

GAO Management News

Vol. 44, No. 10, Weeks of February 20 – March 3, 2017

Learning Center Rolling Out New Mentoring Program

Mentoring, the process of learning from others' experiences has been around in many forms for centuries. But modern refinements to the age-old process allow today's mentor and mentee both to benefit more than they did in previous forms of the relationship, mentoring expert Randy Emelo said during a recent GAO Leadership Speaker Series presentation. The Leadership Speaker Series is sponsored by the Learning Center, which is in process of rolling out a new [GAO mentoring program](#).

Emelo's February 1 talk was the kickoff for a revived and revised GAO mentoring program. With more than 25 years of experience in mentoring and related topics, he is the founder and chief strategist of River, a Denver-based company that produces mentoring, coaching, and social learning software. The [new GAO mentoring program](#) uses his company's software. [PowerPoints](#) from his talk and copies of his recent books, *Modern Mentoring* (2015) and *Creating a Modern Mentoring Culture* (2013), are available to GAO staff. (To access the books, first sign into Skillsoft and Ctrl/click on these book titles.)

Audience members, asked to define a good mentor/mentee relationship, said a mentor should be a safe person to turn to. The relationship should be mutually beneficial and based on trust and confidentiality. Emelo agreed, noting that one interesting result of his studies showed that mentors learn more cognitively than mentees do, as they become more consciously aware of the knowledge they are imparting.

Mentoring fits into organizations such as GAO as one step in a three-part learning structure, Emelo said, each of which makes up part of an employees' knowledge base. The types of learning, and the percentage they make up of an employee's knowledge base, are:

- **Structured learning**—Courses, seminars, and programs provide fundamental concepts. "Learning the rules" = 10 percent.
- **Learning from others**—Mentors and supervisors provide feedback; mentors also provide coaching. "Learning how, when, and where to break the rules" = 20 percent.
- **Learning by doing**—Employees figure out how to overcome challenges and solve problems during work projects. "Learning to make the rules" = 70 percent.

The 70:20:10 Model for Learning and Development is a commonly used formula within the training profession to describe the optimal sources of learning by successful managers. It holds that individuals obtain 70 percent of their knowledge from job-related experiences, 20 percent from interactions with others (i.e. mentoring), and 10 percent from structured learning such as courses and seminars.



Mentoring expert Randy Emelo discusses modern mentoring in a recent GAO Leadership Speakers Series presentation.

A useful mentoring-relationship setup is when a mentee in the “structured learning” stage is mentored by a mentor in the “learning from others” stage, Emelo said. He added that “you can’t be someone’s supervisor and mentor.” A supervisor is an agent of the work organization, who must use both the carrot and the stick in his/her role. A mentor “comes with pockets full of carrots and no sticks” and is interested in helping a mentee reach his/her full potential.

The GAO Generations and Mentoring Styles

In matching mentors and mentees, it may be useful for each party to understand the generational differences and/or similarities between them. Emelo outlined the characteristics of four generations working at GAO, based on studies of the federal workforce as a whole:

Traditionalists (born before 1946): They helped strengthen the rebuilt global infrastructure in the decades following World War II and share characteristics with Millennials, who are now rebuilding that infrastructure in digital form.

Baby Boomers (1946-1964): They believe in hard work for personal gain, in participatory management, and in meetings. “The meeting culture was created by Baby Boomers,” Emelo said, to nods of assent from audience members.

Generation X (1965-1980): They ultimately only trust themselves, are adamant about work/life balance, prefer communicating by e-mail rather than face to face, and are skeptical of authority.

Millennials (1981-2000): They are purpose-driven, optimistic, multi-tasking web surfers who are willing to learn from anyone with expertise. A high percentage of Millennials believe it is important to be constantly learning and many of them think they should be mentoring their older colleagues on technology. An organization such as GAO may feel hostile to them because they want to create functional relationships that may not necessarily be within their jobs’ formal parameters, Emelo noted.

One audience member asked about the wisdom of mentoring someone who might end up under her supervision within a few years. Emelo responded that “you can’t predict what might happen” and not to let that future possibility preclude a current mentoring relationship. However, he also noted that mentoring works best outside the direct line of authority in an organization and for GAO staff that may mean looking outside their mission areas for mentors/mentees. Emelo stressed that “you can’t be someone’s supervisor and mentor concurrently.”

One of the most important factors in a successful relationship between mentor and mentee is the art of storytelling, Emelo said. What the mentor tells the mentee should not just be “successes, he emphasized. A good mentor needs to be able to be vulnerable enough to share obstacles and challenges that have shaped his/her career as well as successes. Also, the mentor should focus on their own stories and not borrow stories from others’ experiences.

He noted that mentoring is not therapy, supervision, or friendship. In fact, two of the most influential mentors in his life were people he “didn’t even like,” Emelo said.

In summary, Emelo said a good mentoring relationship is founded on mutual agreement about three factors:

1. **Logistics.** Regular, brief communication is key; meeting twice a month is optimal.
2. **Boundaries.** Each party should discuss what they hope to gain from the mentoring experience; relevant topics, and type of feedback.
3. **Goals.** The goals of the mentoring relationship should be mutually understood and committed to. Motivation, capabilities, personal experiences and anticipated activities and practices should be related to the goals.

For more details on pair mentoring, group mentoring, and other related information see the [program webpage](#). A video of the Emelo's presentation is available on [GAO-TV](#) and a copy of the slide deck is available in DM.

GAO's New Mentoring Program

GAO's new mentoring program is now available for GAO-wide enrollment. The new program:

- Transitions GAO from a previous manual mentor/mentee matching program to an algorithm-based program through River Software;
- Allows employees to input information and be automatically matched based on skills and competencies;
- Enables employees to drive the timing and focus of mentoring relationships;
- Supports a range of mentoring types, including: paired, group, situational, peer-to-peer, and reverse;
- Encourages and enables existing informal mentoring relationships to be brought into new formal program with enhanced technologies; and
- Provides to all GAO employees in both HQ and field offices, mission teams and mission-support offices.

To sign up, create a profile on the [GAO Mentoring System site](#). For guidance on how to set up a profile, view the GAO Mentoring program [Quick Start Guide](#).