Highlighting the Good, the Bad and OCIO Culture Concerns

From: Webber, Christopher S <Christopher.Webber@hud.gov>
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To: OCIO_Employees_All <OCIO_Employees_All@hud.gov>
Subject: Highlighting the Good, the Bad and OCIO Culture Concerns

Team OCIO,
In keeping with what I started on February 24ᵗʰ , I will be sending out emails to ensure we're all on the same page when it comes to OCIO operations.

Today's Topic: Highlighting the Good, the Bad and OCIO Culture Concerns

I want to thank everyone for the support these last few weeks as I've become more ingrained in the team, processes, outcomes. Over the course of these weeks, I've been listening to staff, reading progress reports and evaluating general OCIO performance. At this time, I believe I have a solid picture of the current State of OCIO. As you can imagine, there are bright spots and there are not so bright spots. It is my aim to highlight both over the next few months and years.

Over the next 6-12 months, the things I'd like to see created are:
1. An engaging OCIO Intranet Site where we can:
    a. Showcase who we are as individuals, tell our personal story (if you feel like sharing).
    b. Showcase our accomplishments… combined with their small and large impacts to the HUD Mission
    c. A virtual "suggestion box" that may filter up general improvement ideas or wholly new technology and/or process improvement suggestions.
    d. Dashboard capability that shows INFOSEC concerns (not so detailed as to be a risk), Data Center and Office performance metrics in near real-time, etc.
    e. Project Plans with detailed timelines for all OCIO efforts.
    f. Budget…not so detailed as to divulge unnecessary data (personal salaries, etc.) or provide existing contractors an unfair advantage in competition.
2. An OCIO Quarterly Newsletter for the Department that covers: 1.) INFOSEC News You Can Use, 2.) Modernization Efforts & their Impacts, 3.) Quarterly OCIO Employee Bio 4.) Budget Report 5.) Project Status Report. The goal is 100% transparency in all we do in OCIO.
3. Modernize the tools used to manage budget, contracts, projects and hiring using a single platform that will allow the efforts and outcomes of each responsibility to better feed into each other, provide greater visibility into timelines and be more reportable.

Over the next Now - 6 months, the things I'd like to see corrected are:
1. **Toxicity: Performance Reviews/Bonuses** – the number of sensitive conversations that are taking place between OCIO staff regarding their performance measurements, bonuses, etc. is the worst I've seen. The way staff share the details of their evaluations serves only to foment more discontent and is, speaking frankly, no one's business except the employee and the manager. It's unethical and unprofessional and needs to cease.
    a. **How to Correct**: Stop. If you wish to see OCIO overcome "sins of the past" we must actively show **more** interest in the future than the things that are holding us back.

Additionally, I ask those who see this type of conversation taking place to have the Courage and Integrity to call attention to it in the moment and help put it to a stop.

2. **Toxicity: Hiring Decisions** - Additionally, OCIO staff are actively attacking each other with regards to the skillsets and justifications of people being hired. This too serves to foment discontent, distrust but also has the potential side-effect of ruining someone's career and ability to provide for themselves, etc. Same as #1, it's gossiping, unethical, unprofessional and needs to cease immediately. You do not have all the facts regarding how someone was hired, nor do you have a right to those facts. So, in the absence of facts the conversation should never take place. Furthermore, this conduct erodes the effectiveness of the OCIO as a whole. 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.
   a. **How to Correct**: see 1a. The first question I always ask of people who tear down someone who was hired for a role they envied is…did you apply for the position because if you didn't, then you really have no room to complain.
   b. **General approach to handling disagreements:**
   Speak to the person with whom you have an issue directly, like a professional. Doing otherwise will deprive that person (manager or otherwise) their right and ability to honorably handle your concern. It's entirely possibly they may not be aware they are doing something you are concerned with! If your concern isn't resolved, schedule a conversation with the person and their manager, and engage in a fair, factual, and open discussion with the intent of working to a common resolution. As always there are several outcomes you can/should expect: a.) Status Quo is maintained, b.) corrective actions are recommended and applied, c.)all parties are left unsatisfied. If the manager believes that nothing illegal, immoral, or unethical has transpired, their decision should stand as the Manager _should_ understand how the issue and its resolution may/not serve the efficiency and effectiveness of HUD. The manager should also make themselves aware of existing policy to ensure their handling of an internal complaint is addressed in a compliant manner. If all parties are left unsatisfied, all parties should schedule a meeting to discuss the issue with the DCIO for your division. Of course, there are numerous variables that this high-level process may not cover, but it should serve to effectively address most of the things that have already made it up to me in my short time here at HUD OCIO. Establishing professional relationships and working together with the spirit of "Always assume best intent…" goes a long way to improving OCIO relationships. **At no time should the issue be discussed beyond anyone not involved, as that would contradict the** discretion **I'm asking you to exercise.**

   There's a right way and a wrong way to go about handling one's legitimate concerns. Wasting taxpayer dollars by submitting fact-less, base-less complaints through mechanisms like Hotline and Whistleblower or other honorable mechanisms only waste time, energy, resources, and internal goodwill. They literally tie up OGC, OCHCO and OCIO leadership unnecessarily for days/weeks. If you're going to escalate a true issue using these solutions, present them in an intelligent, factual manner that will ensure your legitimate concern gets the attention and justice they deserve.

Over the next Now - 12 months, the things I'd like to see implemented and embraced are:
   1. **Accountability** – I've heard from numerous persons in OCIO that the performance of Federal employees could be improved, but staff have not been held accountable for so long that it

would be wrong to suddenly expect more of them. I understand this sentiment but will not embrace it. There comes a time where an organization must look in the mirror and ask itself what needs to be fixed, and how can that corrective action be performed as quickly and honorably as possible. Another way of looking at this is via a motorcycle metaphor:

> *While riding a motorcycle, you'll note that the spinning action of the wheels helps keep the bike vertical and ride straight…like a gyroscope. Following that thought, when entering a turn the motorcycle will go perfectly straight unless you lean into and look through the turn and therein lies the metaphor…simply turning the handlebar left or right is only part of turning, you MUST look through the turn to where the road becomes straight again in order to avoid an accident.* How do you "look through the turn?"

   a. **How to Correct:**

   Performance Plan Overhaul: Managers are being asked to re-review existing performance plans so that PY22 plans will have true, impactful, measurable goals that push the HUD OCIO Mission, which should directly feed the HUD Mission, forward. The goals should clearly define what a Level 3, 4, 5 rating looks like and help the employee know where their efforts are adding value to the Mission. Furthermore, it should also help the employee cease work not in-line with their plan. Who else is involved in the creation of Performance Goals? YOU! That's what may be missed here. I encourage each of you take a stab at developing your own Goals (*see attached*) that you feel best meet your DCIO's vision? Who knows, you may surprise yourself and your manager with how in step you are with the Mission and their expectations. The attached is something I've used for years to capture and rate/score my own goals. If you leave Columns C and D alone, the automated scoring will play itself out.

2. **Develop an Integrity and Compliance Program**
   This program will help OCIO personnel embrace new values that align them with the concepts of Integrity, Stewardship, Trust, Courage and Accountability in every conversation, every action, every deliverable.

3. **Transparency**
   Share the PDCIO's Performance Plan (see attached). Next years is already under construction and promises to be more impactful and detailed.

4. **Management Review**
   In approx. 6 months, and then at my 1-year mark, I will send each of you a survey seeking your perspective on what I've accomplished thus far, failed to accomplish, should start…should stop, do more of, less of, etc.

5. **Training**
   I am working to increase the ceiling for training to something that more accurately reflects the training needs of OCIO personnel. $1,500/year/employee can barely pay for books 😊. I ask all employees to take a personal stake in your own career by researching and requesting meaningful training that will further the OCIO Mission. Please do not default to training that requires travel and hotel stays. Nearly everything you need is available online. I know many think they can only learn while in a classroom because of continuous work-related interruptions. This should not be used to prevent growing and evolving into modern information technology professionals. If COVID has shown us anything, we can do anything from anywhere. Consequently, I want to investigate providing OCIO staff with the ability to spend 1 day per week or pay period focused solely on training…no email, no phone calls, no meetings, no work beyond the training. Training is work and adds value immediately. Along with this training initiative, there would be an expectation that an employee brings that training back to OCIO and perform

a Train-the-Trainer exercise to help their peers better understand what was learned, and to what degree.

6. **Team Building**

   I'm open to suggestions, and of course, have some ideas of my own:

   - For those personnel local to DC, I'd like to suggest a HUD OCIO Bike Team. The annual race I've done in the past is the [Seagull Century](). It would be a fantastic experience getting people out on a 100-mile ride on the scenic Eastern Shore with virtually zero elevation and a gentle back breeze pushing you along… Plus, imagine a Peloton of 30 HUD OCIO bikers hitting speeds of 40mph blazing to the finish line. Pretty sweet…
   - Steps and weight loss challenge – self explanatory
   - Hackathon - Quarterly or Bi-Annual - https://hackathon.guide/. Who knows, maybe we can make it an HUD vs. HUDOIG competition for grins ;-p

This email comes from a good place and with the best intent. I know some of the material may seem inflammatory, and frankly am OK with that. Sometimes it's a necessary evil to speak so plainly there's no room for ambiguity or confusion… Those employees who are performing the actions I've laid out under Toxicity know who they are and should take this email as a moment to reflect and become part of the solution, not the problem. We all succeed or fail based on the actions of our peers.

We are a support arm of HUD. Support **MUST** start within OCIO before we can effectively help our stakeholders. Support one another.

V/r,

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PS: Next PDCIO Bulletin – Top 3 Priorities: Personnel Management, Contract Management, Project Management