NAVAIR hiring managers share job seeking tips

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – “This is a supportive environment to improve interview skills and provide techniques for success,” Tracy Burruss, Industrial and Logistics Maintenance Planning Sustainment Department (AIR 6.7) director said during a mock interview workshop sponsored by Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Diversity Advisory Team June 18.

More than 100 Sailors, Marines and civilians seeking to hone their job-seeking skills attended the two-hour event which was co-sponsored with Logistics and Industrial Operations (AIR 6.0). It featured interviews of two junior and one senior civilian by a three-member panelist of hiring managers who critiqued their responses.

Uncertainty about the government interviewing process can be a factor that prevents qualified civilians from pursuing senior leadership opportunities, according to Ian Leong, one of the workshop’s organizers. “This demonstration gave attendees a look at the process,” she said. “Not only did they benefit from seeing it firsthand, but they gained valuable insight from senior hiring managers that can be applied in their next interview and
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increase the likelihood of being selected for the position.”

Burruss and all three panelists—Jacqueline Heiner, Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division Industrial and Logistics Maintenance Planning and Sustainment Department’s division head; Joe Wible, department head for Acquisition Workforce Development and Training; and Hoang Doan, a Research and Engineering (AIR 4.0) branch manager and AAPI Recruitment and Retention Team lead—stated their advice was based on both professional and personal experience.

Each said preparation is the key to success and starts before the day of the interview.

Heiner advised candidates to understand the ground rules prior to sitting down with the interview panel. “If questions are provided ahead of time, collect your thoughts and jot down notes. Prepare highlights and notes prior to the interview.”

“Understand your strengths and weaknesses,” Wible said. “Put time into knowing your management style as you go about your day-to-day activities and in times of adversity. You may not know what questions will be asked but you can use tools to prepare.”

Doan reminded candidates to cite specific examples of their past experiences and how they relate to the desired position within the allotted time. “Have two or three examples ready to go. They should be concrete and quantitative. Practice at home using a timer,” he said.

Burruss said candidates should provide clear and precise answers for each question. “Even if the panel doesn’t ask you, you must answer two key questions: Why you want the job and what makes you the best candidate,” she said.

Other suggestions included acquiring the position description (PD) before applying; looking for sample interview questions and other resources; writing a one-page synopsis that shows career progression, a list of key experiences, personal strengths and weaknesses; crafting a personal value proposition and preparing questions for the panel. Candidates should not assume their résumés will be factored into their interview score and should expect an Equal Opportunity Officer to be on the panel to observe and ensure fairness.

Finally, candidates should always request contact information to request a debrief on their performance before leaving the interview.

Supportability Test and Evaluation Branch (AIR 6.7.1.8) Manager Billy Biggs, the senior civilian who volunteered to be interviewed during the workshop, is also a hiring manager. He said the event opened his eyes to the need for increased support of employees as they pursue career opportunities. “I want to hold additional sessions to increase their awareness of hiring managers’ expectations,” he said. “This is important to me as I am looking to find my replacement and bring that person under my wing before I retire.”
Burruss encouraged the audience to be bold in their job search. “If you think you have what it takes, apply,” she said. “You may be the best candidate in the pool. Do your homework and be prepared.”

Hoang Doan (on screen), participating via video teleconferencing from Orlando, Florida, critiques an interview.