

SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kayakers_in_Redwood_City,_California.jpg

Recap of 6/10/20 Geoff Abbott presentation upon the publication of his new book, Unauthorized Progress – Leading From the Middle

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

The June 10th session attracted a fascinating assortment of people, as usual. This time, I was thrilled to see retired NASA employee Wes Ousley, a senior fellow participant in our dinners years ago, who has reinvented himself as a contractor to work on the James Webb Space Telescope (launch date March 30, 2021). We were also joined by a former NRC knowledge management expert, who has become the first person to be certified under ISO 30401 and is now developing training for the standard. We learned from a third person of two new mentoring relationships among Senior Fellows and Friends, and we heard that Conversations About Leading is persisting at ED. Almost everyone participated with vigor, resulting in attentive listening and robust Q&A.

Here's how Geoff defines leading from the middle.

What it is:

Initiating or influencing action when you do not have direct authority or control of the resources, policies, or staff necessary to accomplish a desired initiative. We are all "in the middle" at one time or another, trying to positively influence constructive change.

What it's not:

Waiting to be told what to do.

What Geoff did the other night was to draw out key aspects of the thinking, and the assumption of risk deemed to be personally acceptable, he has learned from successful innovation efforts when inaction has not been an option, including,

- Figuring out how to quantify and present the impact of a proposed change compellingly;
- Reducing procurement backlogs much more quickly during the Hurricane Katrina aftermath by flipping the logic, assuming good intent, and taking a reasonable risk to purchase needed items not on the 'don't buy list' instead of buying only what's on the 'authorized list' (assuming a \$2500 limit in each case); and
- Rescue swimmers' buying axes at a Biloxi hardware store at midnight and figuring out how to transport them safely via helicopter in order to chop through roofs to rescue New Orleans occupants before they drowned.

During the decade he has spent developing this book, Geoff has refined tools and techniques for problem-solving and seizing opportunities, unpacked reasons why innovative ideas aren't pursued, analyzed why initiatives fail to achieve expectations, and developed strategies to lead change. We heard more than I can say here. Fortunately, it's all in the book. Within the next day, several of us realized that this message is one that young Feds, especially, need to hear. In the meantime, Geoff asked that a free gift be included in the recap:

[Click to open Geoff's Implementation Strategies Table.](#)

[And, why not click here to read the book reviews on Amazon.com?](#)

Geoff also recommends highly the book, Character in Action, by Donald T. Phillips and James M. Loy, whose inspiring keynote some of us heard in Charlottesville in 2001.

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter
Center for Public Administrators
Department of Education, Retired
Federal Communications Commission
Government Accountability Office, Retired
Housing and Urban Development
Lentech, Inc.
Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Retired
Securities and Exchange Commission
U.S. Army

Participants joined from Wickford, RI, Baltimore/Washington Area, Colorado Springs, CO, and a farm in Pennsylvania! Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,
Kitty Wooley