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OWWA *Mentoring* PROGRAM REPORT

BY GRAHAM NASBY AND
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Mentoring relationships are something that we often like to talk about, but seldom get a chance to do. If you have not participated in a mentoring program before – either as a mentor or as a mentee – it’s something you should definitely try out. During the past six months both of us, Graham and Alex, have had the opportunity to give mentoring a test drive using OWWA’s annual water industry mentoring program. We thought we would take a few moments to share what we liked about the program and how we discovered that mentoring is something we should all be doing more of.

First, we should start by giving an introduction to both of our roles. In the volunteer mentor role was Graham Nasby, a professional engineer and a 15-year veteran of the water industry, who currently manages the SCADA system at City of Guelph Water Services. In the mentee role was Alex Laleva, a young professional who is a 2021 graduate of the University of Guelph and recently joined Crozier Consulting Engineers.

We were paired together as part of the OWWA’s newly launched mentorship program. As part of the 2021/2022 program, the OWWA put out a call for both volunteer mentors and new professionals who wanted to be matched with each other. Both the mentors and mentees submitted brief bios and then, through the program, potential mentors and mentees were matched with each other. The program was wide-reaching, with a mix of operators, managers, engineers, consultants, and contractors participating in both the mentor and mentee roles.

As part of the program’s design, we met monthly from October 2021 to April 2022. Each session was generally about

45 minutes long, and the two of us had the opportunity to talk about a wide range of career topics. We mostly met virtually after work, but we also had one in-person meeting that included Graham giving Alex a tour of one of his utility’s water treatment plants. Other mentor/mentee pairs in the program elected to go with either all-virtual meetings or a combination of in person and online meetings.

The OWWA mentoring program was set up so that a mentor/mentee pair would continue to meet with each other for a 6-to-8-month period. This was to allow for each pair of participants to develop a longer-term relationship and to allow for enough time for the pairs to talk about a wide range of career topics. The program was also set up so that mentor/mentee discussions would be confidential, so each party felt they could speak freely to the other. The format of the OWWA program allowed us to develop a trusting relationship where we didn’t hesitate to ask each other tough questions. Both of us viewed the program as a great learning experience.

Once we were matched up by the OWWA, we each started off by emailing a copy of our resume to the other person and providing a bulleted list of topics we wanted to talk about during our first session. We then set up a virtual meeting for our first meeting. We found that having the video feed, rather than just a phone call, allowed us to establish a more personal connection with each other. We also decided early on that we wanted to meet virtually from 5 pm-6 pm, so it did not interfere with our workdays, and we could fit it in before dinner time.

Our first meeting was mostly spent getting to know each other, talking about our respective school/work careers so far, and discussing the initial topics we had emailed



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to each other beforehand. For the rest of the sessions, we decided we would have Alex email Graham a list of questions/topics 1-2 weeks before the next meeting. Also, rather than trying to set up all the meeting dates ahead of time, we booked the meetings one at a time. Thus, at the end of each session, we would pick the date/time for the next month's mentoring meeting. Graham found this arrangement worked really well due to his operations/projects-focused schedule, and for Alex, it gave her more flexibility in her schedule as she juggled her responsibilities as a new hire at an engineering firm.

Some of the topics we talked about during the mentoring session included working with others, building relationships, work planning, communication, project management, teamwork, networking, personal judgment, self-discipline, crucial choices, problem solving, and how to manage difficult situations just to name a few. We also spent a lot of time talking about how to manage one's work-life balance, and how to contribute to a positive work environment. Because

of the 6-8-month period of monthly meetings, and the ability to speak frankly, it allowed both of us to explore many different aspects of our careers and to learn from each other.

For Alex, the mentoring program has been a great way to learn about some of the challenges (and lessons learned!) that Graham has had during his 20+ year career, in both the water sector and in other industry verticals. For Graham, the mentoring program has helped him gain a fresh perspective on the workplace from a new professional and have a chance to re-examine why we do some things the way we do. Graham also enjoyed the opportunity to give something back to the water community.

If you have an opportunity to be involved in a mentoring program, we would both encourage you to try it out. We found the OWWA's mentoring program to be an enjoyable experience and it helped us gain new insights into our careers – for both the mentee and the mentor. It was also a wonderful way to meet another person in our sector and get a chance to talk about what we all do best – that is keeping the water on.

The OWWA will be accepting applications for next year's OWWA Mentorship program this fall. More information about the program can be found on the OWWA website, or by visiting the direct link: <https://owwa.ca/members/mentorship-program.html>.

About the Authors



Graham Nasby, P.Eng., PMP, has worked in the municipal water sector for 15+ years in a variety of roles, including consulting, operations, and capital projects. Since 2015, he has held the role of Water SCADA & Security Specialist at City of Guelph Environmental Services. Graham lives in Guelph, Ontario. Contact: graham.nasby@grahamnasy.com



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