

Samuel T. Mok

AGA D.C. Chapter President 1991-1992

AGA National President 2008-2009



- **How did you get started in your government career?** I was the Treasurer and Controller for *U.S. News & World Report* magazine when Ronald Reagan was elected president of United States. After the presidential inauguration, my then-boss joined the Reagan administration in a very senior foreign affairs position and encouraged me to serve also. My church elder was then the Assistant Secretary of State at U.S. Department of State and he helped facilitate my entry into government service. I received a presidential commission in 1986 as a foreign service officer and entered the U.S. Foreign Service the same year after graduating from the Foreign Service Institute.
- **How has the financial management profession changed since you first joined the government?** I was trained as a private sector financial accounting professional/executive and enhancing the shareholders' value was the key to career success in that occupation. This often involved focused cost control, performance efficiency and being the first on the block to innovate when operationally justified. In the government, I quickly learnt that while government can be business-like, it is not and cannot be managed as a business. Understanding and aligning with the prevailing cultural values is crucial to getting "big ticket items" accomplished. So, it is a completely different ball game and mindset, not to mention very different technical terminologies and procedures. I had to re-learn the profession and begin my career all over again.
- **Would you describe your first involvement with the AGA?** I was Comptroller (and later the first Chief Financial Officer (CFO)) of U.S. Department of Treasury when I made my first official visit meeting the then Commissioner of the Financial Management Service (FMS), Ernie Douglas. After a very pleasant meeting, I met two young FMS staffers (Doris Chew and Susan Lee) and they asked if I would like to join them at an AGA luncheon. Having just transferred from the Foreign Service, I wanted to make more friends in Civil Service and quickly accepted. They took me to my first AGA monthly luncheon at the Touchdown Club, where I met Warren Cottingham, Karl Boettcher, Virginia Robinson and her Joint Financial Management Improvement Program team, Bill Anderson, and many others. The rest is history.
- **What were some of the biggest changes that happened at the AGA during your career?** The creation of Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM) certification and the related training, accreditation, and continuing education activities. Also, the professionalization of the Association, itself, and the institutionalization of its leadership process.
- **Who at AGA inspired you the most over the years? How did this person influence you?** Dr. Relmond Van Daniker, Jeff Steinhoff, and Hank Steiniger were all influential to

me. From Dr. Van Daniker, I learned how to turn a professional/trade association into a significant opinion maker and influencer in the federal financial management sector. While we were on opposite sides of many issues while I was the National President and he was the AGA Executive Director, much later, I realized how many areas of agreement we shared. I've applied the lessons learned from that experience to formulate solutions for my clients during my last 13+ years as a consulting business owner. From Jeff Steinhoff, I learned how to transition elegantly, professionally and smoothly from a successful senior executive position in the federal government to a senior post in the private sector. I am most inspired by his people skills and alliance-building expertise. Then, from Hank Steiniger, I have adopted his methods and techniques as a playbook when coaching my clients in the areas of market niche, positioning, branding, and community relations.

- **Would you describe the significant financial management milestones you achieved at the federal agencies you worked at?** At the U.S. Department of the Treasury, I was appointed as the first Comptroller, and later CFO, after a stinging Government Accountability Office report about financial mismanagement and reporting irregularities by the Department's senior management. I was brought in by John F.W. Rogers (President Reagan's first White House director of administration) to "clean up the mess." I led the effort to create the Comptroller/CFO office and develop the CFO team. While there, our team rapidly implemented many state-of-the-art financial systems, as well as procedural reforms within the Department. The CFO office also used Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-123 as an effective tool to practice sound financial management. Later, at the U.S. Department of Labor, I was able to secure funding and staff to replace an aging enterprise wide financial management system that is still in use today. I also rebuilt the entire CFO office layout to incorporate state-of-the-art technology and workplace efficiencies. The entire CFO staff of 100+ employees was completely professional and well-balanced demographically. The Labor OCFO won every external award in the area of federal financial management and was one of the first cabinet-level agencies to "Go to Green" under the President's Management Agenda in the George W. Bush administration. I was given a leadership award by OMB and *Government Executive* magazine did a front page article on Labor's CFO office (where I was dubbed "Change Agent Mok"). Before I left Labor, I was elected a Fellow at the National Academy of Public Administration.
- **You served as the AGA National President and the D.C. Chapter President. What can you tell me about the priorities that you addressed during your national leadership period? What are your proudest accomplishments?** While AGA became a very successful enterprise, it was important for its executive council to implement a leadership succession plan, as well as a contingency plan in case of the loss of one of its revenue streams. Improved transparency was another top priority. Upon being elected National President, I pushed through the appointment of a task force to come up with reform suggestions. The final report recommended many significant management practice changes (such as the creation of a Chief Operating Officer position) that were adopted by the AGA national board with bylaw amendments.

- **Would you describe some of your proudest accomplishments during your term as D.C. Chapter President?** I upgraded the monthly lunch speakers to include more top agency policy senior appointees and private sector business leaders. This attracted more government financial management contractors to attend the luncheon. With the help of Doris Chew and Karl Boettcher, I initiated the annual Chinese New Year’s dinner that was well-attended for decades. I am proud that the AGA D.C. Chapter won the “best large chapter award” while I was the Chapter President.
- **Can you describe an AGA project or effort that was the most fun for you to work on? What made it memorable?** The Mardi Gras parade created for the AGA during a Professional Development Training event in New Orleans.
- **What advice would you offer to early-career AGA members?** Get involved, volunteer to serve and contribute enthusiastically. Keep the faith!



Double Chapter Presidents - DC Chapter and National – at the March 2017 Luncheon:
 Doug Glenn, Virginia Robinson, Evelyn Brown, Lisa Casias, and Samuel T. Mok



Asian-American Chapter Presidents at the March 2017 Luncheon:
Doris Chew, Samuel T. Mok, and Salim Mawani