



Ten Years After: Catapult's CEO Randy Slager Remembers 9/11

Catapult's CEO Randy Slager was sitting in his Bethesda, MD office finishing up a proposal for a contract at the Department of Transportation (DOT) when he learned of the terrorist attacks on Washington, New York City, and Shanksville, PA.

"It was a shock to our system," he says. "We had never been affected to this extent on American soil. We were used to this happening overseas on planes, ships or embassies.

"We had been a little naïve in thinking, 'It won't happen here.' We lost some innocence that day."

Thirteen days after the attacks, Randy learned that Catapult had won the DOT contract, a \$40 million task order under ITOP II, a Governmentwide Acquisition Contract (GWAC) that Catapult bid on a full-and-open basis. Catapult was the prime contractor, with several consultants as subcontractors. The contract covered computer center, telephone support, and network operations at the DOT.

Catapult was a mostly a high-end systems engineering (SE) firm up that point, with its Data Center Technical Support/Program Management contracts at DOT and an IBM mainframe systems programming subcontract at the Social Security Administration. Through this new DOT contract, the company was tasked with managing the implementation of all the data and voice communications for a new agency that the DOT was rapidly assembling as a result of the attacks: The Transportation Security Agency (the TSA).

"This was our first large IT operations contract, and we beat out incumbents Lockheed Martin and CSC to win it," says Randy. On October 1, Catapult immediately took over all support responsibilities transitioning the incumbent staff and filling vacancies. Meanwhile, the TSA was occupying any physical space that was available in government office buildings throughout Washington to handle the call load and communications. "We provided telephone and data capabilities to all of these sites," says Randy.

Due to the record volume, our employees, as the phone operators, fielded or routed over 100,000 calls, many of which were from representatives of local and state governments, representatives of Congress, senators, airport authorities, and others asking, 'How do we respond to this new threat?'



In addition to managing the telephone call center, Catapult also managed the installation, testing, and rollout of telephone and data switches to the new TSA office locations.

The TSA also needed help with hiring and training new employees. Catapult took on the senior consultant and federal HR compliance role on the human resources component when it bid with another company for the TSA's HR support. It was a big job, because the TSA was hiring about 60,000 employees.

"There was a sense of urgency at this time," says Randy. "Everybody wanted to do something, but for most people, there wasn't much you could do but watch and get caught up in the suspense. "In our case, we actually *could* do something. And our people were completely committed. They volunteered, worked at night, all weekend, 24 hour shifts, whatever was required. They put in considerable overtime, doing whatever it took to put up the communications, keep the data center and national networks running, answering the phones, and responding to urgent requests 24 hours a day.

"It was such a great attitude of willingness to do whatever it took to get the job done." That dedication got noticed. In May of 2002, the Assistant Secretary for Administration at DOT recognized 24 Catapult employees with the Administrator's Award, which is usually reserved only for federal employees.

The big surprise for Randy, however, was a special award that recognized the company for its work in supporting DOT's response to the 9/11 events. Pausing to reflect, Randy says, "I knew we made a difference after 9/11," he says. "I remain very proud of the dedication of our employees." The contract with DOT put Catapult on the map for operations, Randy says. The TSA gave Catapult visibility within the federal government. It started the company's federal HR practice. It became the key contract Catapult could reference as the company pursued new work with other departments and agencies.

Randy says, "It changed us from a boutique high-end startup to a viable federal small business." The TSA work enabled Catapult to go after other expansive contracts available under the 8(a) small business program.

The legacy of 9/11 for Catapult was a commitment to doing the best work possible for its customers. Through complete dedication at a trying time, Catapult proved its mettle. The national legacy, Randy reflects, is the United States' view of public safety.

"It changed us overnight," he says. "It was a loss of a feeling of security. But we have been so focused on security since then, I believe that the United States is safer today than we were ten years ago."

[*In 2003, the TSA became part of the Department of Homeland Security, which had been established almost a year after 9/11.]