

# Mentoring Strengthens Engineering Workforce, Increases Impact to Warfighter

Sam Rousso | DCMA Public Affairs



Karl Salting, Defense Contract Management Agency Boeing Huntington Beach engineering Keystone intern, standing, discusses his progress with his supervisor and mentor, Alberto Gonzales, at the DCMA Huntington Beach office recently. (Photo by Sam Rousso, DCMA Public Affairs)

## **“I enjoy working for (the Defense Contract Management Agency) because I appreciate the**

willingness of my coworkers to assist me and their professionalism,” says Karl Salting, a DCMA Boeing Huntington Beach engineering Keystone intern.

Salting, a 2007 graduate of Cal Poly Pomona, Calif., has been with DCMA since May 2009. Following a couple of years experience with private industry, he applied for a job with the agency.

Salting says he “heard about DCMA from a colleague; I decided to look for more information. Later, I attended an orientation at the agency facility in Carson, Calif. I followed the procedures that were outlined there and applied. From there, it was a waiting process, which eventually landed me in the Keystone Program.”

Engineers at DCMA work with the very latest in defense systems, weapons and advanced equipment. While the actual design work is done by outside contractors, engineers’ contributions are essential, serving as the government’s eyes and ears during the entire procurement process. From initial design to final production, engineers use their skills to make sure the government gets what it pays for.

Salting is currently working on major programs, such as the Wideband Global Satellite Communication system, Tracking and Data Relay Satellite, and the Mobile User Objective System. All are major communications programs designed to speed the flow of information up and down the chain of command.

As a Keystone intern, Salting says he familiarizes himself “with all the processes of DCMA, whether it is in the engineering, industrial specialist, contracts, quality assurance, program integrator or pricing area. Though as an engineer, I should specialize more on the engineering processes, and that is why I attend contract self-oversight meetings, failure review boards, program floor walks and material review boards. Aside from that, rotational assignments allow me to understand what each member of the Program Support Team does. I am also the point of contact of a program called Metrics Studio where I input data from our Program Support Team every month.”

In addition, Salting is enrolled in Defense Acquisition University and Skillport courses to achieve the necessary Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act certification level for his job series once he graduates from the Keystone Program. These courses supplement all his on-the-job training.

Salting’s supervisor and mentor is Alberto Gonzales. Gonzales has worked for DCMA since 1988. After starting as a general engineer, with additional training he became a program integrator, then a lead engineer and finally a supervisor. Gonzales’ experience is different from the track Salting is taking.

“When I started with DCMA in 1988, I didn’t have a mentor. It was a struggle to know what DCMA does, how it works, who does what,” said Gonzales. “The first few years were spent learning the engineering processes only. It was only after several years that I knew what the contracting and quality assurance sides of the house do. This mentoring program facilitates incorporating interns into the process and making them productive and efficient.”

There are three stages to mentoring, Gonzales says. “The first stage is knowledge

transfer. This is where the intern shadows his or her mentor, and all the required DAU courses come in. Aside from the engineering processes, the intern has to know the processes for other disciplines: contract, quality and management support. We implement this through our rotational cross-training.”

Skills development is the second stage. “The intern has to develop technical expertise in his or her field through constant and continuous interfacing with coworkers and contractor peers. I always want to develop an intern’s full potential by expanding his or her skills,” said Gonzales. “In Karl’s case, his complementary functions could be earned value and/or program integration. I believe employees should be flexible to take on various positions to make them indispensable and also for upward mobility. In these days of constant changes due to downsizing, rightsizing, budgets, etc., it is to the employees’ advantage, and management’s as well, to be able to shift employees to where the requirements are. Flexibility due to multiple skills is always a plus, if not a must.”

The third aspect of mentoring, Gonzales says, is being a role model. “It is our responsibility to be examples in other softer skills, such as ethics, integrity,

fairness, dedication and quality work. Keystones are the lifeblood, the hope and future of our agency. Their development to their full potential rests on us mentors and supervisors. How we groom them today will determine what kind of employees they will be tomorrow.”

Salting says he has gained a few valuable lessons learned during his time with the agency.

“Since starting work at DCMA, I’ve learned that teamwork is a must when accomplishing tasks that we are given. Constant communication benefits all parties involved,” said Salting. “The ultimate DCMA goal is delivering quality products to the warfighter, contract compliance and customer satisfaction. Every contract deals with numerous areas of commodity expertise that DCMA has. Aside from working within DCMA, it is imperative that we work with the program office and contracts. Once you build that trust and integrity and continue diligently to progress, all else will naturally come around.”

Overall, Salting finds his work very fulfilling.

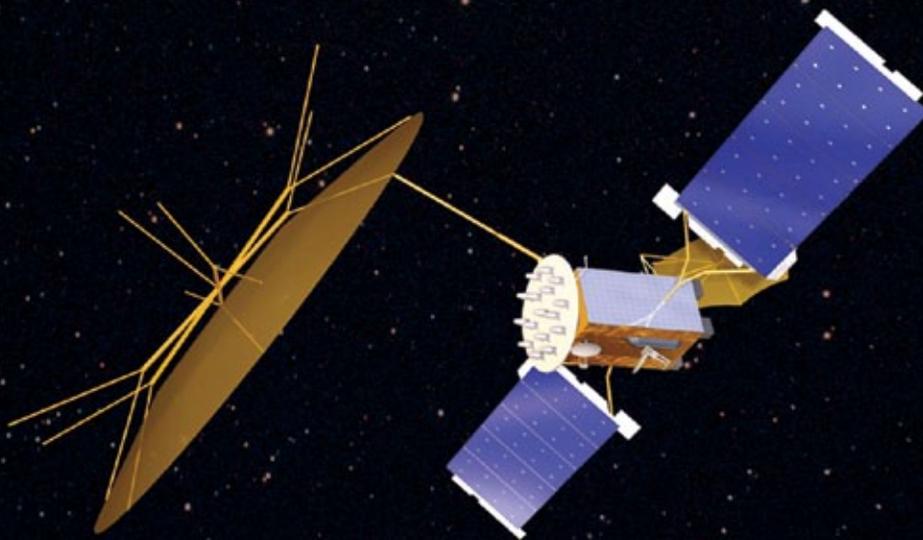
“The word doesn’t begin to encompass my overall thoughts on how much I appreciate being able to serve my country in support of the warfighters. I’m very

motivated that this job that we do delivers products and services that save the lives of our servicemen and women who put themselves in harm’s way,” said Salting. “The quality and technical performance of our products ensure mission success and ensure they come home safely.”

Gonzales agrees. “DCMA work is very fulfilling. Knowing that DCMA’s products and services are for the warfighters and mission success, nothing could be more fulfilling than our work. The quality and technical performance of our products through contract compliance guarantees the accomplishment of the mission. Our work is both rewarding for us employees and the customer, program office and the warfighter. It never dawned on me the full meaning of that statement until I heard the guest speaker at a contractor’s conference.”

The speaker was a Navy pilot who brought his wife and child. According to Gonzales, he said, “Thanks to you all, through your products, I accomplished my mission, and I came back home safely. My entire family says, ‘Thank you!’”

Gonzales concluded, saying, “Since then, I’ve been using that with all my employees to emphasize the importance of our work stating, ‘There’s a warfighter out there counting on you; don’t let him down.’” ©



*An artist’s rendering of a Mobile User Objective System satellite. MUOS will be a network of Department of Defense-controlled satellites and associated ground facilities providing narrowband communication services. MUOS is just one of the projects Karl Salting, Defense Contract Management Agency Boeing Huntington Beach engineering Keystone intern, is involved with as part of his job with the agency.*