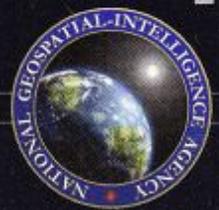


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# Learning the NGA Analytic Craft

## A "How To" Guide

October 2004



## INTRODUCTION

*"It is no use saying 'we are doing our best.' You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary." -- Winston Churchill*

As an analyst at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), the organization has high expectations of your performance. But how do you learn to excel at NGA? There are expertise levels, career progression paths, and proficiency criteria for your analytic/occupational specialty, but how do you learn to perform effectively enough to make all this happen? It's the conundrum of all professionals; your bosses will both judge the quality of your work and influence the pace of your advancement.

First, the good news; being an analyst at NGA is a great job. All that education, training, hard work, and experience paid off. You are playing in the big leagues with a real opportunity to make a difference in the service of your country's national security. Congratulations!

Now, the bad news: yours is a very difficult and demanding job and your performance will be measured against extremely rigorous – sometimes unforgiving – standards. You will often be required to make analytic judgments based upon incomplete data, live with the knowledge that you could be wrong, stand firm in the face of skeptics and those who want a different answer, and have the maturity to admit when you are wrong. This is not a job for those lacking in courage or the faint of heart.

This how-to guide has been written to assist you in learning the "**HOW TOs**" of the geospatial intelligence analysis craft at NGA. It is not about what you need to do as an analyst – write, brief, collaborate, analyze, assess your data sources, etc. – but rather about **HOW TO LEARN TO DO** those things really well. You might think of this guide as a "performance enhancer" without the steroids.

The advice given here is based upon the reality that for all professionals it is what you can **DEMONSTRATE** that ultimately counts. Each of you will have many opportunities to perform before a live audience of your peers and superiors. The skills, competencies, and degree of excellence you are able to showcase will determine how your performance is judged. This Guide is designed to help you acquire, practice, hone, and learn how to demonstrate the skills and competencies you will need.

Just whose advice is this you might ask? It is the collective wisdom of many seasoned NGA analysts and experts who have successfully preceded you. Like the **WISDOM KEEPERS** in any organization – those who have been there, learned it, and done it successfully – they have acquired a veteran's feel for NGA's mission and the intelligence process, the culture and inner workings of their organization, the dos and don'ts of successful analysts, and the keys to learning and mastering their craft. This Guide – divided into nine overarching **LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE** – represents a synthesis of their insights gathered during numerous group and individual discussion sessions involving representatives of each analytic occupation. Their advice is summarized here in the hope that it will both facilitate the speed of your individual growth and development as analysts, and enhance the analytic depth of NGA as a whole. The hard work, however, is yours. The insights provided in the pages that follow will require

action. You will need practice, commitment, determination, patience, and stamina if they are to pay off with star performances, high profile assignments, and advancement. The speed with which you develop and are able to demonstrate the necessary skills of an NGA analyst is primarily up to you.

## I. DO NOT WASTE YOUR EARLY YEARS

*"I believe we have two lives. The life we learn with and the life we live with after that." -- The Glenn Close character in the movie "The Natural"*

We all know the power of initial impressions when it comes to the people we meet in our lives. The same is true for most professionals in the organizations they join. Things done and not done – consciously and unconsciously during our early years on the job – shape organizational first impressions of us which are often resistant to change whether good or bad. Thus it is unwise to leave this impression-forming process entirely to chance.

The two single most important personal qualities you have the power to convey during your early years are **initiative** and a **passion to learn**. These two traits alone signify to those around you – colleagues and superiors – that you are serious about becoming the best you can be. One senior NGA analyst illustrates both these traits in behavioral terms as follows:

*"You need to understand your own learning style and tailor your approach to it. If you don't learn things well without being shown how to do it, insist on being shown. If you need written directions, make sure you get them. Keep asking for clarifications until you get them and keep asking people for help until they help you."*

NGA is an intelligence organization. Therefore, its analytic products must inform and help guide the behavior and decisions of its numerous consumers in the military and policy community if they are to be of any value. During your early years, what you need to learn – or if you prefer, begin the process of sharpening – are the critical skills and process-mastery demanded of an NGA analyst charged with producing intelligence. You will bring to the table certain baseline ability upon which you can build. The following represents the experience-based suggestions of your successful senior colleagues **for how to build and acquire** the necessary skills, effectively contribute to your organization, and achieve your desired results.

***Have a Personal Development Plan*** – At some point during your early years, clearly identify those personal goals and objectives you intend to use as guides in making your own development and skill building decisions. Whether broad or specific, your goals and objectives should be flexible enough to accommodate the changing world of NGA work you are certain to confront and subject to your regular review as you evolve and grow as an analyst.

***Attacking an Analytic Intelligence Issue*** – The twin goals here are to gain experience in thinking like an NGA analyst and producer of intelligence – not just like an Aeronautical Analyst, Cartographer, Geodetic Scientist, Geospatial Analyst, Imagery Analyst, Marine Analyst, Regional Analyst, or Source Management Analyst – and to develop your own substantive expertise. Start by finding an analytic issue or problem you think you can handle

within your specific area of substantive responsibility. Next, insure that your analytic issue has potential intelligence value to some identifiable NGA product consumer. Seek out a supervisor or more experienced analyst/mentor who can help you determine whether your choice is an appropriate intelligence – vice academic – analytic issue and how your insights might inform a consumer’s behavior or decision. Now, work to master all aspects of the issue you have selected. Find others interested in and knowledgeable about your intelligence issue and discuss it with them. You should strive for a well rounded view, so be certain you are talking to at least some colleagues whose occupational specialty is different from yours. Cultivate the practice of asking fact-seeking questions; as many as you need to ask until you are satisfied with the answers. When you have exhausted one intelligence issue, find another.

*Mastering Your Sources* – *Source mastery is mandatory* for all successful geospatial intelligence analysts. Mastery requires a passion for details, accuracy, consistency and discipline. Cultivate these. Get to know the full range of source material available to you – the strengths and weakness of each target and target set – and discuss source issues with your colleagues. Pay special attention to the known accuracy of your sources. Write database entries and perform regular searches. Learn to look for source signatures, anomalies and patterns. The more you work at this the better you will get.

*Building a Learning Network* – Warning, this task will be taxing for all introverts but you cannot be a hermit and succeed at NGA. An analyst’s best friend is often “another set of eyes” or a “different point of view”. Look around you at the talent and wisdom at your disposal. Identify people who can teach you things and ask for their help whether they are junior, equal to, or senior to you in rank. Keep asking until you have learned. Branch out beyond your own work unit in your search for colleagues who can help you learn how the broader organization and intelligence process works. Ask a senior analyst if you can work with her/him on some aspect of their account and observe their techniques. Ask your seniors if you can tag along to meetings and briefings where you can **observe** behaviors, techniques, and the coming together of NGA analytic occupational specialties to produce an integrated intelligence product. Seek out and seize the opportunity to work on an **interdisciplinary team project**, where you can *personally experience* the creation of the broader geospatial perspective on an intelligence issue. View everyone you encounter as a potential teacher and take advantage of any learning opportunity. Then, be prepared to teach others what you have learned.

*Intelligence Writing* – There is writing and then there is concise intelligence writing aimed to inform an intelligence consumer’s behavior or decision. Even the most successful analysts will usually have a horror story or two to tell about their early encounters with the editorial process. The only way to learn its navigational secrets is to go through it as often as you can. So, given the opportunity, write early and often. Start with small things and pay close attention to the changes that are made. Don’t be defensive, listen to constructive criticism, and determine to make the same mistakes no more than twice. If you are hesitant, perhaps afraid to embarrass yourself before a supervisor, ask a more experienced colleague or two to go over something first. Listen to and incorporate their suggestions. If you find you need a basic refresher in grammar, NGA College has one; take it. If your NGA occupation offers you the opportunity, during your early years you should try your hand at as many different product formats as you can. If practice will not make you perfect, it will sure make you better. So write, write, and write.

*Honing Your Briefing Skills* – For many a junior analyst, their first exposure to senior management – sometimes very senior management – is via a briefing of which they are a part. Unless you are practiced and well prepared, this can be a frightening – even disastrous – event; a potentially nasty first impression. Oral briefings are an art form with formats, protocols, and requirements all their own. These need to be learned and take practice. Start early. Attend briefings and pay attention to form, format, and style. Notice what works and what does not. Note how experienced analysts field and answer questions. Take notes and discuss these topics with more experienced colleagues. Start to practice. Pick a topic. Brief a collection of your peers or your first line supervisor. Seek constructive criticism and make the changes required. Like writing, the more you brief, the better you will get. If, like many people you are terrified of public speaking, you might consider Toastmasters or some formal training designed to ease your fears. NGA College, for example, offers briefing courses; take one. Still there is no substitute for practice before a live group of people; even the best briefers insist on a dry run or two despite their years of experience.

*Engaging Your Customers* – We have already stressed that geospatial intelligence products are only valuable if they address some consumer’s specific needs. The world view, problems, agendas, and policy tradeoffs of those who receive your products can only be understood first hand. So, get out of your workspace, get out of your building, and engage customers often in discussions. Learn how they use NGA intelligence products. Develop a feel for how they think and for their deadlines, pressures, and desired formats. The fit between customer needs and what you will produce over the years is among the most important understandings you must acquire during your early years on the job. Done well, the relationships you form early with customers will benefit you immensely in the years to come.

*Shifting Your Identity and Focus* – While you were hired for your particular technical expertise and occupational specialty, yours and NGA’s success will depend upon your ability to harness your expert skills in the service of producing geospatial intelligence. To do this you will need to embrace a new identity: **GEOSPATIAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER**. Dedicate yourself to this task right from the start. Involve yourself in activities, meetings, projects, and discussions that will enable you to learn and see your role in: (1) how NGA’s analytic, occupational specialties integrate their expertise to provide a complete geospatial intelligence perspective to customers; (2) what each of NGA’s major organizational components does and how they all come together in the service of your organization’s intelligence mission; and (3) the missions of each Agency that makes up the overall Intelligence Community and NGA’s critical relationship with each of them.

## **II. DEVELOP SOUND ANALYTIC WORK HABITS**

Experience has shown that imitating the techniques of successful colleagues around us is a very powerful means of developing and enhancing our own skills at similar tasks. So what are the techniques of NGA analysts that seem especially connected to success? In brief, they are all a matter of habit and routine. In his book, “Men at Work: The Craft of Baseball”, Columnist George Will writes:

*“The essence of professionalism is craftsmanship..... repetition is inseparable from craftsmanship”*

So to borrow a notion from Stephen Covey whose seven habits of highly successful people have, to date, provided guidance to millions, below are the twelve habits of highly successful NGA analysts. **Cultivate them.**

*Practice a Daily Routine* – In physical exercise, the more you work a pre-defined set of muscles on a regular basis the stronger, more toned they get; enthusiasts call it doing your “reps”. It is the same notion for successful analysts. They have a daily routine. It helps them with time management because it encompasses establishing an ordered and structured workflow consisting of the critical components of their analytic job; source management, database maintenance, intelligence traffic and publication review, writing time, for example. Your routine and its components are your choice – observing more senior colleagues may help you choose – but it is not a routine if it does not become a regular, daily practice.

*Immerse Yourself In Your Substantive Account* – Successful analysts grow their expertise by reading, looking into, putting their hands on, and wrapping their arms around everything related to the substance of their work. This involves going way beyond just that material which happens to cross their desk. They actively seek – both inside and outside work – to learn everything they can about the focus of their analytic assignment. They understand that many issues related to their work are handled in only one part of NGA or the Intelligence Community and that they will never be considered a true substantive expert unless they know what everyone else is doing in their field. They also understand the difference between substantive immersion (*the goal*) and assuming a selfish sense of proprietary ownership of their account (*close-minded, anti-collegial, and harmful to one’s future as an NGA analyst*). Successfully immersed analysts are often recognizable by their overcrowded work areas filled with posters, maps, flags, aircraft, ship or missile models, logos, and various other icons of their accounts.

*Maintain Analytic Priority Sensitivity* – All analytic problems, issues, and requirements, are not equal. Successful analysts develop a feel for what is really important, semi-important, and not important at all on their always overfull analytic plate, and focus accordingly. Developing your instincts concerning what analytic issues should come first takes some time and consumer knowledge. Colleagues and supervisors can help you discriminate, so ask. But learn to discriminate you must or you will waste a lot of your precious productive time, fail to drive collection activities appropriately when needed, and miss critical opportunity-windows for publication.

*Avoid Inbox and Email Asphyxiation* – You will find little help in establishing your analytic priorities or time to stick to your analytic routine in your inbox or email. Preoccupation with the avalanche of material in either is a great way to waste time. Here again, successful analysts learn how to filter out, prioritize, and focus on what information, meetings, and requests for their time and attention are important. Under no circumstances do they read or respond to everything. When in doubt about something, ask someone to affirm your judgment. But always discriminate, discriminate, and discriminate.

*Visit Your Sources Often* – We noted earlier the mandatory nature of source mastery for the geospatial intelligence analyst. Frequent visits uncover anomalies, patterns, changes, new insights, and potential analytic breakthroughs. Familiarity helps you categorize information and develop your understanding of the technical qualities of the source or collection platform. Make this part of your daily analytic routine.

*Document Accrued Knowledge* – While our memory can be a fabulous thing sometimes, over-reliance on it as an analyst is downright dangerous. So regularly document your thinking and progress toward an analytic judgment, accumulated knowledge, tentative judgments and conclusions, source assessments, and evidentiary needs. This will significantly aid your facility for what one senior analyst refers to as the “**rapid intuitive recall**” of facts, events, and anomalies and their connection to a particular problem. All of this moves you toward the point of eventual publication and satisfying a customer need.

*Problem Solve* – Successful analysts are always asking themselves “what is the question to which this is the answer”? One senior NGA analyst expressed the same notion this way:

*“An analyst needs to define the problem confronting them and not just monitor incoming data; to slice out a portion of the day (the routine thing again) that is a direct attack against the problem, finding what’s hidden, and using one’s sources proactively.”*

The key to successful problem solving is often what is called “**hypothesis driven thinking**”. It amounts to constructing a series of “**what if**” questions and assessing your data for confirming or disconfirming indications. You should also revisit and challenge the analytic questions you are asking and the basic assumptions you have made on a regular basis. It is wise to remember that *a significant number of human analytic misjudgments derive from things we assumed – often with good reason – to be true, that in hindsight turned out to be dead wrong*. So, when you feel stuck on a problem because all the pieces just don’t seem to fit, you might try removing all your assumptions and rebuilding a proof from scratch by reestablishing the chain of substantiation. Once again, the more you practice these techniques the better you will get.

*Always Look for Relevance* – While aimlessly surfing the web may be a relaxing, off-hours pastime, at work with the welter of analytic data available to you it is important to continually ask the questions: why is this important; to whom is this important; and what gives this real intelligence value? These questions help analysts discriminate between the many interesting but non-relevant elements in their data and those with significant intelligence potential.

*Continually Bounce Your Thoughts off Others* – One sure test of your analytic hypotheses and assumptions about relevance is to discuss them with colleagues and customers. The best analysts do this constantly. Moreover, they insist on finding analytic skeptics who are bound to look at things from a perspective different from their own. Over time, the best analysts build a network of others working similar substantive topics whose input forms an integral part of their tradecraft and thinking. At a minimum, this network consists of colleagues inside NGA’s other occupational specialties, analysts in other Department of Defense and Intelligence Community agencies, and customers.

*Learn To Trust Your Analytic Instincts* – New employees in any organization hardly know what to think sometimes. Over time, however, experience provides wisdom and educates our instincts. A successful analyst's instincts are at times her/his best friend. Learn to trust yours, once your feet are firmly anchored on the ground. While your instincts are no excuse for "shooting from the hip", or ignoring evidence to the contrary, they eventually constitute an aggregate synthesis of much you have learned about your craft. After you have thought, discussed, researched, and analyzed a problem to death, pay attention to the message coming from your instinctual voice. It deserves your attention and considerable trust.

*Always Think Multi-Source Analysis* – Few lawyers would be comfortable going to trial with only one type of evidence unless it really was the "smoking gun". They think corroboration. So do all successful geospatial intelligence analysts. The network of colleagues they build – all sharing similar substantive responsibilities – becomes a rich resource for constructing a corroborative, multi-source perspective prior to the production of finished intelligence.

*Push Your Tradecraft Envelope* – As good as they may be, the best analysts are always looking for a new skill or technique to add to their analytic repertoire. This passion for learning and growth must be a conscious process. It rarely happens solely by accident. Ask a good analyst what new skill they have acquired in the past six months and they can tell you.

### **III. PERSONAL TRAITS MATTER A LOT**

Beyond our tradecraft and analytic skill, all of us exhibit a variety of personal traits that distinguish us from each other. While some of these traits are cataloged in our "Official File", the most telling ones are often those that reside in what can be called our "Hallway File". Our Hallway file is the one **WE** personally author through our behavior – both conscious and unconscious – and it reflects perhaps the most accurate picture of how we are seen by others, whether we like it or not.

In all organizations there are personal traits that correlate with success and getting along with colleagues. They are the expected behavioral norms of the organization. These norms are generally not written down anywhere and we often don't know we violated one of them until after the fact; the oblivious among us never quite getting the message. But those who succeed do figure them out and accommodate over time.

Although NGA has gone through several major organizational transformations over the years, the highly complex technical and scientific nature of its analytic mission has created a culture that demands certain attitudes toward one's work, personal qualities – especially when faced with challenges and difficulties – and behavioral traits that define one's interaction with colleagues. These qualities and traits are easy to describe but, being human, are harder to consistently demonstrate. They are almost impossible to fake; you work among perceptive analysts after all.

*Attitudes Towards Work* – Successful NGA analysts invariably demonstrate their intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness in the discussions they have and questions they ask. Their dedication and commitment are obvious in their tenacity, dependability, and willingness to

go beyond their job descriptions. They not only identify problems, they propose solutions. They are always looking for new challenges, will frequently do things without being asked, and understand that the road to bigger jobs and responsibility is, as one senior put it, *“to do the little jobs well”*. They are known for their sound judgment and ability to put things in perspective. Above all, they see their analytic work as a collective enterprise:

*“In some businesses, hoarded information is power. In the intelligence business shared information is power. Hoarded information is worthless”. -- A senior NGA Analyst*

You cannot succeed as an NGA analyst if you insist on being territorial, reclusive, withholding, or unwilling to learn from others everything you can about your craft.

***Personal Qualities, Especially in the Face of Challenges and Difficulties*** – Successful NGA analysts display courage and confidence in their willingness to cope with analytic uncertainty, take a calculated risk, and embrace new and unproven ideas. They are patient and persistent in the face of complexity and setbacks, openly admit when they are wrong, and are unfamiliar with the concept “to quit”. They insist on being honest and have the personal integrity to accept full responsibility for their actions; it is never acceptable to blame someone else. Above all, they maintain their sense of humor, especially when it involves their own shortcomings and flaws. Conversely, be constantly disingenuous, defensive, argumentative, perpetually unsatisfied (a.k.a. a complainer), and never at fault and you will certainly damage your prospects for success.

***Interpersonal Relations*** – Successful NGA analysts are approachable and always prepared to help others and share what they know. Respect for others is demonstrated in their willingness to listen with an open mind and – when faced with a better idea – alter their own point of view. They demonstrate their understanding of true teamwork in their efforts to collaborate, draw out the best in their colleagues, and always give credit where it is due. They are facilitators of collective contribution and team success. “Legends in their own minds” who are arrogant, self-serving, close-minded, often mean spirited, and rude, however, undermine the teamwork essential in NGA’s analytic culture and are likely to eventually derail.

#### **IV. LEARN TO SPEAK UP AND BE HEARD**

There is a significant difference between “saying something” and “having something to say”. Here we are addressing the latter and the art of insuring you are heard. We are talking about developing your powers of persuasion; your ability to build a powerful case for a conclusion and convincingly convey it to others. Unfortunately, for many analysts – no matter the importance of their message – speaking up in a group context is emotionally stressful. The fear of embarrassing oneself can be overwhelming. Add senior officers to the group, or contemplate challenging authority, and the fear increases. Nevertheless, you cannot do your analytic job by taking a vow of perpetual silence. When you have something of value to contribute you must give it voice or risk doing actual harm. Speaking up effectively in a crowd of very smart people or in the face of authority is a learned skill.

Begin by being observant. In meetings note how it is done effectively. Note especially what characterizes performances you would personally not want to repeat; like off the topic non sequiturs, speaking simply to gain attention, and those speeches that never end. Discuss the dos and don'ts of getting your message across with your colleagues and supervisors.

The most experienced and accomplished analysts will tell you that rule one for speaking with impact is to always do your homework, know your facts, and be determined to be succinct. Rule two is to listen first whenever possible, read your audience carefully, and consider the mind-set of those to whom you are about to speak. There are many ways to tailor your message that will lessen resistance and enhance understanding of your point of view. Rule three is to be respectful of other views and under no circumstances attack like a junk yard dog. Your primary goal is to be heard and to have your views respectfully considered by your listener(s); changing someone else's position may not be possible no matter how persuasive you are. Finally, if possible, discern in advance if others share your view. There is always strength and support in numbers when they are willing to add their voices to yours.

Prior to prime time, practice in small, non-threatening forums like work group/team meetings or a gathering of friends and colleagues, and ask for feedback. Keep at it until you are sure your messages are effectively getting through. No getting around it, however, speaking up at times will require your courage and a willingness to take a risk. When convinced it is important, you will simply have to face your fears and speak up anyway.

## V. SEEK STRETCH ASSIGNMENTS

*"Being average has never had much appeal. Better to fail with flair in pursuit of something neat." -- Tom Peters, Management Consultant*

*"When choosing between two evils, I always like to take the one I've never tried before." -- Mae West*

Not everything we need to know to achieve professional success is learned on the job; just a great deal of it is. Consequently, the more varied and numerous our work experiences, the more we increase our opportunities to develop and grow. The key is to insure that each new experience affords you the chance to learn and stretch yourself in new directions. If, like most of us, getting outside your comfort zone scares you a little, **do it anyway and often**. The successful analysts do and you will get used to it.

Over time, you will experience a significant number of "**big A**" assignments. These usually last several years or more. Some we compete for and attain, while others are of the directed, "needs of the organization" variety. Moving from one big A assignment to another is almost always beneficial to long term development, provided you remain open to the learning opportunities they provide, such as how to manage the responsibility that generally comes with them.

But in every organization there are also numerous "**little a**" assignments often referred to as "other duties as assigned". These little a's vary in their duration and generally take place

concurrent to your big A assignments. They carry a myriad of names: Committees; Task Forces; Advisory Groups; Professional Advisory Boards; Inter-Agency Working Groups; Test Beds; Short-term Rotational Assignments; etc. While you sometimes get tapped for these assignments by a superior, many are of the volunteer variety. All of them are great stretch opportunities that afford you an opportunity to learn and do something new, neat, and valuable. They also offer you the chance to demonstrate/showcase important personal attributes: initiative; flexibility; interest in your broader organization; analytic, writing and management skills; team building and facilitating skills; and leadership ability. Managers often discover previously unseen talent in individuals in these “little a” settings. So get to know about and take advantage of these opportunities as often as you can.

Above all, in any assignment, always be looking to stretch and extend what you know and can do, remembering **it is always what you can demonstrate – not just claim – you can do that lies at the heart of professional success**. As a rule of thumb, if a new assignment – big or little a – doesn’t scare you just a little, it is probably not a stretch.

## **VI. FIND THE PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP KEEP YOU ON TRACK**

Nobody succeeds alone. Even Star Trek’s great Captain Jean-Luc Picard needed help to “make it so”. Both seen and unseen hands are invariably involved in helping one’s career progress. Not much you can do but be grateful for the unseen hands. But how to identify those you can see and use in keeping your development and advancement on track?

Earlier we talked about learning networks as essential components of developing the specific skills of being an analyst at NGA, adapting to the rhythms and modalities of the organization, and simply figuring out “how one gets things done around here”. These colleagues are wellsprings of wisdom regarding the nitty-gritty elements of your job. Here we are addressing a different sort of advice giver, a person we generally call a **MENTOR**. Their role is primarily to help us with the bigger picture and with some of the major decisions that shape our careers.

Many organizations assign mentors, especially to the newly hired. While exceedingly helpful, generally speaking, during one’s early years, most of these mentors will not suffice as a sole source of wisdom forever. Over time you will need to identify, contact, and tap the advice of a variety of other individuals as you stand at one of the many technical or professional development crossroads you will face in your career.

There is no single formula that addresses how this should be done. Furthermore, no organization knows each of us well enough to assign us just the right advice giver, coach, or career counselor at just the right time. This leaves you with the primary responsibility for finding your mentors.

As you gain organizational experience and awareness, keep your own mental rolodex of people you encounter who impress you as “having it together”, wise in terms of common sense, and able to put things in perspective. Ask yourself now and then “who do I look up to and admire”? Then don’t be afraid to approach one or two of them when you need to test your

own judgment on some important matter. Above all, seek someone willing to listen, teach, advise and sort out fact from fiction, rather than impose some option upon you.

Finally, a word about demographics. While some excellent mentors will always fall into the category of “seasoned old-timers who have seen it all”, neither age – nor gender – may have anything to do with the advice and guidance you need given the specific issues you face. Many of today’s 50/60 something corporate executives have sought out mentors from the Generation X and Y cohorts in their organization because they are eager to gain the different perspective their generations potentially represent. So put your emphasis on finding the **BEST POSSIBLE** person given your need; period.

## **VII. THINK PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR MANAGERS**

Many of the career development decisions you will make over the years will require you to discuss appropriateness, arrangements, and timing with your managers. Your manager will always need to balance your needs and desires against his/her unit’s work priorities and the similar needs of your colleagues. True, your managers are, in part, responsible for your growth as an analyst. They also generally hold the assignment power necessary to provide a venue where you can showcase your talent, or to free you up for one of those “little a” opportunities. But it will always be a juggling act given the conflicting demands for the deployment of talent that come with a management job.

Successful analysts are, among other things, skilled negotiators when it comes to engaging management in career development discussions. This requires them to look at things from both their own and their manager’s perspective. Consequently, they do not make unreasonable or selfish demands. Rather, they demonstrate their flexibility and creativity in finding acceptable alternatives that accommodate the realities of NGA work.

Ask a successful analyst to describe her/his relationship with their managers and you will get a description that sounds far more like a **partnership** than that of a superior and his/her subordinate. Their relationships with managers are invariably characterized by mutual respect for each other’s perspective and needs, a joint sense of purpose, joint accountability for outcomes, and an understanding that at times both parties have the right to say “no”. Work to structure this type of relationship with your managers and you will avail yourself of a powerful means to accelerate your growth.

## **VIII. GROW PROFESSIONALLY OR FALL BEHIND**

*“Find your passion and become an expert. Master your craft.” -- A Senior NGA Analyst*

Top notch professionals take personal responsibility for maintaining their edge through activities designed to keep them constantly current in their occupations and expand their skill and talent base. As an NGA analyst, you will be expected to grow both as an Aeronautical Analyst, Cartographer, Geodetic Scientist, Geospatial Analyst, Imagery Analyst, Marine Analyst, Regional Analyst, or Source Management Analyst and as a geospatial intelligence

officer. The technologically driven pace of change in both regards will be dynamic and you will be expected to keep up. **So, career long professional self-development, continuing education, and training is a must.**

Your successful predecessors as NGA analysts all recognized the necessity of making professional growth a continuous process and strongly recommend you do the same. Keep up with developments in your field via conferences and some of your reading activities. Your Occupation Guide provides significant development wisdom – skill needs and training suggestions – and the experienced talent you work with every day also represents a rich potential repository of suggestions. Take full advantage of both.

In particular, bear in mind that NGA is a technology and source driven Intelligence Agency. Learn to see technology as a “force multiplier” and determine to make your technological acumen a never-ending area of growth. As new work stations and software applications become available, familiarize yourself with – and begin to master – their use. As new sources of data come on line, determine to become adept at understanding and exploiting them in your analysis. Seize any opportunity to work in an environment and on substance that integrates NGA’s occupational specialties where you can extend your understanding of the complementarity of these various technical specialties.

Professional development will, however, require that you plan ahead. Work demands cannot be ignored or abandoned at a moment’s notice. Regular planning meetings with supervisors are ideal opportunities to schedule development opportunities in advance and arrange coverage in your absence. Take responsibility for making these meetings happen.

## **IX. MAINTAIN YOUR BALANCE**

*“Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans.” -- Thomas La Mance*

*“High station in life is earned by the gallantry with which appalling experiences are survived with grace.” -- Tennessee Williams*

Careers are, for the most part, a series of peaks and valleys; moments of significant achievement and accomplishment, and times of setback, disappointment and even despair. Most of us manage to handle success and high praise with dignity. But organizations learn a great deal more about us by observing how we weather the more stressful times.

In part, our ability to navigate difficult professional waters is a matter of our psychological health; our maturity, sense of perspective, and understanding that mistakes and occasional failures are part of life. Although we do author our own screw ups, they are not statements about our personal worth. We all generally survive, hopefully learn something, and move on. But the clear headed thinking you will need to cope with professional challenges and difficulties has a critical physiological component as well.

Any analyst worth his or her salt will work hard and often put in a totally unreasonable number of hours per week. But you are not being paid simply to work hard. You are being paid for the quality of your thinking, your judgment, your problem solving ability, and for the analytic decisions you make that effect the nation's security.

These are weighty responsibilities that require you to be, as often as possible, at your physiological and emotional best. And, being at your best absolutely demands some reasonable balance between your work and the rest of your personal life. Without some down time, some relaxation, some distance at regular intervals from your professional responsibilities, you are headed for trouble. It is an unavoidable consequence of our human physiology that when we overwork and over stress ourselves, among the first things to go are our judgment, emotional stability, and the ability to think clearly and rationally about almost anything. Maintaining a sense of perspective on what you do as an analyst – to say nothing of your health – demands you occasionally do something other than your job.

There are those who look at this issue as an unavoidable choice, a real devil's alternative: either accept the workload, hours, and stress necessary to be a successful analyst, or lead a more balanced life in a less stressful and less rewarding occupation. But maintaining a balanced life is not really an either/or proposition. Rather it is a fundamental requirement for maintaining the sound judgment and clear headed thinking you are paid for and that will be required for your success as an analyst at NGA. While at times professional progression may top your list of priorities, that may not always be so; you should consider the latter to be healthy, profoundly human, and definitely OK.

NGA's determination to help its employees maintain their balance is embodied in its robust Employee Assistance Program. As one senior put it, "when necessary, it is not a sin to seek help".

## **A FINAL THOUGHT COMPLIMENTS OF GOETHE**

*"There is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that never otherwise would have occurred...*

*Whatever you can do,*

*Or dream you can do,*

*Begin it.*

*Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.*

*Begin it now."*

