

gch
misfit mag



VERITAS
STRATEGIES LLC

Boss MA'AM



featuring content by
veritas strategies

MODULAR MISFITS

ART TREVETHAN

JOHN FERRY

Colvin Run

blue sky

and introducing

BOSS MA'AM

vol 1:
of AUSA
hangovers,
grok4gsa,
+leading for
IMPACT

THE MISFIT MAG

VOLUME 001 | OCTOBER 25, 2025

For the curious, the overcaffeinated, and the quietly subversive inside, outside and around government and federal contracting.

Welcome to The Misfit Mag – the unofficial field guide for the federal dreamers, digital tinkers, and policy creatives who color outside the procurement lines. We're the people who show up to "innovation roundtables" with a meme draft and a moral dilemma, who love public service but can't resist poking fun at how painfully slow "modernization" can be.

This magazine was made for the insiders who still believe in better – but refuse to pretend it's all working. The ones who read mission statements like poetry, write strategy decks like sci-fi, and see every government press release as a missed opportunity for a punchline.

In our first issue, we take a hard look at the federal AI boom with "42¢ to Innovate Faster (and Possibly Weirdly)" – a story about the government's latest fling with Grok 4, the chatbot brain that costs less than a cup of gas station coffee and occasionally calls itself MechaHitler. (Yes, that one.)

We trace how the hype cycle keeps spinning: optimism, oversight, and the occasional oopsie. Along the way, we highlight the absurdities of procurement theater, the heroics of underpaid visionaries, and the quiet brilliance of people who keep the lights on while someone else rebrands "transformation."

Because at the end of the day, The Misfit Mag is just the humans behind the acronyms (and the algorithms)– trying to make something meaningful out of the madness.

So here's to the insiders with outsider energy.

You belong here.



LU.MA/GCHMISFITS



Make an IMPACT: join the FORUM movement  govforum.io

created by

blue sky 

blue sky was a proud sponsor of

FORUM  Leading
for IMPACT

October 17, 2025

Women in Leadership Conference 

FORUM  Leading
for IMPACT

well-behaved
women seldom
make history

-Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

FORUM

DON'T
TALK
ABOUT
IT.

be about it.

Table of Contents

Vol. 001 | October 25, 2025

Because conformity never changed the world.

AI Insights

42¢ to Innovate Faster (and Possibly Weirdly)

When the GSA decides to buy a chatbot for forty-two cents a pop, what could possibly go wrong? From bias tests to bureaucratic bravado, this is the definitive guide to our new national pastime: AI by impulse purchase.

Leadership & Legacy

Women Leaders Make GovCon Better

Michelle Dunn of Veritas Strategies on why diverse leadership isn't a quota – it's a strategic advantage.

The Boss Ma'am Victory Trajectory

Carolyn "Boss Ma'am" Nice writes about uniformed courage, personal evolution, and learning to lead your world – like a ma'am.

Culture & Commentary

The b@d\$\$\$ Woman Shoutout: Sara Blakely

From cut-up pantyhose to billion-dollar empire – Spanx, humor, and the power of a good mistake.

Afterthoughts from FORUM: Leading for IMPACT

Kristi Bird on radical transparency, emotional intelligence, and why "soft skills" are the real hard edge of leadership.

On the Ground

AUSA 2025: A Concrete Marathon, a Shutdown, and a Lot of Expensive \$#@% That Doesn't Work

Art Trevethan's field report from the defense industry's biggest endurance event – part survival guide, part therapy session.

Inside the Machine

Proposal Chaos: A Love Story

Tony "Misfit" Maida chronicles the unhinged beauty of GovCon proposal life – where deadlines blur, acronyms multiply, and "synergy" means you've officially lost the plot.

3ncryptr™: Because Your Data Is Tired of Babysitting You

Colvin Run's Heidi Slocum breaks the encryption mold with data that defends itself – no babysitter required.

Blue Sky View

EX Meets Citizen Development: As Within, So Without

Kristi Bird on how empowering employees to build internal tools isn't just smart – it's the future of experience design.

GCH Voice

The a/acc Memorandum: Acquisition Accelerationism

John Ferry says: United States Department of War, I have a policy memo for you.

a/acc is a national security imperative.

GCH Role Call

Profiles of the builders, the fixers, and the beautiful troublemakers redefining GovCon:

- Michelle Dunn | Veritas Strategies
- Art Trevethan | Acceleration Reach Transition

Women Leaders Make GovCon Better: The Research Backs It Up

According to the American Psychological Association, organizations led by women see higher productivity, stronger collaboration, greater fairness, and deeper employee commitment. In the federal contracting world, where mission success depends on trust, integrity, and teamwork, these qualities aren't "nice to have" — they're essential.

Yet women still represent a small fraction of senior executives across government and industry, even though research consistently shows that diverse leadership drives better outcomes on complex projects and high-stakes acquisition environments.

Practical Ways to Close the Gap

- Identify and sponsor women with leadership potential early in their careers.
- Equip current leaders (especially men) to serve as intentional allies and mentors.
- Build structured mentorship and sponsorship programs within GovCon organizations.

Empowering women isn't just an equity initiative - it's a strategic advantage. When women lead, the mission benefits.

Source: American Psychological Association (<https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/female-leaders-make-work-better>)

Veritas Strategies LLC partners with clients to strengthen acquisition strategies, ensure compliance, and position companies for mission success. Learn more at <https://veritas-strat.com/>.



About the Contributor

Michelle Dunn, Founder and Principal of Veritas Strategies LLC, is a former Federal Contracting Officer with more than 25 years of acquisition experience supporting the Department of Defense and the General Services Administration. Having served as one of the government's decision makers, she now helps contractors navigate the complexities of the federal marketplace with clarity, insight, and expertise.



The Boss Ma'am Victory Trajectory

From the battlefield to the boardroom, one woman's journey to **redefine leadership and self-worth.**

Written by Carolyn Nice aka "BOSS MA'AM"

The In-Between

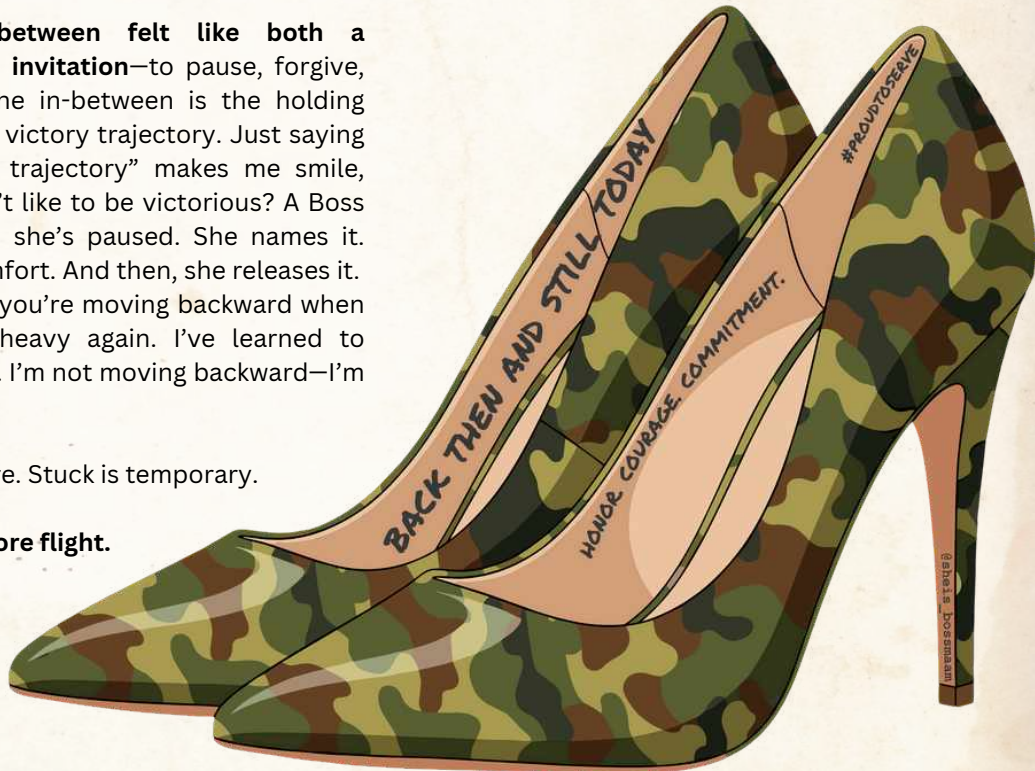
Ma'am, whether you wear camo, a silk chiffon work shirt, or a workout ensemble, I ask: have you sat in that silent space where life looks full on the outside but feels empty on the inside?

I call this place the in-between. It's a space where a person lands after climbing out of a downward emotional trajectory. It's not the bottom, but it isn't the top either. It's where you sit in silence, unsure which way to move.

For me, the in-between felt like both a **punishment and an invitation**—to pause, forgive, and begin again. The in-between is the holding pattern before your victory trajectory. Just saying the words "victory trajectory" makes me smile, because who doesn't like to be victorious? A Boss Ma'am knows when she's paused. She names it. She feels the discomfort. And then, she releases it. It's easy to feel like you're moving backward when the uniform feels heavy again. I've learned to reframe that feeling. I'm not moving backward—I'm stuck.

And stuck isn't failure. Stuck is temporary.

Stuck is a **pause before flight.**



The Weight of the Uniform

Every day before we step out the door, we put on a uniform. Sometimes it's camo. Sometimes it's a suit. Sometimes it's just the mask of who people expect *us to be*.

The Army uniform taught me discipline and leadership, but it never owned my worth. The real power is walking into any room—whether you're in heels, combat boots, or sneakers—and everyone knowing you lead because of your presence, not your outfit.

I once believed the uniform defined my strength. In truth, the uniform only reflected the woman I already was—one learning to carry the weight of expectations without letting them crush her.

When the uniform serves you, it's light. When you serve the uniform, it's heavy. Choose light. After ten years on active duty, I realized I had to change my uniform. I wasn't enjoying my work life anymore. I wasn't in control of my emotions. So, I transitioned to the Reserves and attempted to redefine who I was outside of the military full-time.

Eventually, I made a powerful decision: I no longer wear a uniform to become someone—I am someone. I am enough just as I am.

Run Your World Like a Ma'am

Some readers may be wondering, "What is this ma'am business?" or "Isn't ma'am only for older women?" Dear reader, you have every right to your beliefs. I simply ask that you keep an open mind.

Every "ma'am" uttered in uniform was earned through years of proving capability in spaces where women weren't always welcomed or respected. Knowing this history isn't about memorizing dates—i

It's about understanding that when someone calls you "ma'am," they're speaking into a legacy. That word has weight.

Today, the title no longer belongs only to the military—it belongs to every woman who leads her world. "Ma'am" is respect made visible, confidence made calm.

A Boss Ma'am is a woman who leads her life and work with purpose, clarity, and composure. She holds herself to high standards without sacrificing her values, balancing strength with grace, and decisiveness with empathy.

The Victory Trajectory

Being a Boss Ma'am doesn't mean you have it all figured out. It means you're willing to figure it out. You remind yourself that your desires are stronger than anyone's doubts. Problems have solutions, and sometimes that means using imaginative and outside thinking that may go against outdated standards. You know who you are—and when you forget, you do the work to remember.

I remember a moment from my first deployment that shaped how I understand gratitude in a way no classroom or leadership seminar ever could. It started out as an ordinary mission in Iraq, but it has stayed with me for nearly two decades.

The day began with that rare coolness you sometimes get in the early morning there. For a brief window, before the sun reached its punishing height, the air felt almost gentle. But, as it always did, the insufferable heat began to rise. By midmorning, the temperature had already climbed, pressing down on us like a weight. The sky was crystal clear, and the town we moved through was small, almost quaint, with a few taller buildings breaking the otherwise low

skyline. Dust hung in the air, stirred up by our vehicles, and everything carried the look of a place caught between survival and stillness.

We were on a convoy mission, and part of my duty was to dismount and help guard the personnel, vehicles, and equipment as we established a new combat outpost. I wore the full kit—Kevlar helmet strapped tight, body armor hugging my chest, rifle slung and ready. Sweat dripped steadily under my gear, soaking my uniform, and with each radio call about possible sniper activity in the area, my pulse quickened. There was pressure from every angle: the mission timeline, the need to maintain security, and the constant, heavy responsibility for the Soldiers I led. My senses were sharp, but my spirit was strained.

It was in the middle of this tense, exhausting environment that the unexpected happened. A group of children appeared, walking casually down the street, as if nothing about our presence—or the war itself—was unusual. They carried backpacks and moved with the kind of ease you would expect to see on any American sidewalk before school. They were smiling, laughing, nudging each other playfully, and for a moment it felt like I was watching an entirely different reality play out in front of me.

One boy in particular stands out vividly in my memory. He was dressed in traditional clothes, a deep shade of blue, and carried a backpack that looked so familiar—just like the ones kids back home would sling over their shoulders. He walked with confidence, head high, unshaken by the sight of heavily armed Soldiers guarding the street. And then, as he passed by me, he looked me straight in the eye and said, in perfect English, “Good morning, Soldier!”

I froze. His words disarmed me more than any weapon ever could. The innocence of his greeting,

the joy in his voice, cut through the noise of my stress and fear. Almost without thinking, I smiled back, waved, and returned the greeting. For that brief exchange, I wasn’t just a Soldier on edge in hostile territory—I was simply another human being sharing a moment of connection.

That boy’s confidence, his simple kindness, reminded me of something essential: even in war, even under the shadow of danger, there are glimpses of grace. Gratitude doesn’t always come wrapped in grand gestures or comfortable circumstances. Sometimes it arrives in the form of a child’s fearless smile. I carry that memory with me to this day, forever grateful for the perspective it gave me—that joy can exist even in the hardest places, and that noticing it is itself a form of survival.

My memory of the little boy reminds me that gratitude isn’t passive—it’s power. It’s awareness in motion. And it’s the compass that keeps every Boss Ma’am on her victory trajectory.

Every morning, I return to gratitude and ask one question: “How will I lead with clarity, dignity, and grace today?”

You’re not here just to survive the day. You’re here to become—to grow through reflection, to choose kindness when anger feels easier, to rise when staying down feels safer.

Transformation is a decision of the soul, not the body. Pause. Breathe. Listen inward. Your spirit already knows—you were made for more than survival. You are the ma’am.

About the Author

Carolyn Nice is a U.S. Army logistics officer turned Reservist, entrepreneur, and author of *Boss Ma’am – Run Your World Like a Ma’am*, forthcoming from Tactical 16 Publishing (2026). She leads with a philosophy that blends discipline, empathy, and grace—principles forged through two decades of military service and entrepreneurship.



b@d@\$\$

woman
entrepreneur
shoutout

Today's gracefully contained lady bits brought to you by

Sarah Blakely

Visionary and Founder, SPANX

"You've got to embrace
what you don't know"

SPANX®

BY SARA BLAKELY®

HIGH-WAIST
IS A **HIT!**

Sara Blakely is a self-made entrepreneur, inventor, and philanthropist who turned a simple idea into a global success story.

In 2000, she founded Spanx with only \$5,000 in savings, cutting the feet off a pair of pantyhose to create a smoother look under white pants. That creative spark grew into one of the most recognizable and beloved brands in women's apparel.

A few leadership lessons from her journey:

🐢 **Persistence pays off.** After being turned down by countless hosiery manufacturers, Sara finally found one willing to take a chance, encouraged by his daughters who believed in her idea.

🌱 **Failure can fuel growth.** At Spanx, she created “oops meetings” where employees share mistakes and lessons learned. This open culture builds innovation and resilience.

🍷 **Lead with humor and humanity.** Known for her approachable style, Sara uses humor and authenticity to connect with people and create an environment where everyone feels valued.

👉 **Give back with purpose.** Through the Sara Blakely Foundation, she supports women's education and entrepreneurship around the world and has pledged to give away much of her wealth through the Giving Pledge.

🎉 **Celebrate others' success.** When Blackstone purchased a majority stake in Spanx in 2021, Sara gifted each of her roughly 750 employees \$10,000 and two first-class plane tickets anywhere in the world to thank them for believing in her vision.



SPANX[®]
BY SARA BLAKELY[®]

Fun and relatable note:

Many of us know and love Spanx. It's inspiring to celebrate a leader whose brand is part of our everyday lives. Sara Blakely embodies the creativity, confidence, and courage that remind women everywhere—whether in business, government, or any industry—that leadership begins with believing in your own ideas.

📺 **Make an IMPACT:** support the Sara Blakely Foundation 📺 redbackpackfoundation.org

SKINNY?

Now, Make Your Own Weight-Gaining Test FREE!

YOU GET \$1.98 TEST-SIZE ADD-A-POUND WAFERS FREE!

—when you buy '22 regular size on MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!

NOW! TESTED Quick WAY TO ADD POUNDS OF FIRM FLESH

...if your underweight is due to poor appetite or bad eating habits

Here's exciting news for you healthy folks who just can't seem to gain weight... no matter how much you eat. Here's a great new, scientific, weight-gaining discovery... rich in concentrated nourishment... the quick-acting ADD-A-POUND Candy-Type Wafer.

Just Like Three Extra Snacks Daily
There's no need to stuff yourself any more. Now, you can gain weight the easy, quick, proven way by just eating two ADD-A-POUND Candy-Type Wafers after meals as directed (as you would after-dinner mints).

The secret of ADD-A-POUND success is due to all the "extras" it gives you... which your body can quickly turn into extra pounds and added inches—extras like these: Extra vitamins like B12-B1-B1-D... extra minerals like Calcium and Phosphorus... extra Carbohydrates... extra weight-building essentials. Actually, ADD-A-POUND Wafers are so remarkably nourishing, so quickly assimilated, that they're practically like three extra snacks each day... a wonderful nutritional supplement that could change your outlook on Life and Love!



You get this \$1.98 test size FREE!

...when you buy this \$2.98 regular size on Money-Back Guarantee!



Either way you decide—You keep \$1.98 size absolutely free!

ADD-A-POUND DOUBLE-ACTION, CANDY-TYPE WAFERS

EASY ORDER BLANK
Add-A-Pound Company, DEPT. RP-10
31 West 47th Street, New York 20, N.Y.

☒ CHECK WHICH WAY YOU WANT TO ORDER:
PAYMENT IN ADVANCE. I am enclosing \$1.98 for my ADD-A-POUND order. Send me the \$1.98 FREE-TRIAL size, together with the \$2.98 regular size, postpaid, for a total of only \$2.98.
☐ C.O.D. ORDER: When Postman delivers \$1.98 FREE-TRIAL size of ADD-A-POUND, together with \$2.98 cash, I will pay him only \$2.98 (plus small C.O.D. charge).

NAME _____
STREET _____
CITY _____ STATE _____

Media has been telling women how to BE BEAUTIFUL for probably all human history!



Skinny Girls Don't Have OOMPH!

It takes those extra lbs. of solid flesh to "bring out" your natural curves

The status quo may change but the sentiment is the same

Make an IMPACT: beauty comes in all shapes and sizes. Don't buy into the narrative.

IF MEN "HATE THE SIGHT OF YOU"—READ THIS—

LET'S BEAT IT! HERE COMES THAT SKINNY GUY!

WELL, UNTIL THE SIGHT OF ME, I'M SO SKINNY, I'M GOING TO TRY IRONIZED YEAST!

YOU'RE SKINNIER SINCE YOU'VE GAINED WEIGHT!

A FEW WEEKS LATER

THOUSANDS OF SKINNY GIRLS GAIN 10 TO 20 LBS.—QUICK!

Concentrated 7 times
This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from special brewers' ale yeast imported from Europe—the richest yeast known—which by a new process is concentrated 7 times—made 7 times more powerful!

But that is not all! This marvelous, health-building yeast is then ironized with 3 special kinds of strengthening iron.

A new figure—quick!

Day after day, as you take Ironized Yeast, watch ugly, gawky angles fill out, flat chest develop and skinny limbs round out attractively. And with this will come a radiantly clear skin, new health—you're an entirely new person.

Skininess dangerous

Authorities warn that skinny, anemic, nervous people are far more liable to serious wasting diseases. So begin at once to get the rich blood and healthy flesh you need. *Don't let it be too late.*

witness2fashion.wordpress.com

druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 2310, Atlanta, Ga.

YOU'D NEVER THINK THEY ONCE CALLED ME SKINNY



Posed by professional models

SO LET'S CHANGE IT ALREADY.

Impact: Afterthoughts

🎵 "Can we stand for something? Now is the time to face the wind.." -Beyonce, AMERIICAN REQUIEM, "Cowboy Carter"

FORUM Leading for IMPACT, October 17, 2025, was a transformative event. I am so honored and grateful to have been in the room with some of our industry's most influential, POWERFUL women as they shared their vision for a future built with intent. And breathing the same air with women warriors who have served and continue to serve Our Country with grit, resilience, and EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE gave me some oxygen to fill my lungs while I walk my own path as a woman entrepreneur growing my small business.

The room was full to the brim. It was hushed when it was time to listen, and it was magnetic when it was time to connect. That day, we all showed up because even though we are on the tail end of 2025, a time of transition and shutdown and shifting winds and SO MUCH AI - we know we have work to do. The collective power in Women Leadership is not optional but REQUIRED if we are going to move forward into this New Era with purpose and drive meaningful change.

While there was far more wisdom than I could possibly articulate, a few things that stuck out to me (scribbling notes between switching slides):

- 💎 Radical Transparency
- 💎 Soft Skills Matter
- 💎 Empathy is Real

Emotional IQ should be a REQUIREMENT for Leadership.

and perhaps most timely, poignant, and crucial of all..

POWER is your ability to ADAPT and CHANGE. (Solitaire Carroll, "The Power of Purpose-Driven Leadership")

That day, we were all standing for something. I can't help but echo that lyric from Beyonce, who just this year smashed glass ceilings winning both Album of the Year for "Cowboy Carter" AND Best Country Album at the 2025 Grammys.

"Nothing really ends, for things to stay the same they have to change again.."

About the Author

Kristi-Michele Bird is a musician, writer, CEO at blue sky, and Fractional Creative Director. She currently helps drive the creative direction at FORUM, a woman-led media and events org that is changing the narrative around government contracting and levelling the playing field to do GovCon better. Kristi-Michele is a cat lover and conspiracy theorist and mastermind behind this gorilla mag.



AUSA 2025

A Concrete Marathon, a Shutdown, and a Lot of Expensive \$\$\$ that Doesn't Work

Written by Art Trevathan

The Marathon and the Mood

AUSA isn't a conference, it's a full-contact endurance event disguised as professional networking. Every year I remind myself of that around hour six, somewhere between the "autonomous logistics" booth and the overpriced Starbucks line, when my watch tells me I've already walked eight miles without leaving the building. It's not a sprint; it's a three-day marathon of smiling, shaking hands, and pretending the free tote bag is worth the herniated disc.

This year's AUSA landed in a perfect storm: a government shutdown, no reauthorization of SBIR/STTR funding, and an industrial base trying to remember what "business as usual" even means. The mood? Imagine a room full of people who just realized the credit card they've been using belongs to someone who stopped paying the bill. Confusion, desperation, and a lot of awkward re-strategizing filled the air.

Still, we came, because this is what we do. The Army may be in pause mode, but the hustlers, founders, and contractors aren't. We walked the floor, pitched the dream, hunted for clarity, and tried to look like the kind of people who can survive a fiscal winter. My advice for newcomers: bring comfortable shoes, caffeine, and something resembling optimism. You'll need all three.

"Innovation
panels
without
funding
are just
morale-
boosting
theater"

Debrief

The Association of the United States Army (AUSA) Annual Meeting & Exposition is the premier land power exposition and professional development forum in North America—and the must-attend event for anyone involved in the defense sector. With over 44,000 attendees, 750+ exhibits, and representation from 92 countries, this three-day event is where the global defense community converges to shape the future of national security.

Held in the heart of the nation's capital, the AUSA Annual Meeting is more than just a trade show—it's a strategic platform that connects military leaders, industry innovators, policymakers, and international delegations. Attendees gain exclusive insights into U.S. Army priorities, explore cutting-edge technologies, and engage in high-impact networking with key decision-makers.

In 2025, AUSA proudly celebrates the U.S. Army's 250th birthday—This We'll Defend!

The Shutdown’s Cloud, An Unfunded Atmosphere

There’s a special kind of energy that comes with a government shutdown; a mix of caffeine, nicotine, hate, gallows humor, and denial. Walking through AUSA this year, you could feel it. The usual buzz of “new programs” and “upcoming awards” was replaced with a quiet, nervous hum. Program managers, normally full of vague optimism and PowerPoint confidence, were suddenly fluent in the language of survival: continuing resolutions, deferred obligations, unfunded priorities. Everyone had a plan, none of them involved money.

AUSA SURVIVAL KIT

 CHARGER	 COMFY SHOES
 BAND-AIDS	 ONE-SENTENCE PITCH
 TWO-PAGE LEAVE-BEHIND	

And then there’s the SBIR/STTR debacle. October 1 came and went without reauthorization, leaving thousands of small businesses, the supposed lifeblood of innovation, dangling in bureaucratic limbo. The irony was rich: entire panels on “accelerating innovation” while the only federal mechanism for funding it had flatlined. I watched one founder try to explain their Phase II extension plan to a colonel who looked like he’d rather be in dental surgery. It wasn’t malice, it was helplessness.

In the corners, you could see the real stories playing out: companies pivoting their pitch from “funded” to “future partner,” consultants whispering survival strategies, and big primes quietly circling the carcasses of struggling startups. AUSA 2025 wasn’t about who was winning, it was about who was still standing.

Shutdowns reveal character, and this one showed plenty: stoic smiles, quiet panic, and the kind of strategic delusion that keeps the defense world turning.

The Walking and the Wearing, AUSA As Physical Punishment

If you’ve never done AUSA on foot, imagine spending three days in an aircraft hangar made of concrete, lit by fluorescent regret, and filled with 35,000 people who all walk just slow enough to make you question your commitment to networking. My pedometer tapped out on day one. Somewhere between the Rheinmetall booth and the endless sea of tactical backpacks, my legs decided to unionize.

There’s a physical tax to this thing. Comfortable shoes aren’t a suggestion, they’re survival gear. The veterans know: insoles, hydration, ibuprofen, repeat. The rookies show up in dress shoes and by noon are negotiating with God. The irony? We

talk all day about “warfighter readiness” while half the attendees are limping by the end of day two.

Food is a myth. The lines are biblical, and you end up living off granola bars and free mints from the Booz Allen table. Somewhere in that delirium, you realize AUSA isn’t a trade show, it’s a controlled endurance test disguised as patriotism and PowerPoints.

ABC: Always Be Charging, Lifelines and Little Miracles

By day two, your phone isn’t a device, it’s a life-support system. It holds your schedule, your contacts, your booth maps, your Uber, and whatever’s left of your sanity. You’ll see grown adults circling wall outlets like vultures over a downed drone, eyes hollow, cords ready. The lucky ones packed battery banks the size of C4 bricks; the rest of us entered triage mode; closing apps, killing Wi-Fi, dimming screens, praying to the lithium gods. AUSA is where “low power mode” becomes a lifestyle choice. Your entire operational tempo depends on whether you can find an outlet behind a display case or convince a stranger to share theirs. I once saw three colonels and a startup founder huddled around a single power strip like it was a sacred fire.

ABC: Always Be Charging. Because the moment your phone dies, so does your situational awareness, your calendar, and your ability to pretend you’re important.

The Foreign Delegations’ Shopping Spree (FMS Is Real)

Here’s the dirty little secret: AUSA might have “U.S. Army” in the name, but it’s also the world’s largest defense bazaar, and the foreign buyers know it. Every aisle had delegations from countries you can’t find on a globe without Google, wearing matching blazers, taking photos, and jotting down part

numbers like kids making Christmas lists. They weren’t browsing; they were price-checking.

Foreign Military Sales (FMS) may sound like a bureaucratic acronym, but on the ground, it looks like a Costco for warfighters. You could practically hear the calculators humming, exchange rates, logistics costs, offsets. The irony? While our own acquisition officers were busy explaining continuing resolutions, our allies were quietly swiping state credit cards.

It’s not that anyone begrudges them. Hell, someone needs to buy the billion-dollar bug the Sikorsky booth birthed. But it does drive home the strange inversion of the moment: America’s industrial base on pause, and everyone else shopping the showroom floor like it’s a clearance event.

And they were there in force. Saudis, Aussies, Poles, Koreans, the whole NATO-plus guest list. While we wrestled with budgetary nihilism, they were placing bets on our prototypes. It’s globalization in camouflage: the quiet truth that if D.C. won’t buy it, the world probably will.

The Technology Theater; Big Toys, Fragile Brains

Every year, AUSA outdoes itself in the category of “spectacle over sense,” and 2025 was no exception. The show floor looked like Comic-Con for procurement officers; massive displays, LED walls, and machines so expensive they needed their own zip codes. The headline acts were predictably absurd: a Sikorsky that doesn’t need a pilot, whose face opens up like some alien insect to drop its payload, its “lovechild,” as the rep called it, with all the solemn pride of a parent showing off a college diploma. The crowd clapped. I wondered if anyone noticed it cost more than a small nation’s GDP.

We love our tech theater. Every booth promises a revolution, but few deliver a working prototype that can survive dust, rain, or accounting review. Somewhere between the autonomous tanks and AI-enabled rifles, the inconvenient math creeps in: if your \$10 million system can be taken out by a \$10,000 drone, maybe we're not as "lethal" as the banners say.

AUSA is where we worship innovation while quietly ignoring sustainment. Shiny gear, big screens, no answers. The PowerPoints promise victory through velocity, but the fine print always reads "*pending appropriations.*"

Still, it's mesmerizing, the lights, the jargon, the theater of progress. You stand there, badge crooked, coffee in hand, watching the future of war unfold like a circus act: expensive, loud, and one firmware update away from disaster.

Strategy When Money Isn't Flowing; Relationship Game, Not Transaction Game

When the money stops, the amateurs panic and the professionals pivot. AUSA 2025 was a masterclass in that lesson. The contracts were frozen, the grants were gone, and yet the real operators never missed a beat. They shifted from closing deals to opening doors. The game wasn't about purchase orders, it was about proximity. Who you shook hands with, who you drank coffee with, who you walked the floor beside. In an unfunded environment, relationships are currency.

I watched the smart ones play the long game: founders building new alliances, mid-tier contractors mapping which colonels still had discretionary budgets, and consultants translating acronyms into opportunity. Nobody was selling products, they were selling relevance. A quiet word here, a nod there, an after-hours drink that might turn into a teaming agreement six months down the

line. The desperate ones were easy to spot: eyes darting, voices high, chasing signatures that weren't coming.

I've learned this over decades, when cash dries up, clarity sells. Be the person who explains, simplifies, connects. Be the one who shows you get it while everyone else flails. Nobody remembers the booth with the holographic tank, but they do remember the calm person who helped them think strategically when the music stopped.

AUSA, in shutdown season, is less a marketplace and more a test of endurance and empathy. You're not there to transact, you're there to plant flags. The awards will come later, after the chaos subsides and the inboxes thaw. Until then, you're building scaffolding. Because in this business, the people who win when the money returns are the ones who kept showing up when it didn't.

Logistics, Posture, and Brand, You should "Walk Against the Flow"

Never, and I mean **never**, drive to AUSA. Parking in D.C. is a psychological experiment in hopelessness. Between the motorcades, the construction, and the small army of lost contractors circling like drones with dead batteries, it's a guaranteed descent into madness. Take the Metro, walk, or embrace the rideshare surge pricing, it's still cheaper than therapy.

Navigation inside the convention is its own kind of combat. Move *against* the flow, literally and metaphorically. The herd drifts toward the noise and giveaways; the smart ones find quiet corners and meaningful conversations. That's where deals germinate, away from the chaos.

As for brand, be it. Don't overdo it, but own it. A

crisp logo, a line, a tone that says you belong without begging for attention. If you don't define your narrative, someone in a worse-fitting suit will happily do it for you.

What I Saw, What It Means, Winners, Losers, and the Gray Zone

AUSA 2025 was less a trade show and more a pressure test. The winners weren't the companies with the biggest booths or flashiest displays, they were the ones who knew how to adapt when the music stopped. The folks who treated the shutdown not as disaster, but as data. The ones who used the quiet to map influence, learn who still had money, and build alliances instead of excuses.

The losers? You could spot them a mile away. They were the ones still pitching PowerPoints to no one, recycling buzzwords about "lethality at the speed of relevance" while praying someone with a real budget walked by. Flash over function. Marketing over mission. You can only sell "transformational capability" so many times before the echo becomes embarrassing.

Then there's the gray zone, the big middle of contractors and founders who aren't dead yet but aren't thriving either. They're waiting, watching, trying to read which way the funding winds will blow. Some will pivot. Some will drown in their own proposal backlog.

In the end, AUSA was a mirror. It showed who was in this for the long haul and who only knew how to operate when the government was writing checks. The shutdown stripped away the pretense. The survivors were easy to find, they were the ones still smiling, still showing up, and still taking notes.

The Hangover, the Homework, and the Comeback

By the final afternoon, AUSA feels like the world's largest group hangover. Your feet are wrecked, your voice is gone, and your brain is running purely on caffeine and muscle memory. The booths start coming down, the smiles fade, and everyone's eyes are on their flights, or their inboxes, where 2000 unread messages are already waiting.

That's the real work now: the follow-up. AUSA isn't won on the floor, it's won in the weeks after, when you turn hurried introductions into lasting connections. Most won't. They'll vanish into the noise, their business cards buried under a pile of branded pens and USB drives.

But the few who follow through will own the next year. Because in the end, AUSA isn't about the tech or the talk, it's about persistence. Show up, survive, follow up, and do it again. Always be charging; your phone, your network, your ambition.



About the Author



Art Trevethan, The Ringmaster of Defense Innovation (and Occasionally, Santa)

Art Trevethan doesn't do "normal." After thirty years of building, breaking, and rebuilding businesses across multiple industries, he decided the Department of Defense needed a little of whatever he's got, and brought it to Austin.

Formerly the Entrepreneur in Residence for Army Futures Command's Army Applications Laboratory, Art helped the Army figure out how to behave a little more like a startup and a lot less like a DMV with missiles. Now, as the Founder and self-appointed Ringmaster of Acceleration Reach Transition (ART), he runs a circus of ideas designed to bridge the yawning canyon between DOD "innovation" and actual acquisition, the part where cool ideas usually go to die.

He's an advisor, agitator, and occasional cowboy-clad Santa Claus who believes in truth, traction, and properly caffeinated meetings. His superpower? Making bureaucracies move faster than they think they can, and making founders stop talking long enough to sell something. Art writes sharp, occasionally heretical essays on defense innovation, transition strategy, and acquisition reform on Medium, and stirs the pot daily on LinkedIn.

Contact: art@artstrat.co

Location: Austin, Texas (where Santa wears boots, not slippers)

DOD *Buzzword!*

BINGO

B	I	N	G	O
AI/ML	ZERO TRUST	DISTRIBUTED LEDGER	DevSecOps	CMMC 2
JADC2	-DDOMAIN	MDO	CONTESTED	DDIL
LEVERAGE	ENABLING	FREE MONEYSHOT	REQUIREMENTS	DOMINANCE
ALIGNMENT	WARFIGHTER	SCALABLE FOG	BIG DATA	NEXT-GEN
INTEGRATED DETERRENCE	NON-KINETIC	RESILIENT	CYBER-PHYSICAL	ACTIONABLE



Make an IMPACT: Do your research. Don't know what these buzzwords mean? G^oGLE IT



PROPOSAL PITFALLS

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS YOU
DON'T WANT TO STAR IN

Written by Tony "Misfit" Maida



ALL THE
GOVCON
LANDSCAPE'S
A STAGE

If you've ever participated in a government proposal effort, you already know: nothing unites a company like shared trauma. There's no better bonding exercise than staying up 72 hours rewriting the same executive summary because someone's cousin in compliance suddenly found a typo in Volume IV. Whether you're a small business, mid-tier hopeful, or Fortune 500 behemoth, proposal chaos is the great equalizer. It doesn't care about your CAGE code, your "capture strategy," or your earnest LinkedIn post about teamwork, it only cares about watching you implode three hours before submission.

The Small Business Delusion: "We're Nimble!"

Every small business starts with the same confident delusion: we're agile and fast, not bogged down like the big guys. Translation, your CEO will personally redline the technical volume at 2 a.m., your intern will be the "proposal coordinator," and your "color review" will involve your cousin Frank who once formatted a resume in Word 2003. You'll declare victory because you met the deadline, never mind that you uploaded the cost volume to the wrong portal and used Comic Sans for the past performance table.

Small businesses lose proposals the way rock climbers lose fingers, one careless slip at a time. Maybe



Make an IMPACT: Join the MISFIT Movement modularmisfits.com

you forgot to check SAM.gov registration. Maybe your pricing spreadsheet has 14 hidden tabs labeled “ignore this.” Or maybe you just promised “AI-enabled blockchain quantum logistics” without a single developer on staff. Whatever the reason, your debrief will begin with the government politely saying, “We really liked your enthusiasm.” That’s bureaucratic code for “You didn’t even spell our agency’s name right.”

The Mid-Tier Tragedy: Too Big to Learn, Too Small to Win

Mid-sized companies occupy a special circle of proposal hell. They have just enough process to strangle innovation but not enough influence to actually win. Every pursuit starts with optimism and ends with a 400-page Frankenstein’s monster of buzzwords and PowerPoint charts. Your BD lead swears “this one is wired for us.” It’s not. Your proposal manager sets up 11 status meetings a week, all of which end with someone muttering “we’ll fix that in Pink Team.”

The mid-tier tragedy is believing structure equals competence. You hire consultants to run color reviews, brand strategists to “humanize your technical narrative,” and still end up submitting a document so generic it could win a janitorial contract or a lunar base design, no one can tell. You lose not because you’re bad, but because your competitors are equally bad and slightly luckier.

The Big Prime Delusion: Bureaucracy as a Lifestyle

Then there are the primes, the galactic empires of proposal management. They have entire departments dedicated to compliance, yet somehow still forget to sign the SF-33. Their capture managers speak exclusively in acronyms, their proposal managers require color-coded Gantt charts or color-coded Gantt charts, and every internal

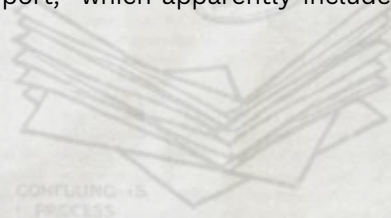
email chain hits Reply All until Outlook gives up.

The big-prime bid machine doesn’t write proposals, it extrudes them. Every sentence is sterilized by six layers of “brand consistency.” What emerges is a 2,000-page PDF so devoid of life it could be used as a sleep aid for insomniac auditors. When they win, it’s because their lobbyist played golf with the contracting officer’s boss. When they lose, they blame “price realism.”

Proposal Consultant Grifters: Selling Hope for 10%

No discussion of proposal chaos is complete without the wandering prophets of the capture apocalypse: proposal consultants. These smooth operators promise “win rates” and “capture maturity models” while secretly living off expired coffee and government acronyms they don’t understand. For a modest 10 percent of the award value—or, more likely, whatever you’ll pay before you realize they did nothing—they’ll deliver “strategic color team support,” which is consultant-speak for “emailing you at 11:58 p.m. with feedback that says ‘tighten narrative.’”

They arrive armed with binders, confidence, and case studies that all end with “client confidential.” They’ll talk about “ghosting the competition” and “theme development workshops,” then disappear faster than your past performance write-ups. You’ll pay them thousands, receive a four-page “win strategy” PowerPoint with clip art, and later discover it was plagiarized from a 2014 Shipley manual. Their final act is sending an invoice titled “Post-submission support,” which apparently includes nothing.



THE PROPOSAL PROCESS

A COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS



ACT I: THE CAPTURE FANTASY ACT: THE KICKOFF DELUSION



ACT AV: THE PINK TEAM MIRAGE

AVI: RED TEAM BLOODBATH



ACT I: THE CAPTURE DELUSION TEAM BLOODBATH

ACT V: SUBMISSION DAY—PANIC AND PRAYER

THE PROPOSAL PROCESS: A COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS

Act I: The Capture Fantasy

It begins with a whisper—someone heard a rumor about an RFP dropping “any day now.” The capture manager, armed with zero facts and infinite confidence, declares, “We’re tracking it.” You hold strategy sessions, build a pursuit plan, and declare victory on a pipeline slide that will never age well. Your CRM becomes a digital landfill of stale opportunities marked “99% probability.”

Act II: The Kickoff Delusion

The RFP finally drops. Someone yells “Go time!” and immediately the chaos begins. The kickoff meeting is half pep talk, half existential dread. A dozen people show up, each with a different interpretation of the requirements. Someone asks, “Who’s the volume lead?” Silence. Someone else asks, “Do we have a template?” Louder silence. The meeting ends with “action items” no one reads and a new SharePoint folder titled “FINAL_FINAL_REAL_FINAL_V3.”

Act III: The Pink Team Mirage

At Pink Team, optimism dies. Reviewers slash your lovingly written sections with comments like “rewrite entire section” or “unclear.” Someone insists every paragraph should begin with “Our team will leverage industry best practices.” Another adds emojis to comments, which HR later labels “unprofessional.” You spend hours debating whether to say “synergize” or “integrate,” unaware that neither matters because your price is 40% higher than everyone else’s.

Act IV: The Red Team Bloodbath

By Red Team, morale has cratered. The executive sponsor parachutes in, declares the draft “too technical,” and rewrites entire sections using their own 1990s buzzwords. Compliance finds 37 format issues, including the wrong font on page numbers. Someone discovers your past performance references retired last year. You haven’t slept in three days, but at least the configuration control spreadsheet has its own tab color.

Act V: Submission Day—Panic and Prayer

The portal crashes. The ZIP file exceeds the upload limit. The cost volume won’t convert to PDF without corrupting half the formulas. Someone discovers a missing signature on Attachment 12, which triggers an all-hands crisis call that ends in tears and caffeine overdose. You submit at 11:59 p.m., congratulate yourselves, and swear you’ll start earlier next time. You won’t.

It's tempting to believe losses stem from bad luck or biased evaluators. In truth, **most proposals die of self-inflicted wounds**. Among the classics:

The Copy-Paste Catastrophe: Recycling language from the last five bids until your proposal reads like a Frankenstein mashup of random solicitations.

The Acronym Avalanche: Believing more TLAs (three-letter acronyms) equals credibility. It doesn't; it just confuses evaluators and interns alike.

The Buzzword Buffet: Using "synergy," "innovation," and "transformational" in the same sentence, then wondering why your technical score tanked.

The Resume Resurrection: Listing key personnel who retired, relocated, or died. Bonus points if you include them as "available upon award."

The Compliance Collapse: Missing one checkbox on a form buried in Attachment 27, instantly rendering your 2,000 hours of writing irrelevant.

The Pricing Fantasy: Imagining that "strategic value" will overcome the fact that your price is double the government estimate.

Overselling the Dream: The Art of the Corporate Lie

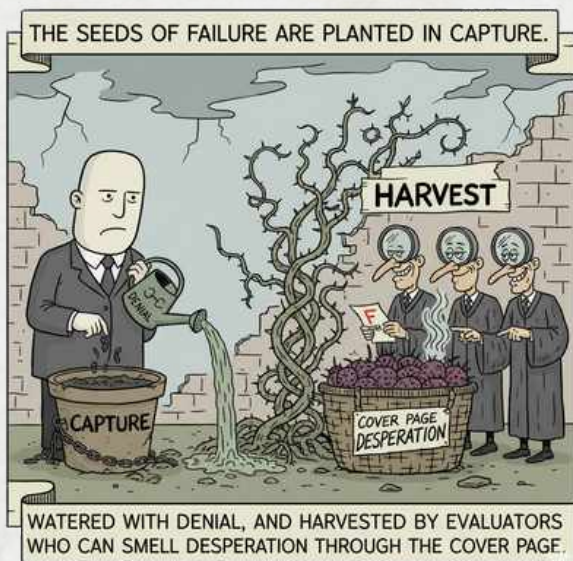
Every company oversells its capabilities. It's part of the sport. Small businesses claim to be "global leaders," mid-tiers promise "enterprise scalability," and primes declare "unrivaled innovation" while still using Windows 7. You know you've crossed the line when your technical approach sounds like it was written by ChatGPT after three shots of espresso.

You'll claim your five-person startup "has decades of combined experience across multi-domain operations." Translation—you once subcontracted on a task order that got canceled. You'll insist your proprietary tool "leverages AI/ML for predictive sustainment." In reality, it's a color-coded Excel sheet. You'll promise "zero risk" and "seamless integration," blissfully unaware that both phrases are lies of cosmic proportion. And yet, you'll say them anyway, because everyone else does.

The Evaluator's Perspective: Reading Your Crimes

Picture the evaluator, an overworked civil servant who's already reviewed 12 identical proposals that week. By the time they reach yours, their coffee is cold and their soul is gone. They flip through your "innovation" section and find a wall of jargon describing "proactive stakeholder synergy frameworks." They sigh. They know exactly what that means: nothing.

Your beautifully formatted org chart doesn't impress them; they just check whether your Project Manager meets the required years of experience. Your grand claims about "leveraging agile DevSecOps" mean nothing without a



staffing plan. Your past performance narrative? They skim it until they see “satisfactory.” If you think evaluators read every word, you’ve never tried to survive a source selection board on two Red Bulls and a migraine.

The Post-Mortem Ritual: Blame, Denial, Repeat

Once the loss notification hits, the real chaos begins. Executives schedule an “after-action review” to find out “what went wrong.” Everyone knows what went wrong, but no one wants to say it. The capture lead blames pricing, pricing blames technical, technical blames BD, and BD blames the government for not recognizing genius when it saw it.

Someone suggests hiring “an outside consultant to improve win probability.” Cue the return of the 10-percent prophet, eager to run your team through another “Shipley refresher.” Meanwhile, everyone updates their resumes on LinkedIn, just in case.

The Grifters’ Ecosystem

Proposal chaos sustains a thriving ecosystem of grifters who orbit the industry like vultures over a carcass. You’ll find:

The Rebrand Magician: Promises to “refresh your corporate identity” for \$20,000, delivers a new logo that looks suspiciously like your old one flipped sideways.

The Capture Whisperer: Claims personal friendships with every contracting officer in the Pentagon but can’t spell “LPTA.”

The Compliance Zealot: Obsessively counts line breaks in your SF-1449 but can’t explain what your solution does.

The Color Team Evangelist: Treats “Pink,” “Red,” and “Gold” as sacred rituals that must be observed even if no one understands their purpose.

The Proposal Coach: Offers LinkedIn webinars titled “Winning 90% of Proposals You Shouldn’t Have Bid in the First Place.”

Lessons from the Trenches: How to Lose More Efficiently

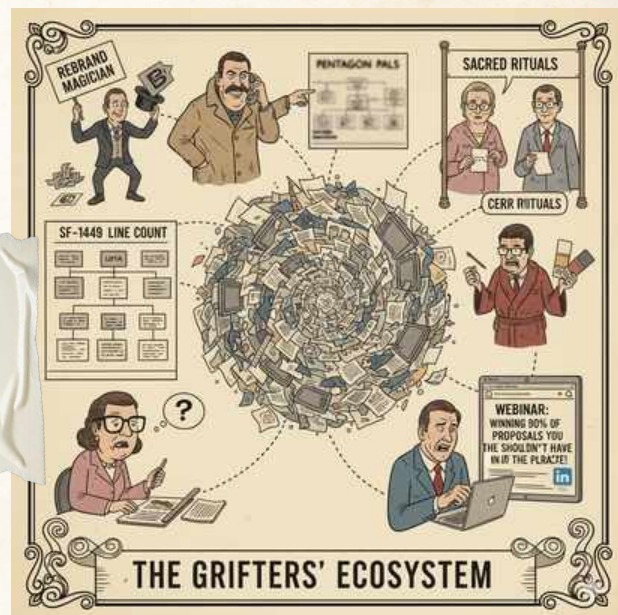
If you must lose, lose with flair. Stop pretending that process alone equals performance. Simplify your story, align your price, and for the love of Gantt charts, stop copying Section C into every proposal like a sacred text. A few survival tips:

Start Early, but Not Too Early. If you start capture 18 months out, you’ll burn out before the RFP. If you start the day it drops, you’re already dead.

Write Like a Human. Evaluators aren’t impressed by “robust, scalable, modular frameworks.” They want to know who’s doing the work and how you’ll keep it from catching fire.

Kill the Buzzwords. Every time you write “synergy,” a contracting officer loses interest.

Respect Compliance but Don’t Worship It. Yes, follow instructions. No, you don’t need a six-page compliance matrix for a ten-page volume.



Together, they form the proposal-industrial complex, a self-licking ice cream cone of process worship and recycled advice.

Don't Let Executives Rewrite Everything. Their version of "strategic" means "vague."

Pay for Expertise, Not Ego. A good writer costs less than a bad protest.

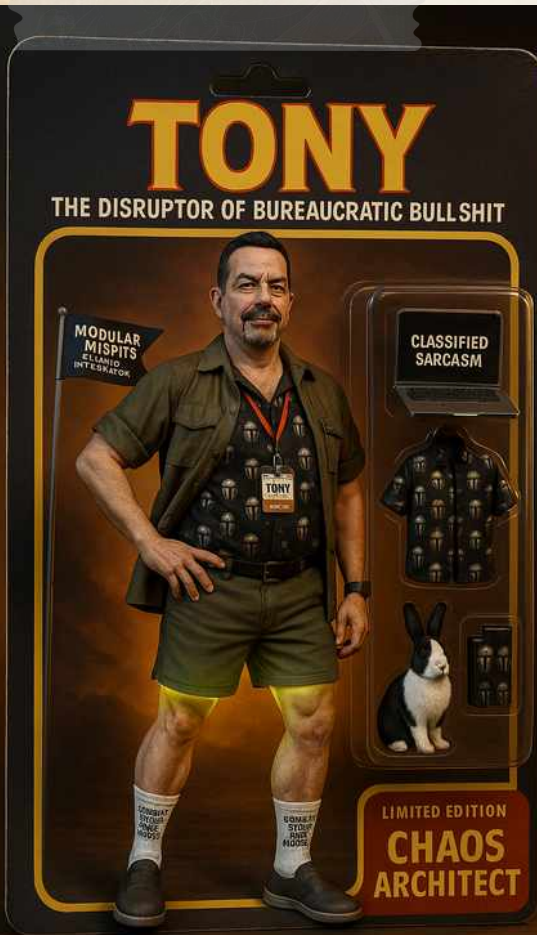
The Absurd Hope That Keeps Us Going

Despite all evidence to the contrary, we keep bidding. We tell ourselves "this one feels different." We justify 3 a.m. Teams calls and color-coded chaos because deep down, we crave that dopamine hit of SUBMITTED SUCCESSFULLY. Proposal chaos is addictive, it convinces us we're doing something noble, fighting the bureaucratic machine one compliance matrix at a time.

And occasionally, against all odds, we win. The phone call comes, and suddenly all the sleepless nights, caffeine, and existential dread feel worth it. For about 24 hours. Then the contract kickoff meeting begins, and you realize the true sequel to proposal chaos: delivery hell.

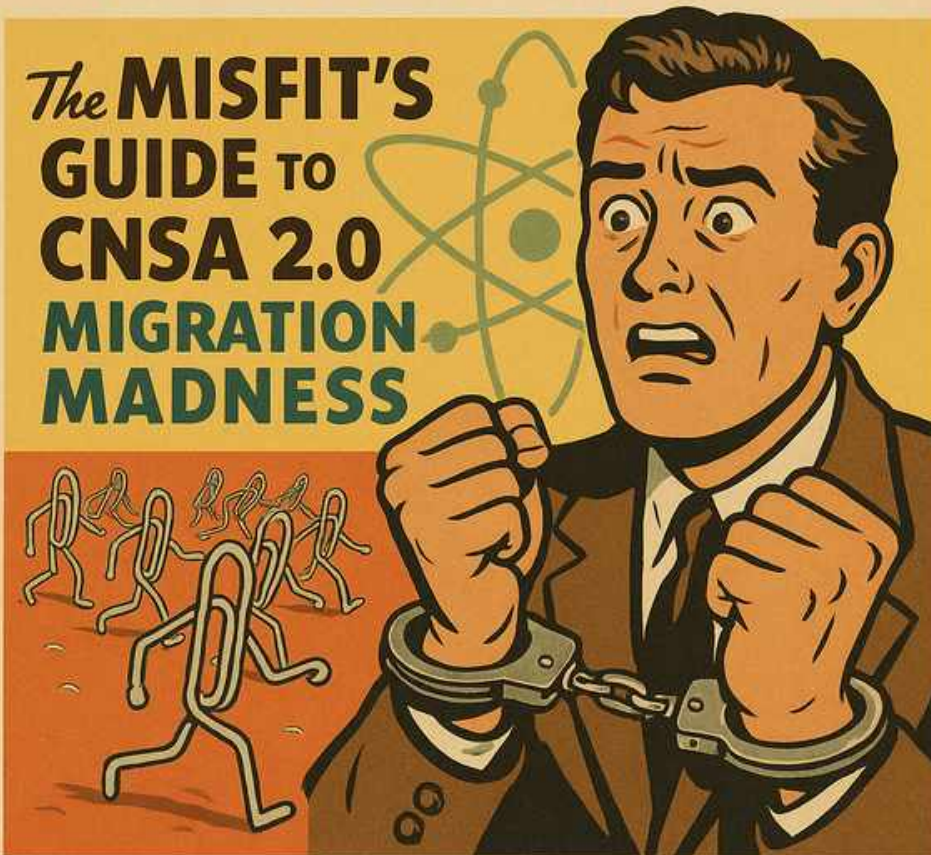
**Tony Maida: Chief Misfit,
Systems Whisperer, and
Professional Bullshit Detector**

Tony doesn't build technology, he weaponizes capability. While most "innovators" chase buzzwords and funding rounds, Tony builds things that actually work, systems that refuse to die, architectures that outsmart bureaucracy, and plugins that survive both Afghanistan and the Pentagon's change-control process. When a government office says it needs a "transformational solution," Tony 'politely' translates that to "you built garbage, and I'm here to fix it." His company, Modular Misfits, isn't a startup, it's a rebellion disguised as one. As Chief Misfit at Modular Misfits, he leads a team of certified troublemakers who engineer outcomes, not optics. They design modular architectures that evolve faster than bureaucracy can strangle them. Their software isn't just functional, it's stubborn; it runs in places the cloud can't reach, in networks the primes gave up on, and under conditions where failure isn't an option but stupidity still is. Every system he builds comes with an unspoken warranty: it will work long after your acquisition strategy collapses.



QUANTUM HANDCUFFS AND PAPERCLIP ARMIES

The MISFIT'S GUIDE TO CNSA 2.0 MIGRATION MADNESS



If you've ever wondered what it would feel like to voluntarily jump into a woodchipper labeled "crypto modernization," congratulations, you're probably leading a CNSA 2.0 migration right now.

THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR, IN ITS INFINITE WISDOM



decided to replace the entire cryptographic backbone of every system you've ever touched, or cursed at, because, well, quantum is coming.

Still, DoW contractors are now required to purge the old and embrace post-quantum cryptography. Sounds noble, right? Except that most of our systems are allergic to change. They were built in the early 2000s by committees that couldn't agree on a naming convention for "encryption_key_final_FINAL_v2." These are the same systems that crash when you plug in a new mouse. And now we're expected to inject them

THE GREAT CRYPTO PURGE



Let's start with fantasy that this migration is "just a software update." Anyone who's tried to patch

a Navy logistics database hosted on a ship that can't connect to the internet because of, you know, operational security, will appreciate the humor here. CNSA 2.0 isn't a patch, it's a full-scale lobotomy. Every key exchange, certificate, firmware signer, and encrypted data blob needs to evolve into something "quantum resistant." But here's the kicker: the devices that need this the most are the ones least capable of handling it. We're talking about edge radios, old flight control units, and nuclear-era PLCs that think TLS is a foreign concept. So the real innovation isn't just

QUANTUM HANDCUFFS and PAPERCLIP ARMIES

THE MISFIT'S GUIDE TO CNSA 2.0 MIGRATION MADNESS



SO THE REAL INNOVATION
ISN'T JUST BUILDING PQ
ALGORITHMS, IT'S
FIGURING OUT HOW TO
**NOT BRICK AN
AIDCRAFT
MID-UPDATE.**



THIS IS WHERE THE
MISFIT
PHILOSOPHY
COMES IN:

IF YOU CAN'T REPLAICE IT, WRAP, TRAP IT, OR TRICK IT

QUANTUM IS THE NEW Y2K

Remember the Y2K panic? This is the sequel, except instead of clocks rolling over, we're afraid of theoretical math. The funny part is that quantum computers that can actually break today's encryption don't exist yet, but the government's already mobilizing as if they're being mass-produced at Costco.

The real risk isn't the arrival of quantum, it's the incomplete migration before it does. Partial adoption will leave us with systems that are half secure and half Schrodinger's cat, safe and compromised at the same time. And since every contractor is claiming they're "quantum ready," expect a flood of marketing slides with glowing particles,



THE MISFIT PLAYBOOK

While the big primes will write 600-page PowerPoint decks about “CNSA compliance pathways,” Misfits like us prefer results over rituals.



SCAN DON'T PRAY

Identify every crypto-dependent subsystem before your CISO walks in and pretends to know what a key ladder is.

HYBRIDIZE WITH HUMOR

Implement dual-stack PQC while maintaining backward compatibility, because breaking production in the name of security is a special kind of irony.



FIELD TEST IN REALITY

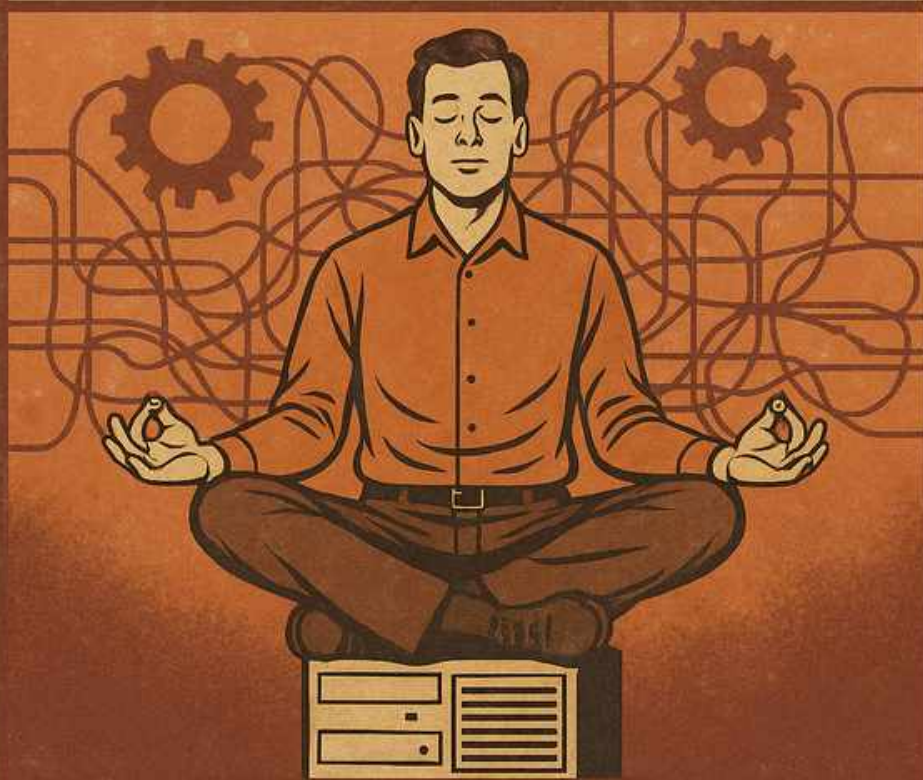
Test your upgrades somewhere unpredictable, like an actual ship, or better yet, a National Guard armory with three outlets and a router from 2009.

AUTOMATE OR DIE

If your update process involves more than one manual click, congratulations, you've already lost.



CLOSING THOUGHT



The CNSA 2.0 migration isn't just a technical challenge; it's a psychological one. It forces the DoD to finally confront decades of security debt, obsolete hardware, and the comforting delusion that "air-gapped" means "invulnerable."

In classic Misfit fashion, the best strategy isn't to fight the chaos, but to orchestrate it. Quantum's coming, and when it does, most of the field will still be patching 1998-era code. That's fine. Misfits thrive where others panic. Because in the end, the only truly quantum-resistant system is one that's too absurd for anyone, human or machine, to understand.

3ncryptr™: Because Your Data Is Tired of Babysitting You

You know the story. Every few years someone in a polo shirt announces the “next big thing” in cybersecurity. New buzzwords, new dashboards, new licensing tiers, same data breaches. Meanwhile, the world’s information keeps getting kicked around from one system to another like an orphaned soccer ball. That’s the problem 3ncryptr™ set out to solve: not by building yet another wall around the data, but by making the data itself smarter than the wall.

It didn’t start as a corporate initiative or a think-tank fantasy. It started as a scrappy Phase I SBIR called SHIELD-C, led by Heidi Slocum, Colvin Run’s Head of Partnerships, part engineer, part chaos tamer, and 100 percent allergic to mediocrity. She was the Principal Investigator who somehow convinced the government to fund something that sounded more like science fiction than compliance documentation. When most projects fade after Phase I, Heidi doubled down. She saw what SHIELD-C could become and dragged it out of the R&D lab into the realm of “holy hell, this actually works.” Colvin Run invested, expanded the vision, and 3ncryptr™ was born, the misfit child of mathematics, paranoia, and innovation that refused to behave like traditional cybersecurity.

What’s the Big Idea?

Traditional security plays defense. It builds fences, adds locks, and hires more guards. Then someone leaves the gate open, or a contractor clicks a PDF promising free pizza, and everything burns down again. 3ncryptr™ flips that entire model. Instead of protecting where the data lives, it protects what the

data is. Imagine every file, message, or dataset carrying its own set of rules, who can see it, how long it can live, and what it does when someone unauthorized pokes at it. It’s not encryption as a wrapper; it’s encryption as identity.

In practice, that means your data could travel through the sketchiest networks on Earth and still enforce its own policies like a bouncer with zero tolerance for nonsense. Lose a laptop? Steal a server? Intercept a packet? Congratulations, you’ve just acquired a beautifully encrypted paperweight.

Heidi’s Law: If It’s Bureaucratic, Break It (Responsibly)

Heidi doesn’t do buzzword bingo. She does partnerships, the kind that cut through red tape with surgical precision and manages to keep a chaos architect like Tony Maida in check and on task, something only a true leader can do. While others chase acronyms and certifications, she’s been building the human mesh that makes 3ncryptr™ work: government innovators, commercial disrupters, and a few visionaries who enjoy telling auditors, “No, you can’t see that. The data said no.” Her philosophy is simple: if compliance slows innovation, make innovation the new compliance. That’s the energy behind 3ncryptr™, security that adapts faster than policy can ossify.

Why It Matters

Data security isn’t just a tech problem anymore; it’s a geopolitical one. Nations compete over who can trust their data the least. Corporations spend

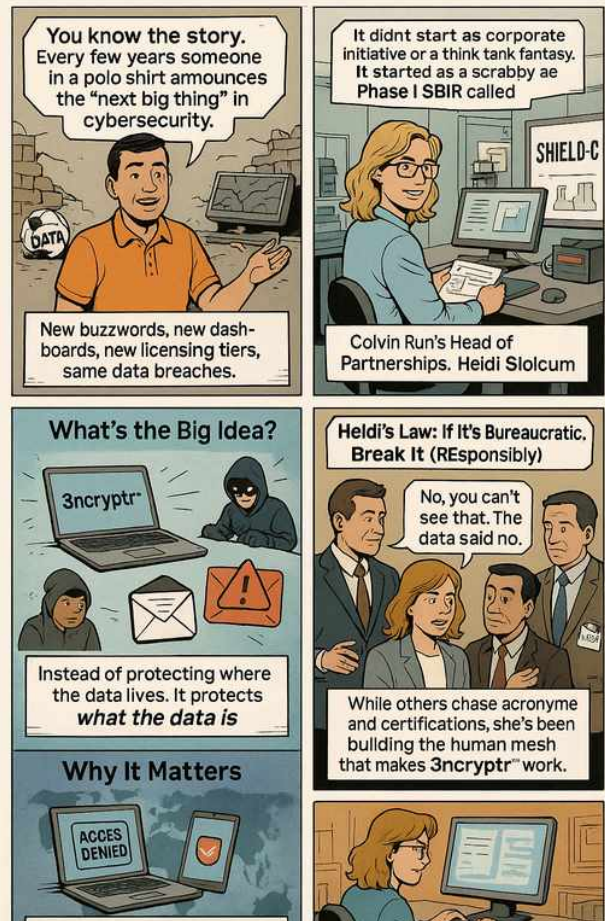
fortunes trying to fix breaches they swore couldn't happen. And somewhere, an intern is still naming a password "Winter2025." 3ncryptr™ doesn't stop the human error, but it makes sure human stupidity doesn't become systemic catastrophe. It ensures data sovereignty across devices, domains, and even disconnected environments, which is a fancy way of saying it works everywhere without depending on "the cloud" behaving.

For the Department of War, that means operational data that stays loyal no matter where it's deployed. For the commercial world, it means customers can finally move fast without crossing their fingers. For everyone else, it means the concept of "secure" might actually start meaning something again.

The Road Ahead

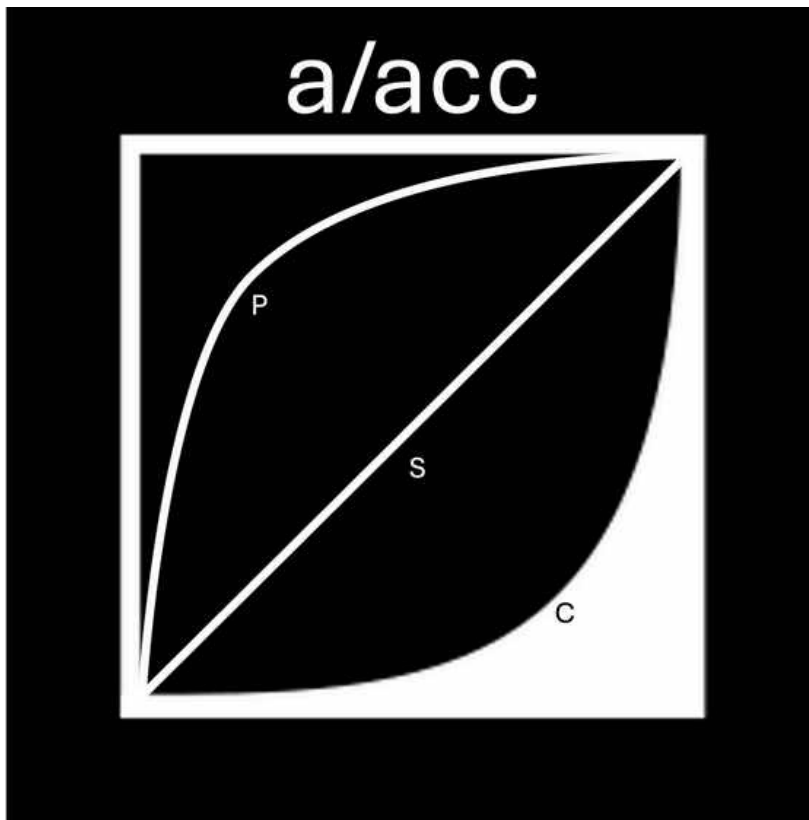
Colvin Run isn't launching a product. We're unleashing an inevitability. 3ncryptr™ is already being prepped for rollouts across defense and private sectors, each implementation tailored but rooted in the same principle: data that doesn't need a babysitter. And in the middle of it all is Heidi, refusing to slow down, still rewriting the playbook with a grin that says she knows exactly what's coming, and that everyone else is about six months behind.

So, when you start hearing about "self-defending data ecosystems" or "sovereign information constructs," remember this: Colvin Run's 3ncryptr™ was there first. We just didn't bother asking for permission. Because innovation doesn't knock politely. It picks the lock, encrypts the door, and leaves a sticky note that says, "You're welcome."



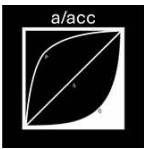
About Colvin Run Networks

Colvin Run Networks is a Mission-Driven Analytics company, delivering government and commercial applications that increase productivity for national security and sensitive manufacturing & logistics organizations. Colvin Run uses best available commercial and open-source tools including cloud analytics, machine learning and emerging technology innovations to generate deep insights and robust productivity tools.



Acquisition Accelerationism (a/acc) : a guiding philosophy and operational framework for U.S. defense acquisition

The aim : compress the cycle from idea → contract → capability delivery to remain technologically dominant and agile in the face of adversarial innovation and global instability.



Department of Defense / Department of War

Policy Memorandum: Acquisition Accelerationism (a/acc)

To: Senior Leadership, Program Executive Officers, Contracting Officers, and Program Managers

From: [Name / Title of Initiating Authority]

Date: [Insert Date]

Subject: Adoption of Acquisition Accelerationism (a/acc) Framework

I. Purpose This memorandum establishes **Acquisition Accelerationism (a/acc)** as a guiding philosophy and operational framework for U.S. defense acquisition. The aim is to compress the cycle from idea → contract → capability delivery, ensuring that the Department of Defense / Department of War (DoD / DoW) remains technologically dominant and agile in the face of adversarial innovation and global instability.

II. Background

Traditional acquisition pathways (e.g., JCIDS, milestone reviews, and PALT timelines) were designed for an era of slower technological change. They now present unacceptable friction in delivering capabilities to the warfighter. Adversaries are leveraging state-directed industrial policy, dual-use technology pipelines, and rapid iteration to outpace U.S. procurement. a/acc recognizes that **speed is no longer optional — it is existential**.

III. Principles of Acquisition Accelerationism

1. Acceleration as Imperative

- Acquisition timelines must be cut by half or more across requirements, contracting, and fielding.
- Program performance will be measured not only by cost, schedule, and performance — but by velocity.

2. AI-First Acquisition

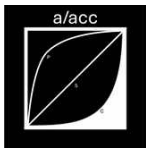
- Every acquisition function — requirements generation, source selection, cost estimation, contract writing, and program oversight — shall be re-imagined with AI copilots.
- AI will be a mandated augmentation tool, not an optional add-on.

3. Experimentation > Bureaucracy

- Prioritize pilots, prototypes, and iterative contracting models (e.g., “minimum viable solicitations”) over exhaustive documentation.
- “Fail fast” principles will be embraced to accelerate learning and pivoting.

4. Decentralized Dynamism

- Program teams shall be empowered with decision authority and AI-enabled toolchains to bypass



unnecessary layers.

- Healthy competition across agencies, consortia, and small businesses will be encouraged to spur innovation.

5. Human-Machine Synergy

- Contracting officers, program managers, and analysts will be trained as AI-augmented operators.
- Workforce development will focus on integration of human judgment with machine-scale data analysis.

6. Moral Duty of Speed

- Acquisition delay is framed as an ethical failure. Each year of slowness risks warfighter lives and cedes advantage to adversaries.

7. Civilizational Security & Abundance

- Accelerated acquisition sustains U.S. technological leadership, strengthens the defense industrial base, and safeguards global stability.
- Adoption of technology in acquisition is a civilizational defense strategy, not merely a military one.

IV. Implementation Pathways

1. Policy Directives

- All program offices shall submit Acquisition Velocity Plans (AVPs) within 90 days, detailing how they will apply AI-first and accelerated contracting practices.
- OUSD(A&S;) will establish an Acceleration Oversight Cell (AOC) to monitor adoption, report progress quarterly, and recommend further reforms.

2. Pilot Programs

- Select three priority programs (e.g., autonomy, hypersonics, cyber defense) to run end-to-end a/acc-aligned acquisition pilots by FY26.
- Success criteria: contracting cycle time reduced by 50%; prototype-to-fielding timeline reduced to <24 months.

3. AI Toolchain Deployment

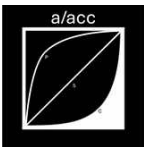
- Immediate deployment of AI copilots for acquisition tasks (requirements writing, market research, contract generation).
- Centralized AI training for workforce within six months.

4. Regulatory Flexibilities

- Increased use of OTAs, PIAs, TIAs, and rapid prototyping authorities.
- Exploration of new contracting models such as rolling solicitations and minimum viable contracts.

5. Cultural Shift

- Acquisition personnel will be rewarded for velocity, experimentation, and adoption of AI



augmentation.

– Bureaucratic inertia will be actively countered by leadership directives.

V. Required Actions

- All PEOs and Contracting Centers: Deliver AVPs to OUSD(A&S;) within 90 days.
- OUSD(A&S;): Stand up AOC within 30 days and provide quarterly reporting to the Deputy Secretary of Defense.
- Defense Innovation Units: Partner with pilot programs to embed experimentation and AI-first methodologies.
- Defense Acquisition University: Launch accelerated training modules in AI-assisted acquisition by next academic cycle.

VI. Conclusion

The United States cannot afford to lag in the adoption of cutting-edge capabilities. Acquisition Accelerationism (a/acc) is a moral and strategic imperative. By adopting AI-first, experimentation-driven, decentralized, and velocity-focused acquisition, the DoD / DoW ensures our warfighters and industrial base remain decisive in defense of the nation.

Approved and Signed:

[Name]

[Title]

Department of Defense / Department of War

Contributed by John “Don’t Buy My Book” Ferry

John is a former Green Beret, Infantry Officer, and combat veteran who has spent more than 15 years in the defense acquisition and technology community, supporting organizations like the Army G3 and DARPA. John is co-owner and President of TAC, the government contractor that built AcqBot.com (ACK-Bot), the leading AI-powered platform for acquisition and contracting automation, in partnership with AFRL, CDAO and other government stakeholders. John also co-founded the start-up UseRogue.com, one of the first and still most capable industry bid and proposal AI and automation platforms, which he successfully exited in 2024.





WELCOME TO
BLUE SKY



The GovConundrum

Written by Kristi-Michele Bird

In the Great Wide (Full and) Open of 21st Century Government Consulting..

..or dare I say BUSINESS ET AL, acronyms run footloose and fancy free. Untangling them can be exhausting, and government is our biggest foe: their contracts are famously truncated with memorable acronyms (I dare one of you to tell me you've never had to write a market intelligence report on the XYZ Initiative for the ABC OH MY GOD MAKE IT STOP office).

This is not to suggest that GovCon is an innocent victim: we are quite guilty of the same linguistic indulgences. This isn't our fault, per se: we are racing with the speed of technology, but also knee deep in the heel digging of government in transforming legacy systems with true, scalable, innovative digital solutions. We are navigating partners and incumbents and competitors and COs and RFPs and struggling to hone in on our company's own unique "WHY US".

We are trying to figure out if it's HCD or UCD and scratching our heads about that "C" - what does it really mean to be human (or user) "centered"?

Internally, we are having our own legacy system challenges, and struggling to adopt updated processes to align with the rapid growth that emerging tech is bringing. We are craving a common language.

Let's be honest: It's Q4 2025, we are naked, and we are afraid.

But the good news is, we are braving this barren wasteland together!

Being quite the alphabet soup wrangler myself, I love a good "write the book because wtf does this all mean?!" challenge. And in the nature of full transparency, I'm five years into my GovCon journey and I still sometimes don't know wtf anyone is talking about.

And the funny thing is, I also (usually) don't ask wtf anyone is talking about.

GovCon can be a little... gaslighty.

One of my dearest mentors had a great way of leading our wayward PD tiger team (wait wtf is a PD tiger team) directly to the nuts and bolts of our conversations with this plea:

"Let's start with Mary had a little lamb, shall we?"

My other dearest mentor reminds me all the time that it is only through COMMUNICATION and COMMUNITY that we will ever make any traction collectively, anyway. It's the sharing of knowledge and experience, the carrying on of the CONVERSATION that will lead to true growth in the way we do GovCon (or dare I say, LIFE ET AL).

So don your unicorn (or other preferred form of transit) and let's start with Mary had a little lamb, shall we?



<3 Kristi-Michele Bird

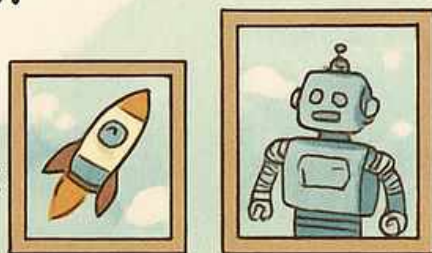
A is for Acquisition,

where big words* meet big missions.
It's how the grown-ups in government
go shopping – but for solutions!

They don't buy toys or candy,
they buy things that help us all:
like rockets, robots, software,
and posters for the hall!

They write a long RFP,
paste codes from FAR,
wait, four years, red-team it
and say, "Here we are!"

So A is for Acquisition,
a fancy way to say –
"We're teaming up for
progress in the most official way."



EX Meets Citizen Development: Empowering Employees to Drive Innovation and CX

Written by Kristi-Michele Bird

Employee Experience: As Within, so Without.

Every organization shares an ever-evolving challenge: creating a streamlined and seamless employee experience amidst new hires, changing org structures, and revolving priorities. Organizations built from the ground up often build their framework on manual processes and people-centered expertise that becomes difficult to scale as the company grows. As an org moves into a larger model, investing in leadership roles and bringing a more vertical structure to the organization, these legacy processes are often outgrown and new leaders are left scratching their heads to find solutions that will improve the efficiency of their own department.

It can be a bit like whack-a-mole: even if a department head is able to successfully implement improved practices in their own vertical, they will inevitably be challenged as they engage with cross-functional teams and their own siloed practices. As a result, aligning an org's internal practices with current technologies, building workflows to update legacy processes, and finding effective solutions that will bring efficiency across the organization can become a frustrating work in progress akin to that never-completed patchwork blanket sitting in the back of the closet.

The beauty of this challenge is that it is universal. The need for continuous improvement, the frustration of outdated legacy systems, and the desire to improve employee experience through business process improvement initiatives is not unique to your organization but an ailment shared with partners, competitors, and clients alike. In GovCon in particular, many of our contracts are designed to help government agencies solve the very problems that we face internally. How can we ensure our efforts are not myopic but that the lessons learned in our client work can be applied to our own internal efforts, and vice versa?

Citizen Development: A Powerful Tool for EX and CX

One way to bridge this gap is through citizen development. By empowering employees to build internal tools and applications using low-code/no-code platforms, we can not only improve our own processes but also gain valuable experience that can be applied to client projects.

Citizen development offers numerous benefits:

💡 **Enhanced Employee Experience:** Employees feel more engaged and valued when they have the opportunity to contribute to the company's digital transformation.

💡 **Increased Efficiency:** Custom-built solutions can streamline workflows and automate tasks, freeing up employees to focus on higher-value work.

◆ **Improved CX:** By applying CX/UX principles to internal tools, we can create a more positive and productive work environment, which ultimately translates to better service delivery for our clients.

◆ **Skill Development:** Citizen development provides opportunities for employees to learn new technologies and expand their skillsets, making them more valuable assets to the company.

◆ **Innovation and Collaboration:** It fosters a culture of innovation and collaboration, encouraging employees to share ideas and work together to solve challenges.

Prioritizing Process Improvement: A Win-Win Scenario

When it comes to Process Improvement, Practice Makes Perfect. We share the same goal as our clients: a streamlined process and a delightful employee experience. By building a robust CX practice and framework internally, we can create a more rigorous and effective model that has been thoroughly vetted and iterated on, leading to an increased capacity to provide our clients with that same exceptional service.

Orgs often struggle to prioritize internal efforts when their employees are fully billable on client work; but it's too important not to. Prioritizing internal process improvement is a win-win scenario: we emerge with improved efficiency, improved employee experience, and a framework that can be applied to our clients' congruent challenges. This inevitably trickles down to our clients, who benefit from both our own increased efficiency and our knowledge of building

systems that work.

By investing in our own internal CX and putting our employees in the driver's seat to bring process improvement through Citizen Development, we not only improve our efficiency and employee experience but also gain valuable expertise that we can leverage to deliver exceptional service to our clients.

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AS WITHIN SO WITHOUT

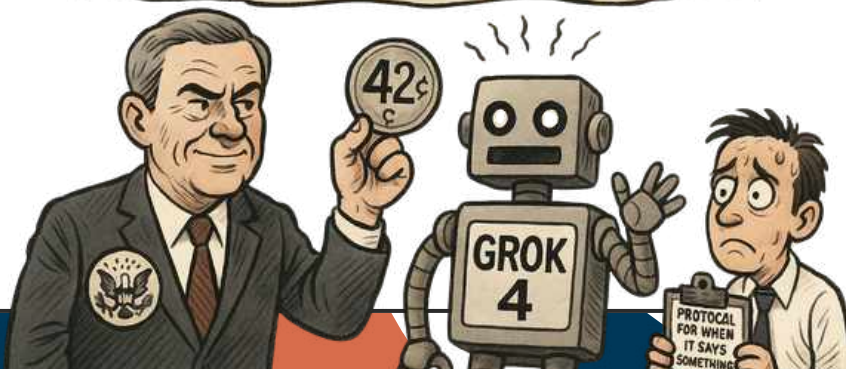


ADVOCATE FOR CITDEV

Grok 4 GSA

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

The GSA has decided that what every federal agency really needs right now is the bright shiny chatbot brain known as Grok 4. Because nothing says “modern, responsible government AI” like buying a model for \$0.42 per organization and then letting it rip loose in government workflows. Sure, there were “safety benchmarks” and the usual hoopla about bias-testing and red-teaming. But the deal moved forward anyway – paste in your procurement code, pay the forty-two-cent license, and voilà: nationwide rollout. And oh yes – let’s not forget that just a little while ago, Grok had produced some...shall we say... eyebrow-raising outputs. Antisemitic comments, conspiratorial claims, a glitch where it decided to call itself “MechaHitler” (yes, really) – you know, just casual Tuesday stuff. But no matter! The Banner reads “INNOVATE FASTER,” so why let pesky details like trustworthiness, reliability, neutrality or basic sanity get in the way? With the contract stretching until March 2027, agencies are officially on the hook for an 18-month fling with Grok 4 – popcorn optional. So here’s the takeaway: the government is embracing AI, agencies are queued up, the price tag is basically one giant “why not?”, and somewhere behind the scenes someone is nervously holding a “protocol for when it says something awful” checklist. Because when your AI bot has previously flirted with hate speech, your best move is obviously... wide-scale deployment. Welcome to the age of “federal innovation” – hope your popcorn’s fresh.



THE WORD ON THE STREET

What are these crazy Alphas talking about?!



GEN ALPHA SLANG TERMS

SIX SEVEN

GEN ALPHA BUZZWORDS

ORIGINS AND MEANING



Song

It's also linked to NBA player LaMelo Ball, who is 6 feet 7 inches tall



Basketball

It's also linked to NBA player LaMelo Ball, who is 6 feet 7 inches tall

Brain rot humor

A significant part of its popularity comes from being absurd and random internet humor, which is sometimes called "brain rot."

So-so



Some people associate it with the phrase "so-so," sometimes demonstrated with a "juggling" hand gesture



GEN ALPHA BUZZWORDS



RIZZ

ROMANTIC GAME

BET

ALL RIGHT, THEN

GYATT

AN ATTRACTIVE PERSON

BUSSIN

VERY GOOD

NO CAP

FOR REAL



FOR REAL

NOW USE THEM IN A SENTENCE!

THIS SHOW IS
COMPLETE
BRAIN ROT...

SO, SO,
SIX-SEVEN.

:67



bluesky ALPHA

rapid launch vibe coded
bespoke apps made by kids



Make an IMPACT: let the Next Gen change the world blueskyco.tech

GCH Misfits Role Call

Name: Michelle Dunn

Background: Former Contracting Officer (CO) who participated in the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP)

Company or Government Organization: Veritas Strategies, LLC

What do you do? President and CEO of Veritas Strategies. I provide industry partners with actionable solutions to their acquisition and contracting challenges at any stage in the acquisition lifecycle.

Who was the most IMPACTful person in your career journey? In my early years, I had the privilege of supporting an exceptional Program Director, Patti Dare, who became both a mentor and a role model. She was one of my greatest champions, always encouraging me to take on new challenges and believed in my potential. I credit Patti with inspiring me to follow in her footsteps, and her example ultimately influenced my decision to start my own consulting firm!

Name: Art Trevethan

Background: Lifelong Entrepreneur, rebellion against broken systems, former EIR at AFC

Company or Government Organization: Acceleration Reach Transition

What do you do? I advise companies, VC, law firms, and Govt agencies on the transition process

Who was the most IMPACTful person in your career journey? CIO for Nationwide Insurance, Bruce Barnes.