



Both Sides of the Fence



After graduating from college, I took a job with a major defense contractor working on a variety of defense software projects that ranged from aircraft modeling and simulation to laser communications research and analysis. After eight enjoyable years, my husband was faced with a job change that meant moving to another part of the country. I found myself searching for a new employer.

The biggest employer in our new location was the Department of the Air Force, and sure enough they were hiring engineers. With my résumé in the Air Force's personnel system I was asking myself, "How can I give up the green grass of the contractor side of the fence and work for the U.S. government?" The Air Force made me an offer worth considering: They matched my salary, paid for my move, and placed me in a high-maturity software development organization. Not such a bad deal and definitely worth a try.

I am happy to say that I recently celebrated my 10-year anniversary of working as a civilian engineer for the Department of the Air Force. Yes, it's a different side of the fence that has many stereotypes, but the change has offered me fun and challenging work. And currently, it is very rewarding to be in my *CrossTalk* position that is committed to helping the Department of Defense and industry understand and overcome software engineering challenges on both sides of the fence.

Today's scientific and engineering professionals make job changes much more frequently than was typical 10 to 20 years ago. Why? Many make the change to obtain a higher salary, gain a higher-ranking position, or fulfill a need to try something different. Due to this trend of career hopping, it is extremely challenging for any employer to keep its workforce happy. I believe this is even more of a challenge for the U.S. Air Force and government at large.

Because of the current and future expected shortage of engineers and scientists in the Air Force, Gen. Lester L. Lyles, commander of the Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC), declared 2002 as the Year of the Engineer and Scientist, or YES. Because of the importance of this initiative, we chose YES as the theme of this month's issue and begin with *Command Leaders Say YES to Engineers, Scientists* by Tech. Sgt. Carl Norman. In this article, Lyles and James A. Papa, AFMC Engineering and Technical Management director, comment on the YES initiative and how it's helping to focus the Air Force's attention on workforce training and development, workforce size and mix, and motivation.

This article is followed by Leif E. Peterson, AFMC's chief of Civilian Personnel and Programs Division, discussing the criticality of the scientific and engineering workforce along with staffing level predictions and initiatives such as phased retirement.

Besides the Air Force, the Army is also recognizing the importance of its engineers and scientists. In *Army Transformation: Uniformed Army Scientists and Engineers*, Lt. Col. Barry L. Shoop and Lt. Col. Kenneth L. Alford discuss a new officer career path. By creating a new functional area, the Army will support a core population of scientists and engineers who has been educated in applied physical sciences and who has advanced degrees in disciplines such as aeronautical engineering, computer science, electrical engineering, physics, and many more. Although we did not receive the Navy's or the Marine Corps' perspective on our theme topic, we are interested in learning of any similar initiatives in these services.

In addition to our YES section of articles, we have a great set of supporting articles this month. I offer a special thanks to these contributing authors: Jeffrey L. Dutton, Maj. Brian G. Hermann, Dr. Richard C. Shirkey, Melanie Gouveia, Grady Booch, and David B. Putman. Also, since we are wrapping up another calendar year at *CrossTalk*, we provide you with our 2002 Article Index. If there is an article that peaks your interest, don't forget to look it up on our Web site <www.stsc.hill.af.mil>.

You can form your own opinion about government vs. commercial employment. As for me, I really do enjoy working as a civilian engineer for the Department of the Air Force. I am also pleased with the current recognition of the Air Force's engineering and scientific workforce along with their increasing importance to our nation's security. If you do find yourself considering a job change, don't hesitate to look into a position in the Air Force or other services. You might find that the grass *is* just as green on the other side of the fence.

Tracy L. Stauder
Publisher