

Hi all,

This message is going to Council for Excellence in Government senior fellows, "Senior Fellows and Friends" dinner participants, and others who are working for good government. If you would prefer not to receive future messages, please ask me to take you off the mailing list.

Last week's dinner generated more thank-you's than any of the other dinners have, and I've been thinking about why that is. Clearly, the discussion touched something at a deep level in most of the participants.

Eighteen of us sat down with Chris Mihm for a leisurely evening in a banquet room at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel last Tuesday. For the most part, we talked about recent large-scale symptoms of a root problem that just does not sound very difficult to solve. Expressed as a question, the problem boils down to: "How do you get people to talk better?"

Aside from the work he does as the managing director of strategic issues at GAO, Chris has been collaborating with the National Academy of Public Administration and others to foster a shift in perspective, from government agency as sole provider of solutions to government agency as active coalition-builder, facilitator, capacity-builder, and steward in critical mission areas. Why? We saw why, during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the rollout of Medicare prescription drug benefit. As a government, we simply do not have a deep enough understanding of governance to handle some of the situations that are beginning to confront us.

Chris was there to remind us that we have to change, and Bob Tobias asked (rather directly!) what we were doing that would create the change--implying that whatever we were doing had the potential to make a difference--something that not everyone really believes. However, the problem stated above does not call for a superhero or even a hero; it calls for us. And that's what Bob Tobias was trying to get us to look at. One of the things we will do at future dinners is to practice "talking better" with partners from other sectors who are playing their part in upholding the public trust. The prospect is exciting.

A list of participant affiliations follows:

American University (ISPPI)  
Booz Allen Hamilton  
Department of Education  
Department of Homeland Security  
Department of State  
Environmental Protection Agency  
General Accountability Organization  
General Services Administration  
Health and Human Services  
Housing and Urban Development  
National Science Foundation  
PricewaterhouseCoopers

Work experience levels ranged from intern to senior executive. Please consider joining us in the future.

Warm regards,

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