

(b) (6)

**Morale and Field Confidence of Regional Leadership
Region 9**

This document contains no classified material.



(b) (6)

US Forest Service
Law Enforcement and Investigations
Region 9

"Best Place to Work," along with some media reports, emails, and discussions with employees all confirm that low morale is a critical issue. In a year when 70% of federal agencies improved their scores on the FHCS, the Forest Service's 2008 BPW survey scores dropped 11%. The "senior leadership" score dropped 17%. These are "indicator lights" that the Chief has determined will no longer be ignored. The Chief is committed to naming what is broken and fixing it.

"Our meetings with agencies and additional research affirm that these key practices put in place over the past several years have had a positive impact on many employees as well as the organizations as a whole. Leadership and communication continue to be the primary theme among all agencies in how and where they have addressed challenges with employee morale. Overwhelmingly, the agencies listened to the issues raised by employees, openly and honestly communicated, and included employees as stakeholders in the outcome. A renewed emphasis on leadership development, communication, and organizational learning is essential to enabling employees to have a stake in the success of the organization in accomplishing the mission of the Forest Service."

-- Forest Service Best Practices Benchmarking Executive Summary April 2010, Chief's Morale Focus Group

Preface

First, I would like to take this opportunity to professionally and respectfully urge and request that you read this document in its entirety. Afterwards, should you feel that these are the ramblings of one employee; I respectfully and humbly challenge you to take a survey of the field employees in R9 and confirm what is written here. If they are given an opportunity to speak, with no fear of retaliation, you will see that the morale, lack of confidence in their regional leadership, and low levels of unit pride are truly at crisis levels.

Background

I came to the US Forest Service (USFS) Law Enforcement and Investigations (LEI) over (b) (6) years ago. My previous experience included over (b) (6) years of law enforcement experience as a (b) (6).

I also brought (b) (6) years of (b) (6). In the (b) (6) I served in various leadership positions and was trained at some of the most demanding and prestigious leadership schools in the country.

When I was considering applying for positions within R9 LEI, I spoke to several colleagues that were familiar with the FS; some were employed by LEI at the time, others

had retired from LEI, some had worked with FS agents in the past, and others had no affiliation with the FS, but were otherwise very knowledgeable about federal law enforcement agencies.

Each person that I spoke with recommended *not* applying for employment in Region Nine because the region was known for terrible morale, poor leadership, and for the lack of confidence within the rank and file for its leadership.

I was troubled by these allegations, especially by the fact that some of this information was considered "common knowledge" amongst the federal law enforcement community; especially those familiar with natural resource law enforcement.

When I entered on duty, within days I could sense the low morale and lack of confidence. It was palpable and quite disturbing. I came to the agency because I believed in its mission and I was determined to make a difference in whatever small ways I could.

Unfortunately, one of the things I learned early on, was that many of the issues from the field were not communicated upward because the rank and file had lost confidence that any good would come from the feedback. They had also become highly fearful of retaliation if they were to provide honest, frank, and constructive feedback. Essentially, they had given up, lost hope, and ultimately lost confidence.

Over the last (b) (6) years I have fallen victim to those same sentiments. However, I have also come to care for this organization, its mission, and the good people that I work with on both sides of the "stovepipe".

For those reasons, I have asked for permission to address certain issues regarding the morale and confidence with the (b) (6). For many months this was not granted. However, I recently received permission to bring certain issues to your attention and feel it necessary to do so.

As I stated above, many R9 LEI employees have a fear of retaliation should they decide to speak frankly on the issues that will be addressed in this document. Ironically, when permission was granted to contact you directly, I was specifically reminded that anything I wrote would be forwarded to (b) (6). Why this was necessary, I don't know, but it certainly felt like a measure to intimidate and silence me.

In the past, I have addressed these issues with (b) (6) without success. On at least (b) (6) occasions I offered to (b) (6) in R9. I made this offer to (b) (6) in order to help us identify areas where we need to improve, sustain areas where we are enjoying success, and to improve the overall morale, confidence, and pride in our organization. I made this offer at least (b) (6) times, and even offered to conduct the survey as part of a project in my Middle Leader training. I have never received a reply, not even a "no". It seems that the idea was either ignored, or the topic just wasn't important enough.

Under these conditions, the efficiency and image of the agency will be, and has been, affected. As you now, this can also lead to unsafe working environments and hazards to the public. As you know from your own leadership training, the performance, demeanor, and effectiveness of your subordinates reflects upon you as well.

I feel confident that you would not approve of the current status of things in R9 if you were aware of them, so I respectfully submit this document so that we can get the issues addressed.

I thank you in advance for your time, consideration, and allowing me to present these concerns to you directly.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is not to conduct a personal attack. It is to relate to the higher levels of management certain issues that are of great importance to the organization and our mission.

The intention is to do so in a very honest way and to use direct sentiments and examples from the field; it will not be “sugarcoated”. That has been done long enough and has proven unsuccessful in affecting change and improvement. The objective is to make us better by identifying areas where we need to improve and opening lines of communication.

The purpose is to “name what is broken and fix it”.

The Issues

Having the benefit of my own leadership experience, training, and employment with other agencies, I have some insight as to how we can do better with different tactics, ideas, and philosophies.

Over the last (b) (6) years I have listened to the issues that my co-workers find most important to not only their morale and confidence in leadership, but their efficiency and sense of organizational pride. I have unofficially surveyed colleagues throughout the region. I have also listened to our cooperators and their opinions of our agency and how we could be more effective partners. Finally, I have made many observations firsthand.

Below is a compilation of personal observations, comments and opinions from fellow R9 personnel, and even some thoughts from our cooperators. All of these are directly related to the leadership in this region, the confidence the employees have in that leadership, and our success. The below listed items illustrate areas where we are desperately lacking.

Most of this surrounds the performance of the (b) (6) because of (b) (6) direct involvement or responsibility for the particular issue being addressed.

- Inaction and Indecisiveness. (b) (6) is unreachable on most occasions, or at a minimum highly unresponsive to important law enforcement matters, whether they be administrative or operational. "Inaction" and "Indecisive" are often words used to describe (b) (6) behavior. (b) (6) office is often referred to as a "Black Hole" where "nothing gets done". One of (b) (6) proudest accomplishments, one that (b) (6) informed the field agents about, was (b) (6) acquiring new office space for (b) (6) in the RO. Meanwhile, field needs were not being tended to.

The general consensus is that decisions do not get made in a timely manner and the (b) (6) rarely takes any action on important issues. Issues that need (b) (6) attention often do not get tended to in time; in many cases they never get tended to.

In fact, it is common knowledge that (b) (6) regularly is not even at the office, opting instead to take time off, or work from home.

When action is taken, it is usually after numerous efforts to reach the (b) (6) or numerous attempts to get action taken.

- Unengaged. (b) (6) is out of touch and completely unengaged in the most important matters regarding law enforcement. Many have characterized (b) (6) as "lazy" and "apathetic".

The common belief is that (b) (6) has no idea what (b) (6) people deal with on a regular basis, their needs, what they face, and that (b) (6) generally has a dangerous lack of law enforcement knowledge. This would be less than ideal, but survivable, if (b) (6) management skills were average or above, but this is not the case either.

- Lacking standards. (b) (6) does not hold underperformers accountable.
- Vindictiveness. Most employees feel that the (b) (6) retaliates using positional authority inappropriately to unjustly punish them.
- Uninspiring. (b) (6) does not inspire, motivate, or encourage proactive performance and is perceived as actually discouraging this.
- Trustworthiness. The (b) (6) is perceived as untrustworthy and dishonest and this has caused a disturbing lack of respect for (b) (6) amongst the vast majority of those under (b) (6) charge.
- Vision. (b) (6) does not provide a vision consistent with proactive and significant law enforcement action and operation. Ideally a leader should inspire and motivate as well, but (b) (6) has no real vision for success in that sense.

In fact, (b) (6) has openly stated that (b) (6) has designed this program to be “regulatory” in nature. This comes as a great source of frustration to our “law enforcement” professionals, forest staff that want law enforcement, and our law enforcement partners.

- Mismanagement of resources. Many feel that (b) (6) has mismanaged resources, including financial and human resources. This mismanagement leaves us unprepared for the most challenging aspects of our law enforcement program.

(b) (6) once said “Successful companies anticipate and unsuccessful companies react.” The same could be said for any field of endeavor. (b) (6)

(b) (6) does not plan or prepare for the major issues we face in this region and we are now dangerously unprepared, financially, personnel, and resource wise.

- Communication. The (b) (6) is not allowed to be contacted by anyone other than (b) (6). Typically there is a chain of command exercised in any organization. However, there are certain issues that directly involve the specific authority and duty of the (b) (6). A certain degree of nuance is missed with the lack of genuine, direct communication.

Additionally, many of us find (b) (6) written communications to be confusing and regularly off target. The field rarely hears from the (b) (6) directly or indirectly, on issues that matter to them.

Closing

In the spirit of agency improvement and growth, I hope this document is received as it is intended. I know that the content is disturbing and displeasing on a number of levels; this brings me no pleasure. Unfortunately, other actions to get these issues addressed have not been well received and thus have yielded little in terms of results.

I feel obligated to bring these issues forward as a FS employee, a law enforcement professional, and a taxpayer.

My sincere hope is that these issues will be addressed in the spirit and example set by the Chief and (b) (6) Morale Focus Group.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.