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ETHICS

The One Email That Explains Why Three APA Officials Had to Go

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Norman Anderson, chief executive of the American Psychological Association, outside the White House after a briefing on health-care issues in 2012. He announced on Tuesday that he would retire in the wake of a damning report on the APA's role in military interrogations.

The American Psychological Association announced on Tuesday that three top officials — including its chief executive officer — [would leave](#) the [troubled organization](#). This was no surprise: After an [independent investigation](#) found that the APA had worked closely and quietly with the Department of Defense to allow psychologists to participate in brutal interrogations at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and elsewhere, close observers expected heads to roll.

Technically, all three left of their own accord. The association's chief executive officer, Norman Anderson, and the deputy chief executive, Michael Honaker, will both retire. Rhea K. Farberman, the executive director for public and member communications, resigned. The news release announcing the departures was full of praise for their contributions to the APA, along with talk of “organizational healing” and the need for a “fresh start.”

But unless you've delved deeply into the extremely thorough and exhaustively footnoted [542-page review](#) put together by David H. Hoffman, a former federal prosecutor, or perused the thousands of pages of internal APA emails and other documents now posted on the association's [website](#), you might not understand what role — if any — the three played in the APA's shame.

Let's boil it down to one email.

The email in question was sent on October 19, 2005, at 1:46 p.m. The sender is Russ Newman, then chief of the APA's practice directorate. The recipient is Ms. Farberman, the communications director who just resigned. They are discussing the wording of a public statement. The draft of the statement says that the APA advises the Department of Defense to make sure that the work by psychologists during “national-security investigations” at Guantánamo Bay is “safe, legal, and ethical.”

Mr. Newman suggests adding the word “effective” to that list. He explains his reasoning in the email: “While adding ‘effective’ to the first three puts us out there a little bit further, I think it is important to acknowledge that we have something to offer that increases the effectiveness of the process ...”

Effective. That one added word was a nod toward the idea that psychologists could and should participate in interrogations, perhaps making suggestions about how best to extract information, without running afoul of the APA. Indeed, the APA, in this public statement and others, appears to give such practices its blessing.

Providing Cover

One reason Mr. Newman might have cared enough to parse the language of a public statement, other than as a result of his official role with the APA, is that his wife, Lt. Col. Debra Dunivin, was at one time the lead psychologist for interrogations at Guantánamo.

Mr. Newman’s clear conflict of interest was not disclosed, and the Hoffman review found that he and his wife had played significant roles in shaping the association’s ethics policy.

A number of APA officials were copied on the email, including Mr. Anderson and Mr. Honaker, the two other departing officials. If they raised objections, their concerns are not reflected in the email record. Ms. Farberman wrote back to Mr. Newman that she would “make the change,” and she must have, because Mr. Newman’s wording is reflected in the public statement.

It’s only one example, and perhaps a small one. The loosening of the APA’s ethics guidelines was more consequential. But the email encapsulates how the APA was more than willing to provide cover to psychologists actively involved in the George W. Bush administration’s interrogation program, one widely seen as practicing torture,

despite public protestations to the contrary. Pleasing the Department of Defense mattered to the APA, and the association's approval mattered to government officials.

A Hands-Off Manager

A look at the hundreds of emails exchanged by APA officials over a number of years suggests that Mr. Anderson was a CEO with a fairly hands-off managerial style. He is copied on plenty of messages but tends not to weigh in on matters of substance. He was, the emails show, understandably concerned about the association's public image, as the APA was pilloried in the news media as complicit in torture. In one email, Mr. Anderson mentions advice he received from an outside crisis-communications firm.

But he was apparently unaware, according to the Hoffman report, that his director of ethics, Stephen Behnke, was simultaneously working as a contractor for the Department of Defense. He didn't find out about that until he spoke to Mr. Hoffman's investigators. The report describes him as "stunned" and "visibly upset" at the news. Mr. Anderson admitted to investigators that he knew Mr. Newman's wife was a top government psychologist and that he did nothing about that conflict of interest.

Meanwhile, his deputy, Mr. Honaker, did know about Mr. Behnke's military moonlighting, but did not believe it was necessary to report it to the APA's board. Or, apparently, to his boss. Mr. Behnke was [fired](#) as a result of the Hoffman review. In a statement issued on Mr. Behnke's behalf, Louis J. Freeh, the former FBI director who is now with the law firm Pepper Hamilton, wrote that Mr. Behnke "strongly rejects the APA's Hoffman report as a gross mischaracterization of his intentions, goals, and actions."

Mr. Behnke has not responded to interview requests, nor have the three departing officials. Mr. Newman, who sent that October 2005 email about effectiveness, is now provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Alliant International University. He didn't respond to an interview request either.

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SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH

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