SURVIVAL TIPS FOR EXTENSION AGENTS

- Find a mentor you are comfortable with.
  - Use the wisdom of the co-workers who have been around.
  - Make some good extension friends to laugh with, share with, ask for input from, and give you a neutral perspective.
  - Listen to your mentor.

- Be a team player.
  - Learn how to get along with co-workers.
  - Appreciate your co-workers for their strengths and value them for who they are.
  - Recognize your own strengths and weaknesses and how you can best contribute to the team.
  - Develop a mutual respect with your staff—they can make you look really good or really bad.
  - Collaborate with existing groups.

- Get to know your Extension Advisory Board, County Board of Supervisors, and leaders in your programs.
  - Take time to meet with them individually.
  - Ask what they think are the top 2 or 3 most important things that you should address.
  - Expect to have lots of bosses. They all think they know what you are supposed to be doing.
  - Develop allies—those people who will go to bat for you on controversial issues or in a crisis.

- Get to know your county or assigned area—the people and communities.
  - Respect the "norms" of the county.
  - Be visible. Meet people in your county.
  - Respect the diversity of people's ideas, opinions, and cultures.
  - Effective agents interact with lots of people, yet they recognize that it is impossible to please everyone.
  - Get to know the agents in your own and neighboring counties.

- Build Relationships.
  - Seek out other's opinions.
  - Avoid making negative comments about anyone—it may come back to haunt you.
  - Keep others informed—make sure people know what you are doing and why you are doing it.
  - Make connections with the local media—gain their trust as a source of unbiased, factual information.
  - Listen to the public and decision makers for program ideas. Don't just work on your "pet" projects.
  - Get to know the specialists and use them.
  - Find connections with Extension in other states.
  - Join National Associations—beyond county and regional ones.
  - Take advantage of professional improvement.

- Choose your battles wisely.
  - Don't make big changes in the program until you get a feel for the current program—listen and learn.
  - Ask people what the needs are in the county, identify a significant program need and begin working on it soon.
  - Don't over react to different situations that arise. Recognize that there are times of the year that are more stressful than others and develop a plan to handle difficult situations that may happen.
  - Avoid the phrase "we did it this way in XYZ county."
  - Be careful what you ask for.
Set priorities and learn to manage your time.

- Take time for yourself and your family. Have a life outside Extension.
- Night meetings and weekend training sessions are on-going demands of Extension work. Successful educators find a balance between work and personal time.
- Learn to prioritize – meet deadlines, return calls and email quickly to show you are responsible.
- Be on time for appointments and meetings.
- Look at the big picture and don’t be afraid to cut programs that no longer fit.
- Develop a network - don’t do everything yourself.
- Have fun with colleagues and clientele.
- Plan for a year.
- Don’t concentrate on grants and funding the first year.
- Prepare for your review.

Be accountable.

- Use public resources carefully. Maintain a high ethical standard with expense accounts, use of county vehicles and equipment, and clarify the difference between what's job related and what’s personal.
- Let your staff and co-workers know where you can be reached.

Be loyal to the organization.

- Actively promote Extension and the University of Arizona. Get involved in the organization – committees, professional associations, etc.
- Get to know the academic environment on campus.
- Keep internal conflicts internal. Never desert or criticize the organization externally.
- Remember who signs your pay check. The funding sources for your programs have, and deserve, the right to have input into your work and how you do it.
- Get to know the University, Extension organization, and campus culture.
- Follow the few rules we do have in Extension (i.e., submitting expenses, annual performance reports, etc.)
- Take advantage of the benefits that support your professional development -- attend conferences, take vacations.
- Expect change. Pay attention and know what is going on in the organization.

People are the reason you have a job... enjoy them as you help them.

- Give more than your fair share. Don’t be afraid of doing "grunt work" with your volunteers. Work with people side by side.

Remember you are a professional.

- Extension Agents are visible to the public both on and off the job.
- Maintain sound ethics and behavior both inside and outside the workplace.
- We are role models whether we like it or not.

adapted from the University of Minnesota Cooperative Extension, September 2001