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Profile in Public Integrity: Mark Greenblatt

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Profiles in Public Integrity: Mark Greenblatt



Mark Greenblatt is an attorney in the Greater Washington area specializing in criminal and ethics investigations. Over the course of his career, Mark worked in several roles to lead investigations into misconduct by senior officials in U.S. and foreign governments, most recently as Director of Special Investigations at the U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General. He also served as an Investigative Counsel for the special investigations unit of the Department of Justice Office of Inspector General. He also led the U.S. Senate investigation into the United Nations' Oil-for-Food Program. Mark is a graduate of Duke University and Columbia Law School,

and was a fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Mark currently serves as Vice Chair of the ethics commission of Montgomery County, Maryland and Vice President of the Marian Greenblatt Education Fund. Mark recently published his first book: Valor: Unsung Heroes from Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front.

How did you first become interested in corruption?

I started specializing in public integrity when I joined the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and led the Senate's investigation into widespread corruption in the UN Oil for Food Program. The moral clarity I felt in pursuing those investigations convinced me that public integrity was the best career path for me.

What makes corruption such a difficult problem to deal with?

Many of the incidents that I investigated over the course of my career involve judgment calls, like contracting or personnel decisions. So the investigations ultimately boil down to sorting out whether the relevant official made the call for proper or improper reasons, which can be extremely challenging.

What's the most important thing you've learned about corruption in your work?

No one is immune from it. I've seen troubling misconduct from senior executives – folks that you would hope adhere to a higher standard and exercise better judgment.

What do you think is the greatest obstacle facing the public integrity community right now?

Limitations on access to relevant materials, particularly emails.

You're on the ethics commission of Montgomery County, where you grew up and currently live. How did you come to serve on the commission?

I had heard about the commission years ago and thought it sounded interesting and rewarding. It's been a great experience – we've addressed some significant issues, and I've worked with tremendous individuals, both commission members and the incredibly smart and hardworking staff.

Do you have any advice for a county considering creating an ethics body?

Make sure the body is truly independent, in terms of leadership and staff. They should not be beholden to officials they could potentially investigate for budgeting, staff performance evaluations, or the like. Also, they should have a mechanism for initiating and conducting investigations that doesn't require approval or financial support from other government actors who might have an interest in the outcome.

Thank you for speaking at CAPI's first conference! What contributions do you envision CAPI making to the public integrity field?

I was so honored to be included in CAPI's inaugural event. CAPI can provide a huge service to the public integrity community in a wide array of areas. I have found that there are tons of resources regarding corruption issues that are disparate and not readily available. Perhaps CAPI can act as a clearinghouse or funnel point to make those resources more available to practitioners. I think it could also act as a unified voice for the community in some ways, such as pushing back in a public manner against limitations on access to important materials. It could also help monitor trends in the industry that can help policy makers make decisions to further public integrity and fight corruption.

The views expressed above are the interviewee's own and do not represent the positions of his employer or of the Montgomery County Ethics Commission.