

SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



Recap of 9/5/23 session with Alex D. Tremble, GPS Leadership Solutions

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

Recently, we had the good fortune to be joined by Alex Tremble, former young federal superstar and current founder and CEO of GPS Leadership Solutions. Alex recently became a new father, with all the joy and sleeplessness that goes with it, and it was wonderful that he was still available when our session began.

Alex began by describing his time in federal service at my request, because an oppressive, unfair situation not of his own making that he experienced over a couple of years not only led to his eventual departure from government but is exactly what makes his coaching, writing, and podcast interviewing so powerful now. He is such an unfailingly constructive man that I wasn't sure he would want to share, but he did.

Before we go further into the evening's discussion, and without dwelling on the details of what Alex experienced, let's look at the following equation I just made up:

Uncommon talent + supervisor jealousy + blocking by next two levels up
=
Misery, inability to keep expanding, and exit

The above comes from my personal knowledge of Alex and contact with him in the sixteen years since we met. It's not an exaggeration. Not only that, it's not uncommon in either the private sector or government.

This unnecessary dues-paying incinerates talent, spirit, time that people can't get back, and organizational benefit. In our case, it also delays potential that could be harnessed to improve things for 332M people. While Alex was talking, I was wondering why it is that none of the "world class" leadership development organizations take such situations seriously enough to teach practical strategy & tactics that enable their students to surmount them.

One of the questions that Alex asks as he reflects on his baby son amid the challenges of growing the GPS Leadership Solutions business is, "How can we tell him to go after his dreams if we won't do it ourselves?" A related question is, "How can we create a culture of safety?"

Alex says that, although we can't control what people think, we can:

- Set examples
- Identify core values and behaviors (i.e., what the values look like in practice)
- Reward and set expectations

He shared an example of a failure to do that: Last year the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship), the largest mixed martial arts organization in the world, ran a domestic violence campaign. At the same time, it did not reprimand one of its biggest stars for violent behavior outside the arena, and thus nothing came of the campaign.

He shared a seminal lesson learned: Focus on your locus of control and define for yourself what success looks like.

Another statement that's worth thinking through: Remember that professional relationships are transactional.

On psychological safety: How do you rebuild trust? It will take time. One step at a time. Be consistent.

There's a difference between can't and won't. Ask yourself which applies to you in this moment.

Study the different effects of control and influence. Most people have more influence than they think.

Executive skills are soft skills – a core realization behind Alex's newest book, [Relationships That Work: 4 Simple Steps to Building Intentional Connections in Business and in Life](#), coming September 29th. Alex has long focused on helping talented midcareer employees who are willing to develop relationship-building skill reach the Senior Executive Service.

In discussion, here's what else came up:

Is DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) real, or just a slogan? One participant always asks who's missing in this meeting or scenario, and "could we give xxx an opportunity?"

Someone else sent me this comment afterward:

Key Quote: 'We do not live in a fair world.' Yet and because in the federal space there are several themes and bumper stickers about accountability and fairness, it is our responsibility to adhere and improve merit systems principles and insure a diverse and inclusive environment throughout the ecosystem.' Personal reflection.

There was discussion about using the 360 degree assessment to find out how you are perceived by others. An interesting insight was that the 360 can also provide opportunity for you to help the rater.

Finally, are you mentoring anyone? If so, consider buying [Relationships That Work: 4 Simple Steps to Building Intentional Connections in Business and in Life](#) for them. It may accelerate their development.

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter
BM Martin Solutions
Department of Education, retired
Government Accountability Office
GPS Leadership Solutions
Intelligence Community
Securities and Exchange Commission
United States Coast Guard, retired

People joined from Colorado, Pennsylvania, and the Washington, DC Metro Area.

Each time, we begin with a round of introductions to warm up the space. Afterward, participants are sent a "Who was in the room" message to facilitate ongoing connection. Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,
Kitty Wooley



HOW WILL YOU CONTRIBUTE?

Cooperating freely, learning on the fly, empowering ourselves, and navigating unknown waters beyond the edge of the comfort zone are the name of the game. We began our public leadership journey in calm harbors, and now we're surrounded by the white water of constant change. Business as usual isn't working well enough. We choose to gather our strengths and lead from wherever we are, applying our best efforts to the challenges of our time. Are you coming?