

EPISODE 473

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[00:00:00] AH: I understand that you have a new book out, Frank, *The FBI Way*. I was just wondering if you could give our listeners a brief distillation of what that book is about.

[00:00:09] FF: Sure. I took 25 years to learn something that I would like to share and tell people they don't need to spend 25 years learning. My takeaway from my FBI career is that the bureau operates at an exceptionally high level of excellence, when the stakes are the highest, when the stress is the strongest. I over 25 years, not only observed that process, but absorbed how it's done in a way that we call values-based leadership.

The takeaway here is you don't have to spend those 25 years. I've distilled it down to what I call the seven C's. I call the book *The FBI Way*. The book says, you can apply high-stress leadership, values-based leadership the way the FBI does, if you take a read and apply the seven C's of the FBI way.

[00:01:05] AH: This is the book that you wish someone had given you 25 years ago?

[00:01:10] FF: Much of the story of my FBI training was sadly on the job. Some of the folks who worked for me. I do wish that someone had handed me this book. The reality is that even after I left the bureau, joined the corporate, big time corporate security world; now I've been in media for three years, I'm finding that the life lessons, the leadership lessons of the bureau apply in any endeavor.

I really was prompted to write the book, not only because I felt so passionately about my FBI experience, but also because I saw the agency that I loved being denigrated over the past four years, sometimes by its own doing, by the way. Then by a presidential administration, that fired an FBI director and other senior executives and caused the public, much of the public to perceive the bureau as some politicized entity. That is death to the FBI's mission. They must remain neutral and objective. This book takes you inside the bureau and gives you the reality of what that day-to-day life is and it's far from political.

[00:02:22] AH: I was speaking to a friend and I told him that I was speaking to you. They're not immersed in the world of espionage and intelligence. I say, what one question would you like to

ask? They said, “Does Frank know James Comey, or Bob Mueller, that he ever worked with them? What's your take on both of those gentlemen?”

[00:02:41] FF: Yeah. I mentioned both of them. In my book, I spend some time talking about them, and particularly Jim Comey. I worked for all the FBI directors over my – that spanned the 25-year tenure of my career. I certainly was named Assistant Director by Bob Mueller, when he was the director. I left the bureau just before Jim Comey came onboard, but I certainly have met him on a number of occasions and spoken with him.

Mueller is what I call a true American hero. I don't mean just his FBI service. That's only a small part of his public service. He was a highly decorated Marine Corps officer in combat in Vietnam. He's got both a law degree and a master's of law. He was a homicide prosecutor. He was an assistant attorney general of the United States, FBI Director beyond the 10-year term, when he was ready to go at 10 years, he got a call from President Obama saying, “We can't possibly find another person to fill your shoes right now. Can you stay for two more years?” He said yes. Then of course, ultimately, became the special counsel over the Russia inquiry into the Trump campaign.

I think very highly of him. I think the most respect for Bob Mueller was earned throughout the government, when he led the bureau after 9/11, after the terror attacks. He was onboard only two weeks as FBI director when those planes hit the twin towers and the Pentagon and that field in Pennsylvania. He had no learning curve. It was time to not only respond to a horrible terrorist act, but to literally transition the FBI from an investigative agency to an intelligence agency.

He led that initiative. In doing so, really saved the FBI after. I talk about this in my book. After the 9/11 attacks, much of congress was calling for the end of the FBI as we know it. He saved it and convinced lawmakers that the FBI as a hybrid law enforcement and intelligence agency was better than splitting into two agencies. As for Jim Comey, a man, as I say, in my book is of the highest integrity and good faith. The kind of guy you'd like living next door to you as a neighbor. Yet, as with all of us, there was a flaw.

The flaw being that he politicize the FBI, when he decided to declare publicly that, “No reasonable prosecutor would ever prosecute Hillary Clinton.” That tended to convince half the population that he had somehow become politicized. Then he lost the other half of the population, when he later announced that he had to reopen the investigation into Hillary. Then

on the eve of the 2016 election, he announced, “Never mind. We haven't found anything new. We're closing that case.” Whenever the FBI is impacting a presidential election, it's a bad year for the FBI. It may take years to overcome those bad perceptions.

[00:05:58] AH: At least, presidential candidates only managed to alienate half of the electorate, but he managed to alienate all of the electorate.

[00:06:07] FF: Exactly. Yeah. The brand and reputation of the FBI is everything. They can't afford to have citizens scratching their heads at their front door. When the FBI is flashing credentials, asking for your help and you have to sit there and go, “You know what? I don't know. I've heard some strange things about the FBI. I don't know if I trust you guys.” That's a problem for all of us. Most of that problem was created by a guy named Donald Trump, who continued to bash the career men and women of the bureau, who come to work every day protecting us.

That's why I dedicated my book to the rank and file, men and women of the bureau. The bureau's got to win back much of the public. Because look, even as we talk, Andrew, the FBI is trying to stop the next act of domestic terrorism. They need the public's help to do that.

[00:06:55] AH: One of the reasons that I love speaking to you as the – it's not just the FBI is a prop to try to sell books. I mean, you really believe in this. You really believe in the FBI as an institution. That really emanates out of you, which made me think, do you ever mess up?

[00:07:14] FF: Oh, of course. First, thank you for that. I wouldn't have written a book about the ethics and integrity and leadership lessons of the FBI if I didn't truly believe. In fact, it would be disingenuous and unethical to do so. The irony would be, I've written a book that's largely about integrity and ethics. If I'm faking that, we're all in trouble. In the book, just to note, the book doesn't claim in any way, that the FBI is a perfect institution. Far from it.

In fact, in the chapter called credibility, I say, credibility is not about being perfect. It's about being passionate about getting it right, owning up to your mistakes and being transparent about how you're going to fix it. As to whether or not I miss it, it's an interesting question. I've had many people say, “Hey, you retired pretty young.” I did my 25 years and I was still young. “Would you go back?”

The answer is, it depends on the given day. Part of the reason agents have mandatory retirement at age 57, or at any age with 20 years of service, is because of the recognized stress of being a federal law enforcement agent. Then if you climb up the ladder, career-wise, they literally told me, I remember the deputy director at the time said, "Frank, congratulations on becoming the assistant director. I want you to know, we don't expect any more than two years out of an assistant director. You will burn out." They were right.

Now, you could argue, well, that's a horrible system. That needs to change. Yes, amen to that. That was the reality. When you say, do you miss it? I don't miss the stress. You can become addicted to adrenaline flow. It's hard to ever again match the mission, or the consequences of what you do. The corporate world certainly doesn't do it. You get addicted to adrenaline and the mission. You miss the caliber of the people. You also acknowledge, I've been there and done that and it's time for someone else to do it.

[00:09:36] AH: I was just thinking there. If you aren't on the up and up, then my faith in human nature is going to be completely destroyed. I've already had my fingers burned with Lance Armstrong. I don't want to go there again.

[00:09:49] FF: Oh, no. Yeah. Well, no, no performance enhancing drugs for me.

[00:09:55] AH: One of the other things that thus made me think about, was there's many people that listen to SpyCast that are current or former intelligence community, FBI. When you think about an organization like the FBI, 35,000 people. How does one get to the heights that you got to? Have you got any advice for any hungry young agents out there? Or anyone that aspires to make some strategic change of an organization?

[00:10:23] FF: Well, yeah. There's a lot there. First –

[00:10:27] AH: Buy the book.

[00:10:28] FF: Well, buy the book. Yeah. You've got a couple of things. One is the bureau's leadership program has come a long way since I first became a, what they call a relief supervisor in the field. Your first look at managing a desk, or the paper that comes through a squad. By that, I mean, in the very old days, it used to be that the guy or gal who would raise their hand and say, "I'm ready for change, or I want out of here, maybe it's time I moved or get

me out of New York City, please. I'll take Washington over that." That led to some really poor leaders.

Then, there were people who rush things. You mentioned the word hungry, which I really – I like and don't like at the same time, depending on what you infer from it. Hungry can often mean, you're willing to skip experiences and rolls up the career ladder. There's a lot of folks who've done that as well. My advice, and that doesn't work well for many people either. Because I readily admit, I don't have these innate leadership skills. Some people do. Some people have incredible people skills, the softer skills necessary for higher levels of leadership. Some people can marry that up with an incredible drive, plus integrity and vision and subject matter expertise. They've got a package going. That wasn't necessarily me.

What I'm seeing is I needed every single rung up the career ladder, and I have held, basically every leadership position there was to hold in the FBI's career progression. Literally, there's a manual for everything in the FBI. The manual said at the time, this is the preferred ladder of progression. You will be a headquarter supervisor, then you'll be a squad supervisor in the field, then you'll be a unit chief at headquarters, then you'll be an assistant special agent in charge in the field, then you'll be a section chief, then you'll be an SAC, then you'll be a VAD, then you'll be an assistant director.

Well, guess what? I did all of that. That was increasingly unusual in the post-9/11 world, because they needed people fast and good. Hey, you're good. Come here. We're promoting you now. I relish the fact that I went through all those hoops, because I needed that seasoning. I needed to experience each of those levels to know, to understand people and to understand the bureau.

[00:13:03] AH: Another question that comes to mind, I guess, it's related as one of the many roles that you've had, that our listeners will be quite interested in, as the assistant director for counterintelligence. I mean, it struck me that if you're responsible for all espionage investigations across the US government, that's a lot to have on your plate. That's a lot to worry about, a lot of responsibility. How do you deal with all of that?

[00:13:31] FF: A lot of people don't know the details of what you just said, which is that the FBI is the counterintelligence overseer for the federal government, by executive order, by presidential order 12333. The FBI is designated as the primary counterintelligence agency. It's

not just for FBI investigations. It is overseeing espionage throughout the United States government.

For example, if a military agency, and of course, they do all the time, sadly, has espionage suspicions, or investigative interest over their personnel. The FBI is not only consulted if it's active duty, but if it's a civilian, or former military, we are that lead agency. That applies throughout the government. It's a big mission that the budget – I think, one of the things that struck me when I took the job, coming from a field office, with a with a sizable budget of its own. It was a very decent-sized field office.

Then, I come on board and I get the briefing of from my budget section chief and she's tells me what our budget is. I will, "What?" Thank God that we had experts to do all of that, and that I could rely upon. To answer your question far more succinctly, as you go up the ladder you learn to increasingly rely on your team, your people, and you relied less and less on you as a hands-on manager. In fact, you are no longer a manager. You are a leader, or executive leader, which is a very different mentality.

You learn to surround yourself with the right people. Boy, that was more than half the battle. Some of the most important decisions I made as an assistant director was who to surround myself with on the team. That makes your life either incredibly easy, or incredibly hard, depending on who you select.

The other thing in terms of surrounding yourself right people, relying on subject matter experts to do their job, it's also learning that you will screw up. If you're a perfectionist at that level, you are going to be miserable and the people around you are going to be miserable. It's okay to make a mistake if you've done it with good intentions and you can learn from it. Leadership is different things at different levels. At that level, it's a lot of letting go. The first lesson that I got in letting go was actually in a field office position. Because of my background, I had applied for the national security leader position in the Miami field office. I got it, just before I arrived in Miami.

It's assistant special agent in charge was that title for that branch. Just before I arrived, the head official in the FBI Miami office called me goes, "Hey, just to let you know, I'm thinking maybe I'm putting you somewhere else in the office. I haven't figured that out yet." I'm, "What? I haven't done much else, other than national security. What do you think about?" He said, "White collar crime." I started doing my homework on Miami and white-collar crime and it was,

the branch was at the time was nine squads of agents, battling police corruption, healthcare fraud, telemarketing fraud, environmental crimes, you name it, bank fraud and embezzlement.

I'm like, okay, I've got an English Lit degree and a law degree. I've never worked a white-collar crime case in my life. Andrew, that was the most valuable experience in letting go and relying on some incredibly talented supervisors of squads that I quickly learned, really knew their stuff. My job was to be their advocate, to shape and guide a vision and get them what they needed. That was incredibly important. One of the pieces of advice I give to any leader, especially younger leaders, is get out of your comfort zone. You will learn a whole lot about yourself and about other people.

[00:17:44] AH: Sometimes if you're Belichick, you just have to let Tom Brady do his thing.

[00:17:51] FF: Yeah. Well, don't get me into Belichick. Belichick is an interesting leadership study in that – I'll give you a real quick thing. The bureau sent me, you're going to regret even bringing up Belichick. The bureau sent me for a couple of weeks to get a certificate at Harvard's Kennedy School. During that experience, they gave us a bunch of case studies to read. Two of the case studies involved an unnamed football coach and an unnamed team who was grumpy, horrible with people skills, horrible with the media, barely uttered a word and had a losing record.

The other case study they gave us, again blind, was a football coach who had an incredible winning record, was still a standoffish with the press and with his own people, but was respected as one of the most brilliant minds in football. At the end of the class, they reveal that both case studies are Bill Belichick. One, when he was the coach of the losing Cleveland Browns. One, when he was the coach of the New England Patriots. The takeaway I had from that, very similar to my thing about letting go, is it wasn't so much about Belichick. It was who he surrounded himself with.

[00:19:09] AH: One of the other things that struck me as well was how would you win over the skeptics among us and the cynics? Well have been quite a cynical age people. Some people will think of values-based leadership. Come on, everyone's in it for themselves. No one really believes this stuff anymore. How would you approach one of those people if you were sitting in a pub having a beer with them trying to win them over?

[00:19:36] FF: I think it's a great question, because I think some people might read the jacket of this book and go, "Okay, so this guy's trying to sell us on leading with values. I've heard this before and yeah, yeah. Good people go far and blah, blah, blah." A couple of thoughts. One, it actually works. In other words, if you're looking for a reason to try this and you're not a firm believer in imposing values, either institutionally or personally on anybody, then look at the end results. Because the track record is that when you lead from core values and your team assimilates the institution's core values, you end up being a more successful leader and a more successful team and a more successful institution.

Because, ultimately, particularly in national security, you're really about preserving what matters most. I mean, think about the FBI's mission. It's about preserving the constitution, the rule of law and our democracy. You can't do that if you don't assimilate those beliefs. In FBI filled with people who don't believe in the constitution is going to fail. Similarly, if the FBI has no core values of its own, it's never going to be able to execute its mission, people won't even buy into the institution itself. Every office would go a different direction. You've got mass chaos.

The same goes for your team, whether you're running a restaurant, or a Fortune 100 company, you need to have a code of conduct based on your core values. If you're a bakery, your core values may be, we are providing nutrition to our village here and we're going to be the best darn bakery there is with a friendly service and best food. If your employees don't buy into that, you will not succeed as a bakery. The same goes for an institution.

[00:21:32] AH: Another thing that I was thinking about as well was being the assistant director for counterintelligence, some of our listeners are much more averse in the intricacies of the federal government and these institutions. Some of the other ones take a little bit more to get their heads around the counterintelligence function of the FBI. There's a director of national intelligence, but the FBI director reports to the Department of Justice. Tell us how is the assistant director for counterintelligence, who's wanting a piece of you? Who are you reporting to? Who are your main interlocutors?

[00:22:13] FF: Yeah. As we explained, that counterintelligence role is bigger than just the FBI. In fact, there are counter intelligence functions at CIA, within the military agencies, and some agencies that you wouldn't even necessarily think about. Treasury has a counterintelligence function, as do several others. Let's first just get a working definition of what CI, counterintelligence really is. It's detecting, deterring and defeating the efforts of foreign

intelligence services operating against the United States. For the FBI, it's defeating those efforts on US soil.

Many people are shocked to realize that it's not just in the movies and in spy novels, where there are actual foreign intelligence officers, spies posted inside the United States every day, from almost all nations, who work often against the interests of the United States. It's the FBI's job to find them and make their life absolutely miserable, so that they don't succeed in their mission. There's often some confusion about the FBI versus the CIA.

The CIA is largely an intelligence agency that collects information for the benefit of the United States. They do that almost exclusively abroad. The FBI is a counterintelligence agency, finding those people inside the US who are acting like the CIA here, but doing it against us. Other people are often taken aback to learn that we still have adversaries in the world who do this. I'm here to tell you that anyone who says the Cold War is over is very mistaken. It's not. The number of actual foreign intelligence officers posted to the United States hasn't really changed over the years. The fight is real. These folks get up every day trying to hurt us.

With regard to my former role as a DA of counterintelligence in FBI, it was a daily connection with all of the partner agencies. When I was new in the job, even surprised to learn, hey, there's a counterintelligence function at this department and this? I did, okay, yep. Now I get it. All right. Then the DNI, it's almost a quarterback role, where they're calling big shots, though. They're up in the booth. If this is an American football game, they're up in the booth making strategic calls and decisions across the intelligence community.

For example, there's a shopping list, a collection list that's updated fairly regularly, where the entire intelligence community is told, you need to do this. Let's focus on this. Let's get this. That brings in another aspect of the FBI, a lot, even fewer people are aware of, which is the FBI also wears not just a law enforcement hat, not just a counterintelligence hat, but an intelligence hat. They do, particularly since 9/11, the FBI does collect intelligence for the sake of information collection inside the United States as well.

[00:25:35] AH: For any listeners that haven't come across it yet, a couple of weeks ago, we had an episode on the Office of Special Investigations in the US Air Force. They've got a very interesting counterintelligence function. I know they spoke quite a lot about working with the FBI.

[00:25:51] FF: Each of the military agencies has a very robust counterintelligence program. I've interacted throughout my career – As a young agent in the field, I worked joint cases. I worked sensitive operations with Army, Air Force, Navy. We had very successful joint operations against adversaries. You can't do it in a vacuum. Counterintelligence is a team sport. You need that 30,000-foot level. I think the best success stories I could point to, at any level that I served in the bureau, were these partnered success stories. There's nothing for example, without getting into classified details, there's nothing passing the adversary disinformation about battle plans in the middle of a war, that causes them to take an approach that causes them to lose the war. I mean, that that is the ultimate example of where a partnership with military, intelligence, counterintelligence, FBI can actually in real war time, pass the enemy information that's going to trick them into thinking something's about to happen. They go left when they should go right and the US wins that skirmish battle or war.

[00:27:18] AH: I've heard you mentioned previously, there's two different approaches to counterintelligence. There's the New York, Washington DC approach. then there's the more provincial cities, or the Miami's, the Cleveland's, some of the other places that you worked. I wonder if you could just speak a little bit more about that, because I found that your take on that really interesting. it was very much informed by your own experience and the field.

[00:27:46] FF: Well, counterintelligence is so many different things, depending on where you are stationed in the world. In my career, I worked in both what we call establishment offices, meaning offices that had major diplomatic establishments. For example, I was in San Francisco. There is a Russian consulate there. There's a Chinese Consulate there. The bad guys are in your backyard. The ultimate examples of that would be the Washington field office and the New York field office.

New York has an interesting scenario, where they've got consulates from every country in the world and they have the United Nations, which means that's another opportunity for adversaries to slip in under diplomatic cover, spies, foreign intelligence officers, whose business card might read first attaché, cultural attaché, military attaché, but really, they're spies as a cover position. Washington field, of course, because the foreign embassies are there and so many of our foreign intelligence officers operate under diplomatic cover, because it protects them and gives them a nice place to work and to work from. All the embassies are in DC.

Those are what we call target-rich environments. It's a different experience when you're working counterintelligence in those offices, because it's not harder or easier, but it's different.

By that, I mean, it's one thing to know that the guy or gal coming out of that embassy door every morning, is likely a foreign intelligence officer, because the three people in that row before him, they were intelligence officers and this one is probably too. You surveil them and you just you determine that by God, they are spying on us. Now, you can take the approach from there.

It's another thing entirely if you're in the FBI, in Mobile, Alabama, or Kansas City. Now, it gets more interesting, because I can assure you that every single field office in the FBI has a dedicated counterintelligence squad. You might ask yourself, "Well, what are they doing in Kansas City, or Mobile, Alabama, or any other state in the middle of America." The reality is, and I experienced that in my career as well. I was assigned to Atlanta, in Cleveland, Miami. I can assure you, there was no shortage of counterintelligence work, but it looks very different.

That means that now, it's even harder sometimes to detect the spy in this picture. Maybe it's a penetration inside in major research university. Maybe it's a penetration inside a targeted high-tech company in your territory. Maybe there's a military base in your region that is a heavy target of a foreign adversary. You find yourself dangling the carrot sometimes at that research university, or at that military base, so that the intelligence officers will be attracted to that carrot, you draw them out, you found them, you work against them. It requires creativity. It requires a lot of work.

When I became the assistant director, because of my background in non-establishment offices, I took a very different view of the nationwide program. That didn't win me a whole lot of friends in the establishment offices, because I started asking some hard questions about what they were doing and what their resource expenditure was.

[00:31:20] AH: One of the things that I found quite interesting about your career as well, as you see the increasing prominence of economic espionage and the stealing of intellectual property, technology, and so forth. I know that you were out in Palo Alto, which is pretty much ground zero for a lot of Visa guests. Speak a little bit more about that, the change that you saw during your career.

[00:31:43] FF: Yeah. When the Berlin Wall fell, it caused the FBI to completely re-examine what counterintelligence meant, because it was no longer almost exclusively about military secrets and political secrets. Those are still hugely targeted. As the bureau came up for some air and

took a look around, we realized that almost any nation when it's in their best economic interest, will spy on the United States.

Now, thankfully, we still have some really good friends in the world, but those are only a handful. The rest of everybody else will spy on you if it's in their economic best interest. What does that mean? It means that it's always easier to steal technology than it is to research and develop it yourself. What has taken years in research, or design at a company, or a university, years to build can be gone in an instant, if the wrong person gets their hands on it.

Economic espionage, I was a part of that. My first assignment as a young supervisor at headquarters, was to a brand-new economic espionage unit. Basically, retraining the workforce to learn the ins and outs of economic espionage. What is in your territory that you're responsible for? What is it that can't walk out the door? You mentioned my time in Palo Alto, Palo Alto is a satellite office out of San Francisco FBI. It was responsible for counter-intel and Silicon Valley, and it was the only fully dedicated satellite office entirely focused on counterintelligence in the entire FBI.

That's because every single intelligence service in the world virtually was working inside Silicon Valley, against the high-tech industry. The good news is everybody wants what America has. The bad news is they're doing anything they can to get their hands on it.

[00:33:43] AH: Would you say that in some ways, it's more difficult to do counterintelligence in the Atlanta, or in the Silicon Valley than the establishment offices, because I guess, if you're in New York, somebody is going to be the code clerk. One of the third deputy secretaries is going to be an intelligence officer. It's just a case of figuring out which is which. Whereas, if you're in Atlanta, I guess, you to smoke them out a little bit more or something?

[00:34:16] FF: I want to be careful not to fall into the trap of saying one is necessarily more difficult than the other, because there's challenges to both. For example, it might be easier to identify a foreign intelligence officer in an establishment office. Now, your task is okay, how do I neutralize this person? How do I even get the ultimate objective, which is to recruit this person for Team America? That is incredibly challenging and requires incredible skill sets.

If I've got this platform in my backyard for spying, it's called a consulate or an embassy, how do I completely cause discord and chaos inside that place, so that they can't function and they don't even want to come back to the United States? That's a good day for counterintelligence agents in those offices. What you turn, what used to be a plum assignment for a foreign

intelligence officer, "Hey, I want to go to the United States, man. That's fantastic." Now, you got people going, "I don't ever want to go back there again." That's a good career for an FBI agent if you've done that.

Then, move out to the hinterlands. Yes, it could be much harder, of course, to creatively draw out and identify the intelligence officers. You're also, when you find one, they're going to stand out like a sore thumb. There's other challenges as well. The economic target, and no matter where you're assigned, that economic espionage program is inherently difficult. I'll tell you why. A couple reasons. One, even big, successful corporations that have sensitive intellectual property, they don't want to spend a whole lot of money protecting it. They will look you in the eye and go, "Are you implying I shouldn't do business in China, or shouldn't have a research center in China, or shouldn't manufacture in this part of the world, because it's a threat? You're wasting my time. Please go away."

You run into that. The other thing you run into in smaller operations, mom and pop businesses, is they don't even necessarily understand why their product is targeted. They have a dual use target. I can recall one time, one officer was assigned to a little mom and pop shop. You walk in and you go, "Can I talk to your security director?" "Well, you're looking at it. I own the company. I'm the CFO, the CEO and I'm the chief security officer. What do you want?" "Well, I'm here to tell you that the paint that you're manufacturing in your little shop is actually targeted by the Chinese intelligence service."

They look at you like you're from Mars. "What are you talking about? There's nothing that we do here that's classified." "Yeah, I know. That's the problem. It's not locked down and you need to lock it down." They're like, "What are you talking about?" Convinced you have a marketing job there when you're dealing with economic espionage.

[00:37:16] AH: I spent a couple of years at the 9/11 Museum in New York City. I can't imagine how difficult it would be to tell someone across New York, that much just be a nightmare.

[00:37:28] FF: Well, a lot of counterintelligence work is surveillance work. Done right, it's a thing of beauty. Because ideally, your target never sees the same person twice. Those people who are specialists in the FBI on counter-intelligence, or national security surveillance, which is very different than criminal surveillance teams, those people live and breathe national security surveillance, and they're very, very good at what they do.

[00:37:58] AH: We're running out of time. I just wanted to touch on a couple of ashes. One of them is just to get a sense of your lay of the land, where we are now, some of the challenges facing the FBI. I'm sure all of our listeners would really like to hear a little bit about your experience with Robert Hansen.

[00:38:18] FF: Let's talk about the challenges, because they're myriad. Number one and again, partly what prompted me to write this book is much of the public has had a period where they questioned the bureau's objectivity and neutrality. That brand protection and that restoration of the brand is number one priority, because the bureau can't succeed without that public understanding of its mission and its objectivity. Number one.

By the way, so some good news, President Biden has said he intends to keep on Chris Ray. I'm not saying that's good news, necessarily, because Chris Ray is fantastic. Although, he very well might be. What I'm pleased to hear is that he's going to honor the 10-year term of the FBI director, which means we're not going to get into the sad rhythm of firing FBI directors at the whim, simply because there's a new president. Many of your viewers need to understand, the FBI director has a 10-year term for a reason to straddle political administrations and not be political. Good news in that. That's challenge number one, restore public trust.

Number two, if we've learned anything over the last four years, it's that the threat is complex and hybrid and even beyond hybrid. By that, I mean, historically, the FBI has had nice neat divisions, counterintelligence division, counterterrorism division, criminal division, cyber division, okay. The bad guys could not care less about which division is responsible for countering their threat. In fact, the threat is coming at us in layered ways, wherein the Russians pose a counterintelligence threat, but they're doing it through cyber, propaganda, through social media, through hacking.

All of a sudden, this stove-piping of divisions, those walls increasingly are coming down at the FBI. There are now hybrid and fusion centers and cells, combining cyber and terrorism and counter-intel and criminal, all working together. That's what we need more and more and more of, because the threat is that diverse today. That's a big challenge. Even the nice little priority list that the agents have pretty much memorized. Any FBI employee can pretty much tell you what the top 10 priorities in the FBI are. I'm not sure that list means anything anymore.

Counterterrorism is number one. Okay. Yeah, I get that. Counter-intelligence is number two. Okay. Three is cyber. All right, now we're not making any sense. Now, what do you mean?

Three is cyber? What's the difference? You cannot tell the difference anymore. That's a challenge. Then a huge challenge investigatively is domestic terrorism. The FBI director has said on the hill, this is the number one threat and even more specifically, hate-based violence within domestic terrorism is the threat.

How the FBI does that, without a domestic terrorism law in place, how they do it without trampling civil liberties and free speech is the challenge of our time right now. They've got to work their way through that.

[00:41:41] AH: I think it would be interesting for the listeners as well, and with that you are in – you worked under Robert Hanson, once upon a time.

[00:41:48] FF: Yeah. As I described in painful detail in my book, my first unit chief coming out of a field office, I go to headquarters for my first time and my unit chief is a guy by the name of Bob Hanson. It's been well-documented through movies and TV shows and books, how odd a man this was. Ultimately, how incredibly damaging he was to US interest, because he ultimately became the most damaging spy in FBI history, responsible for at least the death of 10 individuals, who he identified for the Russian intelligence service as having worked for the United States, while they were Russian.

Years after I worked for him, at headquarters, I was now in a number two role in Miami. I'm driving to work on the Florida Turnpike, I hear on the radio news that the FBI has arrested one of its own, Robert Philip Hanson for espionage for 10 years, on behalf of the Russians. I really had to pull the car over, because I had felt like I was punched in the stomach. I think most agents felt that way. To have worked for him was a shock to the system.

It wasn't a shock, Andrew, because I couldn't believe that he did it. It was a shock because I could believe that he did it. His persona. His eccentricities made sense to me. It caused all of us that work for him to really become introspective and wonder if we had missed something. The reality was, as I say, in my book, that bureau had missed it years ago. Probably should never have hired him and missed it for 10 years.

I put that story in the chapter in my book called credibility. Many of your viewers might say, why in heaven's name would you put that horrible story in a chapter called credibility? I say it, because the FBI screwed up with not detecting Hanson. I also point out that when it became clear that the mole we were searching for, the mole the FBI was searching for in the intelligence

community was an FBI employee, one of the FBI's own, they work in like they were rabid dogs and handcuffed and arrested him and then announced it publicly. We screwed up. This is horrible and here's what we're going to do to fix it. Then, they put in incredible changes to the FBI's security programs to try and mitigate the chance that this would ever happen again.

[00:44:25] AH: You had an interesting encounter with a presidential candidate and with someone on Capitol Hill. Could you speak a little bit more about those examples on the book?

[00:44:36] FF: Yeah. These two stories have been cleared for the very first time by the FBI. There's a number of those such stories in the book that make it perhaps worth reading as well, particularly for your audience. I tell the story as a high-ranking FBI official, where I had to actually confront a sitting member of congress, with the reality that we knew that that member of congress was considered to be an asset, a source, a snitch by a foreign intelligence service.

I similarly, in the same chapter tell the story that I had to sit down across from a minor presidential candidate and tell that candidate that we knew that they were in frequent and clandestine contact with foreign intelligence officers. I tell this story, not just because it's a neat story to tell, but far more importantly, to illustrate that if people think that the concerns around President Trump and his affiliations with Russia and his proven campaign affiliations with Russia were a one off, that they're odd, this isn't going to happen.

I tell these stories, because to illustrate that this is, Trump was not a one-off by any stretch. He got to the presidency. As we speak, some foreign intelligence services spotting and assessing a young talented mayor, state legislator, congress member in the hopes not only that they add value right now, but more importantly, that they might add value later in their career if they climb the ranks. We all should be concerned about that. That's why I've written that we need another way of vetting our candidates for office. We need to understand that a candidate could pose a national security threat. That's a different vetting process.

That's mandating financial disclosures, tax returns, business entanglement, foreign travel of you and your family and your foreign business interests of you and your family, so that we can conduct publicly. I'm not suggesting the FBI, that candidates, heaven forbid, nobody wants bureaucrats deciding who runs for office. No, no, no. I'm suggesting the public needs to be equipped to make a far more informed decision than we've been making in the past.

[00:47:09] AH: I've heard you use the example that even an employee CIA has a relatively junior capacity, they will be more closely vetted than the future president of the United States.

[00:47:24] FF: The example I use, Andrew, is that the FBI spends more time vetting and background clearing a coffee shop worker at FBI headquarters than the nation does vetting a presidential candidate. There's something wrong with that picture. Having experienced the president, who many people assert was a national security threat, we need to start acting like we've learned something from that experience.

[00:47:52] AH: Well, we're out of time, but thanks ever so much. It was amazing to speak to you. I really appreciate your time. I could have went on much longer, but alas, there's many other things to do.

[00:48:04] FF: Indeed. Indeed, there is. I enjoy not only our discussions, but I know that people who populate your audience and they're the kind of folks who are dedicated to national security, interests and discussions. I'm happy for the opportunity to explore those with you. Thanks, Andrew.

[END]