

Army Audit Agency again ranks among best places to work

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From left to right, Max Stier, president and CEO, Partnership for Public Service; USAAA Deputy Auditor General Joseph Bentz; Auditor General Randall Exley; and staff members Ira Smallwood and Elizabeth Casciaro at the ceremony honoring the 2014 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government. USAAA placed fifth in the agency subcomponent category in 2014.

FORT BELVOIR, Va. (Feb. 13, 2015) -- The U.S. Army Audit Agency has been rated, for the fifth year in a row, as one of the best places to work in the federal government.

There are many reasons why employees are so happy, said Auditor General Randall L. Exley, highlighting what he described as the agency's important mission of serving Soldiers, families and the American people.

For 2014, the agency, headquartered at Fort Belvoir, ranked 5th out of 315 subcomponent agencies in the non-profit Partnership for Public Service's "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" survey.

One of the most significant aspects of creating that great working climate, Exley said, is that auditors are part of an important mission that directly impacts the warfighters and their families.

"It's about having meaningful work to do first of all, first and foremost, having a reason why you do your work and making sure that your workforce understands how what they do connects," Exley said.

Auditors, who work on a team and spend about six months on an audit, find efficiencies that allow taxpayer money to be saved or put toward other areas, including to better equip, train and protect Soldiers, and support programs and resources for Army families.

Last year, the agency identified more than \$800 million in potential savings, which is a 12-to-1 return on investment, Deputy Auditor General Joseph Bentz said.

In prior years, with larger Army budgets, the Audit Agency routinely has found more than a billion dollars in potential savings, and sometimes even \$2 billion, Bentz said.

About creating a positive work climate, Exley, who shares the lessons of the agency with other Army agencies, said, "It's hard work; it's not rocket science."

It has to do with engaging people, Exley said, having open communication and transparency, and doing work that makes a difference, he said.

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GOOD STEWARDS, DIRECT IMPACT ON SOLDIERS

"We in Army Audit have always done what we do for Soldiers, civilians, and families because they have made so many sacrifices for us," Exley said.

Exley said the importance of the auditor's job is highlighted in a message posted in every field office. The message honors the incredible sacrifices of Soldiers who have risked their lives, been injured, or killed serving the nation and protecting freedoms.

The efficiencies auditors discover will protect the Army's reputation, safeguard taxpayer money, and make meaningful differences for the nation, it says.

Exley and other agency leaders routinely visit field offices to meet with all employees. The agency has 20 field offices throughout the United States, and in South Korea and Germany -- although four offices -- Fort Huachuca, Arizona; Fort Knox, Kentucky; Fort Hood, Texas; and Fort Benning, Georgia -- are slated for closure.

Auditors do missions all around the world, with assignments that have taken them to conflict zones, including Iraq and Afghanistan, Exley said.

TOP RANKINGS

In addition to ranking 5th place for subcomponent agencies in 2014, the Army Audit Agency ranked first place in 2012 in the Partnership for Public Service's survey of best places to work in the federal government; second place in 2010 and 2011; and third place in 2013.

In addition to the meaningful work and transparency, Exley said, employees are treated as trusted members who have valuable input. The agency, he said, is in the midst of "building an agency of leaders." There are opportunities for training and professional growth; employees can telecommute and have flexible schedules.

"One of the things we understand we have to do is pay as much attention to the workforce as we do to our clients," Exley said.

Exley, who is charged with overseeing the agency's budget of about \$70 million and its approximately 500 employees, blogs about agency events, and each week phones three or four randomly selected employees to hear what is on their minds.

"I think sometimes you forget that or you're so focused on making the clients happy that you forget the workforce are the ones who really make them happy," Exley said. "They have to be happy too, and productive and inspired about and excited about doing what they do."

That direct and open environment is something agency employees thrive on, Bentz said.

"We develop that through open communication with the folks, build trust throughout the organization and that leads us there to where folks trust their supervisors and their leaders," Bentz said.

"They understand the significance of the work they're doing and they understand that somebody appreciates the contribution they are making and they value that contribution," Bentz said.

MAKING A CAREER OF THE AGENCY

At headquarters here, audit supervisor Kenneth Steffy highlighted the reasons he has stayed at the agency for more than a decade and plans to make a career out of it.

Steffy pointed to the varied and interesting audit projects, career development opportunities, high morale and cooperation, and flexible schedule.

"We have a great leadership team. They're very transparent; whatever is going on in the agency, we're aware of," he said.

Even in the times of budget cuts, agency leadership is "very upfront with us; we know what's going to happen, when it's going to happen," Steffy said. "They're always out in the field talking to us."

But the greatest reason for working at the agency, he said, involves the difference the agency's work makes on those who go into harm's way and their loved ones.

"Being able to make an impact on the Army, I think is one of the greatest things about this agency," he said. "The more money we save, the more the Army can do to help Soldiers and their families in other areas."

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