

New group addresses NAVAIR entry-level employees' questions, concerns



Meghan Wagner (left) and Sara Gravatt (right) spearheaded the formation of "Breaking through Barriers: Entry-Level Women" group to address employees' concerns and questions. The meetings are open to all and the next one is Jan. 21 at 11 a.m. in Bldg. 2855, room 135, at Patuxent River and VTC to most NAVAIR sites.

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Meghan Wagner always wanted to work in the government service. So when the Tucson, Arizona, native found a position at Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) headquarters for someone with a bachelor's degree in applied mathematics, she submitted her resume. And, upon being hired as an operations research analyst for Marine Corps H-1 Light/Attack Helicopters program office (PMA-276) in the Logistics and Industrial Operations branch (AIR 6.0) here, she packed her bags and headed to Patuxent River.

Wagner quickly warmed to her coworkers and her new place of residence. However, one day she learned from her supervisor that someone had complained about her laugh. Briefly entertaining the idea of quitting and moving back to Tucson, Wagner was comforted by several of her coworkers who reached out.

They "calmed my heart," Wagner said, "I was new to a military and office environment, and it felt like a personal attack. However, as I expressed my concern with some veteran female coworkers, I came to realize it wasn't a personal attack at all. It was simply a new

New group addresses NAVAIR entry-level employees' questions, concerns

environment that I wasn't used to working in. I realized there are protocols and business rules I was unaware of. They educated me about having an awareness of where I'm at. One co-worker likened it to being respectful of others as if you were in a library. This made sense! Because of this experience, I felt it important to reach out to other entry-level women to share these rules and 'ways of the land' so that we become understanding of this unique working environment and therefore successful in our careers."

Wagner went to Sara Gravatt, president of the AIR 6.0 Naval Acquisition Development Program (NADP) interns, with the idea of beginning a group for entry-level women who may have had experiences like hers in adjusting to a new workplace. Just a few years before, Gravatt was in the similar situation of figuring out how to adjust to a military-civilian environment.

Gravatt, currently supportability test and evaluation monitor for the Persistent Maritime Unmanned Aircraft Systems Program Office (PMA-262 Triton), has rotated throughout the AIR 6.0 competency including the Fleet Support Team (FST), the Program Executive Office for Tactical (PEO(T)) and several program management activities (PMAs).

After talking with Wagner, Gravatt felt certain there was a need for a group for entry level employees at NAVAIR to air concerns and questions.

"There were mentoring groups already," Gravatt said. "We needed something else to address, more specifically, ways to help new employees assimilate into the NAVAIR culture. Not a group for 'how you need to be,' but rather an opportunity to help you understand the new employee experience in the NAVAIR workplace."

The women turned to Jackie Heiner, PMA-276 principal deputy assistant program manager, and charter member of the NAVAIR Women's Advisory Group (WAG) for advice. Since the WAG is an open forum for women and men to discuss more broad-reaching issues such as family-friendly policies in the workplace, Heiner agreed that a new group for entry-level employees was needed.

"We have a new generation of employees entering our workforce" Heiner said. "It is important for them to have resources to help provide guidance and mentorship. Everyone can appreciate advice from someone who has 'been there, done that.' We need to focus on not only recruiting, but also retaining the next generation of our workforce."

"There are a lot of new employees who do not necessarily have a network and do not know whom to ask when they have questions," she continued. "And, quite frankly, sometimes employees do not feel comfortable asking certain questions to their supervisors. So, when Meghan approached me about this idea to stand up the 'Breaking through Barriers: Entry Level Women' group, I thought it was a fantastic idea!"

It took almost a full year to go from the idea stage to a white paper, to being vetted by both

January 14, 2016

New group addresses NAVAIR entry-level employees' questions, concerns

the human resources and the legal departments, to the kick-off meeting. Since the "Breaking through Barriers" group is under the aegis of the WAG, arrangements had to be made to establish points of contact at all NAVAIR sites and video teleconferencing (VTC) to those sites. The format for the one-hour meetings is to have a guest speaker talk for half the time and then use the remainder to answer questions. While the name of the group may sound limiting, it is open to everyone. The idea is to have a forum where employees can share and learn from one another.

Over 100 men and women of all levels of experience and across all of NAVAIR attended the kick-off meeting on Nov. 4, 2015, approximately half were at Patuxent River and half attended through VTC.

"I had anticipated good attendance," Heiner said, "but not attendance from all of the sites and over 100 participants. This definitely supports and shows the need for this group."

One of the participants, Bruce Dinopoulos, assistant program executive officer logistics, Logistics Management Integration (AIR 6.6.1), Program Executive Office for Air Assault and Special Mission Programs (PEO (A)), said he was impressed by the "candidness of the dialogue [at the meeting]. Sara and Meghan provided insights into what it's like to get acclimated into a military work environment. The first meeting caused me to pause and think about how I may have handled some of the situations described. Any organization that is fostering recruitment, retainment and promotion of a diverse group will make us a better organization. I will continue to attend these meetings."

Toni Meier, director of Logistics Management Integration (AIR 6.6) at NAVAIR, was the guest speaker for the inaugural meeting and shared her experiences along her career path from coming onboard as a GS-1, to raising a family, to being appointed to the highest level for a government civilian employee -- the Senior Executive Service (SES) level.

The next meeting of the "Breaking through Barriers" group will be Jan. 21, from 11 a.m. to noon in Bldg. 2855, room 135, at Patuxent River. It is a brown bag event and attendees are encouraged to bring their lunch. NAVAIR sites will be included through VTC. Guest speakers are Darlene Mazzone, technical director, Aviation Readiness and Resource Analysis Department (AIR 6.8), and Wanda Cricchi, lead, Career Development Division, Naval Air Warfare Center, Aircraft Division (NAWCAD). The meeting is about "Professional Practices" and will cover a few topics including meeting etiquette and attire. (Note: As of 19 Jan., VTC is available for all NAVAIR sites.)

Future meetings will be held every other month, right now at various locations around Patuxent River, but plans are to have guest speakers at other NAVAIR sites as well. To learn about upcoming meetings, contact [Meghan Wagner](#) or [Sara Gravatt](#) to receive notifications of upcoming meetings.