

SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



Recap of 12/11/25 conversation with Judy England-Joseph: The state of employee engagement in the public sector

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

One of the most delightful things about this network is that you never know who will turn up! On this occasion, in addition to Judy England-Joseph – who probably has forgotten more about employee engagement than most people will ever know – every other person who joined has made years' worth of effort to make government work better through its people in some way. That includes someone we haven't seen for almost 15 years, whose employee engagement experience extends to consulate Foreign National employees in addition to American Foreign Service Officers. It was a privilege to be with everyone, and a great way to wrap up 2025.

This time around, everyone in the room had federal government experience. Some of you know Judy from the years she spent working with the Partnership for Public Service as Research Director, where she focused on the federal Best Places to Work survey reports and other strategic human capital issues. Or, you may be aware of the wide-ranging oversight work she did while serving as a senior executive at GAO. Or, you may know that, via GAO's Center for Audit Excellence, she continues to do work with federal Inspectors General, State Auditors, and Supreme Audit Institutions (GAO equivalents) around the world.

However, Judy's subject for this talk was the local government employee engagement work she's been doing under the auspices of CPS HR Consulting. As we may have expected, the issues are very similar to the ones we experienced in the federal agencies in which we worked. However, this was not same-old,

same-old, partly because new issues are emerging in addition to the perennial ones with which we are all familiar. It's clear that the stakes have gone up. Here are some remarks Judy made about her conversations with police and fire chiefs:

- Society is changing. The front line needs to be kept safe.
- Law enforcement and rescue personnel often don't think the organization has their back
- Not everyone sees the safety of victims or residents as their job
- Cutbacks resulting in one officer to a car lead to less opportunity for de-escalation
- Fire departments now deal with fewer fires (due to better building codes) and more calls related to the aging population, increasing the need for EMT certification

The mention of aging prompted group storytelling around generational differences. Judy said that, since she defines leadership as the ability to influence others, she feeds survey results back to people at all levels of an organization, not just executives, urging everyone to hold up a mirror to promising practices while asking, "Do I do this?" If the answer is yes, then the next question is, "How can I do it better, and more often?"

Judy's slide deck, which was as value-laden as her remarks were, provides much food for thought. It concludes with 18 specific actions leaders can take to improve engagement, the bedrock of sustained organizational high performance (my words). Those actions focus on three areas:

- Focus on Building Effective Work Relationships
- What and How You Communicate
- Create and Maintain a Stable, Transparent, Consistent Process for Change

Once the "Who was in the room" message went out after this session, the discussion continued a little longer than usual. You're invited to view and think about how you can use the information in Judy's slides, which are available at: [\[Link\]](#).

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter
Be the Pebble LLC
BM Martin Solutions
Charlestown, RI Town Council, Retired
CPS HR Consulting
Old Dominion University

U.S. Government Accountability Office
U.S. Department of State, Retired
U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

People joined from Colorado Springs, CO, Wickford, RI, Spotsylvania, VA, and the DC/MD/VA Metro Area.

Each time, we begin with a round of introductions to warm up the space. Afterward, participants are sent a "Who was in the room" message to facilitate ongoing connection. Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,
Kitty Wooley

