UNFETTERED

Mission-Aligned Boundary Spanning

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MISSION-FOCUSED BOUNDARY SPANNING

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Contents

We often confine and limit ourselves for a whole lot of reasons best summed up as simply fear. Fear of looking foolish, fear of making a mistake, fear of what others will think of us, fear of not being good enough, and on and on. What this book is really addressing and trying to teach people is to ignore those fears. Your message is clear: "You are better than your fears - be curious, speak, be heard, think, do, you are not alone, courage is contagious, you don't have to hide in your cubicle, you will learn that not only can you do more, but it will be freeing."

—VALERIE QUARLES, GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Introduction

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Kitty Wooley

Welcome to the second ebook produced by members of the Senior Fellows and Friends network. Nine people have generously devoted personal energy to the further exploration of boundary spanning for better results within government organizations that are large, hierarchical, paternalistic, and slow to adapt (and thus endangered in their current form). Six of us are current or retired government managers, executives, and individual contributors based in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Colorado. The other three work in the private sector, including a British company's HR leader who paid us the great compliment of responding with enthusiasm to the first ebook[1] on LinkedIn. These three contributed cross-sector contexts, a professionally designed ebook cover, and professional instructional design in the form of experimental business animations. They hail from Brighton, England, Texas, and Colorado. All are experienced boundary spanners. All continue to break new ground.

What prompted this collaboration

An idea whose time has come is supporting boundary spanning behavior earlier in careers. There are a couple of groundbreaking executive development programs that are building track records in developing such behavior among top leaders.[2] This is utterly commendable. *And*, we think there are reasons to expand the approach:

- Teaching only federal executives to span boundaries and practice to the point of ease, and expecting the benefits to change the organization, makes assumptions that may not hold true. Designated leaders who have spent a career 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 silos, organizations, or even sectors. While some may welcome the opportunity to expand their spheres of influence and get bigger things done in partnership with others, some – in the way of all programs that call for personal change – have no intention of changing. For organizations to realize

[1] Adrian Wolfberg, Diane Blumenthal, Kriste Jordan Smith, and Kitty Wooley. Boundary Spanning in Practice: Broadening the Conversation, Self-Published, September 2017. Available at https://seniorfellowsandfriends.org/boundary-spanning/.

[2] For example, Harvard's National Preparedness Leadership Initiative.

the true benefits of cross-boundary cooperation and collaboration, boundary spanning behavior has to be allowed and enabled at all levels.

- Restricting boundary spanning instruction and practice to the executive level seems to be saying that all leadership, not just tone and direction, comes from the top. It ignores the reality that many young people, a few of whom already have held leadership positions of astonishing scope, enter government predisposed to learn about everything from everybody. Organizational units that run on control gradually disabuse new employees of this 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.

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 component, agency, or even sector boundaries, while remaining firmly aligned with agency objectives. Dave Gray, in *The Connected Company*,[3] expresses this as moving from the "thou shalt" of micromanagement to the "thou shalt not" of freedom within boundaries. According to Mark Bonchek, in "How Leaders Can Let Go Without Losing Control, "The opportunity is to replace processes that control behavior with principles that empower decision-making."[4] With this ebook and its accompanying animated scenarios, we have begun to illustrate how things could be done differently.

Outcomes that would be delightful

- Some employees begin to develop greater capability by managing their fears, taking small steps to design their own "heat experiences,"[5] and making experimental forays across silos to connect with others.

- Some managers begin encouraging employees to accelerate mastery, autonomy, and purpose by coaching them to span boundaries in ways that simultaneously support BOTH career development AND organizational performance, realizing that the micromanaging behavior of detailed command and control is not agile, thwarts knowledge transfer, and detracts from high performance.

- Some good-government advocates, whether they regard themselves as leader or followers, shift their mindsets and begin to partner with us on future projects or build on our work.

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[3] Dave Gray, The Connected Company, 2014. https://www.amazon.com/Connected-Company-Dave-Gray/dp/1491919477
[4] Mark Bonchek, "How Leaders Can Let Go Without Losing Control," HBR, June 2, 2016.
[5] Nicholas Petrie, "The What and Why of Vertical Development," https://www.nicholaspetrie.com/vertical-leadership-development.

Fundamental assumptions

- Our readers want to build up public service, not tear it down.
- The leader who depends on coercion and the employee who habitually paints him- or herself as powerless are locked in a dance that is mutually reinforcing and unproductive.
- Leadership that seeks out and leverages employee strengths and frees people up to do their best work promotes an agile culture and superior results.
- It's a both/and world. Stability and change exist together. Old and new behavior must exist together. Only fools throw out the baby with the bathwater.
- Froggish inhabitants of civilian government's proverbial pot, whose water keeps getting hotter, are not convinced that they must will to change *now*, before they are boiled alive. The environment has changed irrevocably in the span of a generation. Mindsets are not catching up quickly enough.
- Even though government organizations are not the same as businesses or nonprofits, those that are large and hierarchical share similar employee engagement challenges across sectors and borders.
- Although some contributors have advanced degrees and scholarly work to their credit, this ebook draws on their hard-won experience and reflection.

How the work is arranged

First, a hat tip to the three other authors of the first ebook, *Boundary Spanning in Practice: Broadening the Conversation*,[6] who were willing to take a chance with me: Adrian Wolfberg (DIA Knowledge Lab creator and pracademic, who was on detail in Carlisle, PA, at the time), Kriste Jordan Smith (federal airport security executive in Dallas, TX), and Diane Blumenthal (currently inventing her next gig in fine art appraisal in Bethesda, MD). Our 16-year-old literary precedent was a mandatory compilation of nine Excellence in Government Fellows' written responses to questions provided by our coach following a benchmarking visit to the U.S. Mint to study the mechanics of a successful business transformation. In contrast, the Senior Fellows and Friends ebook efforts are entirely voluntary. Then, as now, each author handled editing for his or her submission. Adherence to a common style guide was not enforced; that was done to keep barriers to participation low, so that invitees who had something to say did not feel intimidated. Senior Fellows and Friends production is a discretionary effort by competent people who want to improve government. Contributors to this second project include:

Graphic designer **Val Quarles** has participated by designing both our covers so far. Val has an extraordinary ability to "grok" what is really being said, and she continues to play even after having relocated to Austin, TX.

[6] Adrian Wolfberg, Diane Blumenthal, Kriste Jordan Smith, and Kitty Wooley. Boundary Spanning in Practice: Broadening the Conversation, Self-Published, September 2017. Available at https://seniorfellowsandfriends.org/boundary-spanning/.

Following **Lara Plaxton's** value-driven depiction of employee and customer experience within the organization after digital modernization, **Mark Dronfield** shares his approach to supervising and developing the team within a dynamic governmentwide program management office. It was a pleasure to observe his innovative process and interact with his team the last two years before I retired.

The next chapter is an experimental group effort by **me, John Sporing, Barbara Maroney,** and **Chris Harrington** that proposes the mindsets and behaviors of introductory boundary spanning at work, ideally with a supportive supervisor. These are modeled in four animated scenarios based on scripts we wrote. Since this ebook is published in PDF format, the associated animations can be accessed from the Senior Fellows and Friends landing page[7] below the downloadable ebook. The experimental guidance that the animations provide is important because the empathy and supervisory acumen that Mark Dronfield embodies are not the norm in large, hierarchical organizations like government agencies. *If an employee is expected or admonished to stay in the silo, there are cascading damages to both the employee's future and the organization's performance.* Not good. The animated scenarios provide something where there was nothing, with more to come.

Then, **Alex Tremble** courageously shares his experience as an extremely competent, generous young star whose organization was not inclined to respect his talent or support his extraordinary drive to progress. Fortunately for the public, unlike a former outstanding young government leader in DC we know, Alex continues to span boundaries and break new ground *within* government.

The final chapter is a tremendous meditation for leaders on "Fear and Crossing Boundaries" by retired senior executive turned sculptor **Carol Willett,** who continues to transform herself and those around her.

> *Most ORs are ANDs-in-waiting at the next level of thinking. –Michelle James, CEO, Creative Emergence*

> *Public service takes place within a network of systems. If there were easy answers, we would have implemented them already. Reducing the cognitively overwhelming into the digestible-yet-meaningful is the very nature of many public servants' work. Boundary spanning adds clarity to the relationships between systems, and nudges improvement into sustainable existence. –Kriste Jordan Smith, Federal Executive, Transportation Security Administration*

[7] https://seniorfellowsandfriends.org/unfettered

CHAPTER TWO

Re-Designing Work in Search for True Value

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Lara Plaxton

As we move away from the industrial era into a modern, more technological phase where digital interaction and data are the new focus for competitive advantage, we find ourselves looking for answers on how to structure our organisations and our work. The more traditional approaches of hierarchical design and management for control and direction are no longer fit-for-purpose if we want to cultivate an environment that encourages innovation, creativity and collaboration. This paradigm shift is required if companies want to remain relevant; both in the products and services they provide and in the people they serve.

The idea of having a more 'agile' approach to work stems from the need for digital transformation across the whole organisation, not as a one-off exercise but as a continual dynamic that needs to become part of the norm. With the race to bring on board the latest in technology whether it be for customers or employees; we could end up failing to focus on the core value of what we are ultimately trying to achieve if we just concentrate on perceived solutions. Before you engage in the implementation of any new digital products, you first need address a change in mindset throughout the organisation if you want to realise any kind of sustainable success.

"Digital transformation is a significant change in the basic pattern of how organizations create value. In most instances digital transformation represents a fundamental change in the organization's underlying mindset, systems, and tools needed to reposition parts of, or the entire business design."[8]

The rigidity of hierarchical organisational structure, as well as a management style that focuses on control and direction, inhibits the mindset required to enable effective digital transformation. At its core, it requires cross-collaboration over hierarchical boundaries, multi-disciplinary project teams, freedom for employees to be more autonomous and to trial new ideas without fear of failure, an inclusive workplace that attracts diverse talent to ensure diversity of thought and a multi-faceted approach that allows information to flow top-down, bottom-up as well as laterally across functions. Whilst this more fluid or agile style of operating can sound chaotic; it is not without structure if approached effectively.

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[8] Gudergan, G. & Mugge, P. (2017) The Gap Between the Practice and the Theory of Digital Transformation, *Hawaiian International Conference of System Science Whitepaper*

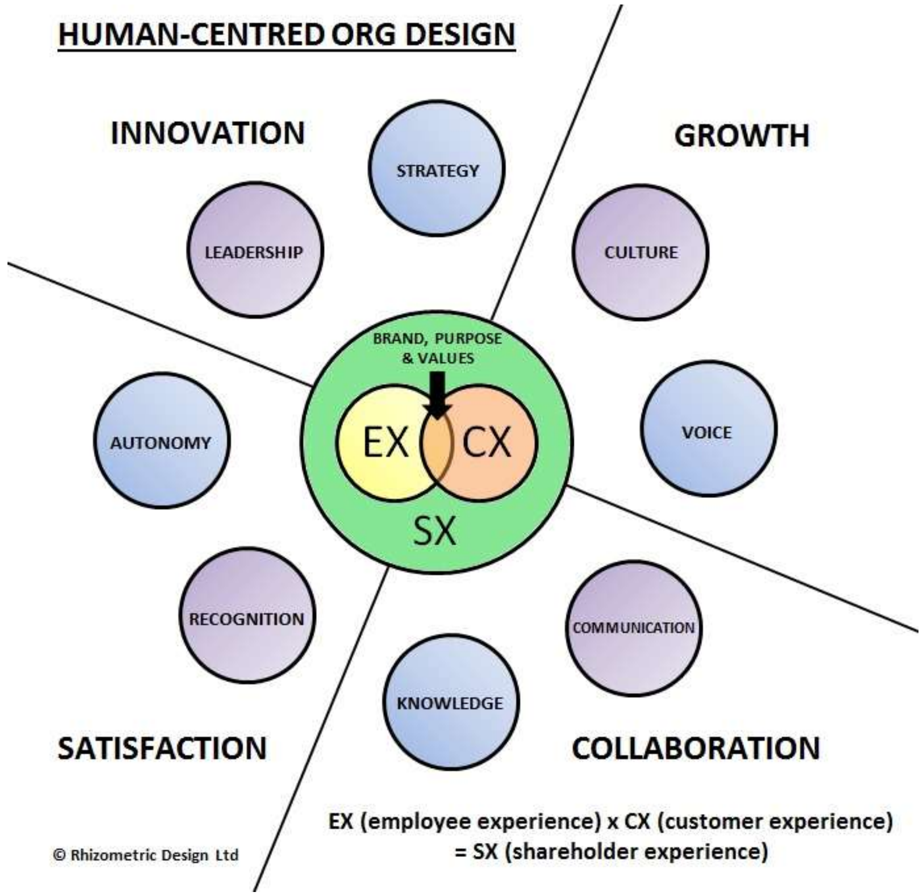
Agile software development principles, which is where some of this mindset change is derived from, concentrates on efficient ways of continually focusing on the critical value. Through short sprints of working, feedback is continually sought to ensure that value is not lost through meandering off in the wrong direction. Transparency is key and through this style of working; trust should be enabled. However, it's important for the managerial approach to be less on directing individuals and more on ensuring a psychologically safe environment where people can thrive doing activities that realise their potential whilst maintaining their wellbeing in order for them to achieve.

Ultimately, the value of any organisation is delivering superior experiences to your customers and employees. However, creating these experiences is not done through a focus on profit as the 'value' for an organisation to work towards. The true value comes from designing engaging experiences that offer value to the user that other companies don't; which in turn should result in profits depending on the internal and external environments which may have an impact. This is where having an anthropological viewpoint is helpful in determining an outside-in perspective to understand those critical factors which could have an impact.

However, value to the user is not necessarily about cost or positioning. In today's market; people seek more meaning in their interactions with an organisation whether that's from a customer or an employee perspective. Monetising those transactions with an emphasis on profit can actually impact trust between the individual and the company because it potentially detracts from meeting user's needs and desires. Of course, profit is still an important factor but it must be aligned with a higher purpose and strong ethics because people are no longer investing time and money in an organisation as a customer or employee, they are also investing their data which is an extension of their identity. Therefore, they will choose to engage with brands who represent who they are as much as the products and services they create.

Professor Karen Pollitt-Cham and I developed a human-centred organisational design to fit this new approach to work and an organisation's true value; the Stakeholder Experience Feedback Loop:

Employee Experience (EX) x Customer Experience (CX) = Shareholder Experience (SX) [9]



The purpose of this new viewpoint of organisational design is to be less focused on the structure and more focused on the value which at its centre is all about people. Technology is one way of enabling the value but if you home in on a new technological solution to provide 'digital transformation' for the organisation, then you lose the ability to add true value because it's not rooted in the value for your people. If you only consider the customer and not the employee or vice versa, then again you lose sight of the value as it's the combination of the two that harnesses exponential value. Currently in organisations, the people we are usually trying to create value for are the shareholders or investors, so goals are aligned with their needs. This is part of the mindset shift that needs to change.

With a human-centred approach to work where leaders, teams and individuals are arranged to meet those human needs and desires of the core stakeholders, then the focus is always on what's valuable. Through having an open-sourced way of enabling skillsets and knowledge to be applied to the work at hand, it creates an agility that allows for people to collaborate on valuable work and pivot should the need require it. Technology then becomes one of the tools that are available to deliver that value and the potential for innovation, satisfaction, creativity and ultimately growth is far more likely to be achievable in a sustainable way. Digital transformation

[9] Cham, K.L., & Webley, S.J., (2016) "Designing for The Play Instinct; Gamification, Collective Voodoo and Mumbo Jumbo", *Chapter in "The Business of Gamification' (eds) Dymek & Zackariasson, Routledge*

becomes the responsibility of everyone, not one department. Whilst it might sound like a large restructure process is required to achieve this, that would actually be counter-productive. First a mindset shift needs to happen and people need to start approaching problems through using design-thinking and other mechanisms that are rooted in digital transformation. It may be that some teams or sub-cultures are already working with agile methodology or this type of approach so start there and learn from them so slowly it can be incorporated across the organisation. The new organisation needs to be iterative in design.

For individuals who may be working in a more traditional environment, this change to work does not need to wait for some large corporate restructure. In fact, the power of sub-cultures is really important in bringing about this type of change. When we discuss culture change at work, it's often a manufactured process which is top-led and not human-centred. This doesn't necessarily allow for the complexity of a large group of people from various backgrounds that may not fit one defined culture.

A key way to instigate change to your own work is to enable a sub-culture to develop which may not sit within the boundary of a team or department, but across those boundaries where like-minded people can approach work in a new way. The power of building networks either internally within the organisation or externally with people who are already working with a transformative mindset can help bring a new level of satisfaction to the work you do. It helps build confidence and credibility to find people who support you, encourage you and challenge you in a positive way. It's important to do this transparently so people can see the value it brings to you, the work you do and those you interact with.

Beyond networks, another useful tool to help you bring more meaning to your work is 'job-crafting'. "Job crafting captures what employees do to redesign their own jobs in ways that can foster job satisfaction, as well as engagement, resilience, and thriving at work."[10]

For work to be meaningful and satisfying, it's important to have a strong level of self-awareness so you can understand what motivates you and what areas of work you are most passionate about. It could be new areas of knowledge or skills that you want to explore further or areas that you already have a good level of experience in and you want to develop further. The framework below is a helpful guide to explain the value of job crafting and how it can support your wellbeing at work.[11]

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[10] Berg, J.M., Dutton, J.E. & Wrzesniewski, A. (2007), What is Job Crafting and Why Does it Matter? *Theory to Practice Briefing, Michigan Ross School of Business*

[11] Ibid.

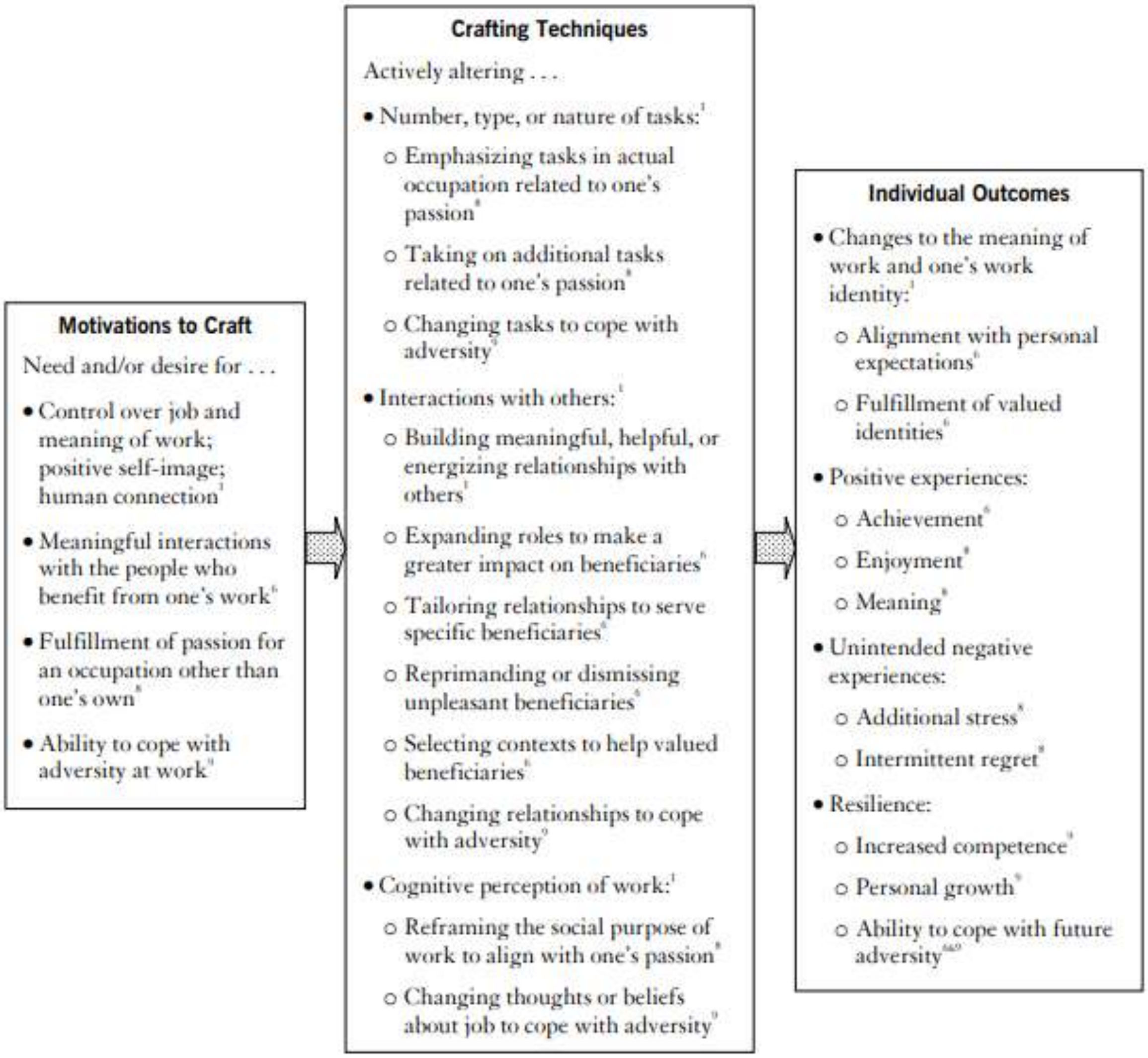

Figure 1 - Summary of Key Job Crafting Research Findings

Source: Justin M. Berg, Jane E. Dutton, and Amy Wrzesniewski - What is Job Crafting and Why Does It Matter? 2007 - University of Michigan Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship

This approach to work reflects similar themes found in digital transformation. It's focused on the user and is user-led, it's redesign is rooted in the needs and desires of the individual and the outcome is a better experience. If this approach to work can be aligned with the value of the organisation, then the output of work is contributing to the overall success of the company and being able to show this link clearly is important to gaining support from others.

Through aligning work to the overall purpose of what you do as an organisation, not necessarily the corporate goals, but the social purpose that has an impact to the people in our society, it can allow for greater meaning and fulfilment. The 'guardrails' that an individual can put in place to support their ability to craft their own role are ensuring their work has a clear link to providing a positive influence on the overall customer experience, creating a network or sub-culture of people who enjoy working in similar ways or share similar passions, measuring the value their work brings in order to evaluate its benefit and seeking feedback from others on how their work positively impacts what they are trying to achieve.

The future of work is likely to be less about job titles and roles, and more about the skills and knowledge a company can harness and then align to work that needs to be done in order to meet an organisation's true value. People will have the ability to work in a more self-managed, autonomous way so that they can see their contribution to delivering better experiences. This can only be done if mindsets start to shift, if we are agile enough to redesign the work we do, if we are focused on true value and we seek to continually learn and improve so we can iterate for success.

About the Author

Lara has over 15 years working within HR across various sectors. She is passionate about understanding people in a business context; both employees and customers to create more meaningful, valuable experiences. She is fascinated by the future of work and how an agile mindset, design thinking and digital technology can enhance the workplace to break down silos, work more collaboratively and foster innovation in order to drive the right behaviours. Lara is also a Trustee for the charity, Jigsaw4u.

CHAPTER THREE

Boundary Spanning, Innovation and Freedom **within "Guardrails"**

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Mark Dronfield

Several years after the E-Government Act of 2002 was passed, a council of budget officers from across the federal government requested a "Line of Business" be created to support the budget community. This display of leadership to recognize an opportunity to improve the budget process as a whole, as well as at individual agencies, was the first of many acts that have brought transformation to a number of agencies across the federal enterprise.

The "Budget Formulation and Execution Line of Business" (now known as the "Budget Line of Business" or Budget LoB) was created as a result of this request in 2007 to facilitate just this kind of transformation. In all of our dealings with our 26 partner agencies, the Budget LoB practices what our friend Kitty Wooley calls "Boundary Spanning" – reaching across the boundaries of our organization to connect with like-minded people to learn from them what works and what doesn't (and why), to expand our individual and collective thoughts on what's possible, and to start the adventure of finding new, and sometimes unexpected, ways to fulfill our collective missions. While the Budget LoB was created to be transformative in nature, we have found many of our experiences to be ones that have broad applicability to other functions performed by public servants.

At the forefront of "how" the Budget LoB has fulfilled our mission is defining the vision into a story that can be told and that people will enthusiastically want to be a part of. On the personal level, we get to know an individual's gifting and passions, organize work for success, and turn folks loose to be creative in finding solutions, giving them clear "guardrails" to work within and making sure they don't drift outside those boundaries as they work (the *wrong* kind of "boundary spanning"!).

This type of mindset is often considered somewhat counter-cultural in the federal government. When I first started federal service many years ago, it was a commonly held principle that if someone demonstrated they had a weakness in a particular area, they were given lots of training to help them get better at it and then held accountable to performing that activity up to everyone's standard. I've come to believe that that is backwards from the way we should be approaching the issue: I want to find out where someone's passion and gifting lies and do what I can to help make them the best they can be at that, and find a second person who has a passion for the things the first one isn't gifted in, and move that work to the second person. It's a 'win' all around if we consistently put our best people on appropriate tasks that energize them, grow their self-confidence and provide superior work products, but it's a losing proposition when I hold someone accountable to gaining proficiency in something they aren't wired to understand or succeed in. It will discourage them, lower their view of their capabilities and potential, and give us a sub-par product in the bargain. Organizational necessity or the lack of having someone who is proficient in every discipline you need could certainly make this difficult or impractical, but this approach is our default and the model to which we aspire (though we have often found interns or personnel in other organizations who can partner with us to fill those niches).

If I'm to live this out, I need to give folks ownership of tasks they're great at or have a passion for (and/or can grow into) and give them freedom to innovate or suggest changes as they continue to learn and understand what's possible, keeping in mind the outcome needs to be aligned with the vision. We once had an intern from a Midwestern university who, during his interview, asked "If I bring you a good idea, will you let me work on it?" We responded "No… we'll let you run it." As it turned out, he did have an idea for an approach we hadn't thought to pursue and he did run with it (with a little coaching from the team). His solution and approach are still in use today. You never know where the next good idea will come from, but if you aren't looking for it, you certainly won't find it – and then you're left alone with only your own, limited perspectives (and do you *really* think you're the only one with good ideas?).

Closed or limited perspectives (or the inability to do anything that hasn't already been done) often lead to siloed practices which interrupt or inhibit innovation. They put limits on how information is shared and with whom, and ultimately put limits (or handcuffs?) on how an organization can fulfill its mission. There are many reasons leaders and managers (or even organizational culture) devote energy to building "silos of excellence", usually in name only. Among the ones we've seen are:

- Fear you can't control outside influences (often viewed as threats)
- Uncertainty of where the outside thoughts will take you (and whether you can manage that)
- The ultimate result might be something different than what you expected (but just might be the answer you need)
- It might not be what you intended or promised (thus you can't claim credit for it)
- You're not expert in other silos you're touching and don't know how to engage with them, where once again, you fear losing control

So, we often default back to siloed practices that are "tried and true" … except when they aren't (which is more and more the case).

Let's be honest – it takes courage and commitment to innovate. Know going in that you *will* make mistakes and you'll need to be able to articulate what you've learned from your mistakes or failed efforts and provide metrics or testimonials on successes you've had (perhaps even as an outcome of a failed effort) to overcome objections to your work. My personal favorite is from a colleague commenting on a solution we provided her: "How can you put a measure on my sanity?" If others aren't inclined to work with you or have objections to your "new ideas", they won't change their mind unless you give them a reason to.

We've found several ways to approach this:

- Find the "early adopters" and work with them to develop a new product or process or outcome. Listen to them and find/build a common vision for what the future state could look like, and together chart a course for getting there. Learn from that collaborative experience (make sure both sides know you *will* make mistakes) and grow, refine, and do the same thing with another adopter. Document your results and the savings achieved (qualitative or quantitative). Over time you build the case that you can be trusted and are competent to deliver what's needed
- Learn everything you can about their issues and problems – do the research, be an active listener when they talk about these things, and be able to communicate back to them what you hear them saying until you're both comfortable the problem or issue statement is correct. That act alone, if they feel like they're being heard, will aid greatly in building mutual trust
- Keep a continuous feedback loop open – and tell those you're working with what you're doing with the feedback they give
- Be honest about what you can and can't do (either resources or skillsets lacking) and work together to find a solution or alternative that allows you to get out of a stagnant situation

By aligning initiatives we're undertaking with our vision for growing the community, we are taking steps to position ourselves for success. Making sure folks know how the work they are doing fits into the vision is vitally important as well, but ensuring they have the ability to make it happen and the freedom to do so will often make it happen because they will *own* it. Daniel Pink notes in his excellent book *Drive*, that "the secret to performance and satisfaction is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world."

Giving folks the freedom to work "within the guardrails", ensuring they understand what they're trying to do and why, will lead them to understanding they *own* the work, that *they're* the ones making decisions and doing the planning. They won't necessarily know everything, but they'll learn that they sometimes need to find answers and move ahead simultaneously, learning from what works and what doesn't. When problems arise, it's on me as the program manager to help them recognize that this can build them together as a team (by helping each other out and keeping their eyes on the prize of mission fulfillment) or tear it apart (blaming someone else if something doesn't work). They need to know it's easier for them to pick up an acorn than chop down an oak tree – when problems arise, address them immediately and honestly, and keep the focus on working the problem, not letting things become personal. It's essential to coach or facilitate their navigating this process, and to have created beforehand a culture of mutual appreciation of what each person brings to the table. Sometimes that includes giving them top cover and being their advocate to those watching from the outside (ideally, I've already spoken with upper management about the approach we're taking and how I'm working with folks to identify and mitigate risks up front, and have top cover for us from *them*).

The outcome from this approach for us has consistently been not only a better end product (because we've been pulling in expertise from every person's strengths) but also giving each of them the experience of how to work as a team and the resultant benefits of collaboration, as well as growing their expertise through the experience and building in each of them a greater sense of confidence. (If you visit our public facing website at www.budgetlob.gov you'll see the outcome of this type of work. We used to have a bland website that looked like every other government website that you only went to when necessary. The goal the team had was to develop a new website that people wanted to visit and would appeal to younger professionals, not the over-55 crowd I represented when we built the initial site. The guardrails were simple: make it visually appealing; speak in plain language, not government-ese; talk about our core values and equity; share success stories; answer obvious questions people would ask about the Budget LoB; invite the visitor to be a part of something special; keep it simple. I invite you to visit the site and see if you think they succeeded)

Key to the mindset of implementing “guardrails” is understanding that innovation is, or should be, a core equity. There is always another way to do ‘it’ and folks can and should be on the lookout for ‘it’ or thinking about that as they go about their work (understand too, that not everyone thinks this way – be careful not to put someone in this situation who doesn’t have the affinity for looking outward for solutions). This means things like our folks investing time in actively seeking out best practices, being freed up to attend industry events or government gatherings to hear what others are doing, getting on industry/government partnership email lists, watching videos, reading anything they can find from current thought leaders – not just on their business function but on things like leadership and organizational development as well. Then invest the time to periodically share the things they’re learning with the rest of the team and talk through the implications of those (once every two weeks, once a month, whatever works for your group). Sometimes these are the seeds of change for organizational practices or pursuing an avenue no one has previously identified.

Innovation is essential to the work we’re doing in government. Early in his tenure as the first Federal CIO, Vivek Kundra gave a keynote at an IT conference where he was talking about collaborating on newly announced initiatives such as Shared First and Cloud First. He said (and I’m paraphrasing somewhat) “if you aren’t working with us to make this happen, you’ll be left behind and in a year you’ll be irrelevant”. That was both a warning and a challenge to everyone present. No matter the mission any of us are on, we’re all looking for a way to fulfill it that won’t leave us irrelevant or outdated.

Hopefully, you’re looking for that spark or thought or idea that provides the leap forward, that lights the way for others to follow. Take courage and press ahead. You’re not in this alone!

About the Author

Mark Dronfield is the Program Manager of the Budget Line of Business (Budget LoB), an eGov initiative supporting the federal budget community hosted at the Department of Education, where he has served for 12 years. There, he is responsible for all aspects of the strategic direction and day to day operations of the Budget LoB's Program Management Office. He is currently on loan to the Office of Management and Budget as the acting Program Manager for MAX.gov, the government's largest cross-agency collaboration and data collection solution with approx. 250,000 registered users. Previously he managed numerous technology projects for the Naval Sea Systems Command for 18 years, as well as several positions in the private sector.

CHAPTER FOUR

What an Employee Can Do

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Kitty Wooley, John Sporing, Chris Harrington, Barbara Maroney

Much has been written and presented about "networking." The word conjures all sorts of negative thoughts, feelings, and stereotypes. More importantly, it misses the point. Although relationship-building at meetings and conferences has its uses, it is a tiny subset of what we're discussing here. The idea we're advancing – applied by each of us over the years in different ways – is that **reaching across silos, when done in order to advance the mission, often results in better outcomes.** (Let us not forget that part of the mission is the development of the people who carry it out.) When those who are aligned with the organization's mission practice boundary spanning behavior to the point of ease, they enlarge their comfort zones. This sets up a triple win:

- The employee becomes a more agile worker who is better able to ride waves of change
- The organization gains new capacity for cooperation and collaboration across organizational divides
- 327 million people in the U.S. will benefit indirectly from improved communication and coordination

When we began to develop the group chapter, we started out with the idea of use cases. Although we shifted to scenarios because we found the use case concept and language to be off-putting when we tried it out on nontechnical colleagues, John Sporing's early response to my circulation of a simple ATM use case is entertaining and useful:

Do you remember the first time that you used an ATM?

If you came of age in the 1990s or beyond, it probably seemed exciting and easy. After all, you probably were already used to a personal computer at home, or a smartphone in your pocket and this just seemed a natural extension. Of course, it may also seem bothersome if you have a credit/debit card, iPay, PayPal or any other many other ways to exchange cash today. But if you came of age before the 1990s, the ATM may have been one of the first pieces of computer technology you actually came face-to-face with.

During my college years, I worked as a bank teller at a mid-sized regional bank in Texas. The job had me working with the mainframe system that the bank used. Although, if somebody tried to cash a large check on Saturday, we have had to look up information on microfiche. We also had to come in one weekend a month to help put the statements and cancelled checks into envelopes to mail out to everyone. Yes, the banking industry has certainly changed a lot since then.
One of the things that changed while I was there was the introduction of the Automated Teller Machine--ATM. This machine allowed you to get cash when you needed it. No more waiting in the long bank lines at lunch or getting stuck in traffic and arriving at the bank minutes after they closed. You could now walk up (only walk up ATMs at that point), put in a card, punch in a PIN (another new term we had to learn and--most importantly--remember) and withdraw cash (assuming you had some in your account in the first place).

This seemed easy to me and I thought this would be a great use of technology. I even worked on a project that looked at putting ATMs on local college campuses to encourage college students to open up accounts at the bank. It would save the bank money by not needing as many tellers (yes, it was making my job obsolete) and by offering more convenience to the bank's customers. But something interesting happened when the bank tried to get current customers to use the ATMs--they did not want to. Well, let me rephrase, the older customers (and by older, I mean anyone over 30) did not use the ATMs. So, we began to look into the reason why not.

We found two main reasons why the ATMs were not being used more. The first reason was that the older customers, who may have lived alone, found the weekly trip to the bank a way to interact with other people. They knew their teller and their teller knew them. The withdrawing of cash each week provided live interaction with a friend. While this is a valid reason, more of a societal issue and not one that the bank could solve.

The second reason was the fear of breaking the machine. This is something that we, as the bank, could do something to change--training. The leadership got all the tellers together and we came up with a short 10-minute training that we could use as the customers came up to our window.

We had an ATM setup in the teller lobby, and we would talk up to the machine with the customer and go through step-by-step of how to use the machine. Then we would let them try on their own. We would ask the customer the next time they came in if they had used the ATM. Slowly, we found that usage was going up. We found, on average, that after the third time they had used the ATM, any fear they had previously, had disappeared. And in order to help with the first reason of not using the ATM (the loneliness issue), customers could, and did less often, go up to a live teller.

So, what does this have to do with leadership?

When you are leading your team, it may be most comfortable for you to stick with what you know. Go up to your favorite teller and withdraw the same way of doing something that you withdraw each week. This way you do not have to worry about breaking anything. You can still get the job done, but it may not be the fastest way, or most convenient way of getting the job done--but hey, it works.

What if, just one time, you allowed someone else to show you (maybe not step-by-step) a new way--perhaps including new technology--of getting the work accomplished. Yes, it may be a little scary, and you may break something (but probably not). So you go to your new resource--perhaps it's a book, a TED talk, a seminar, webinar, training course, or even talking to a fellow leader who does things differently from you--and you come away with a new technique of getting the work finished. You may have to train your team (and remember, one member of the team is your customer) how to the work the new way, but as long as you can also explain the benefits of the new way, most people will welcome a new challenge.

The second time, you use a new resource (or reconnect with the first one) and refine the new technique--figure out what worked the last time and where were the hiccups. Keep the good stuff and make changes so that there are fewer hiccups this time. Ideally, this "postmortem" will take place with your team. You will not always know where hiccups occur--many times they will occur where you think everything went perfectly, but one of your team members stepped up to change the technique so it would work perfectly.

As you allow the team input in the process of getting the work done, they will be less intimidated by your position, and offer up their opinions and suggestions for improvement. Repeat this process again the next cycle. If you can do this for three cycles, you will have gained confidence in yourself and your team that you are not breaking the ATM. Now, just like the bank keeping the live tellers available, you may want to keep some aspect of your original technique available.

As in the preceding chapter, John's ATM story is written from the perspective of an innovative team leader. **In no way are we advocating for an employee to ride off into the sunset, boundary spanning all the way, with no thought for team or mission. It is precisely *for* the organization's gain that establishing weak ties[12] with colleagues elsewhere should occur.** The gain potentially includes, but is not limited to, such benefits as,

- Tacit knowledge transfer from experts who are about to retire
- An understanding of how the total enterprise works[13]
- First encounters with analytic mindsets and techniques, project management that works (or doesn't, and why), acquisitions market research, and customer experience design on a large scale
- Exposure to "black belts" whose emotional intelligence and knowledge of the system enables them to get better outcomes from difficult conversations and navigate the organization to get work done.

The chief downside to the organization that I have been able to discover is expressed in a nutshell by Francesca Gino, Harvard Business School Professor:

> *"Leaders say they value employees who question or explore things, but research shows that they largely suppress curiosity, out of fear that it will increase risk and undermine efficiency."[14]*

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[12] "A network is a set of relationships that are characterized by both strong and weak ties. Strong ties are characterized by high levels of trust, reciprocity, and sense of community, whereas weak ties cross boundaries and are a source of new ideas, information, and resources." –Leadership & Networks ebook by Deborah Meehan and Claire Reinelt, New Ways of Developing Leadership in a Highly Connected World, October 2012, p. 5

[13] Gilmore, Agatha. "Up-and-Coming Leaders Lack Critical Skills, New Survey Finds." Chief Learning Officer (November 2009).

[14] Gino, Francesca. "[The Business Case for Curiosity]." Harvard Business Review (September-October 2018).

That the latter is an old, ingrained belief may explain the seeming inability of many current and former public leaders to see, let alone examine, the dynamics of control that are increasingly out of sync with the requirements of the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment in which government at every level is operating. The tradeoffs must be examined, and soon. A now-famous account of tradeoff examination and astonishing change in the warfighter domain is Stanley McChrystal's Team of Teams.[15] There is no civilian government counterpart yet. However, the Project Management Institute recently sponsored a webinar for 1,500 project managers globally that shows that an examination of the diminishing returns of tight control in project management and software development is well under way:

> **Successful Agile Requires a New Kind of Leadership**
> Jul 29, 2019 3:00:00 PM EDT (UTC-4)
> Presenter: Jeff Dalton
>
> In an agile world, team members are empowered to make important decisions within the context of the behavioral architecture, without having to ask permission from supervisors or managers. But these supervisors and managers are coming from a lifetime of learning how to succeed in a hierarchical world, so they will need to leave behind those ingrained lessons. In order for agile to be successful at scale, leaders will need to change.

During my recent conversation about guardrails with Santa Clara County CIO and Agile Government Leadership board member Ann Dunkin, the first thing she had to say was, "There does still need to be an expectation that you'll (1) *Deliver* (2) *The right thing.*"[16] Rightly so, end results will continue to be the bottom line as government I.T. gradually transitions to a more agile way of working that is consistent with digital modernization – just as they should be in every corner of government.

Now, we'll zero in on the employee perspective.

Three reasons why some may never span boundaries during their careers

Fear of ___________. *"It's just safer to keep my head down and do the work."*

The problem with this is that it becomes a hard habit to break. The first widely acknowledged expert I met at Federal Student Aid when I transferred to Washington had the expression of a condemned prisoner. His decision to remain in the same audit resolution position for decades rather than try to learn something new eventually made it impossible for him to move. See the list at the end of this chapter for respected recent work on the perennial topic of fear. Don't miss the tremendous essay on fear in our final chapter.

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[15] McChrystal, Gen. Stanley, Tantum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell. Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World. Penguin Random House LLC (May 12, 2015).

[16] 6/12/19 phone conversation with Ann Dunkin, former EPA CIO & Senior Advisor to the EPA Administrator

Childlike obedience. ***"Don't talk to strangers." "Children are to be seen and not heard."***

Those messages may have been appropriate when we were small children, and many of us internalized them. When we grow up, we have the opportunity to examine and discard the ones that no longer serve us and do not give us enough room to keep unfolding, try new behaviors, and test our own capabilities. In the context of knowledge work, they rob us of the ability to experience work as craft. If we do not permit ourselves to reach out to others elsewhere whose work or presence attracts us, we shoot ourselves in the foot.

Inexperience. ***"Based on my prior experience at school and work, this is the way work is supposed to be."***

Except for a few young employees who come into the federal workforce already having established non-profits, earned the right to practice law, or developed self-efficacy in other ways, this is how employees often enter the federal workforce. Some supervisors, managers, and executives take full advantage of assumed inexperience to propagate norms that reinforce siloed behavior unnecessarily, dismissing the negative impact that such tight control will have on cross-fertilizing knowledge transfer, employee growth and engagement, and innovation later.

Boundary spanning will not accelerate performance or be a career catalyst for everyone. Many employees will remain in their silos throughout their careers. However, what if they were to adopt these guiding principles of Richard Lyons, the University of California at Berkeley's first-ever Chief Innovation and Entrepreneurship Officer?[17]

Question the Status Quo ◆ Confidence Without Attitude ◆ Beyond Yourself

Or, what if they asked themselves a question Carol Willett asked me in 2008, "What would you do if you knew you could not fail?"

Playing outside the comfort zone: How much do you really need to know up front?

When the vice president for institutional advancement at a midwestern liberal arts college where I was working invited me to expand into a completely different role in 1986, I learned something that could be useful to emerging boundary spanners. The shift involved dropping administrative duties in the dean's office and picking up the pieces, with the admissions director, in the student financial aid office after its director's precipitous departure in late winter. Financial aid is a highly regulated function that is largely driven by federal and state legislation. The two of us were tossed into the deep end of the pool. We had to stay afloat until we learned how to swim – and we did. The first thing I learned was, **it's not necessary to know *everything* before one begins. It's only necessary to know *enough*.**

[17] Takahashi, Dean. "UC Berkeley names its first-ever chief innovation and entrepreneurship officer." July 10, 2019. https://venturebeat.com/2019/07/10/richard-lyons-will-be-uc-berkeleys-first-ever-chief-innovation-and-entrepreneurship-officer/

Appointments with parents and prospective students had been scheduled into the foreseeable future. Parents new to the process, not having received any information to the contrary, expected that they would be given final information at the appointment about the types and amounts of funding that would be forthcoming to help pay for tuition and related expenses. Although technological advances have made that expectation reasonable now, it was absurd then. However, what was reasonable was to welcome those who came to each appointment, build rapport and convey reassurance, explain what would happen next with their son's or daughter's financial aid paperwork, and tell them approximately how long it was likely to take to arrive at the final answer. The result was that almost every parent left satisfied, although without knowing how much financial help would be forthcoming for fall semester.

In that case, *enough* looked like this: "I don't have all the answers yet – about either the process or the amounts for which the student will be eligible – but I understand that the parents need information and assurance that their children will be able to begin college in the fall. What can I talk about at the appointment that will keep it from being a total waste?" I.e.,

1. **What do I *know* now?**
   - I understand at a high level how our process will work this year.
   - I know whether or not this student's application is complete.

2. **How would I *feel*, if I were in their shoes?**
   - I might be feeling anxious about cash flow – what grants, loans, or other funds would be available at the right time to pay tuition, whether the school would work with me to set up installments instead of paying it all at once, and whether or not college attendance was really possible at all.

Note that I had almost no information – but it was enough, early enough in the year, to make the appointments seem worthwhile to the parents. A small note card with basic conversational prompts, such as *"Hi! I'm Kitty Wooley. Thanks for coming. How are you today?"* and *"Today we'll walk through these 3 things, so that you ..."* accompanied me to each appointment until I felt comfortable enough to throw it away. That was just enough to keep me from freezing in deer-in-headlights mode. Financial aid letters were eventually mailed out, and remaining questions were answered by staff on the phone or over the counter in the business office. The appointments were nerve-wracking in the beginning, although I relaxed a bit more each time. In the end, it all worked out.

Do you know what being outside *your* comfort zone feels like? If you take time to figure that out, and then notice what activities or practices help you hang in there long enough to get through an experience instead of avoiding it, then the only other thing you need to do in order to begin boundary spanning is decide who to approach, and why. To develop your "Why," think about what you hope to gain by meeting with a particular person. (And, is there anything you could offer him or her?)

It's worthwhile to collect some intelligence in advance by asking around and searching the agency's site to find out about the person, the work, and the unit beforehand. Preparation signals respect, making it obvious that you've done your homework and are not taking the opportunity lightly. After realizing what you're curious about, you might even write down some questions to ask. Then, you can (more or less) comfortably reach out to see if the person will agree to a conversation. In the event that the person says no, avoid the downward spiral caused by taking it personally. People are busy. You don't know what the person is dealing with. It may work later. Move on immediately.

A friend who develops leaders and optimizes team performance related to me three questions that Power Lab founder Barry Oshry teaches participants to ask themselves when they're considering taking a risk:

- "Will I be fired?"
- "Will I suffer a career setback?"
- "Will I survive?"

If the answers are "No," "Maybe," and "Yes," one should probably proceed.

It is completely possible to make small experiments that match your risk-taking to your tolerance for risk. You can decide to step off a curb, or you can BASE jump off a bridge. Either way, you begin teaching yourself how to fish, even as you wait and hope for others to bring you fish.

Four scenarios for emerging boundary spanners

John, Chris, Barbara and I have partnered on four short, 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. Although most people seem to have no trouble connecting with others outside of work, they constrain themselves at work. As described in the second assumption on page 8, we see that **many in government are keeping themselves in their silos.** That does not promote knowledge sharing, employee development, employee engagement, or performance that matters. It does not help the organization become more agile, resilient, or useful to the public in a crisis. When a major change or disruption occurs, silo-hugging individuals are behind the curve and may become irrelevant. Here, we propose alternative behavior.

The same basic principles work no matter what your position in the hierarchy.

If your organization is not managing talent progressively, and you don't feel that you can grow where you are, is job-hopping the only way out? Not necessarily. Rather than lose the "knowledge equity" you may have accumulated in your current organization, use the scenarios to imagine how *you* would proceed.

The scenario animations are available on this ebook's web page at https://seniorfellowsandfriends.org/unfettered-boundary-spanning/. To make them accessible to screen readers, we have included the scripts on which they are based.

Example 1. New transfer employee builds knowledge network quickly

Here we see a recently arrived HR expert who – amazingly – is reaching out to an expert in another domain to find out more about its people and work. This conversation has win/win written all over it:

- *He* wins by learning more about his new agency quickly, becoming known as a curious individual who values appreciative inquiry, and bridge-building with a unit he may have reason to work with in the future.
- *She* wins by adding a potential HR ally to her network and enjoying an opportunity to share her expertise.
- *The agency* wins via lubricating relationship that may mitigate the risk of operational friction caused by chronic lack of relationship across units.

On the face of it, this is not all that unusual, is it? Well, yes and no. When is the last time you saw someone do this at work?

Example 2. Recent hire accelerates own development through information interviews

In this scenario, a recent hire takes the initiative to begin seeking out others with whom she can do a complementary kind of learning – about the organization, about leadership, or about managing oneself in a bureaucratic culture for optimal results. Based on her supervisor's constructive reaction, if she goes on to experience such conversations as mostly positive, we can imagine that information interviews will become a staple of her Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Will she be lured away from her current unit eventually? It is entirely possible. However, if her boss instead were to say "Don't talk to those people over there" to this young person who is not new to leadership or work that matters, two likely outcomes would be that she looks for another job or – worse – remains in the current position and disengages.

Example 3. Employee proposes intra-agency partnering

Here, something entirely new is being proposed by a local government employee who sees the mutual benefits that could flow from project work with another group in another building in the city. The conversation with his supervisor shows that she does not lead with "No." Each person is really listening to the other. Whether or not the partnering opportunity comes to pass exactly as the employee envisions, based on the trust and openness displayed here, it is entirely possible that he will have the opportunity to make professional friends in the other unit and come out of the experience having acquired a "go-to" person there. How often do finance and health policy people need to interact? That is not the point. The point is that the local government will acquire a tiny bit of new connective tissue that may help it move forward in the future.

Example 4. Employee lays groundwork to maximize job shadowing opportunity

This scenario shows the beginning of a process conducted by an open-minded employee who intends to make the most of a special opportunity. Government leadership programs typically involve requirements that must be completed in order to graduate, such as information interviews with managers and executives, group projects, or job shadowing. Employees who get the most from these programs rightly view the requirements as *opportunities*. To derive the most value from each opportunity, it follows that an employee ought to carefully consider how each requirement can be related to his or her "Why," thinking strategically about how various alternatives could reveal pathways toward a personal vision of fulfilling work and success. Each situation also provides a "meta-opportunity": it invites reflection on what sort of difference one hopes to make in the world, and how that could connect with the opportunity at hand. Making the most of it becomes even more important when the requirements involve bigger opportunities, such as details at other agencies.

Questions for reflection

If my organization's culture does not promote 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?*

Related reading & listening

Edmondson, Amy. How Fearless Organizations Succeed. Strategy+Business (November 14, 2018). https://www.strategy-business.com/article/How-Fearless-Organizations-Succeed

Amy Edmondson describes three steps leaders can take to create psychological safety, the prerequisite for greater innovation and growth.

"Amy Edmondson: Psychology Safety." Disrupt Yourself Podcast by Whitney Johnson. June 18, 2019. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/disrupt-yourself-podcast-with-whitney-johnson/id1156483471?i=1000441915116

To hear an example of a boundary spanning leap, listen to Edmonson's story of first contact with Buckminster Fuller, four minutes in!

Goff-Dupont, Sarah. How to be a great leader in a world of control freaks. Atlassian Work Life (February 12, 2019). https://www.atlassian.com/blog/leadership/great-leaders-secrets
"How to create an environment where people are empowered and excited to do their best work."

Goleman, Daniel. Developing Emotional Intelligence on the Autism Spectrum: Part 1. July 31, 2019. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/developing-emotional-intelligence-autism-spectrum-part-daniel-goleman/

How a high-IQ, low emotional intelligence senior engineer was coached to script his informal interactions, including how to greet people, in order to lead his team and reach his business goals.

Goleman, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence Courses. 2019.
https://marketplace.geteverwise.com/collections/danielgoleman

The course descriptions on each page provide a useful outline of the foundational and emotional skills of emotional intelligence based on Goleman's research and practice. Boundary spanners who develop these skills have been found to become even more effective at work.

Harrison, Spencer, Erin Pinkus and Jon Cohen. Research: 83% of Executives Say They Encourage Curiosity. Just 52% of Employees Agree. September 20, 2018
https://hbr.org/2018/09/research-83-of-executives-say-they-encourage-curiosity-just-52-of-employees-agree

Who gets to be curious at work?

Kelly, Lois and Carmen Medina. Rebels at Work: A Handbook for Leading Change from Within. O'Reilly Media (November 5, 2014). https://www.amazon.com/Rebels-Work-Handbook-Leading-Change-ebook/dp/B00P9WL3WS

How to manage your interactions at work effectively, no matter where you are in the organization, so that your new ideas can be heard and maybe even change the organization.

Neuroleadership Institute. Try the SCARF Assessment. 2019.
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 everyone understand their unique motivations for boundary spanning.

Salesforce.com. Learn the Value of Aligning with Your Manager. 2019.
https://trailhead.salesforce.com/en/content/learn/modules/alignment-with-your-manager/learn-the-value-of-aligning-with-your-manager
"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."

Scott, Kim. Rather Than a Micromanager or Absentee Manager, Be a Thought Partner. Date unknown.
https://www.radicalcandor.com/blog/micromanager/
"We call managers who have low, almost non-existent involvement in their team's work absentee managers. Those with extremely (maybe excruciatingly) close involvement are micromanagers. And in between those are the thought partners, the ones who empower, enable and encourage their teams to do the best work of their lives."

Wolfberg, Adrian (2018) "Problem-Solving in Complex Settings: Techniques for Crossing Organizational Boundaries," *Engaged Management ReView*: Vol. 2: Iss. 3, Article 1.
https://doi.org/10.28953/2375-8643.1047

Senior Fellows and Friends hosted an August 2019 video conversation during which Dr. Wolfberg, DIA Knowledge Lab creator and pracademic, discussed how his research applies in practice with government and *private sector employees in the DC area, Pittsburgh, Colorado Springs, Juneau, and Honolulu. Similar sessions will continue once per quarter into 2020.*

Other recently published work

Cross, Rob. Collaborative Overload - articles and presentations from 2016 forward.
https://www.robcross.org/collaborative-overload/

Rob Cross, Edward A. Madden Professor of Global Business at Babson College, has researched, written, and convened on network-related topics for years. Collaborative overload and its effect on people and organizations has become a major research interest. Cross's work has implications for boundary spanners in that it advocates for finding the sweet spot that enables both career progression and sustainable organizational high performance while avoiding burnout.

Ernst, Chris and Donna Chrobot-Mason. Boundary Spanning Leadership: Six Practices for Solving Problems, Driving Innovation, and Transforming Organizations. McGraw-Hill Education (November 10, 2010).
Ernst served as Senior Enterprise Faculty, Organizational Leadership Practice, Center for Creative Leadership when he co-authored this book. Currently, he is Director, Learning & Organization Effectiveness, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. CCL describes boundary-spanning leadership as "the capability to create direction, alignment and commitment across boundaries, fields, or sectors to achieve a higher vision or goal."

A request by the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation kicked off initial CCL research by Ernst & Yip in 2009. The Foundation sees boundary-spanning leadership as a key way to develop the leadership capacity of its grantees to do their work and solve pressing health and health care problems most effectively.

Langan-Fox, Janice and Cary L. Cooper. Boundary-Spanning in Organizations: Network, Influence and Conflict. Routledge Studies in Management, Organizations and Society, Book 26. Routledge (August 13, 2013).
"This book aims to invigorate, excite, and expand the literature on boundary spanning in a diverse range of disciplines such as sociology, organizational psychology, management, medicine, defense, health, social work, and community services. The book serves as the first collection of reviews on boundary spanning in organizations."

Oshry, Barry. CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT: How Our Blindness to Context Cripples Even the Smartest Organizations. Triarchy Press (February 3, 2018).
"Context, Context, Context tells the tale of a single organization in its struggle to achieve excellence. The story illuminates for all of us the power that comes from transforming context-blindness into context-sight."
In this book, Oshry advocates for everyone in the system to understand the scripts that are playing out at various levels, and the options that are available for each person to develop the ability to act in powerfully effective ways from wherever he or she sits.

> *Taking charge of your own learning is a part of taking charge of your life, which is the sine qua non in becoming an integrated person. –Warren G. Bennis*

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 the business side, report preparation and staff work, and the design and execution of interagency mentoring experiences for executive branch budget staff.

After work, Kitty began hosting a dinner series she named "Senior Fellows and Friends." Since 2003, 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. 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 the office. This is accomplished through in-person meals, video conversation, and experimental activity like this ebook. If that resonates with you, please contact Kitty at kittywooley5@gmail.com.

About John Sporing, Author & Scenario Script Inventor

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 contin-

ues 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.
Contact: JohnSporing.com, LLC 11654 Plaza America Dr., #862, Reston, VA 20190, John@JohnSporing.com

About Chris Harrington, Scenario Script Inventor

Chris Harrington is a public administration professional who is passionate about local community improvement. He has spent his career developing solutions for public, nonprofit, and private organizations that focus on municipal governance and performance. He is currently leading an effort to produce web-based solutions focused on predictive analytics that allow municipalities to better understand the future financial and social impacts of decisions made today. He received both his Master of Public Policy and Master of Business Administration degrees from The University of Maryland. He currently lives in the Baltimore area with his wonderful wife and children.

About Barbara Maroney, Scenario Animation Designer

Barbara Maroney is currently working as a Senior Manager of People Development, Global Sourcing at Walmart International. Her duties include Instructional Design, Graphic Design, and curriculum development. Her new cross-cultural team is being built from the ground up. Barbara's extensive experience in multiple business avenues has helped her jump in and organize team interactions, governance, and the establishment of an asset library for the new group. Past industries included: banking and finance, insurance, technology, and the medical field.

Barbara is a true example of the life-long learner. She has a BS in Psychology from the University of Colorado/Colorado Springs, a Masters in Management from the University of Phoenix, and a Masters of Education, Instructional Design and Technology from Kaplan University. Her latest venture was completing the Full Sail University online certificate course for Instructional Design and Technologies to increase her knowledge of current and upcoming tools and trends.

As the VP of Programming for the Association for Talent Development's Pikes Peak Chapter, Barbara has extended her network of learning experts and enthusiasts locally as well. She has successfully enlisted numerous important speakers on topics that are relevant to today's working environment. Barbara has great passion for learning and is always looking for better ways to increase engagement among fellow learners.

> *Do we realize we are working with people who have great reservoirs of goodness, commitment and creativity? Or do we, in the traditional Western model, feel that if there's good in the organization, it's only because of our own qualities of leadership? I have realized over time that the real role of a leader is not to control but to mid-wife – to evoke – those qualities of commitment, compassion, generosity and creativity that are in all of us to start with. –Margaret Wheatley*

CHAPTER FIVE

How I Made it Out of the Worst Working Situation Ever...

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Alex D. Tremble

. . . A**nd How You Can Too.**

As a professional speaker and career coach, I am often asked if there was any one person who was responsible for my career success. The answer to that question has always been *yes*—but not in the way you might be thinking. This person was the only reason that I rose through the ranks much quicker than my peers, and she was the only reason my federal career was almost over before it started. As contradictory as these facts may seem, I am truly indebted to this person and appreciate the role she played in my personal and professional growth and development.

The Beginning

I have always been comfortable building relationships with others. Looking back on my life, I now understand that I was successful in building relationships because I have always been genuinely interested in learning about the people around me. Because I love learning about people, and people generally love talking about themselves and what's important to them, I quickly developed a network of relationships that have positively impacted my life.

During the first year of my graduate studies in Industrial and Organizational Psychology, I was introduced to LinkedIn.com. This networking platform further amplified my networking skills and my network and facilitated my ability to build strong relationships with people around the globe whom I may have never met otherwise.

It is important to approach networking as an opportunity to exchange value. As you offer something valuable to others, they will want to offer something valuable to you. I actively participated in multiple LinkedIn groups, posting content, sharing my perspectives, and reaching out to influencers as often as I could. I was so active that after a while it seemed as if all the group members knew me and my career interests (which was exactly my intent). After about 6 months of active participation, I decided to inquire whether anyone in my network was aware of any job opportunities that were aligned with my interests. To my amazement, I received a huge positive response. Within a week of my post, I had received six employment offers. After evaluating the offers, I decided to pursue an internship opportunity within the U.S. Federal Government. The internship was by far the lowest paid opportunity, but the potential upside far surpassed the higher-paying opportunities. I was being offered the opportunity to develop and manage the executive development program for a cabinet-level agency. At the age of 23, there was no way that I could pass this up. After my initial interview with the Senior Executive Service (SES) director of the office, I knew that this was the right opportunity to pursue. And that it was.

Success Tip 1: Put Yourself Out There. Growing up, many of us are told not to share our career ambitions with those around us for fear that they will undermine our efforts. Throughout my life, however, it has been my willingness to share my ambitions that has resulted in my greatest career opportunities. If I had not have taken the chance and shared my career interests with the people in my LinkedIn network, I would not have been presented with the multiple job offers I received. My advice to those whom I coach and mentor is to take a chance. Most people want to help you succeed. (Supporting video: https://youtu.be/MIG1KcSNQTM)

The Upside

For the purposes of this book, we will refer to the SES director who hired me and served as my early mentor as Dr. Jane Sanchez. Almost 3 months after my initial conversation with Dr. Sanchez, I entered the federal building as a second-year graduate student, GS-4 intern, under the Student Temporary Education Program (STEP). From the first time Dr. Sanchez and I spoke, we instantly connected. We had so much in common. We had both lived in the same state, had family connections in the military, and had a passion for leadership development; although our political beliefs were not 100% aligned, we respected each other's opinion. Now, to be completely honest, when I was selected for the internship, I never really thought a 23-year-old graduate student was going to be allowed to develop and implement the agency's first executive leadership development program. However, that was exactly what Dr. Sanchez expected of me. And she could not have been more supportive.

Success Tip 2: Learn on the Job. When given the opportunity to create the program, I could have shied away and said that I was not ready. If I had done that, I can assure you that I would not be in the same situation I am in today. 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. Remember, those who offer you an opportunity obviously see something in you and believe that you can accomplish the task. Believe in yourself. (Supporting video: https://youtu.be/GSAXE3_5UE8)

Over the next 2 years, Dr. Sanchez would send me to almost every executive training course I requested; she proactively introduced me to many of her senior-level contacts, hired me as a permanent federal employee, and asked me to lead the agency's three government-wide leadership development programs. In addition to these incredible opportunities and responsibilities, I started and managed the SES mentoring program; played a significant role in the creation of the agency's diversity program; served as the international liaison for two secretarial conferences; and attended many very senior-level meetings that helped me learn how executives think and how executive-level decisions are made and helped fine-tune my political savvy.

Dr. Sanchez was my direct supervisor. I had unlimited access to her and mentoring from her. She was my closest advocate. Admittedly, I thought we were more than that. I thought we were friends. I still remember how we would message each other via Facebook at all times of the night. She was one of the key individuals who encouraged me to pursue my passion of teaching leadership development and to create my keynote speaking and career coaching company, GPS Leadership Success. I can honestly say that I would not be the man I am today without all of her support. But our relationship was not strong enough to withstand what was going to happen next.

The Downside

At the beginning of my third year working for her, Dr. Sanchez hired an SES deputy director to oversee office operations. The deputy director also became my direct supervisor. Due to the new reporting structure, Dr. Sanchez and I did not speak as often. I slowly noticed indications that she was beginning to distrust me and that our relationship was becoming strained. About 6 months into the new reporting structure, the deputy director encouraged me to start looking for new employment opportunities. The success of my work with Dr. Sanchez had resulted in numerous unsolicited offers, but I refused to accept them because I felt a deep sense of loyalty to her for all that she had done for me and my career. I would soon regret this decision.

Two months later, the deputy accepted a job offer outside of our office. I quickly came to the very sad and scary realization that the deputy had been protecting me from Dr. Sanchez's full wrath. Then my life got really bad, really quickly.

Success Tip 3: Tempered Loyalty. I was raised to be loyal to those who help me. Although I am still very loyal to those who work in my best interest, this situation taught me that I cannot have blind loyalty. If someone, or your organization, does not treat you with respect and you have tried to improve the situation to no avail, then you should leave. This is not to say that you should be disrespectful, but you should find another place of employment where you will be respected. (Supporting video: https://youtu.be/8VwgOYM40mg)

Dr. Sanchez began to publicly question every decision I made. She intentionally undermined me in front of my peers and customers and rated my performance as unsatisfactory even through all of my customers strongly disagreed with the rating. The level of distrust had increased so much that I was required to prove that I was working throughout the day. I was forced to keep a day log (indicating when I entered or exited the building, went to the restroom, or was on the phone, whom I spoke with, how many emails I received and answered, etc.), and I was no longer permitted to telework. I could share hundreds of stories of the harassment I endured, but instead I will share the story that made me decide that I could no longer allow myself to be bullied.

One afternoon as I was working, two armed guards and an IT professional—all of whom I knew—entered my office. After verifying who I was, they informed me that they were there to confiscate my laptop. Completely freaked out, I gave them my laptop and waited until they left the room. I then immediately called a few friends to see if they could figure out what was going on. It turns out that because Dr. Sanchez had known about my GPS Leadership Strategies company, she had reported me to Ethics, hoping that I had conducted some of my personal work on my government-issued work laptop. Luckily, I was very aware that that was not appropriate and had not improperly used my government laptop.

The Opportunity

Before my relationship with Dr. Sanchez crumbled, I was one of the office's hardest workers. I worked nights, weekends, vacations, and even during sick leave. My only focus was getting the job done and making my supervisors look good. As you can imagine, after this latest episode, I hated going to work. Although I had too much personal pride to let the quality of my work suffer, I no longer worked any extra hours.

Now that I wasn't working extra hours, I was a bit unsure of what to do with all of my time. Admittedly, I found myself moping around my apartment having a pity party and wondering what I had done to deserve these circumstances. Thankfully, neither the moping nor the pity party lasted very long. My friends and mentors stepped in and pressed me to start doing something positive with my free time. This encouragement led to me putting all of my effort into building my speaking and career coaching organization, GPS Leadership Solutions. Their encouragement motivated me to actively build my skills and ultimately my reputation as a leadership development expert and continue to develop a network of powerful influencers. Soon after starting GPS Leadership Solutions, I began to receive requests to speak at conferences, coauthor books, and contribute to international magazines. I was invited to share my thoughts on leadership development at a White House summit in 2013. Yet, my favorite accomplishment during this stressful time was writing my first bestselling career achievement book, *The GPS Guide to Success.*

Success Tip 4: See Challenges as Opportunities. We all experience situations that are mentally and emotionally draining. The best strategy to employ during those times is to focus on developing ourselves. The reality is that all storms will pass. The only question is: What will you be ready to accomplish when the storm is over? (: https://youtu.be/ky5lYeiSj58)

Since that incident took place, I have held numerous influential leadership positions within the Federal Government and have grown as a professional speaker and career coach. Looking back on this situation, I am not sure whether I accomplished so much in life *despite* or *because of* the difficult situations that I have had to overcome. Before my supervisor started to make my life difficult, I had become comfortable in my career. If things would have stayed positive, I likely would not have written my book, spoken at conferences all across the country, or spoken at the White House. 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.

Undoubtedly, there are numerous hardworking employees who are trapped in bad situations right now. If this is you, recognize that you are not alone. I have been through many situations where I was not sure if I would make it through, but each time I came out stronger. You are strong and you *will* get through this.

At the end of the day, there are two types of people: those who talk about getting promotions and reaching their career goals and those who get promotions and reach their career goals. If you are, or want to be, the second type of person, I encourage you to sign up for my newsletter at AlexTremble.com. Finally, the next book you need to read is *Reaching Senior Leadership: 10 Growth Strategies Every Government Leader Should Know*. I, and a number of former SES and leadership experts, wrote this book specifically for people like you—people who want more in life and are willing to work for it. Learn more at AlexTremble.com, and I look forward to hearing about your future success!

About the Author

Alex D. Tremble (aka the Federal Career Coach) is a professional speaker, career/leadership development coach, and the founder of GPS Leadership Solutions, LLC. Alex's first bestselling book, *The GPS Guide to Success*, focuses on helping people identify their goals and creating strategic plans to reach them. His new book, *Reaching Senior Leadership: 10 Growth Strategies Every Government Leader Should Know*, helps high-potential employees gain influence and strategically position themselves for senior-level positions and opportunities. Alex is a certified John C. Maxwell Speaker and Coach and has over 10 years of experience coaching and advising Federal Government senior leaders. He has also managed three government-wide executive leadership development forums and several executive mentoring programs. Alex received his Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Psychology from William Penn University and his Master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Baltimore. Subscribe to his newsletter at www.AlexTremble.com to receive free leadership and career coaching advice and tools.

CHAPTER SIX

Fear and Crossing Boundaries

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Carol Willett

Dec 2018 - Carol Willett, former SES-3 at GAO and 35-year veteran of three-letter agencies and departments within intelligence community. Former Adjunct Faculty professor of leadership at UVA, American University, Brookings Institution and Federal Executive Institute. Certified Master Hypnotherapist. Sculptor and Board Member of the Dare County Arts Council of North Carolina.

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.

Fear. That's one of those four-letter words that have dictated primate behavior through the eons. What do we fear? Well, among a very long list, we fear virginity, uncertainty, embarrassment, loss of status, failure and ostracization. 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.

By the time one becomes a Senior Executive (or the equivalent rank) you're supposed to have risen above your fears. Not bloody likely. If anything, knowing that you're at or near the tippy-top of an organization strengthens our desire to appear preternaturally logical, effective, successful and vaguely omniscient (no religious connotation implied). Suffice to say, you are expected to know what you are doing and to be able to do it with and through other people in a way that consistently achieves or surpasses organizational goals and casts a glowing light of success on your endeavors.

So, what gets in the way? Let's examine our primal fears in order.

Virginity. When you've never done a thing before it's scary. Lack of experience deters us from taking the initiative to GET experience. So, we rely on word of mouth by others who may or may not have had a successful experience in communicating, coordinating and collaborating with 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.

Uncertainty. No matter our position or intelligence, none of us has a perfect grasp of what is going on. We must make decisions based on insufficient information of questionable veracity in the face of constantly changing conditions. That's the way of the world. Yet those elsewhere in the chain of command expect us to be omniscient. They think that "we know". They would be horrified if we told them that we are "making it up as we go along". Yet that is the honest truth. All of us, everywhere are "making it up as we go along" …. Yes, we have plans, yes, we have goals, yes, we have strategies, but all those are subject to a reality that is in a constant state of flux. Therefore, all our best laid plans must be flexible if they are to have any chance of success. So, in the face of this inherent uncertainty, how does this affect our relationships? We hedge our bets. We temporize. We say, "if this happens, then we will commit to the following". Hence our hesitancy in reaching out to others with common concerns, interests and goals because we are so very reluctant to promise what we may not be able to deliver.

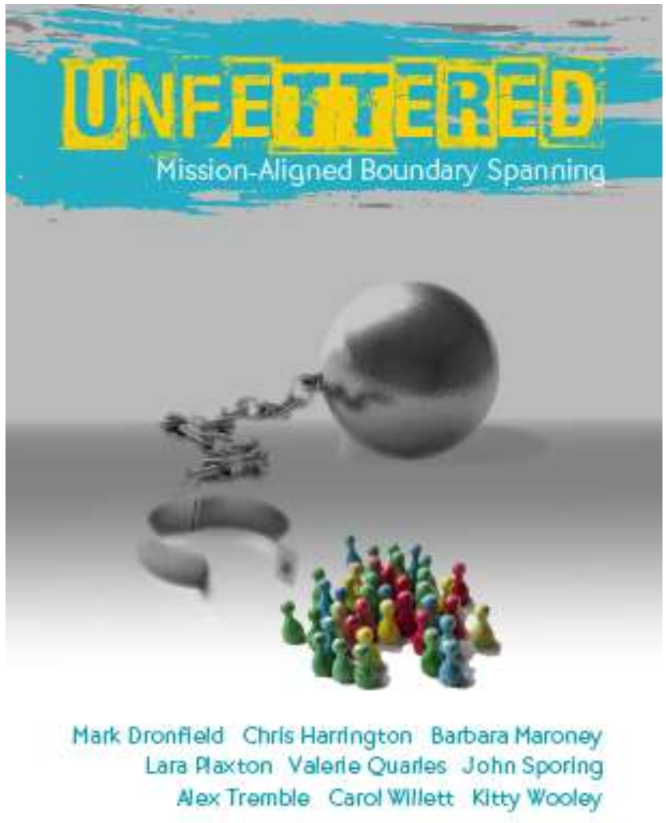
Embarrassment. Adults avoid being embarrassed. It happens, but we don't like it. What embarrasses us? Being shown to be wrong, failing to understand the big picture, inability to follow through on our promises, saying the wrong thing, being associated with the wrong people, or appearing stupid to the people above, next to us, or those we purport to lead. And of course, there's Congress. Being embarrassed before Congress is just one step below a lethal heart attack. To what lengths do we go to avoid embarrassment? We sometimes isolate ourselves – to paraphrase the inspired black actress Pearly McQueen we claim, "I don't know nothing about birthing no babies". If we insist that an issue, a problem, a concern is utterly outside our realm of responsibility then we can't be held to account for failing to have a grasp and a plan and a whole network of relationships poised to deal with the situation. It feels safer to stay home (organizationally speaking) to stay put, keep our head down, and toe the established line rather than venturing outside our narrow specialties to seek insight from others.

Loss of Status. I know what it feels like to be a 2nd Lieutenant with virtually no status at all. Any deference or courtesy I received was a matter of tradition – until I "earned my bars" by proving that I could do the job, effectively and efficiently handle whatever crises came along, and earn the respect of the people I was supposed to lead. Whatever our position inside our organizations, status derives from our personal power. Rarely is that power titular. More often it derives from our ability to work with others, meet or exceed assigned goals, generate and direct the energy needed to improve the way things are done and serve as a contagious source of hope. The instant we step outside our organizational boundaries, we are starting all over again at the bottom of the status ladder. We need to prove ourselves all over again – prove that we think, contribute, solve problems, collaborate, and live up to whatever promises we make. That is a daunting prospect. Every new relationship takes us back to ground zero in terms of trust, confidence and commitment.

Failure. The only sure way not to fail is not to try. If you try to make a difference, bring about change, launch an experiment, or alter behavior, then it is guaranteed that at some point you will fail. Edison once philosophically remarked that, 'I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work". Personally, I don't fear failure nearly as much as I fear inaction. I am happy to generate ideas and to listen to other people's ideas AS LONG AS WE ACT on one of them. If it's not the right one (because it doesn't have the desired effect) then try another. An essential ground rule for all collaborative groups is that we are not out to avoid failure, but to move the ball another few inches down the line in the direction of success.

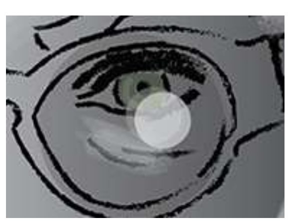
And lastly, we come to the fear of **Ostracization**. What if our "tribe" turns their back on us? What if they forget us? What if, having ventured outside the building, they lock the door? What if we risk a rotational assignment only to find there's no space in the inn when we want to return? At last count, I've worked for and with over 30 organizations, sometimes sequentially, sometimes simultaneously. While my career "track" if it existed more closely resembled a butterfly on LSD than a "ladder", I always was welcomed back because I brought value while I was away. I linked people I met with other people "inside" who benefitted from the acquaintance. I cultivated both organizations (my point of origin and my current host) by ensuring that they knew what was being gained through this exposure. I insured that I was "visible" to both groups on a regular basis so that no one asked, "Who was that masked stranger?"

So, in conclusion, do we give into our fears or learn to surmount them? I vote for the latter. 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.



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.



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