

Building Meaningful and Enriching Hybrid Training Programs



Q&A with Josh Rumlow

Director of Engineering Leadership Development, GDMS

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Josh was previously an Engineering Technical Manager for Training and Documentation with GDMS and a US Navy sailor and Instructor. Josh has provided career guidance, mentoring, and development opportunities for hundreds of engineering professionals. He currently manages an entry-level leadership development program in addition to the Systems Engineering Architect Leadership (SEAL) program.

Excerpts from the Interview:

Q. How has the pandemic affected your organization? What strategies have you used to address the challenges?

Josh: The pandemic did affect our organization mostly by shifting a large percentage of our workforce to working from home and having to virtualize everything, including all of our leadership development programs. The company pivoted quickly and remained focused on delivering on our commitments for our business and our customers. The SEAL program was already set-up for a hybrid training solution (remote and face-to-face). We adapted to the changing work environment and became creative with how we engaged with our cohort to ensure the SEAL program continued to provide an impactful learning experience. We worked tirelessly with our leadership training vendors to virtualize their programs successfully.



We created new ways to connect our program participants with our executives by creating new program elements and connection points. For example, we began a series called “Fireside Chats” where an executive (or two) would sit with a subset of our program participants and talk about a variety of topics. Some topics were predetermined but we focused on small groups and letting the conversations go whichever direction the discussion took them. Our initial feedback indicates this series was very well received by our program participants and our executives.

Looking forward to the SEAL program for 2021, we’ve adapted and implemented a philosophy of shorter, more frequent touch points. We’ve modified our training offerings to include day/time choices for training events, monthly 30 minute check-ins, and kept the Fireside chats.

Q. Have you introduced new leadership development programs in your organization or made modifications to your programs to support and grow your leaders in this time of crisis?

Josh: We had to make modifications to all of our leadership development programs and we did not stop in creating new programs to support and grow our leaders in a time of crisis. The biggest modification that we did was to virtualize all of our development programs, which focus on a variety of career levels from entry-level to very senior.

The crisis did not prevent us from supporting and developing our leaders. We introduced new trainings on resilience, organizational change management, managing a virtual workforce, and best practices for working remotely, to name a few, to help participants cope with these challenging times and provide them tools and information for continued success. In addition, we continued to pulse our leaders, program participants, and stakeholders for feedback to continually improve our programs and make them more impactful.

Q. What lies ahead for the program and how it will continue to succeed?

Josh: We are about to kick off the 9th year of the SEAL program and it will continue to develop leaders and evolve based on newly identified needs that came to light from the pandemic, as well as the changing needs of our customers. As the business evolves, so too will our leadership development program. Each year, we assess both participant and stakeholder feedback, as well as industry trends to determine whether or not changes are required. This guarantees the continued success of the program and the participants who go through the program. Our company and our program is international and we are looking to include a broader swath of our international colleagues in the program to help increase our diversity of thought and exposure to all facets of our business in our future SEAL programs.

Q. As we have been rapidly shifting to virtual and digital learning environments, do you think in-person classroom learning will be a thing of the past?

Josh: We do not think in-person classroom training will be a thing of the past. There is much value to in-person, face-to-face learning and networking. It is our assessment that there are some program components that are working well virtually and other program components that work better in-person. We will be intentional and purposeful with our in-person offerings and plan to build hybrid training programs that will be meaningful and enriching to our participants.



Q. What are leaders struggling with the most right now?

Josh: Leading during a vicious pandemic is a struggle alone. Our leaders have not been immune to this struggle. Many leaders are struggling with staying connected with a remote workforce across different time zones and continents. Our teams have experienced almost no loss in productivity and effectiveness and lower than average voluntary attrition over the last 12 months. As the Covid restrictions slowly relax around the country and our world, it's reasonable to assume that a percentage of our workforce will go back to the office, however we know that it will not be what it was pre-Covid. The hybrid work model will be the new normal in 2021 and beyond.

Q. What do you feel are the most important leadership skills required in 2021 and beyond?

Josh: The pandemic has shined a light on key leadership skills such as resilience, empathy, compassion, and self-awareness to help leaders lead through a crisis. In addition, we will continue to focus on our core leadership skills, GDMS Leadership Expectations model, to include communicating effectively, building relationships, and being a team player - success is a team sport and leaders need to clearly communicate their vision/strategies/thoughts, create a trust-based relationship with their teams, and demonstrate that leading is about effectively meeting one's commitments as a part of a larger set of team objectives. A leader cannot be truly successful without these skills. ■