



EMPLOYEE JOB AND WORKPLACE SATISFACTION IN THE

Law Enforcement Community

Three years ago, FBI Special Agent in Charge Stephen Richardson spent six tense days leading a law enforcement team in Alabama to save the life of a five-year-old boy who was kidnapped and held hostage in an underground bunker by an armed and mentally unstable killer.

For Richardson and his team of crisis negotiators, tactical units, bomb experts, investigators, behavioral scientists, legal advisers, and state and local law enforcement officers, the life and death standoff was a gut-wrenching and emotionally draining experience. After a rescue team stormed the bunker, saved the boy and killed the hostage-taker, Richardsons said his next big worry was for the members of the rescue team, “heroes who literally jumped into a black hole to save a child as they faced a dangerous and unpredictable man who fired shots at them and set off a bomb not far from the bunker.”

Across our nation, law enforcement professionals such as Richardson and his team put their lives on the line every day and face stressful situations to ensure public safety. These law enforcement jobs vary from Secret Service agents protecting the president and FBI agents seeking to thwart terrorist attacks to correction officers, airport security personnel, those guarding our nation's borders and those working undercover to combat drug cartels.

Many law enforcement employees are on the frontlines risking their lives, while others serve in support roles in headquarters or field offices.

Whether they are on the street facing danger or sitting in front of a computer, all of those in the law enforcement community are working toward the same critical mission of ensuring the safety of our communities and nation.

In short, federal law enforcement is complicated and challenging work that can be incredibly gratifying, but enormously stressful. It is not easily compared to other professions.

In order to gain a better understanding of how employees in the law enforcement community view their jobs and work environments, the Partnership for Public

Service and Deloitte examined the 2015 *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®] data for 12 agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Secret Service, Customs and Border Protection, the Bureau of Prisons and Transportation Security Administration. We also held a workshop with officials from a number of law enforcement agencies in February 2016 to better understand the unique workplace issues facing law enforcement agency employees and their leaders.

Based on our review, we identified three top workplace challenges facing law enforcement (see below).



CHALLENGE 1
WELLNESS IN A DEMANDING ENVIRONMENT



CHALLENGE 2
OPENING UP COMMUNICATION IN A "NEED TO KNOW" ATMOSPHERE



CHALLENGE 3
THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AND COMMITMENT TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION

BEST PLACES TO WORK LAW ENFORCEMENT DATA

The *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®] rankings, derived from the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data, measure the satisfaction and commitment of federal employees government-wide and by agency.

When examining the 2015 *Best Places to Work* data for 12 federal law enforcement agencies, there do not appear to be distinct differences among these organizations compared to other agencies across the federal government regarding how employees view their jobs and workplaces. The law enforcement agencies do not have particularly low or high scores, and they do not score very well or very poorly in any particular workplace category.

The government-wide 2015 *Best Places to Work* employee satisfaction and commitment score is 58.1 out of 100, with the bottom scoring agency at 32.0 and the highest-performing organization at 96.3. Among the 12 law enforcement agencies, the FBI tops the group with a *Best Places to Work* score of 69.9, while the Secret Service is at the bottom with a score of 33.4. The median score for the 12 agencies is 62.2. The scores include responses from employees engaged in a wide variety of occupations within the law enforcement agencies.

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES 2015 BEST PLACES TO WORK SCORES

Agency	Subcomponent	Best Places Score
DOJ	Federal Bureau of Investigation	69.9
DOJ	Criminal Division	68.6
DOJ	Drug Enforcement Administration	68.3
DOJ	U.S. Marshals Service	68.1
DOJ	Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives	63.3
DHS	Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	62.9
--	Law Enforcement Agency Median	62.2
DOJ	Bureau of Prisons/Federal Prison System	61.5
--	Government-wide	58.1
Treasury	Financial Crimes Enforcement Network	45.5
DHS	Transportation Security Administration	40.7
DHS	Customs and Border Protection	40.5
DHS	Immigration and Customs Enforcement	34.0
DHS	Secret Service	33.4

Wellness in a demanding environment



Law enforcement officers are always on call and their hours are often long and can be erratic. They encounter suspicious, dangerous and stressful situations that can easily pose a challenge to their health, wellness and the stability of their family life. This dynamic can affect the workplace as a whole, and even colleagues who are not on the frontlines.

Employees also can be negatively affected if their organizations do not provide the necessary training, equipment and staffing for them to manage and mitigate the threats and dangers that are part of their everyday work. In a high-risk environment, there can be safety in numbers; if an organization isn't staffed properly, the employees can feel more at risk.

In addition, the demands of law enforcement work often limits the range of available workplace flexibilities, and the "tough guy" culture does not necessarily lend itself to acknowledging personal or workplace problems. But this does not mean there are not ways to improve both the work-

life balance and wellness of employees.

The FBI, for example, has committed to making sure there are a range of resources available to employees, including help from psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and even a chaplain. The peer support aspect of the employee assistance program trains employees on how to offer support to colleagues.

These practices—and broader commitment to wellness and safety—are reflected in the *Best Places to Work* scores. The FBI is the top-ranked law enforcement agency, and employees have rated their work-life

balance above the government-wide score for the past five years. Agencies struggling with work-life balance scores include the Secret Service, Customs and Border Protection and the Transportation Security Administration—all of which also registered low *Best Places to Work* scores.

Law enforcement agencies can mitigate the stresses of work and assist employees in their work-life balance by reducing the number of hours employees are permitted to work, providing adequate staffing levels, and offering a variety of programs to support the well-being of employees.

"The wellness and safety of law enforcement officers is critical not only to themselves, their colleagues, and their agencies, but also to public safety."

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, May 2015

BEST PLACES TO WORK WORK-LIFE BALANCE SCORES FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMUNITY

Agency	Work-life Balance Score	Best Places Score
Drug Enforcement Administration	68.2	68.3
U.S. Marshals Service	65.8	68.1
Federal Bureau of Investigation	65.6	69.9
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	64.0	62.9
Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives	63.2	63.3
Criminal Division	62.2	68.6
Bureau of Prisons/Federal Prison System	61.3	61.5
Government-wide	59.1	58.1
Financial Crimes Enforcement Network	56.1	45.5
Immigration and Customs Enforcement	51.1	34.0
Transportation Security Administration	50.3	40.7
Customs and Border Protection	49.1	40.5
Secret Service	40.9	33.4

Questions in work-life balance category:

- My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues.
- I have sufficient resources (for example, people, materials, budget) to get my job done.
- My workload is reasonable.

TAKING ACTION

- Create or expand employee wellness programs that focus on stress management for better employee mental health.
- Be aware of how limited resources can affect the strain on employees and their perception of safety, and evaluate the alignment of training, equipment and appropriate staffing to meet the mission requirements.
- Limit length or frequency of shifts employees are required to work in any period of time. Think strategically and allow for flexibility in staffing models to ensure coverage while maintaining reasonable hours for employees.

Opening up communication in a “need to know” atmosphere



The nature of federal law enforcement often entails dealing with classified or sensitive information that cannot be shared outside the workplace, or even among colleagues. This can impact the communication among employees as well as the ability to have open communication within an agency. As a result, there are distinct silos where some employees may not know what the person beside them is working on, and communication across teams often is not encouraged.

In addition to these challenges, tension can exist between the headquarters and field offices. Some information can be lost in translation between the two or it may be difficult to get messages across in either direction.

If leaders of law enforcement agencies do not think about their communication with employees in a strategic way, employees may not be clear on priorities, key changes, or events that may affect the organization and their work.

We looked at three Federal Em-

ployee Viewpoint Survey questions related to communications to get some insights into how law enforcement employees view this issue.

The data shows a positive correlation between how well these law enforcement agencies performed on communication questions and how well they fared on the overall *Best Places to Work* index score. Only four of the 12 law enforcement agencies examined scored better than the government-wide score on communication with their employees, and those agencies topped the *Best Places to Work* law enforcement list.

The FBI is at the top of the law enforcement category on communication. The bureau’s director, James Comey, has made a point of visiting all 56 field offices to talk to employees, assess morale and leadership, and he has prioritized communication both at headquarters and at the field offices nationwide. Each leader also is rated on communication through FBI internal employee surveys. In contrast, less than one-third of the

employees at the Secret Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection are satisfied with the communication they receive from their leadership.

The *Best Places to Work* data suggests that the leaders in the law enforcement community should consider focusing greater attention on improving internal communications that are relevant to how the organization is meeting mission objectives. Doing so could increase employee satisfaction and commitment, and ultimately result in better performance.

BEST PLACES TO WORK COMMUNICATION SCORES FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMUNITY

Agency	Communication Score	Best Places Score
Federal Bureau of Investigation	56.2	69.9
Criminal Division	55.7	68.6
Drug Enforcement Administration	54.2	68.3
U.S. Marshals Service	51.5	68.1
Government-wide	48.9	58.1
Bureau of Prisons/Federal Prison System	48.1	61.5
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	47.8	62.9
Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives	45.1	63.3
Financial Crimes Enforcement Network	38.6	45.5
Transportation Security Administration	35.7	40.7
Customs and Border Protection	30.7	40.5
Immigration and Customs Enforcement	28.8	34.0
Secret Service	28.1	33.4

Related communications questions:

- Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.
- Managers promote communication among different work units (for example, about projects, goals, needed resources).
- How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?

TAKING ACTION

- Encourage leaders to visit field offices to talk with employees and hear their concerns and ideas to improve safety, work-life balance and stress management. Follow through when changes are needed.
- Promote open communication and collaboration among work units regarding organizational programs and employee support services.
- Encourage leaders to communicate regularly with employees regarding workplace issues.
- Provide a mechanism for employees to communicate with leadership about concerns and ideas to improve safety, work-life balance and stress management.

The importance of employee satisfaction and commitment to accomplish the mission



The mission of federal law enforcement agencies is to protect public safety and make sure federal laws are enforced. Employees who are satisfied and committed to their jobs can help drive the mission, but those who are disgruntled or disengaged can pose an internal threat within the organization. They can become a risk to other employees, as well as to the mission, according to Michael Gelles, thought leader and published author on critical national security issues.¹

Gelles points out that dissatisfied and disengaged employees are most at-risk to pose an insider threat to security through leaking information or becoming a disruptive or violent force.

In our discussion with law enforcement officials, a number suggested that agency leaders do not always recognize the link between employee engagement and accomplishing their mission, often seeing these two issues as separate rather than closely intertwined. As a result, they said, efforts to address many employee workplace concerns are often pushed off the list of priorities.

¹ Michael Gelles is a national security thought leader and a Director in the Federal Practice at Deloitte Consulting, LLP. He is also the author of the upcoming book, *Insider Threat: Detection, Mitigation, Deterrence and Prevention*.

These law enforcement officials also said agencies frequently are reactive to the results from the annual federal employee survey, but seldom proactively seek to improve the workplace environment. In addition, there is often a lack of funding or time spent addressing the shortcomings and signs of employee discontent revealed by the surveys. We also were told that when efforts are made to address workplace issues, employees are not always well-informed about these initiatives.

When employees were asked whether they believe, “the results of this survey will be used to make my agency a better place to work,” eight of the 12 organizations in the law enforcement category had scores that are lower than the government-wide score for this question, 34.6.

Across the law enforcement community, employees in field offices are

less confident that the results of the survey will be used to make their office a better place to work. At half of the 12 agencies, less than 30 percent of the employees in the field offices believe that action will be taken based on their feedback. These include Secret Service, Financial Crimes Enforcement Network and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The FBI has been proactive in seeking to deal with workplace concerns. The bureau, for example, has advisory committees set up to discuss issues raised by employees and to recommend changes. The bureau also conducts its own in-house leadership and employee surveys. According to James Turgal, the assistant director of the FBI’s Human Resources Division, “Director James Comey cares very much about the employees and what they are thinking and feeling.”

“Any law enforcement agency organization can make great rules and policies ... but if policies conflict with the existing culture, they will not be institutionalized and behavior will not change.”

President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, May 2015

COMMITMENT TO EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK QUESTION SCORE

Agency	All Employees (Percent Positive)	Headquarters Employees (Percent Positive)	Field Employees (Percent Positive)
Government-wide	34.6	38.5	33.9

Question:

I believe the results of this survey will be used to make my agency a better place to work.

TAKING ACTION

- Highlight the importance of satisfaction and commitment throughout the year, and work to engage employees on a consistent basis.
- Create advisory committees or focus groups to discuss issues raised by employees regarding job and workplace satisfaction, and to recommend changes.

WHERE CAN AGENCIES START?

The management issues of wellness and safety, communication and creating a culture of workplace satisfaction and commitment may not seem unique to law enforcement, but they are extremely important to this community given the nature of the work. Leaders should evaluate the needs of employees and think big by making these issues part of the broader human capital strategy. Then, start small by taking specific actions that will address each of these key areas. Agency leaders can provide support to help develop these capabilities at the office or unit level. Finally, take action by developing, experimenting, learning and adjusting your strategies.

METHODOLOGY

The *Best Places to Work* data is derived from the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data, which includes the views of more than 421,000 respondents who participated in the survey from April through June of 2015. Government-wide scores represent the views of all respondents to the FEVS.

Findings are based on the views of officials from a number of law enforcement agencies that participated in a workshop in February 2016. FBI findings are based on an interview conducted in November 2015.

The story of Stephen Richardson is based on his *Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals* nomination in 2013.

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