



Ben Ross Retires Despite Everyone's Not-so-Secret Desire for Him to Stay with OSHA Region IV.

Insights

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People who do not regularly deal with the local, state and federal government may not realize that there is a huge difference between a “Bureaucrat” and a “Civil Servant.” OSHA has more civil servants than bureaucrats and we are about to lose a civil servant who modelled leadership and an ability to broker deals between employers, labor and OSHA that protected employees. I tire of the endless books on leadership and the self-serving people who pose as leaders, but Ben Ross is the real deal. Our society increasingly shows contempt for nuance and for those who seek a middle ground that protects the interests of those in need. Compromise is not considered the way to advance. Better to be aggressive and unyielding – even though you accomplish nothing – rather than broker a deal that achieves a genuine good.

Ben Ross spent 40 years building a legacy at OSHA. I sat with 100 current and former OSHA personnel who honored him this week. People won’t remember your professional successes, but the people one mentored and whom you affected will preserve your legacy. Respected OSHA manager after manager talked about how Ben protected and backed them, mentored them, and motivated them to pursue OSHA’s honorable mission.

Ben also generated endless quotations such as, *“don’t come to me with a problem unless you have a solution.”* And Ben did so while being human. It was refreshing to hear folks tease Ben about his lively storytelling and endless enthusiasm, while sharing story after story about Ben’s extraordinary record of negotiating deals. Ben was my kryptonite for clients. No matter how negatively a client viewed the Federal government, they left one of Ben’s Mandatory Settlement Conferences with respect for OSHA and a rapport that served them well in the future. Tennessee Area Director Bill Cochran summed it up ... “Ben is a good man.” Ben deserves his retirement. We just liked having him around.

NOTE: Neither Ben or anyone at OSHA was involved with this article or endorsed it. When it comes to Safety, I have respect for many civil servants and union professionals. The fact that we may be on opposing sides, disagree, and fiercely advocate our positions does not diminish that respect. We should show respect to those who accomplish good whether one agrees with them or not. Put simply, despite mutual respect, Ben and I, shall we say, had robust disagreements - that’s part of being a professional. I’ll try to remember these lofty words on my inevitable next occasion of “robust” advocacy

Howard