising from indifference, personality conflicts, and poor work habits. They often provide advice regarding the administration of formal performance rating and employee recognition plans, as well as assistance in resolving problems in the rating or recognition of individual employees. Some employee relations specialists may also provide advice and assistance in providing a safe and healthful work environment through implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

In dealing with individual employees, employee relations specialists seek to promote a better understanding of management's goals, policies, and viewpoints, and the reasons for them, in order to stimulate the interest of employees in the work of the organization. They typically assist

employees in correcting work deficiencies and in establishing constructive work habits. They also guide employees in resolving work related or personal problems which are adversely affecting performance such as providing counseling and referral services for employees in the areas of emotional/mental health, alcoholism, and drug abuse. Employee relations specialists provide information to employees regarding the rights and obligations provided for in regulations, legislation, and merit system principles (e.g., grievances and appeals, and protection from discrimination). They also counsel employees concerning their rights and entitlement to employee benefits (e.g., health benefits, life insurance, and retirement) and assist employees or survivors of employees in filing claims for benefits or in resolving disputed claims with carriers. Additionally, employee relations specialists provide preretirement counseling to individuals or groups-of employees, including such topics as retirement benefits and ways of adjusting their personal lives to the new situations encountered in retirement.

Individual positions entail responsibility for any of a range of the types of advisory services outlined above. Some positions are concerned with only one or two types of actions, such as disciplinary actions or grievances. Others entail the full range of advisory services to all supervisors and employees in an assigned organizational segment, or in an entire activity.

A few positions are concerned with ascertaining the reasonable needs of employees for services and benefits, and the overall planning for meeting such needs. These employee relations specialists relate problems of work attendance, work performance, or morale to needs for-or adequacy of-facilities and services, and pursue solutions involving planning for and coordinating the range of services considered necessary (e.g., restaurant facilities, emergency health units, banking and loan facilities, recreation programs, transportation facilities, and employee newspapers). Such responsibilities are usually found in program or staff positions, but they also may be combined with responsibilities for other activities.

There are two basic approaches for employee relations activities. Some employee relations specialists are concerned primarily with the analysis and resolution of specific individual problems or cases (case analysis), others are concerned with analyzing the underlying forces and practices which cause employee relations problems in order to recommend corrective measures to eliminate the source of problems (situation analysis).

In case analysis, the emphasis is placed on the analysis, verification, and resolution of facts and issues which do not go beyond the specifics of actions or problems presented. Judgments to establish possible courses of action are based on the interpretation of regulations, guides, precedents, or past experience with like situations. Increases in the level and difficulty of positions concerned with case analysis functions result primarily from the complexity of problems, actions, or incidents assigned. Specific features of environmental and work situation elements may also serve to influence the difficulty of individual problems, and the level of skill required to resolve them. These elements are discussed at the appropriate grade levels.

Situation analysis entails the use of facts developed from a variety of sources to explore all the factors in work situations that can contribute to the effectiveness and productivity of individual

employees and the organizational entity as a whole (e.g., supervisor-employee relations; individual and group attitudes towards the work performed and working environment; concepts of communications, morale, and job satisfaction). Courses of action investigated with supervisors entail corrective measures which go beyond the scope of the individual case. Thus, the character of the work situation, and the impact of employee relations actions are significant factors in determining the level of difficulty of employee relations positions involving situation analysis functions. In addition, management advisory service functions, as described in detail in part II of the standard for the [Personnel Management Series, GS-201](#), are also significant at the higher grade levels.

Consideration of the character of the work situation in evaluating employee relations positions requires some caution and additional explanation. The various environmental and other factors present in the work force can add to the complexity of situations when they have a potential for fostering misunderstandings, stresses, and poor adaptation of employees to work situations, or when they otherwise contain inherent difficulties in establishing productive working relationships. However, it is not merely the presence of a factor or condition which must be considered, but the extent to which a factor is an actual consideration which is met with positive and meaningful response. Thus, to be meaningful the factors would have to be actively dealt with in consultations with individual employees and supervisors.

Furthermore, a number of elements contribute to the overall complexity and character of the work situation. Typical elements include:

- a. The character of work force. -- To understand and to react to extremely diverse points of view requires considerable flexibility, knowledge, and skill. As a result, the existence of extremely diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, occupational, or other groups with distinctive and divergent patterns of attitudes, reactions, values, and of authority, typically places particular demands on skills. Significant occupational diversity in this standard means diversity as between broad occupational groups (such as between clerical workers, skilled trade-craft workers, professional employees, or administrative and executive employees). Members of such groups are likely to hold generally similar attitudes, and to have like educational backgrounds, levels of understanding, and values. Concepts of job satisfaction and factors in morale are also likely to be similar within these broad groupings. The intermingling of civilian and military work forces may also be significant when it can be demonstrated that different concepts of authority or attitudes present problems in working relationships.
- b. The size and complexity of the organization. -- Communications problems and communications barriers can increase as organizations increase in size. The increased number of organizational levels through which directives and information flow can pose obstacles in understanding the mission and goals of the Organization and in identification with its success or failure. Organizational and supervisory relationships which are complex can result in confusion regarding responsibilities and authorities for both workers and supervisors. These can also result in organizational or personal rivalries, lack of cooperation between groups or individuals, or general dissension among workers. Complex organizational and supervisory

relations also pose greater demands in analyzing and understanding relationships and their impact on resultant employee relations problems by the employee relations specialist concerned.

- .c. The stability of the organization. -- Rapid expansions or contractions in work force requirements, conversions to automation or new techniques, consolidations or changes in missions, movement of activities from one geographic location to another involving physical relocation of employees in new communities, all can present threats to the job security or career progression of employees. These conditions typically present an acute need for advice and guidance to employees who are affected by reduction-in-force, and reassignments, or who require retraining to meet adjusted career goals.
- d. Undesirable working conditions and environment. -- There are a number of undesirable environmental conditions which can be related to a high incidence of particularly sensitive, or "charged," employee relations problems. Work which involves unusual stresses, mental, and emotional demands, particularly if it involves work situations in which employee actions directly affect public safety, can result in highly sensitive employee relations problems. Chronic dissatisfaction and poor morale may be found when work is characterized by hazardous or unpleasant working conditions, emergency call-ins, unscheduled work, irregular shifts, or excessive overtime. Rigid codes of conduct resulting from situations in which employees are exposed to offers of gratuities, bribery, collusion, etc., also can result in particularly sensitive problems.
- e. Special problems. -- There may be a number of other factors that result in special demands for skills which do not fall into the more general patterns depicted above. For example, a high order of skill is required to establish rapport and confidence in brief periods of time, and to assess quickly and accurately the climate and conditioning factors in specific problems or situations where activities are geographically widely dispersed and direct services are rendered solely on the basis of periodic visits and evaluations. Other situations while not specifically treated in the standard may be recognized when it can be established that they have an impact on levels of skills required which is equivalent to that of the factors described.

The impact of employee relations activities on the operation served, and the character of the operations, are also factors in evaluating positions involving "situation analysis." Positive contributions in the employee relations area are more significant when the work force served is characterized by employees in scarce skills categories, key executive, and administrative personnel who would be difficult to replace, or other types of employees who are difficult to recruit.

## **ADVISORY TASKS**

As all employee relations work is essentially advisory in character, it is important to distinguish between advisory tasks which are an intrinsic part of employee relations work at any level, including case work, and the management advisory service functions which parallel those

described in part II of the GS-0201 standard. These distinctions are particularly necessary in view of their treatment in the grade levels described for employee relations positions.

In this standard, the advisory tasks which occur as part of case analysis and situation analysis situations are accounted for in the basic grade criteria, and are not treated as separate considerations. However, at the higher levels in this standard management advisory service functions, as described at like grade levels in part II of the GS-0201 standard, emerge and are treated as separate considerations.

A basic characteristic of the management advisory service functions as described in part II of the GS-201 standard is the identification of the true nature of a management problem, and its consideration from the total personnel management viewpoint. As in other personnel occupations the management advisory service functions found in employee relations can be distinguished from other management advisory tasks primarily by: (1) the scope of the analysis of the factors in operating situations, which is demonstrated by a concern to identify all the problems in the operating situation including those of other personnel fields; and (2) the pursuit of coordinated solutions to all facets of the problems identified. This does not mean that the performance of management advisory service functions requires incumbents to function as personnel generalists, but it does require that they substantially enlarge the range of employee relations considerations to be evaluated, and relate the solutions to problems in other personnel fields. Typically, they must identify a greater variety of alternative employee relations actions than would be necessary if problems were approached from the viewpoint of employee relations alone.

Usually employee relations specialists work closely with specialists in the other personnel specializations which are involved in the problems to be resolved. In these circumstances judgments made by employee relations specialists also demonstrate that they recognize the degree to which employee relations considerations are primary or secondary factors in the overall solutions of specific problems and are aware of the balance of values among the solutions proposed by personnel specialists in other specialties in order to reach integrated solutions which are compatible with employee relations goals.

In contrast, employee relations specialists concerned with situation analysis functions perform analyses of the employee relationship problems in work situations, but their chief concern is the identification and correction of problems of relationships or other employee relations matters. The identification of the nature of problems in other personnel specialties is limited to recognition of such problems as causes or effects of employee relations actions. In these instances, the employee relations specialists would fulfill their responsibility by bringing the problem to the attention of the specialist in the personnel specialty concerned, but would not actively seek joint solutions on a coordinated basis.

## CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

The grade levels in this standard are presented under the following two criteria:

- Nature of assignment; and
- Level of responsibility

### *Nature of assignment*

This factor measures the scope and complexity of the work assignments in employee relations specialists positions, as well as the extent of knowledge of employee relations principles, policies, methods, and techniques required to do the work. Assignments range from on-the-job and classroom training in the fundamentals of employee relations to complex assignments involving many difficult problems to resolve.

### *Level of responsibility*

This factor covers the kind and degree of supervision received, the degree of judgment and independence required, and the nature of the person-to-person contacts involved in employee relations specialist positions. Levels range from detailed instructions relating to very specific assignments and complete review of work to independent performance of difficult work requiring a high degree of judgment and originality in resolving complex problems.

## KNOWLEDGES, SKILLS AND ABILITIES REQUIRED

The kinds and levels of knowledges, skills, and abilities required in this occupation are not described under a separate factor in the grade level criteria. Rather, they are reflected in the discussion of the other classification factors.

Knowledges required in employee relations specialist positions include:

- Personnel management and employee relations theories, principles, and practices;
- Theories of human behavior, applicable to employee relations;
- Laws, Executive Orders, regulations, policies, and concepts pertaining to employee relations;
- Current practices, problems, and precedents in employee relations;
- Provisions of common employee benefits programs, including health benefits, life insurance and retirement.

Skills and abilities required include:

- Ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with employees and supervisors;
- Ability to gather and analyze facts, draw conclusions, and devise practical solutions to problems;
- Skill in written and oral communication;
- Tact, discretion, and the ability to obtain the cooperation of others.

### NOTES TO USERS

1. This standard provides grade-level criteria for nonsupervisory employee relations specialist positions at grades GS-05 through GS-12. Specific criteria for grades above GS-12 are not provided because such positions are relatively few in number, and are too individualized for the development of specific grade-level criteria. However, positions having duties and responsibilities that clearly and significantly exceed the criteria provided in this standard should be classified to the appropriate higher grade by extension of these criteria and the application of sound classification principles.
2. Use of provisions of other personnel guides The same basic classification concepts that apply to other personnel specialist positions also apply in this series. In most cases, they are built into this standard. However, certain of the provisions contained in the position classification standard for nonsupervisory personnel positions, [part II of the GS-0201](#) series, are to be used in evaluating positions with comparable responsibilities which are classifiable in the GS-0230 series. The provisions of part II of the GS-0201 standard which are to be used, and situations in which they are to be used, are explained below:
  - a. Functions and work situations. -- The definitions for Program Operations, Program Development, and Program Evaluation positions, functions and work situations contained in part II of the classification standard for the GS-0201 series, apply equally to work in the GS-0230 series. The grade-level criteria herein directly cover the Program Operations function. To the extent that positions which belong in this series are engaged in Program Development or Program Evaluation activities, the criteria in part II which cover such activities are appropriate for their evaluation.
  - b. Variety of personnel functions as a level determining factor.- Provisions in the standard cited above which relate to the grade-level value of the performance of a combination of Program Operations, Development, and Evaluation functions should be applied to this series.
  - c. Variety of specialized personnel fields. -- Employee relations functions represent the entire content of some positions; in other positions they represent significant duties which are

performed in combination with duties characteristic of other personnel specialties. Instructions regarding the impact of a variety of specialized personnel fields on grade levels which are contained in part II of the classification standard for Personnel Management should be used to evaluate mixed positions.

### 3. Provisions in this standard which relate to provisions of other personnel standards

A number of provisions of this standard bear a close relationship to the basic concepts contained in the position classification standards for related personnel occupations, but they require special understanding in the framework of employee relations functions. While the provisions of part II of the standard for the GS-0201 series may be referenced in part, cross-references should be made in the light of, and only to the extent directed by, provisions of this standard. These include:

- a.. Program responsibility. -- The grade-level criteria do not deal specifically with the position of a nonsupervisory employee relations specialist who is the sole worker in employee relations in an operating personnel office. Some such positions include full and independent program responsibility, including a selective determination of the employee relations functional elements to be included and emphasized, in addition to those that are mandatory. Such positions also involve planning specific actions and activities to meet goals and objectives, and to integrate the program with other related activities of the personnel office. Incumbents of these positions may also serve, under only administrative supervision, as the final authority in this specialization for the organization serviced. Positions which fully meet these program responsibility characteristics are classifiable at a higher grade than would otherwise be indicated by this standard, provided the position has responsibility for the majority of the employee relations activities considered essential and performed at the activity. Other precautions concerning the application of the parallel provision in part II of the GS-0201 standard are also applicable to positions in this series.

Nonsupervisory positions with program responsibilities, as described above, may require the exercise of particular initiative in recognizing and dealing with special problems in planning to meet employee relations needs. Problems encountered may require devising special counseling programs or like techniques (e.g., preretirement counseling in an aging work force, and counseling of workers whose skills have been made obsolete by automation or other new techniques). The range in the kinds of employee problems which become concerns of the employee relations specialist may also increase substantially when problems of isolation exist. The existence of these and similar special problems, as well as the considerations of proper internal alignment discussed in part III of the GS-0201 standard, should be considered in determining whether the extra grade credit for program responsibility should be GS-08 or GS-09 when the base grade is GS-07; or GS-10 or GS-11 when the base grade is GS-09.

4. Single employee relations functions-employee counseling, grievances, or the like occasionally comprise the sole responsibility in individual positions. Such distinctive but narrow types of

employee relations activities are also particularly susceptible to assignment as additional duties to be performed in combination with the work of Personnel Staffing Specialists. It is sometimes difficult to establish when the latter type of assignment is significant enough to be recognized as an additional technical specialization in personnel positions. It may also be difficult to ascertain if a position is properly classified in the GS-0230 series when an individual employee relations function comprises the sole responsibility of the job.

As a general rule, narrow employee relations assignments should be recognized as distinctive of the GS-0230 series when: (a) employee relations tasks performed require recruitment from the same source, and involve the same kinds and levels of abilities required for the performance of more varied employee relations functions; and (b) such positions are clearly in the line of progression to higher level employee relations work. When such employee relations task constitute the total position it should be classified in the GS-0230 series. When they are found in combination with responsibilities in other technical personnel specializations, positions normally should be allocated in the Personnel Management Series, GS-0201. (See exclusion 2 for exception.)

5. Supervisory positions in this series are evaluated by reference to part II of the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS SPECIALIST, GS-0230-05**

### **Nature of assignment**

This is the basic trainee level. GS-05 employees receive formal instructions and/or on-the-job training in the requirements of formal systems and procedural requirements and guides, pertaining to employee relations functions. They also receive training in counseling techniques, in the nature and consequence of human relations problems, in the theories and concepts of communication, motivation, and in other factors which influence the behavior of people in work situations. On-the-job training assignments are selected to provide a practical understanding of the organization, programs, policies, and objectives of the employing agency, as well as to provide insight into relationship problems in organizations and experience in the application of counseling techniques.

### **Level of responsibility**

GS-05 employee relations specialists work under the close supervision of the supervisor or a specialist of higher grade level. Assignments are accompanied by detailed instructions regarding the methods to be used and the results expected. The supervisor reviews work both in progress and on completion of each assignment for technical soundness, adequacy of conclusions, adherence to instructions, and overall acceptability.

Guidelines are selected by the supervisor and are fully explained when assignments are made. Guidelines include public laws, executive orders, US. Office of Personnel Management issuances, agency policies and directives, precedents, and local office instructions and procedures.

Initially, GS-05 employee relations specialists are primarily observers in contacts outside the immediate office. However, as knowledge and experience are gained, the nature of the contacts is expanded, approaching that described at the GS-07 level. Typically, contacts at the GS-05 level are primarily for the purpose of obtaining or providing factual information.

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS SPECIALIST, GS-0230-07**

### Nature of assignment

This is a developmental level. Work assignments of moderate complexity are selected to combine productive work with supervised on-the-job training in the judgmental aspects of employee relations work and in the appropriate use of employee relations principles and techniques.

Assignments at this level typically involve advising individuals regarding moderately complex work-related or personal problems (e.g., minor problems of employee conduct or dissatisfaction; poor work habits; leave problems; indebtedness; and financial assistance). Advice to individual employees may also relate to, but is not limited to, Procedural requirements for filing grievances, appeals, complaints, etc.; or to the specific provisions of available benefits and services where rights or entitlement are clearly defined and well established (e.g., basic information on retirement, health benefits, and life insurance programs for Federal employees).

Advice and guidance to supervisory personnel and management representatives usually involve explanation of authorities and procedural requirements for performance evaluations, disciplinary actions, and informal reprimands when the penalties involved or other actions concerned do not have a major effect on the career of the employee.

Assignments are also characterized by contacts with members of relatively homogeneous occupational groups, or with supervisors of small, stable organizational units without significant environmental problems.

### Level of responsibility

GS-07 employee relations specialists receive assignments with instructions as to the methods and procedures to be followed and the results expected. The assignments are then carried through to completion. By comparison, GS-05 specialists receive specific and detailed instructions throughout each step of the assignment. When performing designated tasks for developmental purposes that involve new or unusual situations, the GS-07 employee relations specialist receives continuing guidance and instructions while the work is in progress. Completed work is reviewed for technical soundness, adherence to instructions, and acceptability of recommendations.

GS-07 employee relations specialists make recommendations on situations encountered in performing developmental assignments. These recommendations typically concern matters that are covered by policies and precedents.

Contacts outside the immediate office are primarily with individual employees and first-line supervisors to obtain and provide information on uncomplicated problems and to explain well-established policies, procedures, and regulatory requirements.

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS SPECIALIST, GS-0230-09**

### Nature of assignment

The GS-09 level is characterized by the independent performance of assignments requiring the application of fundamental principles, concepts, techniques, and guidelines of employee relations. In contrast, GS-07 employee relations specialist, while they may work on similar assignments for developmental purposes, are not required to apply a full knowledge of employee relations principles and techniques.

Assignments at the GS-09 level are typically concerned with providing advice to supervisors and to individual employees regarding the solution of moderately complex individual conduct or performance problems involving case analysis functions, and/or situation analyses involving a moderate range of problems or situations. Advice to individual employees may relate to the substance of such personal matters as grievances, appeals, complaints, supervisory relationships, and availability of specific benefits or services in a particular set of circumstances. The provision of such advice is complicated by the necessity to consider various options or alternatives open to the employee, and by the need to analyze and explain the relative advantages and disadvantages of each option as related to the employee's situation.

Case analysis functions are concerned with a number of actions in which conduct or work performance problems may have substantial consequence and repercussions (reprimands, suspensions, and the like). Problems of a serious nature (morals, discrimination, fraud, alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness etc.), may be involved at this level when the cases are of such a nature that they can be resolved in accordance with precedent cases and procedures. Serious problems which have the potential to be embarrassing to the employing activity or which otherwise require special treatment, are referred to others for resolution. Work situations are also distinguished from those characteristic of the next lower level by the diversity of organizational settings and climates (e.g., problems may be generated from the entire range of diverse operations conducted at an activity). In some positions diversity is characterized by the need to understand the attitudes and viewpoints of employees associated with widely diverse occupational groups.

Situation analysis functions typically are concerned with providing continuing employee relations advice to supervisors and employees in specific assigned organizational segments. GS-09 employee relations specialists use the facts in individual actions, facts developed through routine

advisory services with organizations, facts extracted from reports, or other indicators to explore existing employee relations problems or identify potential problems.

Assignments are characterized by the existence of a normal diversity of occupational groups (clerical, trades, technicians, and administrative occupations) which present average demands for flexibility in understanding attitudes and job satisfaction factors. There are a variety of ethnic or like groups, but are characterized by reasonable adjustments and attitudes toward each other. Organizations are moderate in size and complexity, or, if large and complex, do not present particularly difficult problems in understanding and communications. Missions are relatively stable; while reductions in force may occur from time to time they do not affect a significant number of employees or pose substantial threats to job tenure for the work force in general. There are some special problems which, for example, require the use of such techniques as pre-retirement counseling, but there is no need for major special projects involving special planning.

Advisory services include the explanation to supervisors and management representatives of the variety of formal and informal methods available to them to assist in carrying out their supervisory responsibilities. This includes appeal, grievance and related procedures similar to those described at the GS-07 level. However, advisory services at this level involve matters which require considerable analysis, are more concerned with substance than procedure, and seek to ascertain causes other than those apparent and to correct conditions having a general effect on the morale of the organizational element served.

### Level of responsibility

Employee Relations Specialists, GS-09, receive assignments outlining the general work objectives and priorities. More detailed instructions are provided when new or unusual problems or situations are anticipated. By comparison, GS-07 employee relations specialists receive instructions as to the methods to be followed in carrying out the assignments. The work of the GS-09 specialist is reviewed for technical soundness and adequacy of recommendations and conclusions.

Situations handled independently by GS-09 employee relations specialists require the selection and interpretation of appropriate applicable guidelines. Minor modification or adaptation of guidelines and precedents may be required to fit the local situation.

Personal contacts at the GS-09 level involve supervisors and employees to provide advice on handling moderately complex problems. GS-07 specialists, on the other hand, primarily obtain and provide information on noncontroversial matters.

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS SPECIALIST, GS-0230-11**

### Nature of assignment

Employee Relations Specialists, GS-11, perform a variety of duties that require the application of the full range of employee relations theories, principles, methods, and techniques. Assignments are more difficult than at GS-09 and require more originality and judgment because the problems and situations encountered are less well defined and guidelines and precedents are not directly applicable.

Employee relations assignments at the GS-11 level are typically concerned with (1) individual cases which involve sensitive or serious problems, or which have resulted in considerable controversy and contention; (2) situation analysis functions in work situations of more than average complexity; and (3) situation analysis functions of average complexity combined with responsibility for highly developed management advisory tasks.

Employee relations specialists concerned with individual problems which have resulted in controversy and contention characteristically are involved as advisors to committees or as participants in hearings concerning grievances, removals, involuntary separations, disciplinary actions, and the like. Employees involved typically are represented by legal counsel or by a union representative. Contentions may arise from the facts in the case, disputes regarding testimony or the sufficiency or admissibility of evidence, etc. Special skills are required to deal with highly charged emotional situations, which may be evidenced by acrimonious accusations, slanderous statements, etc. Individual problems of a sensitive nature at this level characteristically involve serious problems (morals, discrimination, fraud, alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness) which require special treatment because of the nature of the problem, the degree to which it can be embarrassing to the activity, or agency, or its impact on the overall morale of the activity. Problems at this level may also be highly significant from the viewpoint of subsequent relationships with the formal and informal groups involved.

Positions at this level concerned with "situation analysis" functions [(2) above] typically involve three or more environmental factors which pose problems of considerable complexity. For example, the work force of the organization serviced is characterized by substantial numbers of employees in diverse occupational groups (professional, executive, clerical, technician, and skilled craftsman); or by significantly diverse ethnic groups who misunderstand and distrust each other and may additionally hold traditional hostilities or rigid attitudes requiring positive actions by employee relations specialists to achieve more cooperative relationships. Problems in communications or in understanding work goals exist as organizational elements served are large and complex, or because they involve highly dynamic changing missions. Work situations involve unusual mental and emotional stresses which have an impact on the welfare or safety of the general public (for example, aircraft control operations); or they involve unpleasant working conditions or the observance of rigid codes of conduct which have resulted in poor morale, high turnover, and the like. In some instances, special skills are required to establish immediate rapport and confidence in providing employee relations services to activities at widely dispersed

geographical locations. Additionally, at this level the work force served typically includes substantial numbers of employees in scarce skills categories or employees in professional and scientific lines of work, key administrative or executive employees, or other highly trained employees whose retention is of considerable significance to the accomplishment of the mission of the agency. Advisory services emphasizing the identification and prevention of employee relations problems are provided to key personnel and concern the major operating programs of the activity.

Also typical of positions at this level [(3) above] are those in which management advisory functions, as described in the classification standard for nonsupervisory personnel positions in part II, GS-0201, are provided in combination with employee relations services involving situation analysis functions of average complexity. Such specialists provide planned assistance to supervisors and management representatives based on in-depth analysis of such factors as turnover, absenteeism, increase in numbers and kinds of formal and informal grievances and complaints, patterns in disciplinary action, accident rates, health reports, etc., to identify both the existence and nature of employee relations problems and to establish the true nature of any related personnel management problems. Advisory service of this nature is rendered in connection with situations similar to those described at the GS-09 level involving situation analysis functions.

### Level of responsibility

GS-11 employee relations specialists receive assignments in terms of the overall purpose and scope. They plan and carry out the assignment independently, however the supervisor provides assistance on unusually difficult or controversial problems or those of a policy nature. In contrast, GS-09 specialists receive more detailed instructions when new or unusual problems are encountered. The work of the GS-11 employee relations specialist is reviewed for conformance with applicable policies and guidelines and for overall effectiveness.

At the GS- 11 level, applicable guidelines and precedents are available, however they require substantial modification or adaptation because of the complexity and sensitivity of problems encountered. In comparison, GS-09 workers typically make only minor modifications or adaptations of guides.

In addition to contacts with supervisors and employees typical of the GS-09 level, GS-11 employee relations specialists must "sell" themselves to all levels of supervisors and management in order to gain confidence and acceptance of advice. They also participate in various types of hearings, requiring the ability to advise on and or present the technical a judgmental aspects of controversial adverse actions and grievances.

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS SPECIALIST, GS-0230-12**

This level is characterized chiefly by positions concerned with situation analysis functions in work situations of more than average complexity combined with management advisory tasks when the

combination results in a significantly more difficult and responsible position than is characteristic of the GS- 11 level.

The GS-12 individual worker is concerned with situations and environmental conditions which have resulted in significant problems in the identification of the nature and scope of personnel issue involved. For example, the existence of conflicts in attitudes, complex organizational structures, organizational or personal rivalries have created communication barriers or otherwise served to obscure the true nature of personnel management problems. Under these circumstances, stated causes of complaints, apparent reasons for turnover, and the like, serve to conceal the basic nature of problems and require extensive analysis to identify all the personnel issues involved. Both the identification of problems and the solutions of problems are complex when threats to job security, adverse working-conditions, or like factors, exist and have resulted in extremely negative reactions by employees to issues which would otherwise be considered ordinary. In these situations, there are substantial interactions between employee relations and other personnel fields (classification of jobs, reassignment of personnel, etc.), which require special coordination and planning to minimize impact on morale. Typically, at this level participation in integrated solutions of personnel matters involves problems of a wider scope than at the next lower level (e.g., problems involved in a full-scale retraining program resulting from the impact of automation, or in developing all personnel actions affecting positive work attitudes of employees in the face of significant did placements or dislocation of personnel). In addition, a combination of environmental factors results in the exploration of a range of employee relations and related actions in other personnel fields necessary to better poor work situations, or to prevent potential problems from materializing, which is substantially wider in scope than characteristic of the GS-11 level.

### Level of responsibility

GS-12 employee relations specialists, like those at GS-11, receive their assignments only in terms of overall purpose and scope, and are expected to plan their work independently. However, GS-12 employee relations specialists resolve complex problems without reference to the supervisor, except for matters of a policy nature. However, the supervisor is kept informed regarding particularly complex or sensitive cases. Completed work is reviewed for adherence to agency and US. Office of Personnel Management policy and for overall effectiveness of conclusions and recommendations.

Because of the high degree of complexity and sensitivity of employee relations problems encountered at this level, guidelines and precedents are often inapplicable or conflicting, requiring considerable judgment and originality in developing innovative approaches to defining and resolving very difficult situations. In comparison, guidelines and precedents at the GS-11 level, while requiring substantial modification or adaptation, typically have general applicability to the specific situation.

Personal contacts are similar to those at the GS-11 level, except that the nature of the problems encountered at GS-12 requires more intensive consultation and coordination with specialists in other personnel fields and with management officials at all levels of the organization.

The GS-12 specialist must exercise great tact and persuasion in their dealings with employees and supervisors to identify underlying causes of problems and to gain acceptance of solutions that initially may not seem satisfactory to either or both sides.