

AGA DC Members,

One of the proudest moments of my career occurred six months ago as I was leaving GSA as the DCFO for new challenges at NASA. One of my staff came in with his personal cell phone and asked me to listen to a message. He proceeded to play a voice mail I had left on his office phone three years previously about what I thought he should be doing to prepare himself for 'the next level'. He told me that he appreciated the message enough to have someone in the Information Technology department transfer the message to his personal phone and he had kept it all along to listen to periodically.

Now that the dust from our FY 2010 audits is settling, it is a good time to reflect on the corrective actions needed to address the findings that our audit friends gave us as well as a good time to reflect on ourselves and our careers. Therefore, I'm devoting this message to sharing some of the leadership thoughts I believe have helped me in my career and that have help me reach, 'the next level'.

- **Identify two or three good leaders from anywhere in history** (e.g., a mentor, a supervisor, a President, a general, a parent, etc.) and ask yourself, what makes them a good leader. Was it their confidence? Their trustworthiness? Their willingness to make a decision? The fact that they had your best interest at heart? Focus on whatever traits make them a good leader and emulate them. The clearer those traits are in your mind and the more you practice them, the more you'll be that type of leader.
- A good friend and mentor taught me that **everyone has something to contribute**. I remember a GS-14 in the 510 series who didn't know the Standard General Ledger. He drove me nuts at first. I complained to my mentor one evening over a beer: "This guy makes \$100K as a Federal accountant and he doesn't even know the SGL!" My mentor smiled and told me that everyone has something to contribute. My job as a leader was to find value in everyone and use it for the greater good of the office. Months later, I learned that the GS-14 was an excellent meeting planner and was more than happy to do anything around the office needing to be done. He planned some of the best conferences I've ever attended and when any special project came up, he was my go to guy and looking back, he was well worth his \$100K salary.
- One of my former GS-15s, who I consider a great leader, taught me **seek first to understand**. We all have people in our offices who seem do the wrong and/or stupid things for either no apparent reason or worse, a malicious reason. I used to react accordingly. Experience has taught me, more times than not, that simply reacting usually doesn't work well. The GS-15 I used to work with taught me how to change that. He taught me to simply talk with the person and ask what the logic was behind their action(s). I have since found that usually, there are details involved that I wasn't aware of and simply talking with them gives you a chance to learn about those details as well as jointly reach a course of action. Since learning this, I no longer react but instead seek first to understand. I have to say that my success rate in dealing with situations has improved dramatically as a result.
- **Your staff's success is your success**. In my career, I've run into plenty of managers who shamelessly pass someone else's work off as their own and never give credit to the person who provided it. I've seen managers get threatened by the fact that their staff had done something well that earned the attention of the manager's supervisor. Also, there are managers who select "yes" people or less qualified people because they didn't want to be outshined. In extreme cases, managers have 'counseled' their staff because they (the staff) were so successful. I chalk this up to insecurity but regardless, it's detrimental behavior to the

organization and the people in it. Instead, I highly encourage you to remember; your staff's success is a positive reflection on you and you should be doing everything you can to encourage them to shine. If they do well, you'll do well.

- **Your job as a leader is to identify, as clearly as possible, "what success is"**. I firmly believe 99 out of 100 staff want to do the right thing and produce valuable work. If you can plant a flag in the ground and say: "This is where we're trying to go and if we get there, we've succeeded" (e.g., no material weaknesses, lower reconciling differences, less obligations older than a year, greater efficiency, etc.) and give staff flexibility in how to get there, they WILL find a way. Another top memory of my career was challenging my staff to submit the annual report (i.e., PAR) in less than 45 days. I didn't tell them how to do it, only that submitting it in less than 45 days would be a recognized success for all of us. I remember the night we submitted that year. There were eight of us huddled in a shared office at 9:00 p.m. and with the phone on speaker, we dialed the Office of Management and Budget just after submitting our PAR, to ask if anyone had before us. After learning that we were indeed the first, everyone cheered, clapped, and simply felt good about their accomplishment. If they weren't a team before that experience, they certainly were after it. To this day, that team is still responsible for the earliest PAR submission in the history of the CFO Act (November 9th).
- The staff who saved my voicemail on his personal phone reminded me to **never underestimate the influence you have on others**. Your staff and supervisors are noticing you. Take heart in knowing that if you're getting things done and making things/situations/issues better, it will reflect well on you and 'the next level' will naturally follow as a result. Similarly, don't hesitate to help someone out for no apparent reason. You never know when you'll need a helping hand and even if you don't need it, it's always great to have.
- Finally, per Colin Powell, **make your decisions when you have 40 - 70 percent of the information available**. Any less and you're not making an informed decision. Anymore and you're probably too late or spending way too much effort. Colin Powell is my idea of a great leader (I like his decisiveness) and I keep a PowerPoint presentation of his at my desk. It can be found on the Web at: <http://www.blaisdell.com/powell/> if you'd like to read about his other thoughts on leadership.

I hope the ideas above resonate with you and more importantly, help you in reaching 'the next level'. Good luck and happy holidays!

2009 Citizen's Report

<http://www.gsa.gov/citizensreport>

2009 Agency Financial Report

<http://www.gsa.gov/afr2009>

PDF Version of AFR

http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/staffoffices/GSA_FY2009_AFR.pdf

Interactive Financial Pie Charts and Bar Graphs (Web Gadget)

http://www.gsa.gov/AFR/afr_13_interactivefin.html

Gapminder

<http://www.gapminder.org/>

Graph showing how people are moving across the country

<http://www.forbes.com/2010/06/04/migration-moving-wealthy-interactive-counties-map.html>

"Periodic table" of graphic tools...

http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic_table/periodic_table.html

These are really cool ways to display info, that we don't do much of... kind of like a storyboard.

<http://www.mint.com/blog/trends/our-best-financial-infographics-of-2009/>

Poster explaining where your taxes go.

<http://wallstats.com/deathandtaxes/> <http://www.wallstats.com/>