



Does your agency have a speak-up culture?

- **Protecting state resources is every employee's duty and responsibility.**
- **Do not ignore or rationalize away an activity or transaction that does not look, smell, or feel right. Instead, report it!**
- **It is important that management cultivate and promote a "speak-up culture."**

If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is probably a duck. If it smells like rotten eggs, the eggs are most likely rotten. If an apple has worm holes and bruises, it is undoubtedly a bad apple.

Every one of us has used these clichés in one form or another to make the point that it is foolish, perhaps dangerous, to ignore, discount, or rationalize obvious warning signs. Stated another way, it is wise to consider suspicious events, actions, or irregularities as red flags that something is amiss.

Most of us would act quickly to thwart and report anything suspicious or improper taking place which could negatively impact our personal assets, safety, or livelihood, or that of those close to us. The same response to suspicious events or misconduct is needed by state employees in their capacity as overseers and protectors of the state's resources. In fact, various statutes and statewide policies demand that state employees be alert to threats and questionable activities which could prove harmful to the state. Furthermore, if confronted with evidence of wrongdoing, employees are required to report that information through designated agency channels and to the applicable authorities, including the Legislative Auditor.

For agency heads and senior leadership teams, this obligation is even greater. In addition to looking out for questionable and inappropriate activities themselves, management must develop and maintain formal, retaliation-free communication channels for employees to report suspicious activities, pursuant to MMB Statewide Policy 0103-01, *Code of Conduct*.

More important than establishing reporting channels, agency management teams must develop and foster a "speak-up culture." A

speak-up culture is one where employees feel obligated, comfortable, and rewarded for reporting internal control weaknesses or other matters that do not look, smell, or feel appropriate to them.

Hallmarks of a speak-up culture include:

- 1) Supervisors that lead by example by being continuously watchful for irregularities;
- 2) A management team that takes each employee report of misconduct seriously, acts promptly to investigate and resolve the matter, and delivers employee discipline swiftly, fairly, and consistently, if required;
- 3) Open-door practices where staff feel comfortable conveying suspicions and information of wrongdoing up the chain of command without fear of punishment or retaliation; and,
- 4) Management acknowledgement and reward of staff who have the fortitude to share internal control weaknesses, suspicions, or evidence of impropriety.

Ultimately, the organizational culture, coupled with management actions, will determine the effectiveness of the state's whistleblower statutes and code of conduct and internal control policy reporting requirements.

Suggested Action steps: Think about the culture of your agency. Does the culture invite and incent staff to look for irregularities and report them when identified? If not, consider what you can do to help cultivate a speak-up culture for the organization.

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