

## **Interview of Dr. Ron Sanders – Chief Human Capital Officer**

**With Mr. Andrew Pourinski of Federal News Radio  
“Ask the Chief Human Capital Officer”**

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ANNOUNCER: Welcome to “Ask the Chief Human Capital Officer,” brought to you by workforamerica.com, powered by Career Builder, the best place for federal government jobs on Federal News Radio AM 1050. Every week Federal News Radio interviews the CHCOs of federal agencies about the latest human capital directives, challenges, and successes. “Ask the CHCO” with your host, Andrew Pourinski.

ANDREW POURINSKI: Welcome today to “Ask the Chief Human Capital Officer.” We are talking today with Dr. Ron Sanders. He is the chief human capital officer for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and Dr. Sanders, first I would like to welcome you to the program.

DR. RON SANDERS: Thanks.

MR. POURINSKI: Well, let’s start off talking about DNI and the current human resources issues that you’re dealing with over there.

DR. SANDERS: Let me count the ways. Actually, let me identify three really big issues that occupy each about 50 percent of my time. So you add that up and it’s obviously more than 100 percent. First, recovering our workforce, trying to recoup some of the lost capability, the result of downsizing in the ’90s. Secondly, trying to establish the Office of the Director of National Intelligence as an institution. We are a brand-new agency created in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with some unique challenges there.

And then lastly – and this is a page right from Director McConnell’s 100-day plan and now the 500-day plan, both of which are designed to help execute the national intelligence strategy, and that is to build a culture of collaboration in the intelligence community, to take those 16 agencies that cut across six cabinet departments and try to build a single cohesive team out of them eliminating some of the natural bureaucratic barriers that occur between organizations.

MR. POURINSKI: You mentioned in that last answer the 100-day plan. I know that recently wrapped up. Can you tell us how that went in terms of a human resource standpoint and where you are looking to move from here?

DR. SANDERS: I had a couple of major deliverables under the 100-day plan. Perhaps the most significant was the issuance of final implementing instructions for our civilian joint duty program. I am a believer in this. I think this has the potential for truly transformational impact in the intelligence community.

If you're not familiar with the term, "joint duty," it's patterned after the military, and it stems from a conclusion that some very smart people reached about two decades ago in the Pentagon and in the Congress, that we would not be able to fight, and more importantly, win future wars as separate military services. We had to do so in an integrated, joint way. And that same lesson applies to the intelligence wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So back to my earlier point: 16 agencies and six cabinet departments, each pretty stove-piped. The various commissions that looked at the intelligence community after 9/11 said you need to be more integrated. You need to be more like a real community.

And so one of the answers – in my view, one of the most important answers to that challenge is to create a requirement for civilian leaders to have one or more joint assignments, that is, a detail to another part of the intelligence community, to the DNI or from one agency to another in order to broaden their perspective, provide that enterprise focus, and build the social networks across those organizational lines to encourage more collaboration and information sharing, literally to help us to be better able to connect the dots. That was one of the 100-day planned deliverables. The director had a signing ceremony with several cabinet secretaries at his shoulder to demonstrate their commitment to this new and I think revolutionary effort.

MR. POURINSKI: Let's talk now about your workforce and your manpower. How would you assess your situation right now? Are there any shortages? Are you looking to fill positions, any critical needs or anything like that?

DR. SANDERS: Yes, yes, and yes.

MR. POURINSKI: Okay.

DR. SANDERS: I already touched on this. By design or by default, the intelligence community was downsized dramatically in the '90s. Whatever else their faults, our intelligence agencies on 9/11 just didn't have enough people to do the job. We have been trying to grow ever since. That is not a short-term proposition. It requires long-range workforce planning because it takes five, seven, eight years to take a raw recruit and develop him or her into a seasoned intelligence analyst or a case officer or somebody familiar with our own esoteric brands of technology.

So in my view, while we have been at it since shortly after 9/11, we're about halfway there, both in terms of quantities – the overall numbers are of course classified, but we have our employment targets, the levels. But even more challenging to me is the quality, the skill sets that we are looking for.

If you look back at the '90s when we had what many call a bipolar world, our focus was communism and containing it, the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact nations, the People's Republic of China. Today's world is exponentially more complex, and that means we need people, our analysts, our technical people, our case officers on the ground who know far more than just those relatively few narrowly focused targets, but literally the entire world, all of the peoples, all of the

cultures, all of the languages, to be able to analyze them, to be able to operate in them. So that makes recruiting and developing and then deploying that workforce infinitely more challenging.

We are getting there. We are blessed with tens of thousands of interested applicants, but sorting through that to get the right skill sets, some of the esoteric languages, or esoteric technologies that we need in the IC, that is a huge challenge for our agencies.

MR. POURINSKI: You mentioned that you have tens of thousands of applicants. Do you feel that you have enough applicants rolling in or are you still looking for more?

DR. SANDERS: We're always looking for more, again, because while we get lots of applicants, to be able to sort through that, it sometimes takes as many as a hundred applicants to find one recruit that meets our own particular skill requirements. Some of the foreign languages that we need – of course, we have to hire U.S. citizens; that is the law. And if you look at the number of U.S. citizens that are fluent in Arabic or Farsi or Urdu or Pashto, then the labor market gets a lot tighter.

And one of the other deliverables under the 100-day plan was for us to develop and then begin executing a strategy to recruit more first- and second-generation Americans, people with those languages, and the cultural awareness of many, many different countries to be able to attract them to the IC and then bring them on board. So that is another key part of our strategy.

MR. POURINSKI: Do you have any specific initiatives or programs targeted to finding these people that may speak Farsi or Arabic or Urdu or something?

DR. SANDERS: A couple of our agencies, most notably NSA, CIA, and FBI have done really good work – I think groundbreaking work in reaching out to these communities. And we have taken a page from them. We actually convened a summit of heritage community leaders and organizations in June.

But we had about a dozen-and-a-half Arab-American groups, Pakistani American, Indian American, Chinese American, Korean American – you name it, we tried to reach out. And people in those communities have a lot of concerns about working in the intelligence community. They come from countries where the countries – the intelligence agency is something to be feared. So we learned a lot from them. We learned some of the misconceptions that we have to help correct. I hope they learn from us what we are after and the fact that we can provide members of their communities a very, very interesting employment.

We have found that first- and second-generation Americans are extremely patriotic. They are grateful to be here. They want to give something back, and we hope the intelligence community can try to provide an avenue for that.

But based on the experiences of the three agencies I mentioned and the feedback we got from that summit, we are going to start very, very targeted marketing to those heritage communities, including bilingual recruit marketing materials, websites, et cetera, visits working

through and with those community organizations to attract those first- and second-generation Americans.

This is really exciting stuff. It's got a tremendous upside as far as our mission capability is concerned.

ANNOUNCER: We're going to take a quick break, but up next, we'll talk about training as well as some incentives being offered to attract employees to the intelligence community. Stay tuned.

(Commercial break.)

MR. POURINSKI: And welcome back to "Ask the Chief Human Capital Officer." We are talking today with Dr. Ron Sanders. He is the CHCO for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. And Dr. Sanders, I want to ask you about whether there are any incentive plans going on to attract employees. I know a lot of other agencies talk about telework. Obviously in your agency, it would be pretty hard to telework in many of those positions.

DR. SANDERS: Telework is difficult given that our information systems are very, very secure and extremely well fire-walled from unclassified open Internet. So telework is problematic. I think what we offer is far more intangible. Our mission is still a very powerful magnet among first- and second-generation Americans as well as citizens at large.

MR. POURINSKI: So you are looking for people in many ways who buy into the mission.

DR. SANDERS: Yes. Who are looking for a way to give back but in this own unique way. We are, after all, on the frontlines of the global war on terrorism. In fact, many of our people are in front of the frontlines, and we need a unique set of skills. So I think that attraction, the intangibles of working for the intelligence community, that is part of our pitch to new recruits and to applicants.

MR. POURINSKI: Let's turn now to talking a little bit more about training and development. Are there any new initiatives going on in the training area to help improve maybe or speed up training time for – you mentioned I think it takes about eight years you said to fully bring up a recruit.

DR. SANDERS: There are a number of initiatives underway to do that, to sort of compress the lifecycle, if you will, from a recruit – train, develop, and then deploy. Part of this going to be tied directly to our joint-duty program. There is a companion joint leadership development effort that focuses first on professional development, teaching our mid-career intelligence professionals about all of the parts of the community and how they work together, and so that is going to be a critical piece in addition to technical training, language training, et cetera.

We have invested very, very, very heavily in language training, both through distance learning and in the classroom as a way of enhancing some of those critical foreign language skills that we need.

MR. POURINSKI: As you know, as we all know, that your agency was implemented about a little over two years ago. How would you say the implementation is going two years on?

DR. SANDERS: It's going.

MR. POURINSKI: (Chuckles.)

DR. SANDERS: This is transformation, and the book says transformations take five to seven years. I worry because I don't think we can take that long. I still have a sense of urgency and I know my colleagues do.

Here is the challenge that the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act gave us: The DNI does not have chain-of-command authority over the intelligence agencies. He has some budget authority and some personnel authorities, mainly the appointment of some of the agency heads, but as a general proposition, he can't tell them what to do. They all work for different cabinet secretaries, or in the case of CIA, an independent agency.

So I think in the short term, that has made implementation much more of a challenge. It's not, like, for example, the Department of Homeland Security where the cabinet secretary can say I'm going to combine these organizations and establish these policies, and impose this information system. We have to take a far more collaborative approach, and that takes time.

My own view is that at the end of the day, over the medium and long term, we'll be better off for it because we truly will reach a consensus. For example, I hope we get a chance to talk about our efforts to develop a pay-for-performance system in the community.

In order for us to do that, we have to get those cabinet departments to all agree on a common way ahead. We do have the binding force of common mission and common values. We have to translate that into a common set of personnel policies. And again, we don't have the authority to say at the end of the day, he will do this. So we have to reach agreement. But when we do, the foundation for that system, based on that agreement, based on that collaboration, I think will be very strong. It will be far more resilient than if we had simply imposed it.

So we talked a little bit about joint duty. Getting that program up and running, doing the policy development and program development work to get it to the point where Director McConnell can sign the directive. That took 15 to 16 months of very hard discussions, very hard negotiations because again, we are doing something there as we are in pay-for-performance, something I think is revolutionary. We are creating policies that cut across cabinet lines. Joint duty will actually help affect assignments across cabinet and agency lines.

And you know that our experience to date in developing people, in encouraging mobility across departments has been generally a failure. People just don't move; they get in one

organization and they stay there for life, and yet we have concluded in the intelligence community that movement is essential to our mission.

So that is a very longwinded answer, but the bottom line is, in the short term, it's going to take longer than many of us would like. In the medium- to long-term, we are building a very strong foundation for the future of our intelligence community so I'm optimistic that we'll get there.

MR. POURINSKI: So you in essence are really on the cusp of doing something that no government agency has really done in terms of your position of dealing with people from all different departments and agencies and everything else, and bringing them all together.

DR. SANDERS: Certainly in that collaborative sort of consensus way. Again, I'll harken back to my previous life in the Office of Personnel Management. We would write rules, government-wide rules, and they would be binding on the agencies. And we would get input and we could take it or leave it. At the end of the day, it's not clear how much commitment those agencies had to many of those policies if they were imposed on them. That said, with the intelligence community, that is a choice we don't have. We have to build that consensus, we have to collaborate, and develop policy that way. And, yes, I believe that is a precursor of the way we're going to have to do business in the future, so in that respect we are breaking some new ground.

MR. POURINSKI: And you talked about before about how important it is to get people to move around and to fill certain positions. How tough is that and what kind of steps are you putting in place to encourage advancement on both the executive level and through the ranks?

DR. SANDERS: Actually, we don't make that distinction through the ranks or through the executive level. One leads to the other. Our joint-duty program is in effect our succession strategy, how we are going to develop leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century intelligence community. It starts at grade 13, and we have told our GS-13s, 14s, and 15s, if you expect to be a senior executive in the intelligence community, the civilian equivalent of a flag officer, you must have at least one joint assignment. That is a pretty hard-and-fast rule. There are provisions for waving that rule, but they are very, very hard. I have told our professionals, don't play the lottery. If you think you may be able to get a waver, that is like playing the lottery and the odds are about as good.

The vast majority of our senior positions – and we have many of them – they will require that joint assignment for somebody to qualify. And we have now actually begun phasing that in. Beginning this October 2007, if you are a direct report to an agency head, our most senior civilians, you'll have to have joint-duty experience in order to qualify or get a waver.

So that is our succession strategy. It starts as a 13. In my view, the more joint assignments the better. There will be built-in protections to ensure that people get promoted at comparable rates. You're not putting your career at risk by going off and taking a joint assignment. But we believe at the end of the day, that is the key to developing our 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders, not just in terms of the numbers, but in terms of the mindset, the competencies, this

ability to look at the entire set of intelligence agencies, see how the parts mesh and be able to take action across them.

ANNOUNCER: We are going to take another short break, but up next, we're going to talk about pay-for-performance at DNI. Stayed tuned.

(Commercial break.)

ANNOUNCER: Welcome back to "Ask the Chief Human Capital Officer." We are talking today with Dr. Ron Sanders. He is the CHCO for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

MR. POURINSKI: I want to ask you now a little bit about pay for performance, along those lines as we're talking about advancement and executives, and employees and everything. Can you tell us a little bit about where you currently are in implementing pay for performance and where you're going with that?

DR. SANDERS: Here again I think we're in a unique situation because while a DNI can't order all of the intelligence agencies to move down this path, we all collectively concluded about a year ago that we had no choice. Some of our agencies were already moving towards pay for performance, most notably in DOD and in homeland security. And our senior leadership took a look at the situation and concluded that on one hand, if we really wanted to strengthen the community, and in particular, facilitate movement across the community, we needed to have a far more common compensation system, and oh, by the way, one that emphasized performance far more than the current one does.

But the flip side of that is even more problematic. Just picture a situation where one part of the community pays its civilians one way, another part another way, a third, yet again – there would be no community. And our senior leaders concluded we needed to have that consistency in part to facilitate joint duty, but in part to just keep the community viable.

So we have been at this a year. Once again, each of our member cabinet departments has to literally sign up to this. We have characterized these as treaties, but we have pretty much completed now a framework for a modern civilian performance-based compensation system in the IC that I hope takes advantage of all of the lessons learned at Internal Revenue Service, in DOD both in the labs and now at the National Security Personnel System in the Department of Homeland Security.

Next year we'll begin implementing it starting with phasing in a new set of performance management system requirements that will bring consistency there across the IC. And with that performance management system as a foundation over the next several years, we'll begin phasing it across the community.

MR. POURINSKI: I know you haven't phased it in yet, but have you had much response from employees about what they are thinking about it or anything?

DR. SANDERS: We did an initial round of focus groups, and our employees told us a couple of things that I think are interesting. One, they expressed the anxieties that you would expect. And I don't mean to – I don't take them lightly, but they are concerned that their managers be up to the task, that they be trained. They are concerned that the system be sufficiently funded, et cetera, that there are avenues of redress, and we have tried to address all of those concerns in the design of the system.

Secondly, we have a unique demographic in the intelligence community. We are now more than 40 percent of our workforce with five years or less of service. And this generation of intelligence professionals wants to be paid on the basis of their contribution to the mission, to their expertise, to their – to the results they achieve as opposed to longevity. So our particular demographic says, bring it on; we're interested in this.

And so I think we have a couple of things working to our advantage in that regard. A, they want it so that means they are much more likely to embrace it. And B, we have addressed a lot of their concerns. They also told us when we did our focus groups last spring, don't come back to us until you have got some of the details.

We have told you what we are concerned about, but rather than sort of give us little hints of what is to come, we would like you to show us how the whole puzzle fits together and then let us comment on it. And so beginning this fall, as we finalize the design, it's our intention to begin socializing it with our employees, engaging them, getting their input and making changes where necessary to address any more concerns they may have.

MR. POURINSKI: If I were talking to you in a year from now, what changes, what improvements, what would a human resource situation at DNI look like?

DR. SANDERS: If you were talking to me a year from now, I hope I would be able to say that I have delivered on some of the things that are in Director McConnell's 500-day plan. And that includes a couple of the things we have just talked about. We have just signed our joint-duty directive. That needs to be up and running. It will be phased in over three years, so a year from now we will be well into it. And I hope to be able to see a lot of movement between our agencies, people getting those joint assignments and preparing themselves for leadership.

I hope we have begun to implement a new set of performance-management requirements, performance standards and the like across the IC that will again begin welding that community together. So as we talk here today, we have got the designs, we have got the directives, we have got the policies and strategies that we have unveiled, and we have developed them in a very collaborative way. This time next year, I hope we have begun to establish some beachheads in joint duty, in performance management, in pay for performance.

We haven't had a chance to talk about something that is high on Director McConnell's list, and that is establishing a system of 360-degree feedback for executives, managers, and eventually employees in the IC as a way of encouraging collaboration and information sharing. That too is something we have begun to pilot test, and this time next year, I hope we have the strategy in place and we are well underway towards implementation.

MR. POURINSKI: We have been talking today with Dr .Ron Sanders. He is the chief human capital officer for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Dr. Sanders, I would like to thank you again for being with us.

DR. SANDERS: Glad to. Anytime.

MR. POURINSKI: And that will do it for this edition of “Ask the Chief Human Capital Officer.” Thank you all for listening. I’m Andrew Pourinski.

(END)