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**We often focus** on the tools required to develop software and it's true, there are many tools available that help develop requirements, design and test software. There are tools used to manage processes, configuration and even tools that help with software assurance and cyber security. But make no mistake, software is a product of people. In the end

it's people that communicate their need, it's people that develop and refine the requirements, design the architecture, code the unit level programs, integrate the software modules, and test the software and processes for quality and functionality. There's no getting around it, it's a people product.

So, what are we doing to take care of the people? How do we prevent knowledge base from walking out the front door and signing on with the competition? How do we keep employees interested in our products, trained with the latest tools, languages, processes capabilities and management techniques to meet the challenges that allow for success? How do we continue to attract new talent to not only meet our existing demands, but keep up with our continued growth? One thing I have learned is if you are successfully developing software, then your business is growing and it's growing fast. Software is quickly taking over in terms of functionality. We rarely have to make hardware changes to add new capabilities; it's all done with software. Software is becoming more and more complex and the demand for MORE is the challenge facing all of us in the industry. These are the questions that keep me up at night while trying to successfully manage the Software Maintenance Group at Hill Air Force Base.

Not only do we have to figure out how to stay ahead of the game as we continue to move software from the art form, to an engineering discipline, we need to create a strategy for transferring the knowledge base from the grey beards to the young superstars and keep them interested enough to stay. Money is often considered the way to keep personnel from leaving, but more and more, our new rising superstars are more interested in the ability to work on products that interest them, work on technology that they find interesting, while working in an environment that's flexible enough to fit their lifestyle. The current market for software has created such a need that they can work almost anywhere they want. I recently saw a report indicating that there are four positions available for every software application we have. Those are TOUGH odds for the software industry.

The Software Maintenance Group at Hill Air Force Base is embroiled in a continual dilemma trying to overcome these obstacles. We constantly review policies to create an enticing environment for our employees. We recognize that getting "the right people on the bus" is crucial to our continued success. As a military organization, we certainly have our share of administrative constraints, just as all companies have their own challenges to overcome. We work hard to create the right mix of benefits, flexibility and positive environment for our people. Our goal is to create the "Best Place on the Planet to Work!"

The articles included in this edition of **CROSSTALK** focus on Software – A People Product. I hope you enjoy them as you turn your organization's eye inward and focus on your people.

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