

Highlighting the Good, the Bad and OCIO Culture Concerns

From: Carter, Cynthia F <Cynthia.F.Carter@hud.gov>

Sent: Wednesday, March 24, 2021 11:53 PM

To: Webber, Christopher S <Christopher.Webber@hud.gov>; Secretary Fudge <Secretary.Fudge@hud.gov>

Cc: OCIO_Employees_All <OCIO_Employees_All@hud.gov>; Robinson, Ashaki <Ashaki.Robinson@hud.gov>; Carraway, Antonio A <Antonio.A.Carraway@hud.gov>; Jones, Jennifer C <Jenn.C.Jones@hud.gov>

Subject: RE: Highlighting the Good, the Bad and OCIO Culture Concerns

Madame Secretary – Please note that the Office of the Chief Information Officer is broken in more ways than you can imagine. we have spoken with a number of our BUEs who would welcome the opportunity to provide some “boots on the ground” insight into the underbelly of the beast. If you are amenable, I will avail myself to ensure this happens. My only word of advice would be that you not allow management to cherry-pick which employees you speak with as you will not receive a true representation of the dysfunction that plagues that office and the BUEs that work there.

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Christopher,

The Union was made aware of your recent diatribe below titled “*Highlighting the Good, the Bad and OCIO Culture Concerns*” that was shared with our members and bargaining unit employees within the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and have concerns with much of what was spewed at the staff. While we recognize your tenure with the OCIO organization has only been around the 90-day mark, please know that your mission may have been better served by FIRST taking some real time to accurately and effectively gauge the climate of the OCIO before sending your self-proclaimed “inflammatory” email. That aside, I would be remiss in my duties as Local President if I did not acknowledge your adroit attempt to shift the blame of years of managerial incompetence and overall dysfunction onto the very employees that keep this office running. **If this is how you are choosing to uplift, encourage and empower your team to be better than they were before your tenure in the CIOs office, I can assure you that THIS was a complete miss.**

Given your most recent background working for the Office of the Inspector General, one would assume that you were equipped to recognize the differences in culture between your prior workplace and here. And if not, then maybe that should have also been something you sought to hone in on before criticizing and attacking the very people that work to keep this office and this Agency technologically afloat. This sir, is what leads to positive reinforcement and a better buy-in from the team - collectively.

As an officer of Local 476, I have acquired a better understanding of the CIO environment not only through meetings and discussions with our members and bargaining-unit employees, but also by engaging with those non-BUEs and managers as well. Through those discussions, meetings, hostile work environment allegations and subsequent investigations, EEO and whistleblower cases, my knowledgebase of the “toxicity” within the organization has grown exponentially. While I would definitely agree with your overall characterization of the environment, I would also caution you on where you haphazardly choose to place the blame.

The success of any organization, be it public or private sector, begins at the top and OCIO management is not exempt from this responsibility. For far too long, OCIO management has [seemingly] been allowed to wreak havoc on its staff and the external HUD customers it serves, with little to no consequence or repercussions to those in positions of power that were responsible for the melee that later ensued. However, those *worker bees* (BUEs) that serve on the front lines to ensure deadlines are met, and priorities are achieved were made to suffer in silence or risked the wrath of a manager that made each and every work day, and sometimes vacation days, a living nightmare. In the CIOs office alone, we have seen bargaining unit employees retaliated against for whistleblowing; employees with ADA recognized disabilities blatantly discriminated against and those that sought relief by requesting a hostile work investigation tormented, micromanaged and blatantly harassed by the very manager the allegations were against. While I could go on and on with many instances of unfair, disparate and sometimes even unlawful treatment of our members and BUEs, for the good of the order, I think its best if I specifically address your email below:

Toxicity: Performance Reviews/Bonuses - To be frank, the details of an employee's performance evaluation and/or performance bonus belong to that employee, and thus they are not precluded by you from having discussions with whomever they choose. For you to suggest that having these types of conversations "*only foment more discontent*" and further suggest they are "*unethical and unprofessional*", is actually the epitome of how the "*toxic*" foundation laid by your predecessors came to be. It also suggests that you are actively willing to maintain the very "*toxic*" culture that you are professing to want to erase. For your personal edification, there is nothing unethical or unprofessional about any employee voluntarily sharing information regarding their own performance evaluation and/or performance bonus if they so choose. The fact that you would like for them to *walk in silence* suggests to me that you are proving to be more on the side of the problem, and not necessarily the solution. Fear is never the way to manage your staff, nor is mandated silence. So, in keeping with your suggestion outlined below on how to correct the problem, and as the President of AFGE Local 476 and the voice for our members and BUEs, I absolutely have the "*Courage and Integrity*" to call you out on your perceived attempt at verbal intimidation, and am demanding that you seek a more unified and cohesive approach – if it is truly your desire to affect positive change within this already fractured and fragmented organization.

As an aside and although non-bargaining unit employees are well outside the purview of AFGE's representational responsibilities, I felt it prudent to bring this to your attention, in the event you failed to capture it while becoming "*ingrained with the team*". For several years we have received complaints about certain "managerial type" employees that frequently and freely divulge and discuss fellow OCIO employees "need to know/protected information" with anyone that has an ear to listen. The Union has complained to varying levels of management, with minimal improvement. So our hope is that while you are addressing the fungus that plagues your team, you will add this to your tickler file as well.

Toxicity: Hiring Decisions - Again, I find it unfortunate that you did not take the time needed to conduct a deep dive into what the underlying issues are within this organization. Although it is clear that, at a minimum, you have identified some of the *toxicity* that exists, you have failed to outwardly acknowledge from where this *toxicity* stems. To put it in a way that would be easy for all to understand, while you are busy pointing your managerial finger at the staff, never forget that there are always three more pointing back at you. When you agreed to accept this position, you also agreed to inherit all of the problems that come with that role. The success of your

organization begins with YOU and your team of leaders. If you want to erase the *toxicity* that has taken over, you must first work on RE-building TRUST and STOP encouraging an atmosphere of fear, silence and intimidation which has plagued OCIO for many, many years. While, at best, it may be inappropriate to speak on how or why someone was hired, the distrust that has been fomented and the erosion of OCIOs effectiveness stems from those in positions such as yours that have failed to lead with integrity, honesty and the willingness and ability to help forge an atmosphere of empowerment, appreciation and recognition for those employees that so selflessly serve every day; sometimes under the supervision and direction of some of the most *toxic* managers within the Department.

In keeping with your analogy, *"Like an engine, each piston must fire in time with the other OCIO pistons. Failure in one area has an adverse impact on the entire Team's ability to perform. An OCIO divided cannot stand....."*, If each CIO BUE represents a piston, and CIO management represents the engine, know that without the *pistons*, the *engine* cannot operate. But more importantly, any defects in the engine, will eventually cause each piston to erode and falter. In other words, if management (the engine) is *toxic/defective*, it doesn't matter how hard the employees (pistons) work, as their efforts will always be represented as a failure when in actuality their failure is a direct result of the defects in management. (Let that sink in.....)

While I am more than prepared to address your off-putting email word for word, I think it best to synopsise my closing as I choose not to lose the interest of my audience. If it is **accountability** you seek, start with your leadership. If it is **integrity** and **compliance** that you are after, ensure that your managers are equipped to lead by example. (As I can assure you many of them are not.) If **transparency** is truly important to you and the OCIO in its entirety, then begin by not encouraging an atmosphere of silence through intimidation, but encourage open and active dialogue so that everyone feels heard and everyone feels valued. If you truly desire an open and honest **management review** in the upcoming months, I would suggest utilizing a mechanism in which employees can report anonymously so that there is no fear of retaliation for offering the very thing you asked for – their opinion. **Training** is always needed, and I agree that \$1500 per OCIO employee does not go a long way. However, do not stifle or limit the types of training requests that can be submitted; remember, you get what you pay for. Invest in your team so that they can re-invest in their jobs. And finally **team building**, know that no amount of team building will ever be effective if your foundation (engine) is out of order. If employees don't feel that they can TRUST their leadership, the team will never be a cohesive unit, and will continue down the same *toxic*, fragmented path that it has always traveled.

Although I find it unfortunate that you are "ok" in knowing that some may have characterized your email as *inflammatory*, one can only hope that you have gleaned a modicum of insight and understanding from my email. Hopefully you will apply some or all of it in the upcoming days, weeks or months as you look to fix that which is broken within your organization.

Know that I too am a firm believer of *"it's a necessary evil to speak so plainly there's no room for ambiguity or confusion"*, which is what I have attempted to convey in my message to you today. Please know AFGE Local 476 is an ally and here to assist in any way we can, but our FIRST and most important responsibility lies with our members and bargaining-unit employees. As such, when they feel slighted or disrespected, so do we. Going forward, let us make this the plan – OCIO management will purposefully carry out the very charge that you have conveyed in your email below. (Fix the foundation, and the rest will follow.)

I welcome the opportunity to discuss in as much or as little detail as desired – just let us know. Until then.....

Agree Where We Can. Fight When We Must.

But **Always..... In Solidarity,**

CYNTHIA FISHER CARTER, President | AFGE Local 476 | (202)402-2915

Pearl of Wisdom: *“Work until your signature becomes an autograph.”*

****CWS: EVERY Friday** - During the pandemic, I can be reached at the above office number. **