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The overtaxed investigator: When whistleblower reports aren't properly prioritized

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Most people's minds are averse to accepting risk. If everyone thought about the very real danger that we can crash our cars each time we get into them, there would be fewer people driving to work. Instead, to avoid a great deal of stress, we tend to optimistically assume that we will arrive at our destination safely. While this is a very natural reaction, and one that helps to keep us sane, it is often taken too far. If the illusion of safety is too strong, we might forget to implement the basic skills that help mitigate driving risks. The same idea can be applied to many business situations where frontline managers are perhaps overly optimistic, affecting future business. For example, a lead on a potential new customer may seem like a definite opportunity, or a hotline call about potential asset misappropriation is "most likely" just a data entry error.

When conducting investigations into whistleblower reports of misconduct, the easiest way to avoid stress is often to put makeshift patches on some cases to close them quickly so others can be prioritized. You optimistically assume that your knowledge and experience will carry you through. Most of the time it will. But due diligence, like your seatbelt, is important for the rare times that you need it—not for the many times when you don't. While expecting the best can help to keep us sane, it is important to remember that we should plan for the worst. Vigilance is key to mitigating risk.

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