



# The Department of Defense Office of Inspector General's Seven Key Principles for Improving Our Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Scores

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Every year, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) surveys employees throughout the federal government on how they view their organizations. This survey, called the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, or FedView Survey, asks federal employees a variety of questions about their views of their organization, managers, supervisors, and senior leaders; whether the employees believe they have the training and tools they need to do their jobs; overall how satisfied they are with their organization; and several other important questions related to employee engagement. The Partnership for Public Service then analyzes the results of the survey and ranks the government organizations on employee engagement, as reflected by these scores.

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Glenn A. Fine became the Acting Inspector General of the Department of Defense in January 2016. He previously served as the Inspector General of the Department of Justice from 2000 to 2011.

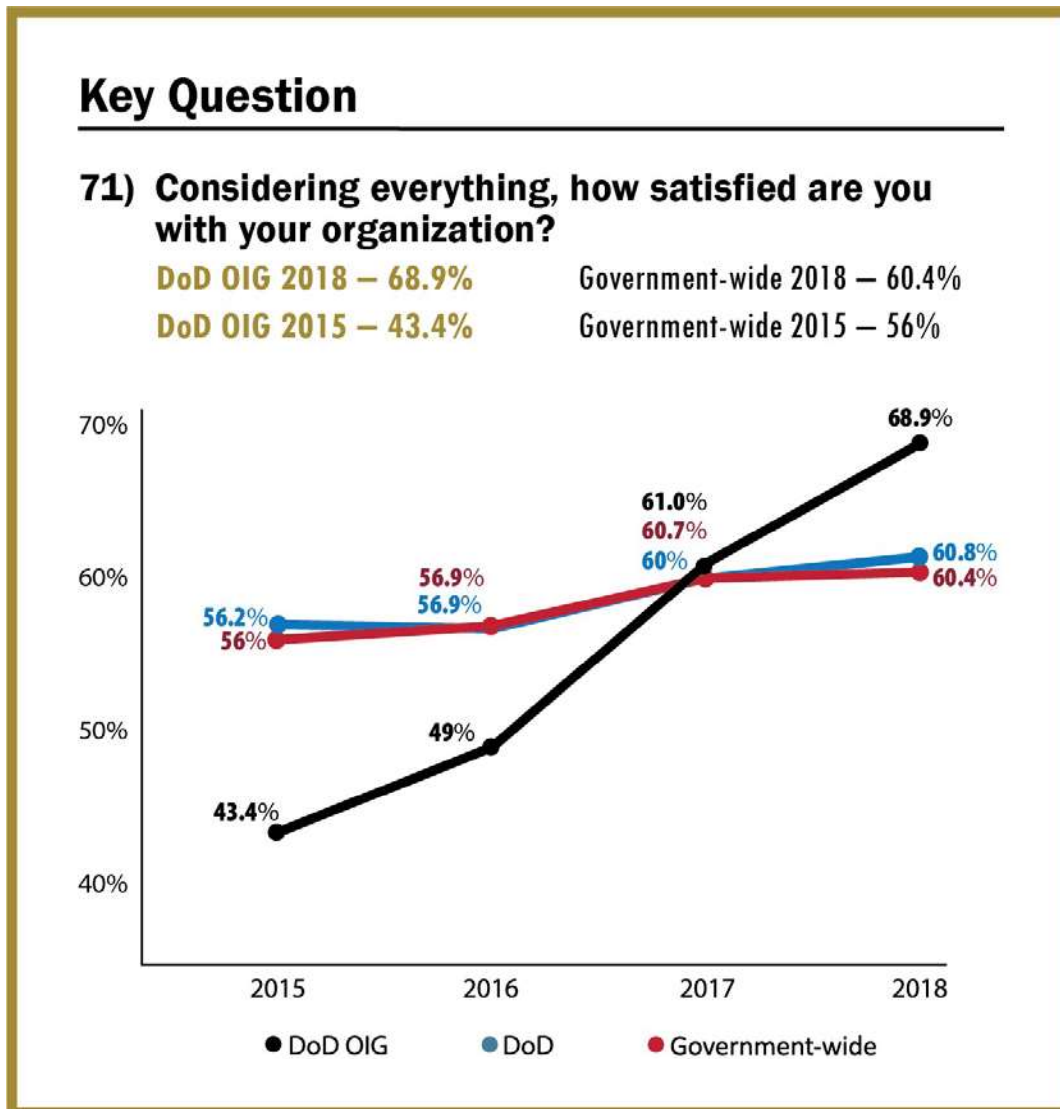
When I arrived at the DoD Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) in June 2015, and then became the Acting Inspector General six months later, I was impressed with the challenging and important mission of the DoD OIG – to provide oversight over the entire DoD, the largest agency in the federal government.

However, I was also struck by the DoD OIG FedView scores, which were low. For example, in 2015, the DoD OIG ranked about 295 out of the 320 federal entities that were surveyed. This was concerning because the FedView scores are one measure of the health of an organization. They are not the only important indicator – productivity, output, timeliness of products, and impact of work are key performance measures. But without engaged employees, the work of an organization suffers, and the quality, timeliness, and impact of the work is diminished. For example, engaged employees are more likely to go the extra mile when needed, and to remain with the organization rather than seek employment elsewhere.

Therefore, when I became the Acting Inspector General in January 2016, we decided to focus more attention on addressing our low FedView scores. To be clear, some of the initiatives discussed in this article had begun earlier, and there had been some positive movement in our employee engagement scores. However, we decided to make a concerted effort to focus more attention on existing employee engagement initiatives, to expand others, and to implement additional changes. We also attempted to be more disciplined, coordinated, and persistent in our efforts.

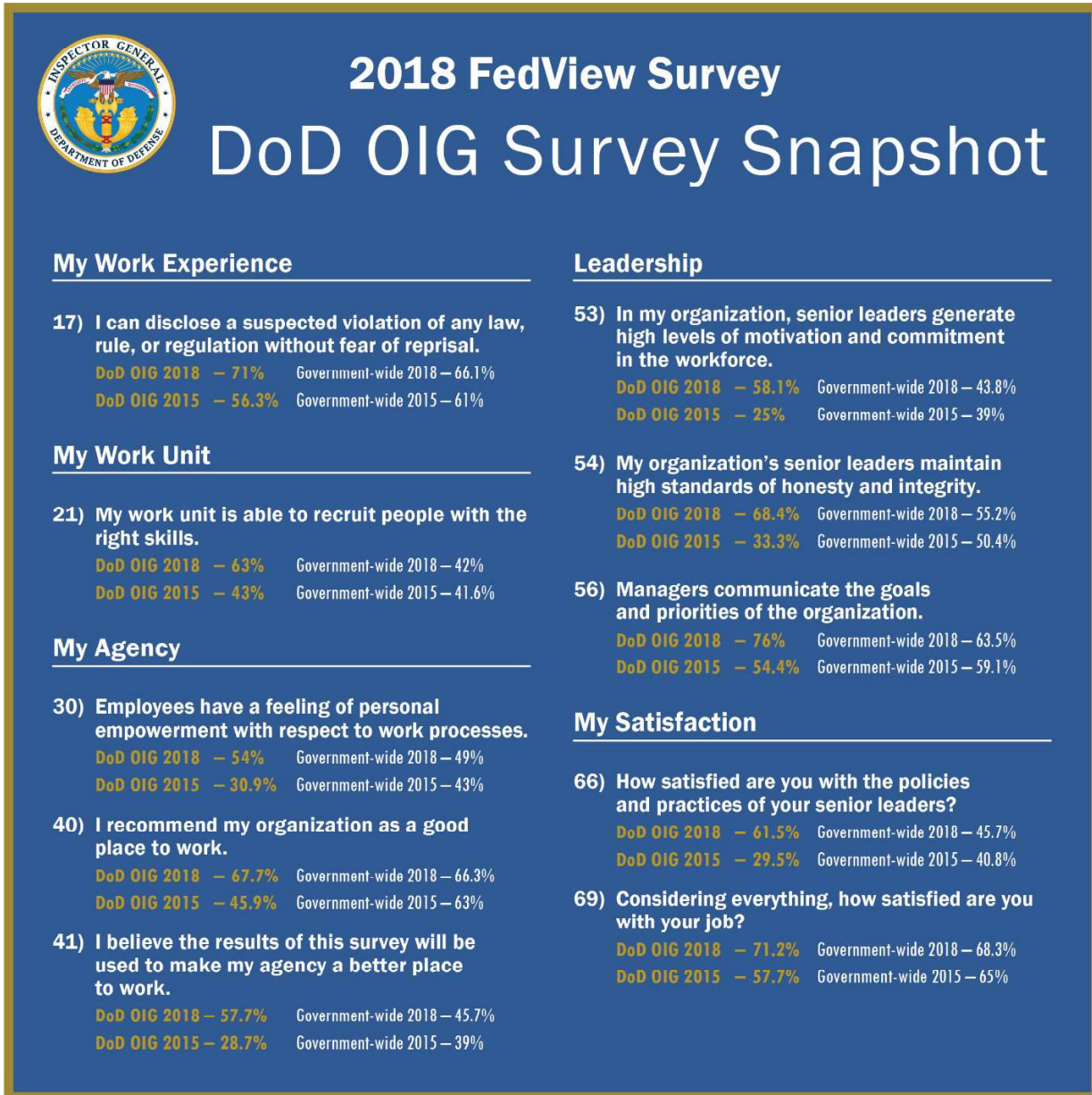
At the same time, we attempted to improve our work products, to operate more efficiently, and to implement a variety of new measures to increase the quality, timeliness, and impact of our oversight. Those goals – to improve performance and to improve employee engagement as reflected in the FedView scores – were complimentary.

As a result of these efforts – through the hard work of many managers, supervisors, and employees throughout our organization – our FedView scores have dramatically improved in the past several years. Our employees are more engaged now, which has also helped improve the quality and timeliness of our work. In contrast to our FedView scores in 2015, which were below the government and DoD average scores on most questions, the DoD OIG is now significantly above the government average on most questions. Our overall FedView scores are now in the top one-third of government entities.



This chart shows our progress, comparing our scores to the government and DoD averages on a key question (“Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?”).

The scores on other questions, such as those relating to DoD OIG employees' sense of empowerment and views of their supervisors and senior leaders, show similar improved results, as shown in the following table.



In addition, our employees' participation rate in the survey is now very high. Approximately 30 percent of government employees and 40 percent of DoD employees choose to complete the survey. By contrast, over 70 percent of DoD OIG employees complete the survey.

The Partnership for Public Service recognized the DoD OIG with an award for the most improved FedView scores of any federal OIG, and also noted that the DoD OIG was the most improved component of the DoD. When Max Stier, the President of the Partnership for Public Service, presented the award to the DoD OIG, he stressed the importance of employee engagement, stating, "It's really important to understand that this is not about happy employees. It's about whether your employees are engaged, whether they're going to give their discretionary energy to achieve the goals, because that is the most fundamental asset you have."



*Max Stier, President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, presents the DoD OIG with an award for the most improved Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey scores of any federal OIG at the DoD OIG Headquarters at the Mark Center in Alexandria, Virginia.*



The increase in the DoD OIG's FedView scores also corresponded to an increase in our efficiency and effectiveness. Some examples of our work include:

- the DoD OIG Audit Component completing the first ever full financial statement audit of the DoD (what DoD Deputy Secretary David Norquist has called the largest financial statement audit in the history of the universe);
- improvements in the timeliness of our administrative investigations, whistleblower reprisal investigations, and hotline cases;
- the establishment of an alternative dispute resolution program for whistleblower reprisal investigations, which has been labeled a model program by the Project On Government Oversight;
- regularly coordinating and completing comprehensive Lead Inspector General quarterly status reports on six "overseas contingency operations" (which include the wars in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan);
- OIG criminal investigators conducting many important criminal investigations throughout the DoD, including the Glenn Defense Marine Asia investigation (known as the "Fat Leonard" case);
- the DoD OIG's proactive release of many audits, evaluations, and investigations reports; and
- improvements in the quality of our audits and evaluations, including writing them in plain language.

At the same time, our staffing attrition rate has declined, and we are attracting many talented new employees to the DoD OIG, including many who have returned to the OIG after working elsewhere (we refer to them as "boomerang" employees).

I am sometimes asked by other IGs and federal managers how we accomplished the dramatic improvement in our FedView scores in such a short time. One person jokingly asked me, "What are you putting in the water over there?" In addition, we were recently asked to participate on a panel discussion, sponsored by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), of representatives from several organizations that had dramatically improved their FedView scores.

There is no magic formula for improving these scores (and nothing was added to the water). However, this article discusses the basic, common sense actions we took, and the principles we followed, to improve our scores.

However, we recognize that the DoD OIG is not a perfect organization, and we have more work to do and more improvements to make. We also recognize that the measures we took are not earth shattering, or rocket science. Rather they are basic principles that we tried to conscientiously apply throughout the organization, and that are relevant to any organization. They played a significant part in our success in improving our scores – as well as in improving the work of our organization. These are not the only principles we applied, or all that we did, but they are seven of the key principles we implemented to help improve our FedView scores and our work.

## 1. **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**

The first, and most important initiative, was to improve communication throughout our organization. This was a collective effort by leaders and employees at all levels of the OIG.

Our employees, like the employees of any entity, hungered for information and communication about what was happening in the organization. Employees told me and other senior leaders that they did not always know, or understand, what other parts of the DoD OIG were doing, or why the OIG was taking certain actions that affected their work. Our employees also wanted to know how their work fit into the goals and direction of the organization – and why their work mattered. At the same time, they had ideas on how we could do things more effectively and efficiently, as well as recommendations about many aspects of the organization.

In short, our employees wanted more communication – both to them and from them. We therefore took a series of steps to improve communication throughout the organization.

For example, as the Acting IG, I began writing an “IG Update” email that I send to all DoD OIG employees, about once every two or three months, describing developments, significant events, and changes throughout the OIG. The email includes discussion of new policies we are implementing, changes in key personnel, various accomplishments by OIG employees, important developments throughout the DoD, and upcoming events. The email also discusses my activities, including my meetings with DoD leaders and information I learned from them that is relevant to the work of our employees.

Steve Stebbins, the DoD OIG Chief of Staff who is responsible for the OIG Mission Support Team, also regularly writes an email to all OIG staff discussing developments relating to information technology, personnel policies, office space and logistics, and many other mission support areas that affect DoD OIG employees.

I also try to meet regularly with individuals and groups of employees to discuss what is happening in the DoD OIG and to listen to their views on their work and our organization. For example, I regularly visit our field offices. We have over 1,800 staff who work in the Washington, D.C., area and in more than 50 audit and criminal investigative field offices in the United States and throughout the world. In the past 4 years, I have made 85 separate visits to our field offices. During these visits, employees tell me about their work, inform me of their concerns and suggestions, and ask me questions. I get to know our employees better, and I learn something new during every visit.

## Seven Key Principles for Improving Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Scores

1. **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**
2. **Provide Clear Direction**
3. **Seek Employees’ Input and Follow up on Their Input**
4. **Provide Employees the Tools They Need**
5. **Ensure Accountability**
6. **Promote Pride in the Mission**
7. **Be Persistent**

Other OIG senior leaders also visit the field offices to have in-person meetings, to listen to staff concerns, and to discuss their successes. In addition, senior leaders are conducting more town hall meetings, and smaller meetings, with their staffs about issues within the OIG.

I also schedule brown bag lunches that any OIG employee can attend in person or by calling in. At these lunches, we discuss OIG issues, books and sports, travel plans, or any other subject anyone wants to raise. Other OIG senior leaders also conduct brown bag lunches or similar small group meetings (one is called a peer-to-peer power hour) to get candid feedback and improve communication on component and OIG issues.

I also walk around our offices to visit with our over 1,000 employees who work at our headquarters in the Mark Center located in Alexandria, Virginia, just to say hello and to listen to anything they would like to tell me. Sometimes, I get a very surprised reaction (“It’s the IG – what are you doing here? Is everything ok?”), but now they are getting more accustomed to me arriving unannounced.

We also have a senior staff meeting every Monday morning attended by DoD OIG senior leaders. We encourage the leaders to bring any employee from their component who wants to attend, so that their employees can hear first-hand what we discuss at the meeting and see how decisions are made and communicated within the DoD OIG. While I admit that these are not always the most scintillating meetings, the employees who come get to, as lawyers say, “see how the sausage is made.” We also introduce the employees at the meeting and we learn about them – their background, skills, and outside interests.

To further communicate, we also conduct an “Engagement Board” with OIG senior leaders, where each new audit or evaluation proposal is presented and discussed. We allow anyone at the Engagement Board to ask questions about the proposal, including the objective, scope, and methodology of the project. Often, we identify overlap in projects or complementary work that can be conducted by other parts of the OIG. Using the talents and expertise from employees throughout the organization also helps sharpen the individual projects. Most important, the Engagement Board increases communication and knowledge among our senior leaders about what is occurring throughout the entire organization.

The value of effective and frequent communication cannot be overstated. Many employees understand and assimilate information and guidance in different ways, and at different times. We therefore need to communicate regularly, and in many different ways, to share information throughout the OIG.

In short, robust and regular communication has been critical to improved employee engagement.

## **2. Provide Clear Direction**

Our employees also told us about their desire to better understand the vision and direction of the DoD OIG. In this regard, we recently updated the DoD OIG’s Strategic Plan, which includes our mission, vision, and values, and our strategic goals and objectives to achieve them. The update was not a top-down exercise. We sought input from all levels throughout the organization.



The resulting Strategic Plan is short – it is not War and Peace – but it clearly describes what we seek to accomplish and how we intend to achieve our strategic goals and objectives.

The Strategic Plan also was not just a check-the-box exercise to be placed on the shelf after it was completed. We regularly refer to the Strategic Plan and reinforce it by evaluating how our initiatives, policies, and practices align with the Plan. Each OIG component also develops its annual action plan to support the Strategic Plan’s goals and objectives, and our Chief of Staff leads an annual review of our progress in implementing the Plan.

We also try to provide clear strategic direction from the very beginning of new employees’ tenure. The Chief of Staff shows all new employees a short video on the Strategic Plan and we ask them to read the Plan. I also swear in all new employees, either in person or by VTC, and discuss the importance of their work and the DoD OIG’s mission.

In addition, we conduct monthly New Employee Orientation sessions. At these sessions, new employees hear from senior leaders from each component of the OIG. We want the new employees to understand the full range of activities occurring throughout the OIG. We also want them to understand that they are working for the DoD OIG as a whole, not one component of the OIG, and that we need collaboration and coordination from all components of the OIG on a regular basis to be most effective.

To provide more concrete direction, and to discuss my vision of how OIGs should operate, I also wrote and distributed two articles entitled “The Seven Principles of Highly Effective Inspectors General” and “Seven Additional Principles of Highly Effective Inspectors General.”<sup>1</sup> These two articles, published by the Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity, were based on speeches I gave to the Association of Inspectors General. The articles describe fundamental principles for any OIG, and they also give our employees guidance on how our OIG should seek to operate.

The DoD OIG also created an Editorial Guide, which provides direction and clear rules on how OIG reports should be written. The Guide discusses a range of writing issues, including how reports should be structured, common style that should be used, and grammar mistakes to avoid. This short Guide, which has examples of do’s and don’ts, is designed to standardize writing throughout the OIG and to ensure that OIG reports are consistent in format and style.

The intent of the Guide is to allow our employees to focus on the substance of reports, rather than to wrestle with questions of usage or grammar. As one trainer told us, “Standardization can speed things up.”

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<sup>1</sup> See “Seven Principles of Highly Effective Inspectors General,” Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity, available at <https://www.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/public-integrity/348650509-seven-principles-of-highly-effective-inspectors-general.pdf>; “Seven Additional Principles of Highly Effective Inspectors General,” Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity, available at [https://www.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/public-integrity/seven\\_additional\\_principles\\_of\\_highly\\_effective\\_inspectors\\_general.pdf](https://www.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/public-integrity/seven_additional_principles_of_highly_effective_inspectors_general.pdf).

### **3. Seek Employees' Input and Follow Up on Their Input**

Employees are a terrific source of ideas and concrete recommendations for improvements to an organization. We therefore promote our OIG employee engagement councils, which are voluntary groups of OIG employees who make specific recommendations for improvements, raise questions about OIG practices, provide insight on employee views, and communicate with fellow employees about OIG policies. The councils have been an extremely valuable source for improvements, and they also provide an avenue for OIG senior leaders to hear from and communicate with OIG employees.

The DoD OIG Employee Engagement Council is composed of representatives from throughout the OIG. The council analyzes the results of the FedView Surveys to assess areas where we need to improve and to provide input on how to address weaker areas reflected in the survey. Our Audit and Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) components also have their own employee engagement councils.

The employees on these councils have been professional, innovative, and instrumental to improving the OIG. I regularly meet with the councils to hear their concerns and suggestions, and to thank them for their innovative solutions to hard challenges.

For example, the DCIS Journeymen's Advisory Council made valuable suggestions about topics such as leadership development, employee transfer policies, and other issues affecting our special agents. The Audit Advisory Group created fact sheets for audit staff on telework policies, rotations among offices, and report review processes.

For these councils to be successful, however, it is important for management to follow up on their suggestions. We implement the suggestions that make sense, but we also explain why we cannot or should not implement others. We also ask the council to communicate management's response to the suggestions with their fellow employees, and to explain why certain suggestions cannot be adopted. This has proven to be a valuable process that improves employee engagement.

### **4. Provide Employees the Tools They Need**

It is critical to provide employees the tools they need to perform their jobs effectively. Every organization has resource constraints, hurdles, and frustrations in filling employees' needs. But we have tried to advocate for, and fight for, essential tools that our employees need to be more productive and effective.

For example, most federal criminal law enforcement agencies allow their agents to drive their government vehicles from their workplace to their home and back. This "duty to domicile" usage is necessary because law enforcement agents can be regularly called outside of normal working hours to immediately execute a search or arrest warrant, participate in a surveillance operation, or locate and interview a witness. It is inefficient, makes little sense, and impacts the timeliness of their work to require the agent to drive their personal vehicle to the office, pick up a government vehicle, and then drive the government vehicle to conduct the operation (often too late to perform the mission).

In addition, agents have safety gear that must be with them at all times, and requiring them to transfer their safety gear from car to car increases the risk that it will not be available when needed.

Duty to domicile use of government vehicles is standard in many federal law enforcement agencies. It must be approved by the head of the agency – in our case by the Secretary of Defense. When I arrived at the DoD OIG, however, I learned that our DCIS agents did not have duty to domicile usage. I therefore sought this approval from the DoD. After significant back and forth, and my advocating why it was necessary and appropriate for our agents, the Secretary of Defense agreed to approve this authority for DoD OIG criminal investigators. Our agents appreciated that we fought to get them this approval, which allows them to perform their jobs more effectively and more safely.

OIG employees also know when their managers are responsive to their needs. Our Chief of Staff and Mission Support Team leaders regularly speak at OIG component town halls to provide updates on mission support activities, take questions, and attempt to address concerns. They stress the importance of collaborative partnerships between mission support functions and oversight components, so that each can understand the requirements and work towards solutions that “get to yes” in support of the OIG mission.

Sometimes, small issues are critical. For example, parking for DoD OIG employees was a problem at the Mark Center. We have over 1,000 employees located at our Mark Center headquarters, and commuting there is difficult because there is no Metro stop and only local buses serve the Mark Center. The OIG is growing to meet the increasing demand for timely oversight and we have been hiring new employees, which resulted in an OIG waiting list of over 150 requests for parking spaces in the Mark Center garage, which had many open, unassigned spaces.

Our Logistics Management Office, Chief of Staff, and I therefore pushed hard for the DoD to provide the OIG additional parking spaces. We regularly raised the issue with DoD senior leaders, including the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense, with whom I meet regularly. During some meetings, one minute I would be discussing OIG reports on topics such as the wars in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, and the next minute I would be asking for additional parking spots. While that sounds incongruous and trivial, it is not. We did not let the parking issue rest until it was resolved.

The DoD’s leaders, to their credit, recognized the importance of the parking issue and the impact it was having on our employees. We eventually were assigned 150 new spaces, which eliminated the waiting list for parking. This made a tangible difference to the morale of our employees.

Small things matter. Our employees saw that we would fight hard, when appropriate, to improve their working conditions.

## **5. Ensure Accountability**

One of the key messages from the FedView Survey is that employees want underperforming employees and leaders to be held accountable.

The vast majority of DoD OIG employees are dedicated, talented, and hardworking public servants, who have the critically important mission of detecting and deterring waste, fraud, and abuse in DoD programs and operations; promoting the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of these programs; and helping ensure ethical conduct throughout the DoD.

That mission is an enormous challenge, given the size and importance of the DoD. The DoD is the largest organization of any kind in the world. It has 3.2 million people and a budget of over \$700 billion a year, which is about half the discretionary spending of the U.S. government. The DoD holds \$2.7 trillion in assets, and owns and maintains over 30 million acres of land and bases, or larger than the size of the state of Pennsylvania.

The DoD OIG has approximately 1,800 staff to provide oversight over the entire DoD. That may sound like a large staff to conduct oversight, but it is not, given the size of the DoD. As a result, every employee in the DoD OIG matters.

General Joseph Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke at a DoD OIG town hall meeting and said something that resonated with our workforce. He discussed the need to set a high bar and to ensure accountability. He also stated that he learned early on as a first lieutenant that, “Every time you see something that is below standard and ignore it, you have set a new standard, and it’s lower.”

General Eisenhower also said it well when discussing faith in military leaders. He stated, “Soldiers will not follow a battle leader with confidence unless they know he will demand full performance of duty from every member of the team.”

While the overwhelming majority of DoD staff work hard, effectively meet their critical mission, and reach the high bar we set, a few do not. Other employees therefore want these few underperformers to be held accountable.

Our managers and supervisors need to provide training, coaching, and candid appraisals to our employees on a regular basis. But if an employee’s performance does not meet standards, even with that guidance, then we need to hold them accountable. This is a challenge, and can expose supervisors to complaints and allegations. However, supervisors have an obligation to assess employee’s performance and take the appropriate actions when warranted – both for the taxpayer and for the vast majority of our employees who are working tirelessly to achieve the mission.

Employees also appreciate feedback about their work, not just when they receive their annual performance appraisals, but on a regular basis. They want to know what they are doing well, and what areas can be improved. We stress that our employees should receive direct, candid feedback on an ongoing basis, so they can fulfill their critically important mission even better.

In addition, just as we examine whether DoD programs are operating effectively and efficiently, we have an obligation to look at ourselves and make changes in our organization when necessary. In that effort, the DoD OIG recently combined our three Evaluations components, which had developed separately over time for understandable reasons, into one consolidated Evaluations

component. This consolidation enabled us to reduce overhead, assign more evaluators to conduct the evaluation work, and improve the management of our Evaluations component to make it more consistent, effective, and efficient.

However, any restructuring can create some anxiety and concern among the employees. Change is not easy. This consolidation went smoothly because we communicated regularly with our Evaluations employees, considered their input, explained the reasons for the changes, and assigned an outstanding manager to lead the consolidated component.

In short, we try to hold ourselves accountable to most effectively perform our mission.

## **6. Promote Pride in the Mission**

Most employees have a keen desire to understand why their work is important and how it impacts the mission of the organization. They have pride in their work and want to know that their work matters. It is therefore critical to highlight the impact of their work, to regularly recognize the value of what they do, and to foster pride in the organization.

In this vein, we try to provide recognition for our employees' important work on a regular basis. For example, we provide on-the-spot awards to individuals and teams for outstanding achievements. We also highlight their work and its impact at senior staff meetings, at town hall meetings, and in my IG Update emails.

In addition, we make a big deal of our annual awards ceremony, where we recognize outstanding accomplishments by DoD OIG employees. At our annual awards ceremony, or at separate town hall meetings, we also invite senior DoD leaders to discuss developments in the DoD and to explain how the OIG's work impacts the DoD. In the last three years, both Secretaries of Defense (Secretary Ash Carter and Secretary James Mattis) addressed OIG employees at these events, the first time a Secretary of Defense has spoken at a large meeting of OIG employees. In addition, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (General Joseph Dunford) and the two most recent Deputy Secretaries of Defense (Secretary Robert Work and Secretary Patrick Shanahan) have spoken at either the OIG awards ceremony or a town hall meeting. This year, the incoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (General Mark Milley) spoke at the OIG awards ceremony about the importance of IG oversight. Our employees appreciate hearing from these leaders about the direction of the DoD and also how their work affects the DoD.

We also, when appropriate, communicate the work of the DoD OIG to the media. For example, OIG leaders have appeared regularly on the television show *Government Matters* and on *Federal News Network* to discuss recent OIG work.

In addition, our reports are regularly the subject of Congressional hearings in the Congress. When I testify, I invite the team members who worked on the audit, evaluation, or investigation to attend with me and hear how members of Congress react to their work. They see the impact of their work and how it is valued by members of Congress.



## 7. Be Persistent

Any effort to improve employee engagement is a long-term effort that will not be accomplished overnight. Employees are justifiably skeptical of any initiative if they do not believe the organization is committed to it in the long run. To be effective, the initiative cannot be, as they say regarding players on NCAA basketball teams, “one and done.”

Moreover, long-time employees have seen such efforts fizzle out before. For example, the first time I showed up at an OIG DCIS field office for an office visit, employees were skeptical and wondered whether they had seen me at their office for the last time, or whether we would follow through on issues they raised. They were more receptive the second time I came, and more convinced the third time, particularly after we had acted on some of their concerns.

Employees want to see results, not just talk. Otherwise, they view the efforts as the “flavor of the month.” By our addressing the FedView survey each year, analyzing the results to see where we need the most improvement, and asking the Employee Engagement Council to assess the results and help us determine where and how we should improve, employees have become more receptive to change and more committed to helping improve employee engagement.

We must be realistic though. In a large organization, some employees will never be convinced. Some will be resistant to change and see the negatives of any new initiative. But most employees are open to change and improvements. To succeed in improving employee engagement, we must demonstrate to our employees that we appreciate their concerns, convince them that we value employee engagement, and show them that we want them to participate in solutions. We must be persistent in our efforts. Only then will our scores – and our work – continue to improve.

Finally, as noted above, there is no magic formula. The seven principles listed in this article are not an exhaustive list of what works, or all that we have done to improve employee engagement. However, implementing these principles has helped improve our FedView scores and our employee engagement, which improves the organization and its work. We are committed to improving employee engagement in the long run because these efforts can help us perform our critical mission in a more effective and impactful manner.

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***What is CAPI?*** *The Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity is a nonprofit resource center dedicated to improving the capacity of public offices, practitioners, policymakers, and engaged citizens to deter and combat corruption. Established as partnership between the New York City Department of Investigation and Columbia Law School in 2013, CAPI is unique in its city-level focus and emphasis on practical lessons and tools.*

***Published:*** *September 2019 by the Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity at Columbia Law School. Available at [www.law.columbia.edu/CAPI](http://www.law.columbia.edu/CAPI).*

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