

Professional Development for Seasoned Genetic Counselors: Moving from Clinical Expertise to Leadership Excellence

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Background

- Nearly 40% of respondents to the 2024 NSGC Professional Status Survey have been in the profession for 10 or more years.
- Over the course of their careers, genetic counselors cycle through phases of desired learning - moving from gaining clinical acumen and psychosocial skills to maintaining competency in emerging technologies.
- With our rapidly evolving profession, interest in developing broader professional experiences and comfort in leadership roles is growing.
- To understand and fulfill this need, we sought to create a professional and personal development program for the most experienced genetic counselors at our commercial laboratory to foster positive, measurable growth in leadership skills and traits.

Methods

- Among a team of 55 counselors, 8 genetic counselors with an average professional experience of 17.65 years and at the highest individual-contributor (IC) job level were selected to participate in a custom-designed program to build and support comfort in presentation skills, strategic thinking, and leading with influence.
- This half-year program consisted of monthly content focused on a theme driven by a pre-selected online learning course.
 - Content and resources included self-paced asynchronous course review, presentation by a guest speaker, group/partner discussion, and an application workshop.
 - As noted in the article From Novice to Seasoned Practitioner: a Qualitative Investigation of Genetic Counselor Professional Development¹: “... experience in combination with reflection upon that experience (through introspection, self-reflection, informal discussions with colleagues, or other means) is essential to professional development.”
- Prior to the start of the program, the participants completed a self-assessment to determine their comfort level in eight leadership domains and situations; they completed a nearly identical assessment at the culmination of the course and results were compared.

Results

- All eight professionals completed both surveys, rated the experience 5/5 stars and reported that the program was a good use of their time.
- 100% of respondents agreed that their “work as a... team member will be served by the skills I have developed through this program” and that there are “areas of my own leadership style and approach that will benefit from the approaches and insights I have gained through this program.”

Figure 1. Self-assessment percent improvement May 2024 - December 2024

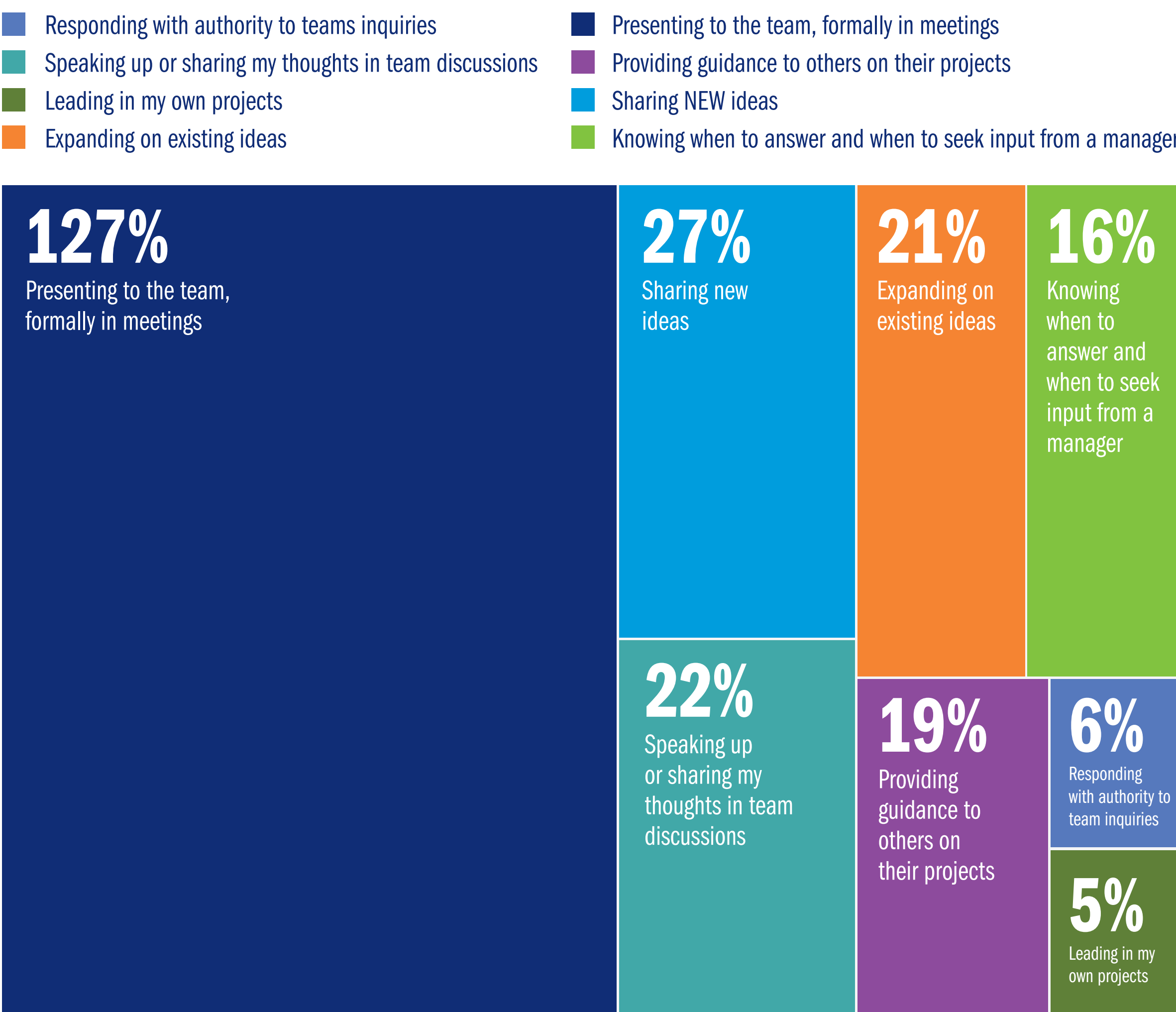
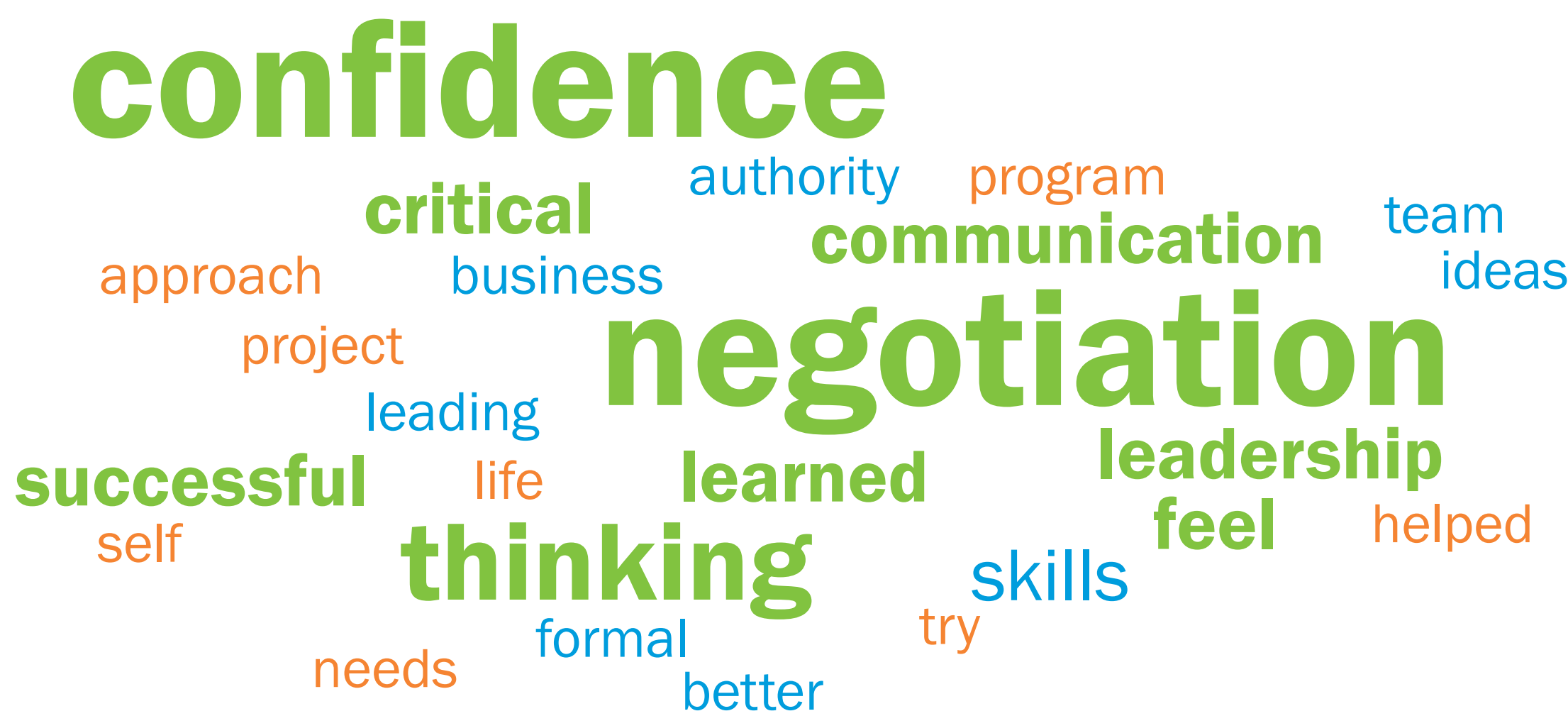


Figure 2. Word cloud generated from responses to the survey question “Through the GC3 Leadership Program, I have had the opportunity to grow these skills or leadership qualities”



- We compared results from these self-assessment questions which showed increases in all domains of leadership (5%-127%), with the highest percent improvement associated with “Presenting to the team, formally in meetings” (**Figure 1**).
- Positive qualitative feedback was also received from all participants and shared with organizational leadership to promote continued support for this program (**Figure 2** and **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Responses to the survey question “Please provide feedback on your experience in the GC3 Leadership Program or thoughts on how to improve this program in the future.”

“I really enjoyed this program and being able to connect with the other GC3s and have conversations/discussions that I wouldn’t have had without this program. The availability of this program shows that leadership values us and wants to make opportunities available for us to further our own professional development. I also enjoyed all of the guest speakers as well. I would definitely participate in this program or a similar program again.”

- GC3 Leadership Program Participant 2

“This was a fantastic experience. Perhaps adding in more time for pairs or small groups to brainstorm? The group relationship-building is so valuable. **One of the big values of this program is having the GC3s feel like a more cohesive group and feel comfortable with each other to be able to bounce ideas off each other and collaborate in way they might not have felt before.**”

- GC3 Leadership Program Participant 4

“I loved the variety of topics covered in this program, and I feel like the size of our group was just right to allow for easy discussion and participation. This was a great opportunity to interact with other teammates who have similar longevity/experience in the field, and I found it particularly helpful to hear how other “experts” on our team deal with some of the challenges I have faced in being an unofficial leader among our group.”

- GC3 Leadership Program Participant 8

Conclusions

- Based upon this data — both qualitatively and quantitatively — this program met the desired outcome of building leadership skills and providing unique professional development opportunities for highly trained clinical experts, outside of a genetics-focused curriculum.

References: ¹ From Novice to Seasoned Practitioner: a Qualitative Investigation of Genetic Counselor Professional Development : “Overall, the findings support prior assertions (e.g., Defining Moments essays, Journal of Genetic Counseling, 2002, 2012; Runyon et al. 2010) that experience in combination with reflection upon that experience (through introspection, self-reflection, informal discussions with colleagues, or other means) is essential to professional development.

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