

Nominee: Michael Parker, Director, Chief Counsel, Internal Revenue Service

Nominator: LaNita Van Dyke, chief, Publications & Regulations Branch, Chief Counsel, IRS

Why is this person a great federal leader?

As a leader, Mr. Parker's top priority is always caring for the people under his responsibility. His basic leadership philosophy is that by taking care of those responsible who perform the mission essential tasks, the success of the organization is accomplished by default.

When he assumed leadership of the Legal Processing Division (LPD), Chief Counsel, Internal Revenue Service, which consisted of four branches and a staff of 65, LPD was still maturing having been established for only two years. Prior to the standup of LPD, the responsibilities of the four branches were spread among several different associate offices with no specific or logical business reasons. This led to the staff of the branches considering themselves as completely separate entities and not part of the division. Mr. Parker realized this was something that had to be resolved quickly. He began by walking among the different branches and engaging the staff, more on a personal basis than business, always reinforcing the concept of division being one unit with the same goal. [Note: the previous director did not feel it was important enough to learn the names of all the staff, much less try to engage them in any way.]

When a branch had a staffing shortage, he presented an opportunity for those in other branches to be temporarily assigned and gain experience in other areas of the division. Due to limited ability for career progression within the division, he revised specific job descriptions to more accurately reflect duties and allow for someone to serve an entire career within the division and progress from a GS-5 mail clerk to the GS-15 director. Also, to give the branch chiefs broader experience, he would rotate them among the four branches. Not only did this broaden their experience, but it also exposed them to staff they rarely interacted with previously.

To further bring the division together as one, he established a division motto, "Makin' It Happen." From that he had T-shirts and coffee cups made at his expense that included the motto, the division name and the Chief Counsel's seal. These items were given to all staff members and to the top leadership in the agency. Further examples of how he improved morale was the establishment of an annual division walk, often provided lunch for the division and supported different events, e.g., summer "cook-in," pre-Thanksgiving party, Halloween and an event that encouraged the staff to participate in the annual employee survey.

Mr. Parker ensured the staff was appropriately recognized at an annual award ceremony. Though the staff of the agency is comprised primarily of attorneys, LPD, which contains only non-attorney support staff, consistently had a higher percentage of award recipients than any of the legal divisions. Also, by virtue of Mr. Parker's written justifications, eight LPD staff members received Chief Counsel National awards during his seven year tenure as the director. The categories of the awards are: Excellence in Management, Customer Service, Outstanding Mentor, Innovation, and Exceptional Administrative Services.

In addition, Mr. Parker received the following Chief Counsel National awards: Manager of the Year (the highest award for non-attorneys), Customer Service, and Innovation. The end result of Mr. Parker's lead-

ership was a more cohesive unit, an environment where the staff felt the leadership cared about their concerns, and a staff that would do whatever was needed to ensure the success of the division, and not just their specific branch. These results were quantified in the annual employee survey. Each year the overall results typically showed an increase in employee positive ratings.

Give at least one specific example of a time this person has shown their exceptional leadership abilities.

One of Mr. Parker's strongest leadership traits is that of a mentor. Though there are several examples of his mentoring staff members, and, through his guidance, how they would come to recognize their potential and blossom into leadership positions within LPD or move on to leadership positions in other agencies.

The best example of his success in mentoring individuals is of an employee that rose to become the chief of a branch that plays an integral role in ensuring the Department of Treasury is able to release for public inspection tax regulations that affects all taxpayers. This crucial task often had the interest of the White House. Through Mr. Parker's guidance, she excelled as a leader and a mentor. She was awarded the Chief Counsel's National Award for Mentoring 2008 and the Chief Counsel's Excellence in Management in 2012.

As the director of LPD, Mr. Parker was responsible for receiving and processing legal documents (petitions, orders, decisions, motions, etc.) served on the IRS by the United States Tax Court. Approximately 100,000 documents are received annually. These documents are extremely time-sensitive and critical for the enforcement of tax laws. It was imperative that the prompt and accurate processing of the documents was done within 24 to 48 hours of service. The consequences of any failure to get the documents processed timely could impede the IRS' ability to collect tax revenue in amounts that could be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars or higher.

In June 2006, the IRS office building was flooded due to heavy rainstorms. This resulted in the building being closed immediately and remained closed for several months. Neither the Tax Court nor the field officer were affected by the storms and remained operational. And the Tax Court allowed no reprieve in the time requirements for filing answers, briefs, motions, etc. Therefore, it was critical that Mr. Parker quickly establish a satellite office with adequate automation support for the 10 employees needed to process the documents.

Upon being informed of available office space in an office building located about one mile from the main building, he immediately gathered his managers and began the challenging task of quickly establishing operations in the new location. To further complicate this daunting task was that IRS building had no electrical power and the LPD offices were located on the fifth floor, thus adding to the difficulty of moving files, supplies and equipment needed for processing the documents. Mr. Parker was able to assume responsibility of a computer training room and a conference room. He quickly assessed what needed to be accomplished in order to establish a working office, delegated responsibilities among the managers, provided guidance on how he expected the office space to be setup, and oversaw each aspect.

Within two days operations were fully established. Though a two-day backlog had occurred, within three days all Tax Court documents had been processed and the backlog was eliminated. The Tax Court documents were processed in a timely manner with no adverse effect. During the six-week period in this makeshift office, more than 15,000 Tax Court documents were processed in a timely manner. This entire process of relocating the office occurred two more times within a four-month period, once to another temporary building located and then back to our permanent office facilities. Through his leadership and his internal drive to not fail, he ensured that each time the office was again quickly established with no adverse effect on operations.

What qualities do you look for in a great leader?

I look for three basic qualities in a great leader: 1. Does this person have a passion for people? Without this quality no one can be considered a great leader. 2. Is this leader able to connect with those he/she is responsible for at a personal level that honestly conveys a message that he/she cares for the wellbeing, personally and professionally, of those who look up to him/her for leadership? 3. Lastly, but just as important, does the leader lead by example? In other words, does he/she put their money where their mouth is. Without this, the above listed qualities will not be meaningful. Mr. Parker exceeds these qualities.