

# Helping AAs Become Better Managers

*Common Sense Fund, Founded by Fascell and DioGuardi, Attacks a Major Hill Problem*

By Martin Frazier

Reps. Dante Fascell (D-Fla) and Joseph DioGuardi (R-NY) were shocked by the results of a survey they conducted last year on the management problems of Hill offices.

Among the findings of the outside consultant who helped conduct the survey: One administrative assistant reported a 220 percent turnover rate in his office. Worse, another AA had a 110 percent rate and felt it wasn't a problem.

So DioGuardi and Fascell set out to do something about the lack of managerial know-how on the Hill. The result: the Common Sense Educational Fund (CSEF), whose name comes from what DioGuardi feels Congress operates with very little of.

Some results of the survey weren't so shocking — AAs have to run Congressional offices with limited funds, cramped working space, little chance of promotion, and a high rate of turnover (the study

*The fund awards a scholarship for an AA to attend a program at the Harvard Business School.*

showed a 26 percent average). And, commonly, AAs are thrust into the managerial role with little prior experience from their backgrounds in politics and campaigns.

DioGuardi and Fascell, as president and chairman of CSEF, recently talked publicly for the first time about their non-profit organization, whose sole purpose is to offer AAs the chance to learn how to be better managers.

Currently, the House Administration Committee will not permit Members to use their office accounts to send staffers to management training courses. The Congressional Research Service offers seminars in legislative specifics but not in generic managerial problems such as conflict resolution and resource allocation.

DioGuardi, a former accountant and longtime champion of streamlining government operations along private-sector lines, stresses that the issue of good management in Congress cuts across lines of partisanship and seniority.

The CSEF, whose \$30,000 budget comes from private contributions, isn't involved in legislative matters such as Hill labor reform or post-employment lobbying restrictions.

Nor is its goal to act as a surrogate to the Congressional Management Foundation, which instructs AAs in "how-to mechanics," says Ozzie Bermant, the program director for CSEF and a former IBM executive.

In March, the CSEF and the Administrative Assistants Association sponsored 20 AAs on a three-day program at the Federal Executive Institute in Charlottesville, Va., which offers intensive seminars in broad management skills to executive branch officials.

CSEF also awards a full \$5,700 scholarship for a Hill AA to attend the Senior Managers in Government program at the Harvard Business School. This year's recipient, Ed Uravic, an AA to Rep. George Gekas (R-Pa), is currently on leave at Harvard for three weeks.

Fascell's and DioGuardi's hope is to offer specific training in management techniques that most private-sector companies would provide routinely.

"There is no upward mobility," says Fascell. "We're molded into a system that has less flexibility than most people like to think about. I've got X-number of slots, I can only pay X-amount of money to any one person, and I've got a cap on the amount of money I can pay in salaries."

"The major gap I see here is that we're not really trying to identify how people feel about their jobs within the organization."

says DioGuardi, who sits on the Government Operations Committee.

DioGuardi, a two-term Member, defers to Fascell's office as the "model in projecting what we're trying to do." Fascell has had two administrative assistants in his 32 years in Congress, and says he's never had a turnover problem because he "tries to give those people something for themselves besides trying to just improve my own office."

Money does become an issue for most who work on the Hill, says Fascell: "If a guy thinks he ought to be driving a Cadillac,

and all I can give him is a Ford, I say, 'The best thing for you, my friend, is to go someplace where they've got a lot of Cadillacs.'"

The CSEF plans to hold one-day seminars on the Hill and other weekend retreats next year. Bermant wants to get retired Members to participate as well.

Having better managers benefits the entire staff, and in the long run, says Fascell, Congress itself. "I see all of this as an investment in people which ultimately winds up making a major improvement in the operation of Congress."