

The State Inspector General (SIG) began operations in August 2012 under State statute as an independent agency to conduct unbiased fraud, waste, and abuse investigations in the operations of the Executive Branch. A legislative mandate in the SIG's mission is to pass "lessons learned" from our investigations and management reviews to all state agencies to stimulate Agency Heads reflection on how their respective agencies may handle similar issues, which at a minimum is a soft quality control and at its best, inspires positive change. Following is the SIG's fifth "Lessons Learned Alert."

SIG Lessons Learned Alert No. 5

Two Recent SIG Hotline Trends: Time and Attendance Abuse & Outside Employment Impinging on State Workday

During my first six months on the job last year, there were a number of complaints pertaining to abuse of state vehicles. I can't remember the last time the SIG received a similar complaint, so whatever controls have been put in place by agencies on state vehicles seems to be working.

The current trend in the past six months were employee complaints about fellow employees abusing time & attendance or their outside (secondary) employment impinging on their state workday. Due to the pattern and specificity of some employee complaints, the SIG looked into several of these complaints. The outcomes are what most managers would expect – not as egregious as portrayed, difficult in collecting evidence to "prove up" complaint, but there appeared to be some level of inappropriate behavior that was divisive and disruptive to others in the workplace.

The purpose of this alert is to raise awareness on these issues, yet lend support to managers using flexibility, in both workplace schedules and authorize secondary employment, as an asset in maintaining employee motivation, particularly when other forms of state compensation are not available. Further, given the nature of our work, many employees operate with great autonomy requiring managers in the same organization to develop different work rules to meet their unique missions. Nevertheless, absent clear policies reinforced with management expectations and follow-up, human nature has the potential to slide down a slippery slope of incremental stretching of workplace rules.

The triggering event for this SIG alert was a complaint involving a co-worker keeping a very detailed journal on the time & attendance abuses of a fellow employee. All I could think about was where was their supervisor who allowed this chain of events to unfold with likely a bad ending for all involved? A famous man once said, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," so maybe using this alert to sensitize your managers may prevent future personnel issues.

I have a personal philosophy that leadership tends to go against human nature. Leadership requires proactive engagement to see problems and address, preferably while small, which many managers, particularly young first line supervisors, may opt to just avoid due to the inherent need to have some level of confrontation. First line supervisors are the backbone of every agency, but they need the top down expectation to be proactive, such as in these two trends, to be assertive to set expectations and engage/confront even small problems - to keep them small.