

Permission to

PRACTICE

Public Service Boundary Spanning

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Colorado Springs, Colorado

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What is "practice"? Practice is the permission you give yourself to not be very good at something until you get good, and then become very good. My challenge was to create a visual of that concept. I think the tangled "string" is a perfect example of that concept - the frustration, and patience needed to untangle, then develop a smooth and simple expression, then the ability to develop a more complex expression.

—VAL QUARLES, GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Introduction

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Kitty Wooley

Before we begin, let it be known that this multimedia ebook co-production is about purposeful, **mission-aligned** action by eight people who ably pursue work that benefits the public, whether or not their email addresses currently end in .gov. Our intent is to explain and demonstrate how you can create enough freedom – make enough space – to act effectively and continue to grow inside large, hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations.

Two earlier ebooks included seminal chapters about the organizational context in which employees work:

- Adrian Wolfberg, chapter 2, “At the Street-level Intersection of Organizational Boundaries: Competencies for Sustainable Change,” in *Boundary Spanning in Practice: Broadening the Conversation* (2017)
- Lara Plaxton, chapter 2, “Re-Designing Work in Search for True Value,” in *Unfettered: Mission-Aligned Boundary Spanning* (2019)

This ebook focuses solely on the individual dimension, on what an individual can do, so that those who are unlucky enough to have excessively controlling bosses – or who have internalized the impulse to keep themselves small – need not wait for years for their organization to introduce change that gives them “permission” to exercise agency. This book is about practice.

I’m convinced that government’s capacity for innovating solutions to crosscutting problems – not to mention its continued viability in the eyes of the public – depend on noticing individual talents and inviting everyone to put those talents in harness to a worthwhile mission. The worthwhile mission has always been there, but the “talent management” discipline continues to view people as commodities – one reason why young talent may not stay long and employee engagement is harder than it has to be.

My past few years’ regular contact with local Association for Talent Development chapter members who work for large corporations has shown me that there is a need for this kind of explanation and demonstration across sectors, although we focus on public service here.

If you take one thing away from this third ebook in the series, including the videos on the landing page, let it be this:

You don't need anyone else's permission to act as an adult who has enough agency to reach across silos and relate to other adults. You have the permission you need.

Your organization doesn't have to change first, although major organizational changes may be overdue.

You don't have to be picked for a crosscutting leadership development program, although some fabulous opportunities exist.

If there's a little voice in your head that insists you do need permission, GO LOOK IN THE MIRROR. The person staring back is the last hurdle to your being able to get what you need to do your work freely and with relish – right now, not when you are _____ enough.

All you have to do is take responsibility for your actions.

Hint: If you make it a point to stay aligned with the subset of organizational objectives that your unit is tasked with pursuing – and you keep thinking, learning, and honing your emotional intelligence – taking responsibility for your actions will not be hard.

Those who habitually talk to everyone about everything will begin their review of this project asking, “What's the big deal?” Certainly, none of the co-creators on this project spend time asking permission to talk to other people whenever that's what it takes to do better work.

However, as you may have realized, talking to everyone about everything is still the exception rather than the norm. An October 8th *Irish Times* article entitled “The risks and rewards of networking within your own organisation”¹ begins, “In theory boundary spanning is a good idea and can be positive for employees, their team and their wider organisation.” It goes on to say:

“Some managers may react badly if they discover someone has been cosyng up to other departments.”

If you're wondering why curious, accomplished new hires under 30 aren't staying long, think about that.

When you take a job

You do not surrender your agency as a human being – that is not part of the contract. You promise implicitly to do the work for which you were hired, while reserving the right to talk with others in the course of doing it. Let excessively controlling bosses tell you who you can talk to only at the risk of imperiling your development, as well as optimal completion of the mission. In short: (1) You owe the organization your best effort in exchange for a paycheck, assuming you have integrity; and (2) you owe yourself the joy that comes from talk-

¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/work/the-risks-and-rewards-of-networking-within-your-own-organisation-1.4691915>

ing, informal partnering, and growth in ability to get results that align with organizational objectives. Doing these things helps you view your work as craft, boosts morale, and increases organizational capacity.

Look up Taylorism – many supervisors, managers, and executives are still stuck in scientific management theory and have yet to see that excessive top-down control does not yield the best results and demoralizes people because it does not free them to do their best work. The continuing prevalence of this mindset can be seen in the idea that top and midlevel designated leaders do the reaching across, whereas everyone else stays in the silos to do their work. Examine the model of any competent organization that provides leadership development to government and you will detect the assumption that “across” is inherently a top-level activity. Even for those who are doing production jobs or working in shifts, this assumption no longer serves the organization or its employees. It’s one reason why superficial perks and amenities don’t increase engagement much.

If you want to accomplish things that matter and to grow continually in your capacity to deliver results, whether as an individual or a team member, even reskilling isn’t enough – unless you’re also free to use your own discretion to select and talk freely with colleagues anywhere, at any level, when you deem it necessary. This ebook (with accompanying videos) is about that, as are the animated scenarios on the 2019 ebook’s landing page. If you are already doing what we’re sharing, then you don’t need this. How about sharing it with someone who does?

Why is it important to develop ease in boundary spanning?

The reason to practice to the point of ease is so that you do not hang back when confronted with a need to connect across silos to get something done, or when you’re presented with an opportunity to partner on the fulfillment of an important interagency challenge that requires willing hands to get off the ground. Making yourself ever more ready to help by refining your practice in this area is a form of upskilling that you can invent endlessly. As you become more adept, you gradually augment your organization’s capacity.

In my paid professional life, this practice ensured that I had interesting work and made a good living in two sectors while doing it. In yours, practice will help you develop enough agility, agency, and transferable skill that you will be able to thrive and earn income no matter how work evolves.

To find examples of chronic interagency problems that could be mitigated or solved by leaders who are adept at boundary spanning, comb through the GAO High Risk list and start with those that have been on the list the longest, or that involve more than one organization, or that cite conflict among the players. Scratch the surface and you are likely to identify a lack of boundary spanning behavior or even a resistance to it, because that is the status quo. When you see such lack, it’s not always about big egos or clashing rice bowls; sometimes it’s a clue that deep discomfort has kept the leaders from engaging with each other. A smart leader in that predicament will send equipped subordinates to some discussions instead. Position yourself to be one of those people who is willing and able to help.

That will provide Senior Executive Service (SES) leaders with more capacity to harness, for even the most competent cannot possibly do everything themselves. Moltke’s insight applies here – Helmuth von Moltke the Elder is the military commander who originally expressed, “No plan survives contact with the enemy.” He

mastered strategy in the context of war, although I would argue that his insight about the capacity of top leaders also applies in the context of executive branch leadership today:

*"The advantage which a commander thinks he can attain through continued personal intervention is largely illusory. By engaging in it he assumes a task that really belongs to others, whose effectiveness he thus destroys. He also multiplies his own tasks to a point where he can no longer fulfill the whole of them."*²

There are about 7,000 SES for roughly 2.1M civilian federal employees. For organizations to leverage the talents of their people to reap full benefit from cross-boundary cooperation, boundary spanning behavior will have to be coached and encouraged at all levels, not just top levels, because the trickle-down effect is not sufficient. This is the fallacy around boundary spanning in leadership development today, which conceptualizes practice mainly at the executive level. That's too late, especially since some of those who became federal executives came up through a system riddled with the crippling managerial injunction, "I don't want you to talk to those people over there." They may not change their behavior or want to leave their silos – one reason why joint duty assignments have been implemented at the Department of Homeland Security and in the Intelligence Community.

Increased employee engagement is a likely derivative of boundary spanning practice: People relish novel work challenges, having their unique gifts recognized and tapped, and participating meaningfully in something bigger than themselves. That combination is catnip for humans.

Restricting boundary spanning coaching and practice to top organizational levels seems to say that *all* leadership, not just tone and direction, comes from the top. Do you believe that to be true? It ignores those career employees who take initiative to lead from wherever they are, and the reality that many young newcomers, some of whom have held leadership positions of astonishing scope elsewhere, enter government predisposed to learn about everything from everybody rapidly so that they can begin adding value.

Organizational units that run on control gradually disabuse young newcomers of that notion, resulting over time in compliant employees who put their heads down in their silos and do their work, with loss of enthusiasm and dire effects on autonomy, purpose, growth, knowledge transfer and innovation – or who leave. Whether they stay or leave, they lose their edge. If they stay, they take up a slot that could be filled by someone who still gives a damn. It's lose/lose.

Playing beyond your comfort zone expands it over time

Three small sessions were held by Zoom early this year, with the gracious assistance of sculptor and retired federal executive Carol Willett. The series culminated in "homework" that charted the relative distances of typical boundary spanning activities from each participant's comfort zone. Here's one person's unique submission:

² Clarifying Command: Keeping Up With the (John Paul) Joneses, a War on the Rocks commentary by B. A. Friedman and Olivia A. Garard, April 7, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/clarifying-command-keeping-up-with-the-john-paul-joneses/>

Which of these boundary spanning activities would be most uncomfortable for me?

Drag the hardest ones farthest away from your comfort zone. Assume you don't know the other person yet. Near-peer is someone at approximately your grade level or in a similar role.

Assume that your comfort zone will shrink and expand per conditions.

This gave us a rough feel for mindsets and other factors that have deterred certain kinds of boundary spanning among public servants because they're imagined to push the person too far beyond their comfort zone, which would feel too uncomfortable. It also revealed that everyone who showed up had done at least one or two of these activities and felt okay about it. That provides clues about where growth opportunities may lie and how to make experimental mastermind sessions we're thinking about offering in 2022 more valuable.

Of course, people who really want to double down and achieve mastery quickly are advised to hire a professional leadership development or career coach who understands the value of boundary spanning – and has a personal track record of getting things done across boundaries – for one-on-one coaching.

Further, the openness to new experience that was present in our virtual room convinced me that:

- One size doesn't fit all in terms of either psychological safety or capacity for minor risk-taking.
- Proposing an order in which certain activities should be attempted would be counterproductive.
- It helps those who want to expand their comfort zones and become more skilled to be presented with a range of initial options from which to choose (hence all examples on this [ebook's landing page](#)).

I conceptualize that range as extending from **stepping off a curb** all the way to **jumping off a cliff**, with lots of options in between; you may have other ideas. The "crazy reach" example depicted on the right side of the graphic refers to Amy Edmondson's "cold call" to Buckminster Fuller as she was about to graduate from college (see podcast URL below, under "References to challenge your thinking and strengthen your practice").

Two reasons why alignment is important

The obvious reason is that, in order to get results that matter to the organization (and not just to you), you have to know what the organization is trying to achieve. Each one tries to communicate to all its employees a “line of sight” connecting their jobs to the organizational mission and strategic objectives. It does that through strategic plans, internal communications about where it’s going this year, through job descriptions to some extent, and so on.

Paying attention to alignment also makes it more difficult for an overly controlling boss to chastise you for straying outside your lane to talk with other colleagues for mission-related reasons. (Rear Admiral Grace Hopper’s “It’s easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission” fits well here.)³

Boundary spanning vs. Networking

Isn’t boundary spanning just networking by a different name? Not if you’re doing what we propose. We’re talking about boundary spanning as reaching across silos for a mission-related purpose, whereas networking implies reaching across silos for a personal or professional purpose that may or may not have anything to do with organizational objectives. They’re related, though, and both are necessary for different reasons. A few people (such as our gifted colleagues Alex Tremble, who contributed a chapter to the 2019 ebook, and John Sporing, who conducted this year’s interview with Connie Berhane) are truly adept at both. In the context of this ebook, professional relationships develop in the process of reaching across for a mission-related purpose. I.e., the mission comes first.

That said, chapters 2 and 3 and some of the roleplay examples and interviews talk about career growth. In this time of emphasis on reskilling, upskilling, mentoring, and retention of young hires, it is easy to make the case that career growth is a strategic imperative for the organization.

If you do not have top cover

You have alternatives to consider and a choice to make. If your boss and your boss’s boss either actively support your boundary spanning or are neutral, no problem. However, if you’re being told not to talk to those people over there, here are five common alternatives:

- Hunker down and wait for better days
- Quit immediately, with or without another job to go to
- Begin wrapping up your work while looking for another job on your own time
- Hone your ability to persuade by using business reasons to try to change the boss’s mind
- Conduct your boundary spanning activity at lunch and before or after work

³ As quoted in the U.S. Navy’s Chips Ahoy magazine (July 1986)

The real choice you are making, consciously or not, is whether or not you'll allow your work to be stifled and your growth to be stunted over a long period of time because exercising agency in this particular situation is challenging. The great news is, you can change your mind at any time. Every day is a new day.

What prompted this series of ebook projects?

Supporting boundary spanning behavior earlier in careers is an idea whose time has come. There are several groundbreaking executive development programs that concentrate on developing such behavior among top leaders.⁴ This is utterly commendable. And, it is past time to expand the approach to the entire workforce.

Teaching only executives to span boundaries, providing coaching during their programs as they practice, and expecting the new behavior to continue and to increase organizational capacity as a whole, makes assumptions that have not been observed to bear fruit consistently. Program participants who may have had successful careers in one kind of work at one agency, who have mastered the dynamics of getting things done within their silos, are suddenly expected to develop competency in getting things done across bureaus, agencies, or even sectors. While some may revel in the opportunity to expand their spheres of influence and get bigger things done in partnership with others, and are very good at it, others – in the way of all programs that call for personal change – have no intention of changing. You have only to watch what the graduates actually do.

Our first ebook asked how managers who wanted to accelerate employee development could partner on the implementation of “guardrails” that would make space for novice boundary spanning and self-directed growth, while giving the organization a way to manage the risks associated with it. It also asked how more seasoned employees could hone the ability to contribute to better outcomes by reaching across bureau, agency, or sector boundaries while remaining firmly aligned with agency objectives.

In the second ebook project, with its animated scenarios, an accomplished British HR executive introduced knowledge work's probable future and we began to illustrate how rank and file employees could start reaching across silos, and reasons why they would bother.

This third project in the series features short, recorded roleplays and a monologue by a Presidential Management Fellow alumna, showing situations that have actually occurred – thus providing concrete examples of outcomes that emerged *only when people gave themselves enough permission to practice*. Finally, longer interviews with three colleagues transfer tacit knowledge that may spur the imagination of would-be boundary spanners by showing them what's possible.

Our 20-year-old literary precedent was a required compilation of nine Excellence in Government Fellows' written responses on topics provided by our coach, Jon Seymour, after a benchmarking visit to the U.S. Mint to study the mechanics of its successful business transformation. In contrast, the Senior Fellows and Friends ebook efforts are entirely voluntary. Then, as now, each author handled editing for their submission. Adherence to a common style guide was not enforced; that decision was made to keep barriers to participation low so that invitees who had something to say did not feel intimidated. Senior Fellows and Friends co-productions are

⁴ For example, the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative, a joint program of the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health and the Kennedy School of Government's Center for Public Leadership.

discretionary efforts by competent people who want to contribute in unique ways to the improvement of government.

If you're curious about the Senior Fellows and Friends network that sources these high-powered contributors, start with this new post on the Integration and Implementation Insights blog at <https://i2insights.org/2021/10/26/maintaining-informal-discussion-groups/>.

Fundamental assumptions:

- That we and our supporters want to build up public service, not tear it down, and that improving connectivity by developing boundary spanning ease and capability at all levels is a significant path to that end.
- That a leader who depends on coercion and employees who habitually consider themselves to be unempowered are locked in a mutually reinforcing dance that is unproductive and wastes talent.
- That leadership that seeks out and leverages employee strengths, freeing people up to do their best work, makes the entire culture attractively agile and leads to superior results.

What I would like to see:

- Midcareer public servants become even more capable by giving themselves permission to practice, managing their fears, and connecting with others across silos to get work done better, thus taking small steps to design their own leadership “heat experiences.”⁵
- Young hires are respected and encouraged to talk with colleagues in other units in order to ramp up more quickly while forming new professional ties, the existence of which helps them in their work and invites them to stay.
- The government ecosystem:
 - Stops throwing money at leadership programs whose primary goal is to help a few wunderkinds from various agencies build their professional networks and starts exerting leadership and influence governmentwide to challenge outdated assumptions and inflated ideas about control and ownership (rather than stewardship) up and down the chain.
 - Starts noticing those boundary-spanning employees who are in the workforce now, so that they can be coached if necessary and – most importantly – *harnessed* by agency leaders who are working on problems that span departments and agencies on behalf of the public.

Toward these ends, we who together wish to refine or extend our ability to span boundaries will be inventing and participating in free, short-term coaching or mastermind sessions (depending on the initial self-

⁵ Nicholas Petrie, “The What and Why of Vertical Development,” <https://www.nicholaspetrie.com/vertical-leadership-development>.

assessments of those who opt in) in 2022. See my bio at the end of the chapter for contact information. Now, please read on. And don't forget to sample the roleplays and interviews.

References to challenge your thinking and strengthen your practice

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<https://neuroleadership.com/research/tools/nli-scarf-assessment/>

"The SCARF Model® assesses the differences in people's social motivation. Some people are more sensitive to status threat and rewards, others to certainty and relatedness. Having SCARF needs satisfied drives engagement and retention. Learn more about the SCARF Model® by reading the blog post, Five Ways to Spark (or Destroy) Your Employees' Motivation." This free assessment can help you understand differing motivations for boundary spanning.

Salesforce.com. Learn the Value of Aligning with Your Manager. 2019.

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"After completing this unit, you'll be able to:

- Define what it means to align with your manager.
- Identify the value of alignment with your manager and direct reports.
- Explain the value of team alignment to your organization."

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<https://www.amazon.com/Rebels-Work-Handbook-Leading-Change/dp/1491903953>. "... provides concrete ideas, techniques and advice on how to refine your thinking, improve your approach to work, and manage yourself so you can achieve more and stay sane and optimistic in the process."

About the Author



Kitty Wooley, M.A., PMP, spent 19 years at the U.S. Department of Education, retiring in 2013. Her first position in government involved transitioning from college financial aid director to federal institutional review specialist. For the first year and a half, she was part of a great team based at 50 U.N. Plaza in San Francisco that traveled to examine college financial aid operations in four states, ensuring that billions of dollars intended to help students pay for college were doing just that. Subsequent positions in Washington, D.C., involved data analysis and risk management, project management, business intelligence and decision support, stakeholder outreach, translation of IT issues into plain language for program managers, report preparation and staff work, and the design and execution of interagency mentoring experiences for executive branch budget staff.

In 2003, after work, Kitty began hosting a dinner series she named “Senior Fellows and Friends.” Since then, SFF has cultivated an atmosphere of trust that has added value through conversation and relationship among leaders at every level. Participants continue to make space in novel ways for the growth and encouragement of those who have dedicated themselves to public service. See <https://i2insights.org/2021/10/26/maintaining-informal-discussion-groups/> for a systems perspective on these events.

We think it’s important to span locations, level the playing field, and foil low expectations by noticing untapped talent and capacity, inviting it to play with a purpose and reengage at work. This is accomplished through in-person meals when feasible, video conversation across time zones, and experimental activity like this multimedia ebook project. You’re invited to explore participation in all of the above by emailing kittywooley5@gmail.com.

CHAPTER TWO

Stories of Success: Boundary Spanning to Grow Personally & Professionally

✎

Joshua J. Avila

Let me begin by being transparent with you – I had no idea what boundary spanning was before signing on to this project. Kitty Wooley, a legend within the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), reached out to me on the first day of the 2021 ASPA conference. She had noted that she had read my Founders' Fellow application and wanted to connect later. As someone who loves meeting others and getting to know more about who they are, what they do, and why they do it, I found this to be a fantastic opportunity to chat with someone in the field of public service. We set up some initial time to talk after the conference, and we spoke in-depth about this project. At first, I didn't think I could provide any valuable content as it sounded like a foreign concept. However, I decided to sign on as an opportunity to grow and to connect with, and learn from, others. I didn't know it then, but I was boundary-spanning at that exact moment!

Boundary spanning sounds foreign and terrifying, but it is a skill and a worthwhile one at that. Stepping out of our natural comfort zones for any reason allows us to grow – and while that may be cliché, I can speak to the truth of the statement. Fear, and more specifically fear of failure, is often our most influential motivator or deterrent – and usually, the latter when it comes to boundary spanning.

My objective is to deter some of the fear surrounding the concept of boundary spanning by providing you with some success stories of when I utilized boundary spanning in both my personal life and in my professional work in local government. In all these instances, boundary-spanning allowed me to advocate for myself, the communities I care about, push the needle forward on issues that matter to me, or a combination of the above.

I have divided the stories into two sections to highlight boundary spanning experiences that have happened in my personal life and my professional life. Some of these instances may highlight both aspects, but I will place them into the category that makes the most sense.

Personal Stories

I have always heard that "you have to be your own strongest advocate," but I never really understood what that meant until I started to build my personal brand. Personal brands are much more than just what we like to wear and do. More importantly, our personal brand can represent our ethos – who we are, what we stand for, what we care about and advocate for, etc. We are not just simply employees for organizations who perform specific functions – we are human beings first and foremost. Often, the human element gets lost in the professional setting, which can encourage individuals to branch out within their personal lives to connect with various people and organizations of interest. These connections do not need to improve our professional growth solely; they can enrich both ourselves and our communities if we allow the opportunities to flourish and allow ourselves the room to grow in the process. I have presented a few examples in which I have utilized boundary spanning to advocate for myself and issues that matter to me.

Rhode Island Black Business Association Board Service

I decided to become involved with the Rhode Island Black Business Association (RIBBA) during the Summer of 2020 as a form of activism. The inhumane and irresponsible actions that lead to George Floyd's death earlier this year were a call to action for hundreds of thousands across this nation, including myself. I had always spoken out against systemic racial and societal injustice whenever displayed, but this was a moment of reckoning. My goal was to march the streets, but I could not because of the pandemic as I am immunosuppressed. I knew I had to act and do something to make a positive impact, so I joined the Rhode Island Black Business Association's (RIBBA) newly created Community Advisory Board (CAB). I learned about this Board opportunity through a colleague I had recently completed a leadership program alongside. He had worked with the Founder and Executive Director of RIBBA for several years. He enlisted a few individuals from our leadership program cohort to get involved in the newly formed Board.

As a part of the CAB, I lead the charge in creating and distributing a survey that would dictate the foundational principles of the mentorship program we were developing. The goal was to create a mentorship program centered around critical skills and knowledge that potential participants deemed crucial to their professional and personal growth. After working with the CAB for around six months, I had seen the Founder and Executive Director post on social media that RIBBA was revitalizing their Advocacy and Policy Committee and was looking for interested individuals to serve as Committee members. I applied soon after seeing that post and sent a quick LinkedIn message to her, noting my interest in serving on the Committee. She responded shortly after that and requested a 30-minute meeting to explore further my interest in joining the Committee. Around halfway during our conversation, she cut straight to the chase. She offered me the Chair position of the Advocacy and Policy Committee due to her observations and personal experiences of my passion, skills, and ability to be a leader. I was so shocked that I asked for a day or two to respond, simply as I had expected to be a committee member rather than the committee chair. After serious consideration, I accepted the offer as I saw it as the perfect opportunity to effectuate positive community impact while simultaneously furthering my personal growth.

Getting Offered a Job I Didn't Even Know I was Interviewing For

I entered the Master of Public Administration Program in the Winter of 2018 to help me exit the retail sector and gain employment within the public service realm. Throughout my first year of studies, I had begun to

connect with other students through both our in-person and hybrid class components. While many of these connections and conversations centered around academics, I began to foster more intimate relationships with some students in the public service field. One such person was a mid-career professional who, at that time, worked for the City of Providence. During our conversations, she had expressed that she viewed me as a "mission-critical change agent" who could have a tangible impact working in local government or a non-profit. Shortly after, she noted she could put me in contact with a colleague and friend of hers who she also viewed as a "mission-critical change agent" - the Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the Community College of Rhode Island. Her words humbled me, and I gladly accepted the connection offer. Shortly after our conversation, she made the email introduction, and the VP of Institutional Advancement and I set aside some time for in-person introductions at his office.

Now get ready for an unforgettable and quite humorous exchange to begin (see one of the videos for this scenario acted out – which I promise was almost verbatim). I arrived at the VP's office around 10 minutes early, and there was no one (and I mean no one) in his office – the lights were dark, and the door had a sign that said, "Advancement team will be away for a team-building retreat." As I walked towards the exit, the VP of Institutional Advancement apologizes for the delay and the confusion about the door sign. We stepped into his office, and we start conversing for around five or so minutes before he starts asking hard-hitting questions such as – why are you passionate about higher education and what about the College's mission resonated with me. I had luckily done some research on the Institution, so I was decently prepared to respond. However, I was intrigued by his questioning when the intention of this meeting was simply an introduction, and I hadn't acknowledged a passion for higher education (even though it is one of my passions). With that in mind, I had low expectations of any potential meeting but decided to stick around for 15 to 20 minutes past our established meeting time.

We continued talking for another five or so minutes (around 10 minutes into our entire conversation), and he asked, "where's your resume?" I was extremely puzzled by that inquiry (and I know my face showed it) and apologized for not bringing it as I didn't think I would need it. We then pressed forward, and he asked a few more questions about higher education before asking me, "so, why do you want the job?" I promptly replied, "Job? What Job? I'm sorry, I didn't even know there was a job open." Now he seemed to be extremely confused – he asked how we had connected, and I had mentioned our mutual colleague and the in-person introduction. That's when everything connected in his mind. He sincerely apologized as his work-life had been crazy and assumed I was an applicant for the Development Coordinator role that he was trying to fill. After explaining the position in question, he asked if I was interested and as I was searching for a new job – I undoubtedly, and very quickly, expressed my interest. He subsequently offered it to me on the spot. I noted I would need a few days to consider as this opportunity had not been on my radar at all. He walked me out of his office, and a young woman was waiting to meet with him – for a job interview for the job he had just offered to me. He told the young woman to go to his office while quietly assuring me that I would have until three days later to give my answer and that he would only consider other candidates if I turned down the offer. I emailed him three days later and accepted the offer.

Professional Stories

As a young professional whose goal is to advance a career through public service to effectuate positive changes for his community, I would love to tell you that our current systems and structures allow for effective

communication, partnerships, and deliverable results. However, that is not the case, which is why many individuals have lost faith in our governing structures. This assertion is not only based on personal experience and observation but backed by data as well. In 2019, the Pew Research Center found that 81% of Americans believe that members of Congress act unethically at least "some of the time," while 66% believe the same of local elected officials (Gecewicz & Rainie, 2019). The same study found that 79% of Americans believe that members of Congress take little to no responsibility for their actions and mistakes, and 57% believe the same of local elected officials (Gecewicz & Rainie, 2019). Specifically, Americans believe that local elected officials and members of Congress do not handle resources responsibly, provide fair and accurate information to the public, or care about others (Gecewicz & Rainie, 2019).

I have the great privilege of working for a municipality that prides itself on cutting the bureaucratic red tape to provide a governing system that works for everyone. Yet, the entrenchment of the status quo takes a toll on the capability of passionate public servants who want to impact themselves, their families, and their communities positively. On a perpetual basis, society tells us that the moment to act is now, especially when social injustices and crises, yet never see any return on those promises. The essence of change stems from an individual or groups' passion and ambition who seeks to challenge a system, that in their perspective, perpetuates the problem at hand rather than solve it. However, I will admit that it can seem highly daunting when done on an individual level.

At this point, you may be thinking, "How can I make a difference when the system I am operating within suppresses my ability to do just that?" I completely get why you may be thinking that – because I've been there (and I am still there at times, to be honest). Strategically utilizing boundary spanning has allowed me to effectuate positive changes for the city and communities that I care for deeply. Here are some examples of those instances.

City's Human Relations Commissions - Anti-Racism Coalition

During the Summer of 2020, my colleague serving as the Executive Director (ED) of the City's Human Relations Commission approached me to inquire if I would fill in as Interim (ED) while they went out on parental leave. I was completely honored to be asked and accepted the opportunity immediately, even knowing that it would mean I would have to operate concurrently in my current role for the entirety of their leave. In preparation for my time as Interim ED, I began to join some Commission meetings and work closely with the Commission's Anti-Racism Committee (ARC) before my colleague's leave. The Commission created the ARC in direct response to the murder of George Floyd as a means to create actionable steps to ensure that the movement for social justice would not come and go with the wind as it has so often done before. During one of these ARC meetings, the Chair expressed the idea of forming a collaboration of community partners whose mission, vision, and goals include anti-racism to assist in moving the critical work forward.

The Commission consists of passionate individuals who were sick and tired of the "we must act now" narrative and wanted to be the mission-critical change agents pushing this work forward rather than waiting for those in power to do so. The Commission and ARC expressly set ambitious goals, and the desire to form a coalition of partners and funders turned into a reality. The goal would be to identify like-minded community partners who could help establish a "Racial Healing Series" that would examine the significance of racial healing

in the eyes of various communities and industries. The agreed-upon approach, as noted below, was created to avoid lengthy processes that would circumvent the work being completed in accordance to set deadlines:

- Reach out to community partners.
- Discuss the initiative.
- Gauge their interest in the coalition and its respective initiatives.
- Have them sign on without the need to create formal binding collaborative contracts/agreements.

As the Interim ED, it was one of my primary responsibilities to help identify potential community partners, reach out to gauge interest, and potentially schedule meetings between them and the Chair of the Commission to discuss the potential partnership. Rather than spending countless hours trying to research potential community partners and locate their respective designees' contact information, I reflected on who I knew in the community and how they could assist in the formation of this coalition. I had thought of three community partners who may be interested in joining the coalition – the Rhode Island Black Business Association (RIBBA), Santander Bank, and Fidelity Investments. I had previously established connections with RIBBA through community boards and engagement events, including serving as their Advocacy and Policy Committee chair. I then had an epiphany!

I had made connections with individuals within the RIBBA network who had past and current connections to individuals who worked at Santander and Fidelity Investments. I reached out to my colleague Grant, a current employee of Santander, who I knew pretty well as we served on a community board sponsored by RIBBA. I had asked if he could contact anyone from the organization who may be interested and willing to hear about what the Commission was trying to do. He obliged and noted he would get back to me. After a couple of weeks and some frustrating bureaucratic dealing of his own, he was able to provide me with the necessary contact information. I asked Grant if he could write an email introduction between myself and the appropriate person within Santander, and he happily obliged. While I had anticipated Grant would help me in this endeavor, I was unsure about my connection to Fidelity as I had just met him less than two weeks prior – this attempt was going to be more of a hail-Mary. I had connected with John as the Advocacy and Policy Committee that I serve as the chairperson for would soon be sponsoring an "Advocacy 101" workshop for interested committee members and the general public. As our consultant for the workshop, he had asked to connect over Zoom for maybe 45 minutes to discuss workshop content, and this is when he had referred to his time working for Fidelity. We planned to meet a few days before the workshop, and towards the end of that meeting, I abruptly asked John to confirm that I had heard correctly and that he had worked for Fidelity in the past. Once he confirmed that to be true, I discussed the Commission's efforts to create the coalition. John happily stated that he would put me in contact, via e-introduction, to the Vice President of Community Affairs for the Northeast Region. He believed that a great partnership could develop. After several weeks, all three organizations (RIBBA, Santander, and Fidelity Investments) agreed to be coalition members. The Commission was well on its way to plan, develop, and implement the Racial Healing series.

American Society for Public Administration Conference Connection

As a 2021 ASPA Founders' Fellow, I had the great opportunity to attend the organization's annual conference, and I knew going in that I would make the most of it. Before the conference began, I had a goal of connecting with anyone interested in networking. However, I changed my mindset early on after recognizing that

the conference had thousands of attendees because I realized that I couldn't connect with everyone attending. As the conference unfolded, I saw the need to be strategic in my outreach to individuals. I then directly reached out to attendees whose work genuinely interested me or made a speech/presentation that deeply resonated with me. Creating a few meaningful and strategic relationships can be much more impactful than making numerous connections that focus on "one-off" meetings or conversations is an essential lesson in the world of boundary spanning. Individuals may forget many of these casual connections as you continue your professional and personal career as they may not have gotten the chance to flourish at their inception.

One keynote speaker, a professor from the University of Pennsylvania, caught my attention as he spoke about the importance of using data-driven research to drive policy that tackles our most critical societal issues. His comments resonated with me as I always believed in the importance of data-based decisions, but how he utilized this passion for addressing homelessness or generational poverty stuck with me. I knew I needed to connect with him, but I didn't want to take the chance of missing the opportunity to chat with him if I solely reached out to him via the conference messaging platform. I was able to find him on LinkedIn, requested to connect with him, and wrote the following brief message to him:

"Hi Dan, my name is Josh Avila, and I am a 2021 Founders' Fellow. I currently work for a municipality in Rhode Island. I loved hearing from you today about the importance of crafting a story about the data that is relatable to the audience in question. I've always believed wholeheartedly in the power of storytelling and how quantitative data can be intertwined to make a positive change in both our political and societal landscape. Do you have the capacity to chat more offline?"

He reached out to me within a couple of days, and we set up a time to chat. We spoke for around an hour about various things, and before the Zoom call ended, he asked me to confirm where I worked. When I told him what municipality I worked for in Rhode Island, he noted that he had met both the Mayor and his then Deputy Chief of Staff (currently our Chief of External Communications) at the 2019 U.S. Conference of Mayors. Not only had they met, but they had been seated at the same table during the event and had discussed how to tackle the issue of homelessness through data-driven decisions. He noted they had exchanged contact information to stay in touch, but the pandemic occurred shortly after, and he had lost her contact information. He had asked if I could reach out to her to see if she was willing to re-connect on the issue. I reached out to the Chief of External Communications, and she confirmed everything he had said. After remarking about how small of a world we live in, I was thrilled to make a re-introduction email between them to begin collaborating on this critical issue.

What Didn't Hang Me Up, But Definitely Could Have

I want to end this chapter by discussing some of the potential setbacks and hurdles that professionals may have to overcome to effectively boundary span. As mentioned before, the fear of failure often weighs heavily on our shoulders – there were numerous times where I feared being rejected (either through a negative response or no response at all). However, I referred back to the notions that "the worst someone can say is no" and that "you miss every shot that you don't take." Through my experiences, I have found that people are often very receptive to connecting if the rationality behind doing so is genuine – i.e., not a sales pitch. Simply taking the time to reach out with a thoughtful and well-crafted message can result in excellent and unique connections, relationships, and opportunities.

One hurdle is being able to muster the capacity and energy to boundary span. While that sounds nonsensical, genuinely think about it. How often are we so exhausted after our workdays, especially considering our current workforce environment due to the pandemic, that all we can even think of after "logging off" (if we even have the privilege of doing so). Most, if not all, have personal matters that we must attend to after we finish work, including self-care and household/family duties. We may be able to generate the energy to reach out to someone, but how often do we get a response and forget to follow up as we keep telling ourselves that "we will get to it later." I have usually found that if "later" means more than a maximum of 24 hours, then it won't get done due to the information and sensory overload many of us deal with daily. It is also important to remember that everyone may not have similar working hours – so don't get discouraged if someone doesn't respond to you within a specific timeframe that you may expect them to.

Finally, one of the hurdles that I see most individuals get hung up on is the ability to intertwine their professional and personal selves when boundary spanning. We frequently have specific rationality for boundary-spanning, either reaching out for professional reasons (i.e., informational interview, questions about a job, etc.) or personal reasons. However, it is essential to remember to be our authentic selves when establishing that connection or relationship. Simply showing one "side" of yourself can not only diminish any unexpected opportunities or connections that may arise, but it also prevents us from truly growing. Hiding either version of ourselves may allow us to achieve our short-term goals but simultaneously foregoes the ability to establish meaningful relationships with others – which in its essence, is what boundary spanning is.

About the Author



Joshua J. Avila is a graduate of the Master of Public Administration program at Roger Williams University. He is a member of the 2021 cohort of the American Society for Public Administration's Founders' Fellowship. His goal is to advance a career in public service through acting as a voice for all individuals and to be a mission-critical change-agent to help foster an inclusive and welcoming society and nation. To accomplish that goal, he currently works for a municipality in Rhode Island and spends much of his time serving the community through various Boards and Committees centered around social equity initiatives. He aspires to hold elected office someday. Contact: joshuaavila251@gmail.com.

Editor's note: Around the time our ebook project was published on the Senior Fellows and Friends site, Josh was promoted to Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Recovery Compliance Project Manager. Congratulations and best wishes!

CHAPTER THREE

My Federal Mentoring Story

✎

Cheryl A. Abram

I entered the government as a Presidential Management Fellow (PMF) with a master's degree in social work (MSW) and high expectations of the government and my role as a public servant. I envisioned a federal career filled with work that would have a significant and positive impact on the public. For me, working in government was a continuation of my military duty to "...support and defend the Constitution of the United States...", but this time I was out of uniform and in much more comfortable clothing. My public motivation was strong, and I was prepared to do my very best.

Unfortunately, my high expectations were like oil in an environment of water. From the very beginning, things did not work the way I'd envisioned. I was supposed to be noticed and heard. I was supposed to be welcomed and enthusiastically invited onto a team. I was a PMF. I'd successfully navigated a rigorous assessment process, outperforming other highly intelligent and ambitious candidates from across the globe. I clearly belonged in government, but it did not feel that way. About five months into my shiny new PMF position, I was ready to admit that I'd made a huge mistake. The PMF assessors were wrong. I did not belong in government. The government did not need or want me. My supervisor didn't even know I was there until my 2nd week on the job! No one knew me and no one heard me. How could I use my skills, share my ideas, or make an impact in such an environment?

After I graduated from Catholic University of America with my MSW my heart was set on a long and fulfilling career in the nonprofit sector enacting change through policy writing and implementation. I'd never considered the federal government until my college advisor mentioned the Office of Personnel Management and a program they managed--the PMF program. With more information, I decided to apply for the program; primarily because federal and nonprofit work are closely related. I also enjoy assessments and competition, so on a rainy day I visited the Office of Personnel Management to participate in a day-long event where I was tested, assessed, and judged as an individual and as a team member. I was genuinely surprised when I saw my name on the list of finalists. In fact, the day I discovered I'd been selected I was scheduled to interview for a position at a local nonprofit. I cancelled the interview and moved forward with becoming a federal employee.

My expectations of government were quickly crushed. I did not want to leave government but in the 5 months that I'd been a federal employee, I still felt like an unwelcomed outsider. I was assigned a mentor, but

it was not a good match. She was my supervisor, so I did not feel comfortable sharing my genuine feelings about the position. Before I turned in my resignation, I decided to find my own mentor, so I visited the agency website, read a few bios and emailed a Senior Executive Service (SES) member who seemed to have the career history, skills and attributes that aligned with my own aspirations. Mentoring is a PMF program requirement, but at that time, it was the lifeline I needed to see more clearly, adjust my thinking, and create my own space in the federal government.

When my supervisor discovered I'd reached out to an SES (outside of the chain of command), I was advised to find a different mentor. I did not know what the SES position meant in relationship to other positions, so I did not fully understand why I had to find a different mentor but I said, "okay", and began a new search for mentors on the agency website. I finally emailed a GS-15 whom I credit with encouraging me to stick it out at least until the end of my fellowship—which, at that time, was about another 18 months. He made himself available when I needed to talk, and he provided actionable advice and support as I found my voice. Well, I went well beyond the remainder of my fellowship and "stuck it out" for close to 17 years.

My mentor helped me simplify complex situations and gain a broader (and sometimes different) understanding of what I was going through. I'm a mentor now because I know what it's like to feel lost and unsure. A little guidance goes a long way and I'm almost positive that today PMFs remain in government because of mentors and the genuine stories they tell that help us feel like we are not alone in our uncertainty. I'm glad that I was able to venture out on my own to gather more information before I made my decision to remain in government. Venturing out on my own to gather more information and gain a new perspective became a habit that propelled my career in a direction I could never have anticipated.

As fulfilling as my years in government were, I experienced a shift in mindset that compelled me to think differently about everything, both personal and professional. With this shift came the realization that I could no longer grow professionally in the federal government. There were too many constraints, requirements, political motivations, and fear of new ideas for me to bloom and flourish in a federal organization. My book "Longing to Learn. Bringing a Sense of Delight and Freedom Back to Training and Development in the Workplace", is a short, power-packed view of the change in perspective that propelled me toward an entirely new career outside the federal space.

There were many "collaborators" that I trusted to aid me in making this career change. First, my federal supervisor and team members were quite supportive in my transition. They worked with me in my indecision and eventual withdrawal from federal service. My supervisor allowed me to take a mini sabbatical, giving me the time and space to figure out what I really wanted. At this time, I also emailed and video-conferenced former colleagues who had retired from government for mentoring and advice. Most of them generously allowed me access to their networks. This was somewhat of a challenge since asking for help made me feel more vulnerable, but I gladly emailed and video-conferenced these individuals as well.

My best friend was also integral in indirectly supporting my decision to change careers. He was studying to obtain a cybersecurity certification. He asked me to help him study and I did. These study sessions were the beginning of my new career. At this same time, I began volunteering to develop a cybersecurity course for a local nonprofit. All of this started me on my journey to learning about and loving cybersecurity, but I still did not know that this was going to be my new career. Very early one Sunday morning I made a video on my

“Everyone Deserves an Ypifany” YouTube channel entitled “I’m Quitting my Job!! I’m Not Gonna Die Here.” In this video, I share with the world, my decision to resign from government. I did not know what I was going to do, but I did know that I could not continue to work in the federal government.

When I finally resigned from government, I had no job, no interviews, and no prospects. I did have my time, my knowledge and skill and my belief that an organization’s value with me is greater than that same organization’s value without me. With these tools, I studied to attain two cybersecurity certifications and used my network and qualifications to land my first cybersecurity job three months after resigning from government.

I now have four cybersecurity and risk management certifications added to my resume and portfolio as well as experience as a virtual chief information security officer, cybersecurity consultant, policy writer and curriculum developer. There is so much space to grow in this profession and I’m once again, excited about my work. I have not permanently closed the door on federal service. My public service motivation is stronger now more than ever and I am willing to share my knowledge and expertise in federal service if they are willing listen and become pioneers in the cyber world.

Cheryl’s companion video can be viewed on the landing page and at https://youtu.be/-a_IYGwEF8E.

About the Author



Cheryl Abram, MSW, MSQSM, SEC+, CySA+ is a cybersecurity strategist, consultant, learning designer, author, and thought leader. She is noted for her insight and ability to harmonize competing objectives into practical compromises that produce value across teams and organizations. With extensive work and life experiences in the military, public service, federal contracting, entrepreneurship, and motherhood, Cheryl’s “person-centered” perspective guides her thinking, teaching, and practice of prioritizing human rights in cybersecurity while developing end-to-end cybersecurity solutions. Cheryl is an active and prolific writer, speaker, and content creator on various social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. She enjoys reading, practicing calligraphy, and resting. Contact: ypifany@gmail.com.

CHAPTER FOUR

Guide to the roleplay videos



Christi Bartman, Joshua Avila, Connie Berhane, Kitty Wooley

Many public servants, even those who get along well with colleagues and want to make a difference, never initiate boundary spanning during their careers. Here are three common reasons why:

Fear of _____. *“It’s just safer to keep my head down and do the work.”*

Childlike obedience. *“Don’t talk to strangers.”*

Inexperience. *“Based on my experience so far, this is the way work is supposed to be.”*

Although most people seem to have no trouble connecting with others outside of work, they constrain themselves at work. It’s clear that many in government are keeping themselves in their silos. That does not promote the kind of knowledge sharing, employee development, or performance that matters. It does not help the organization become more agile, resilient, or useful to the public in a crisis. When major changes or disruption occur, silo-hugging individuals are behind the curve and may even become irrelevant. That’s one reason why we produced this series of ebooks.

Before going any further, we want to acknowledge the contribution of our cherished colleague Mark Dronfield, former director of the MAX Federal Community Program Management Office based in the Department of Education’s budget office. Mark, who has moved to OMB’s budget systems branch since he contributed a chapter to the second ebook in 2019, reviewed and edited a script for the roleplay team on his way out to rare vacation days this summer so that one of the scenarios would be more credible.

Annotated list of the roleplays

The roleplays can be categorized roughly as mission accomplishment and upskilling. The latter is a burning concern across sectors because employees whose skills are up to date are essential in order for organizations to accomplish strategic objectives as modernization continues and implementations of artificial intelligence, Robotic Process Automation, new collaboration tools, etc. are deployed. That’s why the team has produced both types of roleplay examples, available for watching on this ebook’s [landing page](#). The list follows:

Local gov employee seeks potential member for new coalition

Here, Josh Avila and Christi Bartman act out a conversation he had while seeking a corporate member for a new city anti-racism coalition.

A Presidential Management Fellow reskills herself into a new field

This actually is not a roleplay, but a video report contributed by a former OPM Presidential Management Fellow who reskilled herself with jaw-dropping speed into a completely different discipline (from instructional design to cybersecurity), and then moved government to the private sector and back again. There's a reason for the title she gave it. This is a "two-fer" that describes PMF mentoring that was never a good fit and shows how her ease in boundary spanning helped her make the transition so quickly. It provides useful information for any HR experts who may view it. Chapter 3 goes with the video.

Fed asks CIO colleague to assist regional office employee

Sometimes it's unnecessarily cumbersome and way too slow to run a minor request that no one cares about all the way up and down the chain. This roleplay comes from a time when the cloud did not exist and seat licenses for software were common. Some software was used by only a few people and was expensive, so it made sense for an agency to buy a limited number of licenses. Occasionally a license assigned to an office remained unused due to changes in job duties, etc. This call made from my cubicle in the CNN building to "the guru" on the other side of the Mall, on behalf of a colleague based in our Philadelphia office, resulted in her quickly reassigning a spare Microsoft Project license to him.

Fed requests meeting with exec at other agency to explore detail

Some leadership development programs require that participants complete short details in other offices, or even at other agencies. Many participants expect the program manager or their supervisor to tell them where to go – this is a missed opportunity. Instead, by taking the initiative to research other organizations and then "reaching across" to people you'd love to work for, new possibilities emerge. In this case, our meeting was fruitful and I was able to have a great 60-day experience in 2007 in GAO's Learning Center.

Fed does information interview with OMB official

As mentioned elsewhere, Josh and Christi act out an information interview that Connie Berhane took the initiative to get and conducted with someone at OMB.

Fed invites exec at own agency to share leadership lessons

The point was to create space to learn from senior procurement official I admired based on the way he enabled his direct reports and related to everyone else. He was so sought-after that I doubted uninterrupted conversation inside our building would be possible, so I asked if he would meet for coffee at a Starbucks up the street. He found a date & time that worked for us, put it on his calendar, and showed up. Surprisingly, this often works when a leader prioritizes staff development, even if they are super busy – they need to stop and catch their breath as much as anyone else does. But you have to ask.

Information interview with community college VP morphs into job interview!

Josh told us about a funny information interview he conducted one time, when the community college VP he wanted to talk with mistook him for a candidate for a job opening she had. We decided this had to be included! Notice how he recovered from his surprise and went on. It wasn't necessary for him to be perfectly prepared and rehearsed for any possibility, but simply to relate to her in a human way so that a real conversation can occur. This takeaway applies to all the roleplays. **It's not necessary to know *everything* before one begins. It's just necessary to know *enough*.**

In 2019, John Sporing, Chris Harrington (City of Baltimore), Barbara Maroney (Walmart) and I created four animated scenarios that depict individual contributors, supervisors and managers who are open to boundary spanning experiments and are modeling behavior that better serves the mission and the person:

1. New transfer employee builds knowledge network quickly
2. Recent hire accelerates own development through information interviews
3. Employee proposes intra-agency partnering
4. Employee lays groundwork to maximize job shadowing opportunity

The animations are a little clunky, but they get the point across. You may review them at <https://seniorfellowsandfriends.org/unfettered-boundary-spanning/>. This year's roleplay videos simply continue in a different medium.

Questions for reflection

If my organization's culture prefers rigid control over psychological safety, what shall I do – curl up in a ball for the next few years? Who could cheer on my boundary spanning, or do it with me?

Given the changes that are on the horizon for many occupations, is it reasonable or safe for me to depend solely on my employer to “reskill” or “upskill” me, or should I also be doing something to grow my capability and ensure the viability of my career? (Why would I put others in sole charge of my career?)

If I supervise boundary spanners, what guardrails could we establish together that would help them develop while minimizing the fallout from their mistakes?

And will I be equipped to cope with the exuberant energy released by the Aha! moments of boundary spanning practice? Are there trusted colleagues who could be enlisted at times to “debrief” and encourage my boundary spanning direct reports?

About Christi Scott Bartman, our “Roleplay Wrangler”



Christi Scott Bartman, MPA, JD, PhD, has been involved in anti-human trafficking efforts in Ohio for over a decade. Working areas such as law, legislation and advocacy, she saw the need for even more dedicated effort. In order to do that, she left her position as Director of Public Administration, Public Policy and Legal Studies at American Public University System and now operates as a compassionate catalyst to push for better ways to address human trafficking and the vulnerabilities that underlie it – specifically poverty and lack of education. She is the founder of Eyes Up Appalachia an anti-human trafficking initiative.

She is also the founder her own nonprofit and educational consulting firm, Basic Concepts. Ltd. where she has worked with nonprofit and educational organizations on development, volunteer management, board development, strategic planning and other needs. Christi holds an undergraduate degree in business from Appalachian State University, a Master of Public Administration from Troy State University (achieved while on active duty in the Air Force), a law degree from the University of Toledo College of Law and a PhD in Policy History from Bowling Green State University. She is also a Certified Professional Coach. She is currently a member of the American Society for Public Administration Endowment Board and is an adjunct professor in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. Contact: cbartman@ix.netcom.com.

Guide to the Berhane, Allen, and Eng interviews

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John Sporing and Kitty Wooley

John and I conducted these interviews with three remarkable people because each tells a story that transfers tacit knowledge and provides useful clues to help you blaze your own trail. As you will notice when you view them on the landing page at <https://seniorfellowsandfriends.org/permission-to-practice-public-service-boundary-spanning/>, they are at completely different levels of scale. Depending on what you want to accomplish, one interview may apply more to your own situation than another. However, all show how the ability to span boundaries with ease has enabled *a whole other level of accomplishment* than would have occurred otherwise.

The interview with Connie Berhane

Connie's story will resonate with many positive, dependable, consistent high performers (Kim Scott, author of *Radical Candor*, rightly calls them "Rock Stars") who feel increasing urgency to find a source of new growth in their careers. Why urgency? Because many managers understandably don't want to let such people go yet may not know how to provide enough challenge to keep them. They don't always realize how serious having that challenge is for high performers who don't want to rest on their laurels or coast for the remainder of their careers. After many months of trying various approaches internally, Connie began doing information interviews on a wide scale. Recently, that led her to begin work as an Air Force civilian analyst, where she is extending the knowledge, skills and abilities she acquired during years as an Army civilian analyst. The OMB Information Interview roleplay, although acted out by Josh and Christi, was conducted by Connie.

About Connie Berhane



Connie Berhane, MPA, was a Senior Management Analyst at the Department of the Army for years until her August 2021 move to the Department of the Air Force. At Army, she oversaw Force Structure across Active Components, Reserve Components and National Guard Units. She is no stranger to volunteerism having spent two years as the Chairperson of Reid's Prospect Homeowner's Association Advisory Group in which she successfully led a team of homeowners in a community with over 300 units in the transition from Developer to Homeowner. As the spouse of a retired Army Soldier, Connie served six years as a Family Readiness Group Advisor of an organization comprised of over 3,800 personnel where she planned numerous events, fundraisers and family recognition programs. She is on the Board of Directors for the American Society of Public Administration, National Capital Area Chapter. Contact: clberhane@gmail.com.

About John Sporing, her interviewer



John Sporing retired from the Federal Government in 2016 where he worked in leadership positions in both the Executive and Judicial branches for 25 years. During that time, he helped people realize their potential at all levels by helping them become more innovative and customer-focused leaders. He also worked with Hispanic Serving Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities to recruit and prepare students for leadership roles. He founded JohnSporing.com, LLC—a leadership development and mentoring firm dedicated to assisting minority professionals maximize their leadership potential and turn them into world-class leaders. John is a Professor at the Jack Welch Management Institute where he teaches in the MBA program. He continues to present at academic and professional conferences around the world.

In addition, John has worked with mentoring programs in organizations such as the Federal Asian Pacific American Council, GovLoop, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the Cisneros Hispanic Leadership Institute. John holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from The University of Texas, San Antonio, a Master of Arts degree from the St. Mary's University of Texas and was a Ph.D. candidate at American University. He holds an advanced certification from the Wine & Spirits Education Trust and owns A Life Well Drunk, LLC—a wine tourism, events and education company. His ALWDEvents company hosts academic and wine education events around the world. In addition, John serves as the Co-Executive Director of the Southern Regional Science Association—an organization dedicated to the advancement of regional analysis and related spatial and area studies.

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The Interview with Lora Allen

Lora's accomplishment was one that I watched unfold while we were working in different units of the Office of Management at the U.S. Department of Education. There were unusually refreshing aspects to her method, like the time she, her supervisor in Executive Resources, some of the year 1 and 2 Presidential Management Fellows, and I decamped to a restaurant in Gallery Place, a few blocks up 7th Street from the LBJ Building in DC, right after work one day. She created a welcoming "pop-up" space where everyone could decompress with drinks and snacks and share their stories and experiences of work in various offices across the Department before heading home. Her PMF program improvements led to further employee engagement experiments at other agencies and inform her customer experience work. Another thing Lora did was talk to many of our hiring managers to keep developing placements for PMF rotations. See her interview for more.

About Lora Allen



Lora Allen currently works as Principal CX Advisor, Public Sector at Medallia. She is an alumna of the Presidential Management Fellows Program. Her government service is detailed at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/loraallen/>. Like fellow PMF alumna Cheryl Abram (above), Lora is equipped to move between sectors as her commitment to serve continues to unfold. Contact: lora.l.allen@gmail.com.

The Interview with Patricia Eng

When we did this interview, two sentences kept running through my mind, “And then one thing led to another...” and “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.” This engineer’s establishment of formal knowledge management across the Nuclear Regulatory Commission became famous in government KM circles in Washington. What isn’t as well known is the lead-up to that accomplishment (which NRC determined to have saved 57 million dollars in agency operating costs in the first two years) or what she’s done since then. It’s a wild story with funny parts and insider commentary that anyone who’s spent much time working in any bureaucracy, anywhere, will recognize. There are numerous takeaways in the areas of technique and emotional intelligence.

About Patricia Eng



**Certified ISO 30401 KM Auditor, Trainer, Speaker, Author
KMHR Systems Auditors**

Patricia Lee Eng, P.E., is a certified Lead ISO QMS Auditor, the first certified ISO 30401 auditor, and Principal at KMHR Systems Auditors. An engineer by trade, she first learned about Knowledge Management whilst on assignment at NASA when engineers discovered that vital information from the Apollo program had been lost. Upon returning to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), she was appointed Senior Advisor for Knowledge Management (2008-2013) where she created and managed NRC’s first KM program saving NRC over 57 million dollars in agency operating costs in her first two years. After her retirement, she co-authored “Navigating the Minefield: A Practical KM Companion,” published by the American Society for Quality which “is the book I wish I had when I started KM – no theory just practical information that one can use to start or improve their KM program”. She also co-authored, “The KM Cookbook: Stories and Strategies for organizations exploring the ISO KM standard,” in which she discusses what to expect in an ISO 30401 audit and offers tips on how to prepare for the audit. She is certified to conduct ISO 30401 knowledge management system audits, provides training and certification for ISO 30401 auditors, and is developing a course to explain the ISO 30401 standard. Contact: patricia.l.eng@gmail.com.

CHAPTER SIX

Thoughts from two wise early supporters



Alex Tremble and Carol Willett

Many people start off with a “can’t do” mindset. My mentor once told me that it was better to accept an opportunity knowing that you will have to work your hardest to be successful than to turn down an opportunity and stay exactly where you are. Growth always requires a step forward into the unknown.

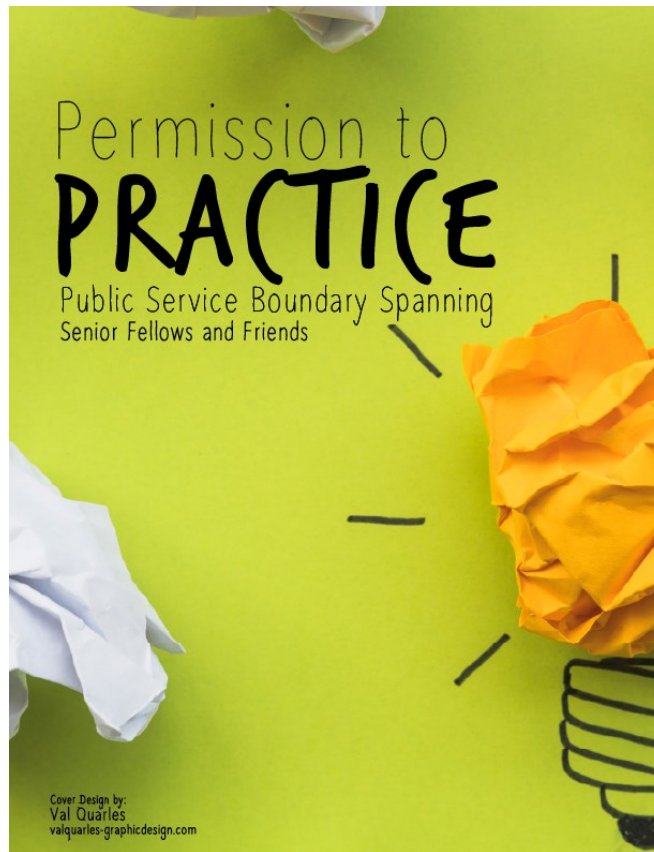
I am where I am today not because of the challenges, but because of the choices I made in the midst of the challenges. We always have a choice. —Alex Tremble, Federal Career Coach, in Unfettered: Mission-Aligned Boundary Spanning

Premise: If you’re afraid to cross boundaries, either inside or outside your organization, to find common cause with others who face the same problems you do, then your likelihood of success in solving those problems is diminished. Not only are two heads better than one, but two skill sets, two different perspectives, two differing constituencies and different cultures increase the probability that others may offer that elusive something that helps you around your own roadblocks. If the problems we face were simple, we would have solved them already. So why are we so hesitant to reach outside our organizational boundaries to talk to other people? My experience suggests that the big reason is fear.

Most of us vehemently and loudly refuse to do the things we fear. And we are endlessly inventive in rationalizing all the reasons why we can’t do the things we fear. Therein lies the greatest hurdle to communication, coordination and collaboration – the very things that offer us the greatest chance of success in bringing about effective change by reaching out to others.

Throughout most of my careers I was warned against talking to “those people” because nobody had ever done it before. Consorting with people in different department and agencies in order to learn about them, seek out points of common concern and (gasp!) maybe even share information was seen as unprecedented, dangerous, and detrimental to one’s advancement if not actually treasonous.

There is too much to be gained and too much necessity for us to become master collaborators for our fears to get the better of us. For every relationship we learn to establish, nurture, promote and strengthen, we multiply our ability to make a positive difference both in our organization, and in the larger world we inhabit. It is only when we stand together that we increase the odds of our mutual success. —Carol Willett, Sculptor & Retired Federal Executive, in Unfettered: Mission-Aligned Boundary Spanning



I can't remember a time when I wasn't a graphic designer. I created a typeface when I was seven or eight years old. Upper and lower case, A through Z – no punctuation though, I hadn't learned grammar yet. In third grade I made a poster for a school clean-up drive, it was a "wanted" poster with a trash monster that looked suspiciously like my dad. It was chosen and put up at the school and local Safeway store. My first job as a graphic designer.

Graphic design is about creating a captivating, interesting, and actionable short story in the 10 or 20 seconds you have someone's attention - to go to an event, prevent forest fires, or read about changing the way you work or do business to create successful improvements in both.

