



Working with Insiders and Whistleblowers

- **Some of the best congressional investigations utilize insights from whistleblowers and insiders.** Insiders can quickly direct you to key documents and internal operations. Without a source, you can waste a lot of time trying to figure out what's going on in an agency or a corporation.
- **Make sure people know how to contact you (and that they *can* contact you).** One way of letting people know that you are beginning an investigation is to send a letter to the agency giving a broad description of your investigation and including your contact information. This serves less to warn the agency than to let potential whistleblowers know how to contact you. You can also work with the relevant trade press to accomplish this goal.
- **Figure out what's important.** There are tons of whistleblowers out there, and millions of pages of documents that could potentially be used in innumerable investigations. Know what's most important to your boss and set your priorities accordingly so you don't get buried by paperwork.
- **Be sympathetic.** In coming to you, insiders and whistleblowers are taking a huge risk, and making an equally significant break from the places they work and the lives they have established there. The journey that has brought them to this point has likely been extremely difficult, and you need to try to understand their situation.
- **Find out if your whistleblower has become known internally.** More often than not, whistleblowers have already spoken to their supervisors, only to be frustrated time and time again. They are usually coming to you as a last resort, and are already well known by the leadership within their respective agencies. If you know who knows about their complaints, you'll know the degree of secrecy with which you need to work.
- **If at all possible, keep your whistleblower anonymous.** Keeping your whistleblowers' identities secret not only helps them in their professional lives, it also helps you with your investigation: more likely than not, as soon as the agencies know your source(s) of information, the agencies will probably prevent your whistleblowers from having access to other resources that could help your investigation.
- **Make sure your whistleblower knows what he or she is getting into.** Be cautious before asking people to come forward in the media or in hearings. Make sure they know the possible professional and personal repercussions of their actions. When the agency becomes aware of your investigation, its first priority will often be to find out who leaked the information rather than to fix the problem that was exposed.

Over

- **The whistleblower's motivation shouldn't dissuade you.** Agencies often attempt to discredit whistleblowers by alleging ulterior motives or a personal vendetta. If a whistleblower's information is accurate, detailed, and has sufficient backup, it shouldn't matter what the reason for revealing the problem is—the motive only affects whether they'd make a good witness in a hearing.
- **Protect your whistleblower.** There are ways to get what you need from an agency without requesting specific documents. If you ask for a specific document, it will give the agency clues as to who has been tipping you off. If you ask for some grouping of documents that you know will include what you are looking for, you cast a wide net that throws them off from identifying your source.
- **Stand by your whistleblower.** If your whistleblower becomes known, ask your boss to write a letter on his or her behalf explaining that he or she is cooperating in a congressional investigation and that any negative actions against him or her will be considered retaliation.