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Pre-Employment Orientation, an Adjunct to Recruiting

*How the New York regional office helps prospective employees
make informed decisions about a career with GAO.*

The Issue

Traditionally, GAO has recruited its professional staff from all over the world for assignments in Washington, D.C., and in the regional offices. A recent issue of *The GAO Review* listed new staff members from the London School of Economics, the University of Puerto Rico, and campuses throughout the United States. This diversity of employees affords GAO an ever-broadening perspective; helps insure objective approaches to issues; helps GAO avoid stilted, hackneyed, parochial thinking; and promotes creative problemsolving. The selection process, while beneficial to the organization, can create difficulties for the candidate.

Frequently, students from a campus in one part of the country are inter-

viewed for positions in another. For example, a student from a campus in Albany, New York, might be interviewed for a position in Washington, D.C., or New Orleans.

More frequently, candidates are recruited for positions at a regional office which can be well outside of commuting distance. Students from schools in Syracuse, or Buffalo, New York, are interviewed for positions with the New York regional office in New York City—hundreds of miles away.

The Problem

Under these circumstances prospective employees when considering GAO's offer, not only assume a responsibility for selecting a career but must also de-

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Mr. Acocella, a management auditor in the New York regional office, has a B.B.A. degree in public administration from Baruch College and is now working towards an M.P.A. degree in public administration at the City University of New York. He is past chairman of the Junior Staff Council, the alternate regional office representative to the Comptroller General's Youth Advisory Committee, and a member of the American Society for Public Administration.

cide whether to pick up roots and select a new place to live. Two big, very big decisions indeed, especially when considering the length and depth of the average on-campus interview.

The decision concerning career selection is often aided by the student's knowledge of, or access to, information about GAO. This knowledge may be based on conversations with the GAO campus recruiter, GAO employees, college professors, placement officials, or campus counselors, and available literature.

The candidate may also compare the information obtained about GAO with other readily available data: previous employment experiences; the results of other campus interviews with other organizations; and discussions with family, friends, and associates.

The other decision that must be made—whether to relocate—and perhaps the most difficult and more traumatic of the two, must be made without this kind of assistance. Information readily available to the candidate from Belmont, Massachusetts, about New York City and its environs is likely to be scarce and probably not as reliable or as complete as if it had come from a native of the city.

Where one should or should not live upon reporting to the Chicago regional office from Brooklyn, New York, may present perplexing, confusing questions to even the most sophisticated prospective employee and could result in an uninformed decision. At best, it is a confusing but important time in which a candidate needs all the help possible.

The Solution

The New York regional office has begun helping prospective employees both

during their deliberations and after they select GAO as a career. The office is trying not so much to encourage a candidate to accept employment but to help him/her make an informed decision—one which will not be regretted.

This assistance is in the form of pre-employment orientation provided by Junior Staff Council members *Austin Acocella*, *Tony Carlo*, and *Hank Titone* as an adjunct to the recruiting effort. When a job offer is extended, one of these staff members contacts the candidate. Whatever assistance can be given and is needed, is offered—for example, an invitation to visit the regional office, answers to questions about the type of work and work environment the candidate can expect, a suggested tour of the city, and the classified sections of local newspapers. In general these staff members try to allay apprehensions and clear up doubts.

Recently arrangements were made for a prospective candidate, interviewed by the Boston staff, to visit New York City. Two members of the staff, including this article's co-author, met the candidate and spent a few hours providing him with insights not usually available to potential employees. They explained GAO's history, mission, and organizational structure; discussed typical GAO and regional office assignments; and answered questions about first-year professional responsibilities, travel, training, promotion, career opportunities, and professional development. The candidate joined the members of an audit staff working nearby for lunch. A lively discussion ensued starting with living conditions in and around the city and moving to job assignments, report referencing, employee benefits, rents, neighborhoods, and subways. The visit ended

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with a meeting with the regional manager and the assistant regional managers.

The Benefits

The program's benefits are quite clear: an interested employee has the opportunity to leisurely and frankly discuss his or her professional interests and aspirations with recent CAO recruits. This eliminates surprises and better arms him or her to make a good career decision.

Making an informed decision creates a sense of security and confidence and frees the individual to assume professional responsibilities without distraction. The New York regional office hopes this practice will lead to recruit decisions which are in the best interest of both the candidate and GAO.

Yes, there is a distinct possibility that a prospective candidate will decide against a career with GAO and, in fact, this has happened. However, this in itself is not without benefit. The costs involved in spending a few hours with a candidate are far less than hiring, orienting, training, and then exit interviewing a candidate who has made a less than fully informed career choice.

Epilog

Local candidates receiving offers which will require relocation to another region will now be offered help. A candidate living in New York and offered a

position in Los Angeles will be provided portions of the orientation program by New York's Junior Staff Council members. For example, an in-depth session about GAO as an organization, including promotion, training, travel, and relocation policies, might be in order. Likewise, a thorough discussion of GAO work, the reporting and referencing process, and other such general items would do much to prepare the candidate for work upon arriving at the Los Angeles office.

In addition, a modified version of this orientation is being used by the New York region in helping those who transfer from other regions. When the region knows that a GAOer will be transferred to New York, regional office staff members immediately contact the person to make the move as smooth and convenient as possible. Anything available to the New York staff and thought to be useful to the transferees is forwarded as soon as possible. For example, classifieds, special real estate listings, train and bus schedules, motor vehicle registration and license forms, data on local and State income taxes, and Knicks, Rangers, Giants, Jets, and Mets schedules made up one recent package. Guides to shopping, dining, sightseeing, and entertainment in and around New York City made up another. A regional office staff roster, copies of the office's newsletter, and maps of the New York City subway system made up yet another package.