



One of 12 Outstanding Airmen of 2015, Sharry Barnshaw, 436th Communications Squadron client systems section chief, focuses on personal improvement to become a better leader, supervisor, mentor, peer, and follower, ultimately shaping herself into a better person (U.S. Air Force)

Mentoring Civilian Contributions to the Joint Force

By Kevin D. Scott

The future operating environment will place new demands on leaders at all levels. To best prepare our future leaders for success we must continuously assess and refine our leader development.

—GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD, JR.

This year, in support of the Secretary of Defense's priority to "build a department and joint force of the future by embracing change," General Dunford laid out his approach for the future joint force. His three key joint force focus areas include the requirement to develop leaders for Joint Forces Next.

To achieve the Chairman's goals, the Joint Staff developed three core functions to focus staff efforts on the unique capabilities they bring to support the Chairman, Secretary of Defense, and President of the United States. Committed leadership is the driving force behind all current and future efforts.

Vice Admiral Kevin D. Scott, USN, is the Director for Joint Force Development (J7).

J7 Role in Integrating Tomorrow's Joint Force

As director for Joint Force Development and the Chairman's lead for the third core function, "Integrating Tomorrow's Joint Force," I am committed to the Chairman's vision of "a joint force composed of agile and adaptive leaders and organizations who can critically think and innovate through dynamic problems in an increasingly transregional, multidomain, multifunctional threat environment." Success requires that we pay attention to current and future joint leaders—military, officer and enlisted, as well as civilian. Civilian professional development and growth need a deliberate approach. Our ability to meet future challenges will depend in large part on the quality and effectiveness of our own civilian leaders.

Today, our civilians lead organizations at every echelon. They drive doctrinal and functional changes and work side by side with senior leaders, deployed military units, and all levels of staff. They understand the operational picture as well as the risks, constraints, intentions, and political nuances of the current operating environment. Our civilians provide critical continuity, expertise, and stability. A deliberate approach to grow and retain quality civilian leadership is a critical component of joint force development.

Creating a mentorship program is one of the primary ways we can develop and retain our civilian leaders. The Joint Staff J7 established a formal Joint Force Development Civilian Mentorship Program in 2014. The deliberate integration of a mentorship component within our leader development program provides the Joint Staff with an even more capable and competent cadre of civilian leaders with in-depth joint force development expertise.

Mentoring, unlike training, is intended not only to impart skills, but also to encourage a change in individuals' perspectives on their organization, their goals, and their own personal development. Our leaders need to understand how their particular work or skill set

contributes to the organization's overall mission in support of the warfighter.

Civilian leaders need to understand the importance of work/life balance as an essential skill for success. We must continually review our professional goals as we expand our experience and education. A mentoring program is grounded in quality mentors. Mentors listen to their mentees' ambitions and concerns and share their own professional experiences. Mentors build the confidence of their mentees, so they can further enhance the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in positions of increased responsibility.

While developing the Joint Force Development Civilian Mentorship Program, our research team identified several themes from successful Federal and formal and informal corporate mentorship programs. In line with those successful themes, the J7 team outlined the following program objectives:

- **Commitment:** requires and ensures a pledge from mentors, mentees, and the directorate's senior leaders and personnel supervisors.
- **Effective pairing:** matches mentors and mentees based on specific criteria so that the individuals will have different, but complementary, characteristics.
- **Diversity:** avoids pairing mentees with mentors from the same division or branch.
- **Partnership:** creates a superior-subordinate relationship between the mentor and mentee, which is why the word *mentee* is used and *protégé* is not.
- **Honesty:** makes clear that while the mentoring process helps the mentee to gain new skills, there are no promises associated with the program.

How the Program Works

First and foremost, this program is voluntary for both mentors and mentees. Supervisors can recommend someone for the program, but that individual must agree to participate. Once mentors and mentees are identified, they conduct initial in-person "meet and greets." Mentees submit their mentor

preferences after they have assessed several potential candidates.

The next step is for both mentor and mentee candidates to complete a personality profile tool for helping predict how people will relate to one another. The profile tool evaluates compatibility rather than skills or knowledge. After reviewing the profile results and mentees' preferences, the program coordinator (a senior civilian collateral duty) matches mentors with mentees. This matching is critical; the mentee needs a mentor who is a teacher, sponsor, counselor, and advocate. We then conduct a formal meeting, presenting each mentor with his/her new mentee, after which the paired mentor/mentee meet to complete a mentoring agreement. This agreement defines how and when they meet with each other as well as relationship expectations. Within the first month, the team develops a formal mentoring action plan that identifies the mentee's goals and what is required or recommended to reach those goals.

Formal mentorship and monthly group training sessions occur throughout the year. Mentors and mentees attend presentations that provide an expanded view of Joint Force Development missions as well as Joint Staff, combatant command, Service, and Department of Defense-wide systems and processes. Mentees are exposed to senior leaders who help them understand the "big picture" and improve their confidence and situational awareness. The most important part of the relationship is the mentor's ability to listen rather than dictate, encourage rather than discourage, and provide guidance so the mentee can make informed decisions. After the year is over, we hold a formal closing ceremony. Mentees receive a certificate of completion, and all participants receive a Joint Staff Mentorship Program lapel pin. But that is not where the program ends. Many of the mentors/mentees that were paired still meet today.

Benefits

Results from a J7 survey completed by mentors and mentees who have participated over the past 2 years identified

multiple benefits from establishing and executing a mentorship program.

Benefits to Mentees

- **Organizational understanding:** Mentees have the ability to exhibit a better understanding of roles and responsibilities throughout the organizations, their contributions to missions, and how all roles fit together to support the warfighter.
- **Career orientation:** They look at their careers as a long-term opportunity rather than a short-term job.
- **Focus:** They have a clearer vision of their own personal goals and how to achieve them, including various on-the-job experiences or formal degree programs.
- **Professional networking:** They are more exposed to others from different organizations in a team-like environment, as well as helping to develop and expand their network of people.

Benefits to Mentors

- **Giving back to the organization:** Some people seek a career in public service to do just that—serve. One reason so many veterans and military retirees go on to become civilian government workers is to continue serving. Mentoring provides a meaningful opportunity to do so.
- **Improved listening skills:** Unlike a supervisor, coach, or trainer, the mentor's primary tool is to listen—*truly* listen—to what the mentee is communicating. What mentees are not saying is as important as what they actually verbalize. This enhanced listening capability is applicable to everyday use at work, at home, or in the community.
- **Personal satisfaction:** Mentors enjoy the pleasure of helping a colleague to grow professionally and gain the organizational equivalent of “street smarts.” Mentors take pride in knowing that their efforts have made their organization just a little better.

Benefits to the Department of Defense

- **Improved unity of effort:** Mentees gain broader knowledge and understanding of the mission and vision of their organization, as well as the Chairman and Secretary of Defense. They become personally invested in organizational success.
- **Greater productivity:** Productivity improves as a result of an enhanced skill set and a better understanding of the organization's goals.
- **Orderly transition:** Joint Forces Next is the most important beneficiary of the mentoring program. Today's mentees will become tomorrow's government civilian leaders.

The current and projected security environment our nation faces is characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and rapid change—far faster than we have ever known. We face strategic challenges and crises simultaneously and across the full spectrum of our current capabilities. Technology gives adversaries low-cost capabilities that can offset some of our most expensive acquisition programs. Adding to this dilemma are significantly diminishing manpower and funding levels. The burden of success is now placed squarely on our most valuable resource, *people*, and with the challenges we face, *people* are the true game changers. Therefore, it is essential that we commit to providing pathways for professional and personal growth to meet current and future demands.

Creating tomorrow's joint force leaders requires the creative selection, development, and management of our talent. The primary task for developing a well-balanced and integrated future joint force is to develop military and civilian leaders who can think critically, solve problems, and collaborate. To ensure success we must infuse both military and civilian leaders at all echelons in the joint force with adaptive behavior, creativity, innovation, and critical thinking skills. When successful, we will have attained the vision laid out by the Chairman to develop leaders for Joint Forces Next.

Mentoring is one of the primary means by which we can develop and

retain our future civilian leaders.

Mentoring promotes the ability of every member of the Joint Staff to contribute meaningfully to Joint Forces Next. I see this as a powerful tool to improve the entire Defense Department civilian workforce—personally, professionally, and organizationally. This codified initiative, along with other civilian professional development programs, will further support the quest to achieve a Total Joint Force that will face any transregional, multidomain, multifunctional challenge in the future. JFQ

Should you have any questions about this program, please contact Ms. Stephanie Roper-Burton of the J7 Military Secretariat, manager of the Joint Force Development Mentorship Program, or Ms. Beth Lape, program director of the Joint Force Development Professional Certification Program.