To be an effective leader at NAVAIR, you must first understand the role you play and how that role contributes to the overall mission.

That’s according to Gregory Yellman, NAVAIR’s deputy assistant commander for corporate operations and total force, who offered a warm welcome and some words of advice to participants of the Journey Leadership Development Program (JLDP) Nov. 14, speaking at the program’s orientation event at Patuxent River Naval Air Station.

“That understanding of how you fit into the whole is where the value comes in,” he said. “So take advantage of this opportunity. Go after what you want to go after. Do you have a career path in mind? It’s not always going to end up the way you plan out, but you’re at least headed in the right direction.”

The one- to two-year program is part of NAVAIR’s ongoing effort to implement a long-range workforce strategy that gives employees the tools they need to excel in key skill areas. Since its inception in 2010, the program has graduated 615 employees.
“NAVAIR has a focus on the people,” Yellman said. “And part of that focus is the development of the people. This is one key aspect of it from a leadership perspective in attempting to help develop and encourage our people to continue to grow and learn … and deliver capability to the warfighter.”

For the 2017 cohort, program administrators selected approximately 120 NAVAIR civilian and military employees from a pool of 250 applicants from across the command. For the benefit of selectees not based at Patuxent River, the orientation was broadcast at 10 other sites, including Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Naval Training Center Orlando and others.

Yellman, who has been with NAVAIR more than 30 years, serving in a variety of roles “from software to logistics to financial to corporate operations,” said he has “made a career and a life out of NAVAIR.” He assured the program’s participants they work for a remarkable organization that values its employees’ diversity of experience, backgrounds and skills.

“Part of what makes you valuable is the diversity you bring to a problem or to a team,” he said. “That's what we're looking for, and that’s what this program is [for], to help enable you to ... collect and add to your toolkit [to apply] to any issue you’re dealing with.”

He reminded participants that big changes are on the horizon that are sure to present opportunities as well as challenges, noting the impending retirement of the baby boomers and the ever-shifting budget outlook.

“We need creative leaders, good ideas and innovation brought to bear,” he said. “You want to know how to succeed in your career? Look at data, try to get predictive … get innovative people there, get a diverse perspective … [and] figure out how you fit into the whole.”

Following Yellman’s remarks, Twila Kopaniasz, national JLDP manager, walked the participants through an overview of the program. Included among the requirements were finding a mentor, attending leadership or diversity events, interviewing a senior leader and completing three job shadowing assignments.

“Sure, it’s going to be busy,” said Steven Day, a maintenance planner at the orientation who has served 20 years in the Navy, and has been with NAVAIR since 2006. “But for me, I see each of the [requirements] as an opportunity to get some additional experience. You have to ask the questions. You’ve got to want to know. You’ve got to be hungry for the knowledge.”

For him, JLDP represents an opportunity to see what current leaders are doing outside his technical sphere. He believes that being inquisitive and proactive will be the keys to his success in the program.
“I want to expand my own professional knowledge and my own professional experience levels,” he said. “But also I’d like to gain a better understanding of how other areas of the organization work, both at the senior level and at the worker level, because it all ties together.”

JLDP participant Ann Buckler, said she applied for the program because she is pursuing a promotion. She graduated from the NAVSEA Intern Program in 1992 and has been with NAVAIR since 1995. Today, she is a deputy acquisition program manager for logistics.

“I'll have to strategize how to make the most of my three shadowing assignments to learn how and why the people I shadow got to where they are now,” she said. “I plan to glean some advice and ideas how to further my own career.”

Her supervisors are supportive of her participation in the program, she said, and she doesn’t any anticipate any issues with balancing her work responsibilities with the program’s requirements. She hopes the program will allow her to make a difference at NAVAIR.

According to Kopaniasz, many JLDP graduates have gone on to participate in the NAVAIR Leadership Development Program, the command’s flagship leadership program for high performing NAVAIR employees. Kopaniasz suggested participants seek a past JLDP graduate as a possible mentor.

She also urged participants to offer feedback on the program’s courses and curriculum. She said she intended on following up with them after they graduate to learn more about their experience.

“JLDP is a living program, and we want to keep making it better,” Kopaniasz said. “And [the participants] are the folks who can do that.”

To learn more about NAVAIR’s career development programs, visit https://jobs.navair.navy.mil/training.html.
Program preps NAVAIR employees for future leadership roles

Program selectees listen and take notes during the Journey Leadership Development Program orientation event Nov. 14. (U.S. Navy photo.)