

2015 NAVAIR Patuxent River Mentor of Year: Invest in yourself



Capt. Francis D. Morley (left), vice commander, Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR), presents the 2015 Patuxent River Mentor of the Year award to Michele DeMoss-Coward (right), director, Workforce Strategy, Acquisition, and Development, Logistics Management Integration department (AIR 6.6). DeMoss-Coward and the award winners from the seven other NAVAIR sites were recognized as “Mentors of the Year for 2015” at the national NAVAIR “Women’s History Month” event Mar. 24 at the Rivers Edge Catering & Conference Center, Naval Air Station Patuxent River. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. -- When speaking to being a mentor and of the subject of mentoring, Michele DeMoss-Coward's enthusiasm is infectious.

“Michele is often the first employee to volunteer to support mentoring events, all the while encouraging others to do the same,” said Toni Meier, director, Logistics Management Integration (AIR 6.6), Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR), in a letter to the “Mentor of the Year” selection panel. “Her heightened mentality and enthusiasm for striving to elevate NAVAIR’s mentoring program to do things better provides incentives for many workforce members to embrace various types of mentoring opportunities.”

DeMoss-Coward, director for the Workforce Strategy, Acquisition and Development, Logistics Management Integration department, NAVAIR Logistics and Industrial Operations (AIR 6.6), was named the “2015 Patuxent River Mentor of the Year” at the NAVAIR Women’s History Month event here on Mar. 24.

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DeMoss-Coward was recognized for best exemplifying the ideal qualities and character of a mentor and serves as a mentor to nine NAVAIR employees at all levels of the organization and at all levels of progression in their careers.

"During my eight-month rotation at Patuxent River she not only mentored me, but went the extra mile and called me if something was on her mind she thought would benefit my professional development," said Michael Taylor, information technology specialist, Fleet Readiness Center (FRC) Southwest, in a recommendation letter to the award panel.

Taylor, who has worked at the FRC for 25 years, found the guidance DeMoss-Coward provided invaluable: "Miss DeMoss-Coward gracefully availed herself, even when I appeared in her office without an appointment. She spoke to me kindly and professionally, even if she disagreed with my perspective."

DeMoss-Coward said she understands the need for an organization to build and promote a diverse mentoring program. When she began her career as a GS-3 in the components division of the Patuxent River field activity, there were almost no senior females in the organization whose career path she could emulate.

"If I wanted to advance, I had to figure things out on my own," she said, and, looking back, realized she viewed her career as a soccer game -- where each promotion felt like scoring a goal -- instead of strategically and more like a chess game.

"Each position provided new responsibilities where I could grow technically; however, not every move led to a stream-lined, efficient career progression," she explained.

Except for a year and a half in Crystal City, Virginia, DeMoss-Coward has spent her career at Patuxent River, holding positions throughout the Logistics and Industrial Operations (AIR 6.0) and Program Management (AIR 1.0) competencies. She established the NAVAIR chapter of Federally Employed Women, a non-profit group dedicated to promoting equality for women and addressing concerns of women in the Federal workforce.

In her position as director for Total Force Strategy and Management (AIR 7.3), she said she felt NAVAIR's mentoring program was not reaching its full potential and formed a group to enhance its impact. The group's recommendations led to the formation of a Management Externally-Directed Team (M-EDT), helmed by DeMoss-Coward, which was chartered by Research and Engineering (AIR 4.0), Test and Evaluation (AIR 5.0) and AIR 6.0 competencies to put the group's revitalization ideas into action and eventually replicate them across all NAVAIR sites.

The M-EDT worked closely with Information Technology (IT)/Information Management (IM) (AIR 7.2) and mentoring program manager Donna Belcher, and met with hundreds of member of the workforce, to make improvements to the program's web-based tool, iMentor.

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The team's efforts resulted in an increase in mentoring program participants, and, to share the story of its success, DeMoss-Coward was invited to give the keynote address at the Federal Mentoring Roundtable, an event held biannually in Washington, D.C.

"It's the most fun I ever had in my life and called it work," DeMoss-Coward said.

If looking for a mentor, she recommends finding several -- "At least two. One within your competency and one outside your competency."

"You shouldn't feel like you have to do this on your own," she explains. "But realize that your supervisor is not supposed to be your mentor. Your supervisor is there to guide you in your daily work; a mentor is to get you to where you want to be in your career five, ten, fifteen years from now."

"A mentor should push you out of your comfort zone," she said, adding that being mentored is work. "Your career takes work. Invest in yourself. You are developing and earning your professional reputation every day. Be extremely good and you will stand out."

DeMoss-Coward takes her own advice. She is still a mentee.

"I have a cadre of trusted colleagues," she explained, "a group of senior women with time-tested relationships who ensure each other's success. It's priceless. I also don't have problems with ad hoc mentoring, asking professional men and women for information and guidance"

DeMoss-Coward will be the next speaker at the Women's Advisory Group (WAG) Breaking through Barriers: Entry-Level Women" meeting on Thursday, May 19 in Bldg. 446 here from 11 a.m. -12 p.m. (The meeting will be VTC to all NAVAIR sites.) The topic is "Act Like a Lady; Think Like a Boss: NAVAIR's Professional Rules ... for Women." No pre-registration is required. To learn more about the "Breaking through Barriers" group, contact [Meghan Wagner](#) or [Sara Gravatt](#).