

Mentoring Allows Employees to Pass Along Knowledge

By Mark Woodbury, Associate Editor

It was Albert Pine, American author, who said, “What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us. What we have done for others ... remains and is immortal.”

With 75 percent of Defense Contract Management Agency employees eligible for retirement within the next five years, the agency has a pressing need to pass these employees’ knowledge to others.

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Wallis Berrios, DCMA Human Resources workforce specialist, is the person overseeing a program that will assist the agency in accomplishing this goal while also developing well-rounded future employees. “The informal mentoring program accomplishes many agency

goals. Passing along knowledge to newer employees is just one of them,” said Berrios. “With so many people eligible to leave the agency soon, it is imperative to try and capture their insight and knowledge before they go.”



Wallis Berrios, DCMA human resources workforce specialist, oversees a program to pass on the knowledge of retiring employees while also developing well-rounded future employees. (Photo by Mark Woodbury, DCMA Public Affairs)

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— Wallis Berrios

To capture this knowledge, Berrios is encouraging employees looking to retire within the next five years to become a mentor to another DCMA employee. Berrios says this is not an exclusive offer, however, and encourages employees at various stages of their careers to participate in the program — be it as mentor or protégé.

Unlike formal mentoring programs that place every participant into the same program, regardless of their circumstances, an informal mentoring program, says Angela Bailey, human resources executive director, “allows employees to establish mentoring relationships based more on what the two individuals think will work best for them, rather than a prescribed set of procedures and processes that may or may not work.”

According to Berrios, there is a common misconception among protégés within the program that they can have only one mentor. “It is hard to find one person that has every attribute the protégé wants and needs to better themselves,” she adds. “This is why I encourage protégés to have as many mentors

as needed to assist them in accomplishing their short- and long-term career goals.”

During her time with the program, Berrios has had a chance to hear some success stories. One protégé said the informal nature of the program allows her the flexibility she needed to complete her formal work training while still getting the mentoring she needed on various issues. Another protégé said she had considered leaving DCMA, but because of her mentor, she was able to gain insight into the opportunities available to her within the agency, which motivated her to stay.

Bailey said the program can open doors for people, not so much to get a promotion, but by understanding the big picture — such as the direction of the agency — or little things, like how a person balances work with his or her children’s ball games.

David Wilson, DCMA Bell Helicopter industrial specialist and long-time mentor within the program, feels everyone should, and can, get something out of the program — whether as a protégé or mentor. “Mentoring is for everyone,” he said. “A person is not fully successful unless another person has benefited from your knowledge and success.”

For complete information on the informal mentoring program, employees can go to DCMA’s intranet home page — <http://home.dcma.mil> — and click on the informal mentoring program link under “What’s Hot.” 

Role of the mentor:

- Provide advice and guidance about career development opportunities
- Encourage development to the fullest, both personally and professionally
- Assist a protégé with developing and charting his or her career path
- Share insights on broad DCMA missions and functions and an awareness of the programs and activities that fall within the scope of the mentor’s responsibility
- Provide suggestions about activities and information that would benefit the growth of the employee, to include reading materials, pertinent Web sites and participation in professional groups
- Recommend pursuits that will help develop specific areas in the employee’s professional advancement (e.g., written or oral communication skills)

Role of the protégé:

- Seek out and select a mentor
- Define career goals and be ready to present them to the mentor
- Research available career management and professional development material in anticipation of dialogue with mentors
- Utilize the relationship to the fullest by honestly declaring strengths and weaknesses and requesting guidance on strengthening specific areas
- Focus on listening and learning, then on using the information to enhance performance

(Source: DCMA Informal Mentoring Guide)