

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS



OCT - 5 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Agency Heads

FROM: David J. Apol 
Acting Director and General Counsel

SUBJECT: The Role of Agency Leaders in Promoting an Ethical Culture

As a leader in the United States Government, the choices that you make and the work that you do will have profound effects upon our nation and its citizens. It is essential to the success of our republic that citizens can trust that your decisions and the decisions made by your agency are motivated by the public good and not by personal interests.

You are ultimately responsible for the ethical culture within your organization. The priorities that you set, the messages that you deliver, and the actions that you take demonstrate your level of commitment to ethics in Government. Your personal conduct sets a powerful example for the employees in your organization.

I am grateful to agency leaders who have demonstrated their commitment to ethical service. At the same time, I am deeply concerned that the actions of some in Government leadership have harmed perceptions about the importance of ethics and what conduct is, and is not, permissible. I encourage you to consider taking action to re-double your commitment to ethics in Government. Attached is a sample of actions that OGE has observed in Government agencies, which you can take to strengthen the ethical culture in your agency.

The citizens we serve deserve to have confidence in the integrity of their Government. The public's trust is not guaranteed. We must earn that trust every day, because the loss of that trust is catastrophic. I want to personally thank you for your service and your work to earn and secure the public's trust.

Attachment



Attachment to *The Role of Agency Leaders in Promoting an Ethical Culture*

Suggested Actions for Agency Leaders

- Demonstrate personal ethical behavior by modeling a “Should I do it?” mentality (versus a “Can I do it?” mentality)
- Talk about the importance of ethics to your organization by including ethics themes in speeches, communicating ethics priorities in memos, and recognizing the support that ethics officials provide. For example:
 - the Secretary of Defense recently stated his expectation that all employees maintain high ethical standards¹
 - the Secretary of Agriculture recently announced new ethics training initiatives and encouraged employees to participate²
- Get to know your ethics program, and ensure that it is staffed by qualified personnel and has sufficient resources
- Include ethics officials in meetings of senior leaders
- Recognize and praise honorable service by employees in your agency
- Underscore the consequences to the organization and its mission of unethical behavior
- Promote a safe culture for reporting misconduct

¹ Memorandum from James N. Mattis, Sec’y of Def., U.S. Dep’t of Def., to Dep’t of Def. Employees (Aug. 4, 2017), http://ogc.osd.mil/defense_ethics/resource_library/2017%20ethics%20letter.pdf (URL updated Oct. 6, 2017)

² Press Release, U.S. Dep’t of Agric., Perdue Unveils New USDA Ethics App for Executive Branch Employees (Aug. 23, 2017), <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2017/08/23/perdue-unveils-new-usda-ethics-app-executive-branch-employees>.