

Horizontal, Collaborative, Connections Improve Effectiveness: Crossing Career, Agency, Sector, Learning Boundaries Yields Program Results

While playing immersive Jai Alai in his basement on a Saturday morning with a competitor in Cambodia, Josh's display is interrupted: an urgent message from FEMA. Perspiring, out of breath, Josh answers, "What's up, Carole?"

"We got trouble, Josh. Two minutes and 10 seconds ago, a rail car on a high-speed freight train broke a seal while passing close to Dayton, OH. Looks like a nano release. Based on the emanifest, this is your kind of stuff. Can you join us in the op center right now? Here's the sign in."

Josh, a USDA natural resources program manager, enters the op. center through his basement display. Just by chance, the room is populated by a who's who of his multiple mentors as well as others: Deirdre from Interior (his expert on natural resources program management) Lan from HHS (his teacher on industry/contractor relationships), Phil from EPA (his guru on as well as nanomaterial regulation and industry assistance), Sudhakar from NIST (his master on nano science and technology), as well as Carole, the Dayton incident commander, the Ohio state emergency and environmental managers, the nano manufacturer, and representatives from industry and nano environmental associations.

Carole and the incident commander posted the accident status, confirmation of the nano release, the nature of the materials, dispersion vectors, and video feeds. The group quickly started evaluating the intervention options based on the facts and criteria arrayed through the decision engine for this kind of event. The group debated and discussed the options. Josh provided the expertise on the agricultural nanomaterial in the tank car and how it was manufactured, used, regulated, and supported by others who provided the science and other relevant facts.

They were on the verge of sending in a team from Houston to augment the local, state and federal resources that had the right sets of technologies and skills for the response and mitigation. As they moved to a decision, Josh offered, "SynVacuum has a tech. team and equipment right there is Dayton. I worked with them last month and they have the right people and equipment for this. We can also deploy them through an Ohio University co-op agreement." Josh and Carole pulled up a display of SynVacuum's resources and got its Director of Operations to join the group. He committed his organization to the effort and the validated the contracting approach. SynVacuum was on the ground in 45 minutes.

Josh demonstrated his program management, technical, and relationship skills as well as his industry connections to get the job done.

Back in 2015, the federal government put some real muscle behind a nascent effort to define and develop horizontal career groups – integrating common career and job categories across agencies to provide common skills. Initially used to identify competencies and some common professional

development needs for IT, HR, Acquisition, and STEM career groups, agencies started sharing resources to develop these groups, but they also started looking for real programmatic performance improvement.

Part of the natural resources career group, Josh received professional development in the foundation skills, but also received e-mentors from across his agency and outside his agency based on the specific job he would need to do at Agriculture and the kinds of leadership, management, technical, programmatic, and relationship needs he would have and issues he would face. The horizontal career groups, mentoring program, and programmatic performance measures were integrated and cross-referenced -- initiating, pruning and shaping initiatives for real impact.

This effort paid off in Josh's performance and the performance of thousands of program managers across government.