

## ## Transcript of DoD National Mentoring Month Celebration Event: Unlocking Potential

**Jim Buchman:** Well, good afternoon, good morning, good evening. Wherever you happen to be across the DoD global landscape, we're going to welcome you to the inaugural DoD National Mentoring Month celebration event. The title: Unlocking Potential, The Transformative Power of Mentorship in the DoD, that's being hosted by the Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service. My name is Jim Buchman, and I serve as the chief learning officer for the civilian workforce in the Department of Defense, and I'm very privileged to have that position. I'm very honored to be your MC for today's event.

So right off the bat, if this is where you plan to be, you're in the right spot. Congratulations. And if you are not in the right spot, we welcome you to stay and join us. This is a very, very special group of people today and a big, big crowd too. We had over 2,646 registrants for this particular event, and as I look in the, you probably can't see it, but I have a little counter that, in the upper corner of my screen, I see the number climbing and climbing as more and more people are enjoying, are joining us. That's a pretty big crowd. That's about a small and medium-sized basketball arena, a college basketball arena, standing room only maybe.

So I really appreciate all of you being a participant. What brought you here today to be a part of this, we want to thank you for that. Thank you for your time and appreciate what you're, what role you're going to play either now or in the future as it, as it pertains to mentoring in the department.

Our theme for 2025, this celebration is "Mentoring Tomorrow's Leaders Today." This particularly highlights, in my opinion, how mentoring can develop leaders at all levels. Because, as you'll hear from me and my, my talent development team, we really believe that everybody's a leader. It's not relevant to your job title, where you sit. It's really how you influence, and everybody at all levels, whether you have, I know not can influence leadership. And so mentoring is one of those enabling functions, as I call it, to help us grow our leadership and our own professional development and our journeys in the DoD workforce.

So what we're going to do is we're going to identify a couple of things. We're going to hear from a distinguished panel of leaders that we have assembled today, people that have volunteered from all across the department and defense agencies and the service components to tell their stories on what inspired them to be involved in mentoring at whatever role, either a mentor, a mentee, or, or both. I know in my case, mentoring is near and dear to my heart, literally, given the logo here, but, but personally, I spent 25 years as an active-duty Air Force officer before I retired and now coming up 9 years as a federal civil servant, and I can tell you that I would have not succeeded at any stage without both informal mentors and formal mentors helping guide me through the mistakes I've made, the successes I had, and just helping me to stay, to get on

and stay on the right path. So mentoring is very, very important to me personally, as it is the rest of our distinguished panel as you're going to hear from them very shortly.

Mentoring offers, impacts all across the HR life cycle when you're talking about how the criticality of us bringing people in, assessing, recruiting talent, both young and old, into the department, into our workforce, how we develop and retain them and keep them there hopefully for the long haul, all of that can be very positive, the impact of a mentoring. So it's another nugget of criticality of why we're doing, why we're focusing on this as we are.

You may wonder why it's a whole month that we have National Mentoring Month. We have Valentine's Day, we have Grandparents' Day, we have National Doughnut Day. Why do we have a mentoring month? Well, that actually comes from the White House. And on the 31st of December, President Biden made the proclamation establishing National Mentoring Month. And in that proclamation, he noted that it was, it was to honor all the Americans who give their time and hearts to mentor. Many of you fit into that category. And the mentors represent the very best of America's spirit of community and care for one another. So there's another vignette of why it's important and why we're spending a whole month and why we're spending time today as well on this particular topic.

Some of you are data-driven like I can be sometimes. And so if you don't understand the qualitative benefits of mentoring, let me give you some quantitative numbers too. And I'll just read these to you because I think they're really, they really cement the importance of mentoring in what we're doing. So a study of the, from the Harvard Business Review a few years ago found that mentees who receive guidance and support from their mentors have reported a 67% higher level of job satisfaction compared to 45% that did not get mentoring. The study from the Society for Human Resources Management, SHRM, found that employees who participate in a mentoring program are 72% more likely to stay in their organization compared to 49% that have not participated in mentoring. And 67% of those organizations, so two out of three organizations, SHRM noted, reported a mentoring had a positive impact on their employee engagement and retention. A survey by the Mentoring Institute found that 63% of mentees, 63%, reported that mentoring had helped them to advance in their careers. And then finally, a study by the National Mentoring Partnership found that mentoring can lead to a 50% increase in employee productivity.

So there's some numbers that I kind of recited really quick, but they, they really show to, to quantify the value across the whole life cycle, like I talked about, bringing people in, developing them, developing your confidence and competence, and making them want to stay. All of those are, are, in many ways, national security imperatives for our department. So this is all why we're gathered here today, okay? To celebrate the, the positive impacts of mentoring and to understand why and how we all can get more involved in this endeavor.

So let me talk about Rules of Engagement. We've got a whole lot of people on this call, like I said earlier. So how are we going to actually operate our session? Well, first of all, because we have so many people, we're not going to have microphones available on Teams Live. Can you imagine if all of us came off mute at the same time and tried to talk? It would be insane really quick. So there won't be any microphones, but you will have an opportunity to interact with the panel, and we'll do so by the chat function.

So, we're going to have, I have a team of my talent development professionals willing volunteers are making all this happen behind the scenes, and we got a number of them. They're going to be monitoring the chat function. So we encourage you throughout, beginning now and throughout the time we're together, to offer up your questions or even comments if you'd like in the chat. If you do have questions, you can remain anonymous if you wish. We encourage you to put your name to it, and, you can address your questions to a specific panel member or panel members or offer it up to the whole group. The moderators are going to sift through all of these inputs, and they're going to provide it to me as the MC and the traffic cop, if you will, and we'll try to get as many of your questions addressed during the session. We probably won't get to all of them. What we're going to do is we're going to take your questions. If they're addressed to a specific individual on the panel, we'll get an answer back at a later time. And we're going to capture all these questions and try to give answers to as many of them as possible on our website afterwards. And we'll get a little bit more specifics on where you can find that as we go towards the latter parts of our, of our session today. But just know that we're going to do our best to make sure that if you take the time to put an input in the chat, that we make sure we get you some information to help you at least help address that question.

We're going to set aside time at the end. We're going to have each panel member is going to get 10 minutes to talk, to tell their story. All right, I think you're going to find those fascinating. At the end, then we'll moderate the, the Q&A as we have time. If there are a lot of questions, and if you are interested in hanging by, we have a stop, you know, we plan this for a 2:30 Eastern Time stop date, but if you're willing to hang on, and if we have any panel members that are available and willing to hang on, we could potentially extend this session a little bit. We'll see and play it by ear. But for now, your job is to make sure you listen, appreciate the stories you hear, add any comments or questions in the chat, and the panel members will, will do the heavy lifting for now.

And, and I mentioned them. Let me introduce them really quick. The lineup that we've got, it's a great group, and they represent across the departments, but also six very specific unique stories that, that get to be shared today. The panel members are going to include, from the, from the Air Force, we have Ms. Crystal Moore; from the Army, we have Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Yang; from the US Navy, we have Command Master Chief Neal Olds; from the Defense Security

Cooperation Agency, we have Ms. Elisa Ruth Nelson; from Defense Finance Accounting Service, we have Ms. Deborah White Johnson; and then from the DoD Office of Inspector General, we have Mr. Kelly Mayo. So that's the lineup that you can look forward to.

And we're going to jump right into it now and start with our 10 minutes each starting with the order that I just mentioned a minute ago.

We'll start with Ms. Crystal Moore. Ms. Crystal Moore is a member of the Senior Executive Service. She's currently the director of force development for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Services within the headquarters US Air Force, based out of the Pentagon. So, Ms. Moore, thank you again for your willingness to be a part of the panel, and I'm going to turn the floor over to you for your remarks.

**Crystal Moore:** All right, well, thank you, Mr. Buchman. I appreciate the introduction and opening up our event today. Welcome to everybody on the line. Sounds like we have a very large audience, and I am super excited to be here. Not only is this in my job jar for my portfolio as the director of Force Development for the Air Force, it's near and dear to my heart as well. So I want to talk to you just a little bit about my background and introduce myself. You'll see, I have access to my bio, but I wanted to sum it up in a couple of ways.

Number one, I'm a jack of all trades. You'll probably find that master of none. So I had a lot of room for mentoring along the way. And I also, you might also tell that I can't make up my mind on what I want to do with my life and my career. So throughout my career, I've transitioned to different jobs and, and functional areas. So I started out with the Army and air defense artillery with the Patriot missile system, and then I was able to transition into finance while I was in the Army on active duty. And I decided to get out and transition to civilian life, and when I did that I got a job with the Air Force as a civilian doing financial management. At that time, I also was able to transfer my commission from the Army to the Air Force, so I started serving in Air Force financial management and the reserves, and then I was able to transition to the Air Force Personnel Center at one point. And during that time, I got exposed to a lot of the HR functions in the Air Force. And that kind of started my, my journey in the HR personnel world, and so that leads me to today, where I'm the director of force development, working in the HR arena.

So I've had a lot of opportunities to, to learn new things and have a lot of opportunities to be mentored. My theme today for the mentoring talk that I have is that anyone can be a mentor, and peers are mentors too. And in my experience, the best mentors that I've had were some peers. And so I'll tell you a little story about when I transitioned from the Army to Air Force civilian service. As you can imagine, the culture was different, the language was different. I was coming from a military environment to a civilian environment. And so I didn't understand the financial systems that the Air Force used. I didn't understand the process that the Air Force used

for various things. And so my best mentors were my peers, and there were three in particular Judy Crespo and Diane Clark. They were the first civilians that took me under their wing, and they taught me how to use financial systems, how to use the Air Force process in a financial arena. And, got me started on my journey to be successful in my career.

But the next person that I really want to deep dive into and talk about is Kathy Day. And I will tell you that I would not be in my position today if it weren't for the mentorship of Kathy Day. Kathy was another peer of mine, and I met her about a year into my Air Force civilian journey, and she took me under her, under her wing to really teach what the Air Force looks at and values when it comes to force development and the expectations that the Air Force has and what civilians or even military should be doing to grow in their career. And so Cathy taught me and encouraged me to join the Air Force Reserve, so I never would have been in the Air Force reserve if it weren't for Cathy. She exposed me to different positions and encouraged me to, to try to do an inter-service transfer. And, and she also showed me, encouraged me to pursue a master's degree. So at the time, when I was in the Army, of course, you come in with your bachelor's degree. It wasn't necessarily required or needed in order to advance in rank at that time. And so when I came into the Air Force, I, I didn't realize that I should probably also be pursuing a master's degree. And so Cathy showed me that, you know, the Air Force values civilian education, and I ended up working on my master's degree, because of her encouragement. Then she also encouraged me to attend Air Command and Staff College, which is professional military education, also valued in the Air Force, so I got the opportunity to go do that.

But more than that, she taught me the whole ecosystem of force development. And I was able to then start mentoring and coaching others throughout my career, which culminated, before I got into this position, to be in the career field manager for financial management within the Air Force. And, and in that job, I was able to meet thousands of civilians across the Air Force, help them understand what they should be doing with their resume, how to advance in their career, the types of things that they can do to grow, and I was able to pass it on and show them what the development ecosystem was in the Air Force.

So, I really do owe a lot to the mentors in, in my, that came along in my career, but, but most importantly, I think peers were the best mentors that I personally had. And really taught me a lot on what I needed to do, especially as I transitioned from the Army over to the Air Force. So that's my story, a little bit about me, and how I view mentoring in my career. Thank you.

**Jim Buchman:** Well, thank you, Ms. Moore. I really, I really appreciate your, your thoughts, and, and what really struck me as much as anything is when you're talking about anybody can be a mentor and how true is that? Again, it's just like anybody could be a leader, doesn't require status. You can get just as effective mentoring from a peer, and sometimes a subordinate, as you

could a leader or somebody senior to you. So I think that's really wise advice, and I appreciate you saying that.

Okay, let's move on to the second panelist. We've got, now grabbing the microphone is Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Yang. And Andrew is the Army Coaching Program Manager with the US Army Talent Innovation Directorate, also based out of the Pentagon. So Colonel Yang, the floor is yours. And I think you may be on mute, unless it's my system.

**Andrew Yang:** Hello, good morning. Thank you. Well, good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, all, depending on where you are located. And, for those impacted by the extreme cold, hope you're staying warm.

Thank you, Anita and all the organizers, for the consideration of this tremendous opportunity to share the impact of mentorship on both my personal and professional life, and how it shaped me into the person I am today.

I am Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Yang. I am originally from the great state of Texas and a big fan and supporter of all Texas sports, except for the Dallas Cowboys. Sorry, not so sorry to the Cowboys fans out there.

I graduated from the United States Military Academy in 2003 and was fortunate to branch into aviation. I was able to fly the Apache helicopter, in addition to serving the assignments as an aviation officer. I had opportunities to select assignments to attend graduate school, where I received my MBA, and also serve as a mission officer back at West Point. And also served in ground units, and now I have the pleasure of leading the Army efforts of establishing the Army Coaching Program.

As I reflect on my journey, whether it's in academia, aviation, or non-aviation assignments, I've been fortunate, you know, to have mentors present in all capacities with a wealth of knowledge and experience and expertise, whether it's in, you know, aviation or non-aviation fields.

My mentors have guided me, they challenged me, and most importantly, helped me grow. However, mentorship is more than just providing guidance and advice. You know, to me, it's about building relationships, establishing that trust, and creating a safe space for open and honest communication. At times, and I greatly appreciate this, you know, may not have always been what I want to hear, but what I needed to hear. And that is something I truly treasure and appreciate from my mentors.

As I look back at my journey, to this point, I'm reminded of the importance of paying it forward through mentorship. And my, my theme today is, is really, you know, it dates back to over 25 years ago when, when I was even considering, you know, joining the forces or even applying to

the academy. You know, I, it, you know, I didn't go directly from high school, you know. I actually went to college for a couple of years before applying and being accepted into the academy.

But one of the things as I treasure and I look back is, Captain Richardson at the time, he was my admissions officer, you know? And, and, and I know I didn't, I didn't make my initial entry into West Point, but, you know, he was there to help and assist and guide me through the process. Again, actually, 22 more times, you know. So, you know, thinking back now, you know, I didn't really consider him as a mentor, but looking back at everything that he has done for me to get to where I am today, or even into the process of getting into West Point, you know, it was definitely a huge, played a huge piece in, where I am today, you know, as a mentor.

And, and one of the things that, you know, I look back and see that, all the patience, the, the journey of going through that whole process again, if you have, you don't know the whole application process, I mean, it is a year-long process, and to do it over and over and over again, you know, it's strenuous, you know? So, looking at that, you know, I was able to... I'm reminded of all the importance of, of everything that Captain Richardson, sir, at the time, had, had gone through and insisted me. And I was fortunate enough, 10 years later, you know, to return back to West Point to serve as an admissions officer.

So, I was able to pay it forward through mentorship of now serving as an admissions officer and helping all the thousands of students now applying to get into the academy that took me, multiple times, you know?

So, that, that is one thing I truly treasured, one thing that I appreciated, and I was able to meet, which then, which, when I finally met him, was Colonel Richardson. He actually returned back, and I saw him, and I recognized him, and was very appreciative. And we talked through the whole process and kind of, you know, thanked him for everything he's done and helped me along the way and paved the, my whole journey to where I am today.

You know, so one thing, you know, I do greatly do appreciate it, and, and try to volunteer, or, or try to participate in, is definitely paying it back to paying it forward through mentorship, whether it's through formal programs or through in relationships built. You know, to me, that, that's something that, you know, it's the least that I can do, at least share experiences or provide, you know, my journey, to others, and hopefully, that can help them, you know, give them an idea to for their journey moving forward.

In conclusion, mentorship, as you can see, has been very impactful for me, and, and believe it can be for anyone. You know, for me, it's, it's, you know, I'm kind of in all walks of life, and not just aviation, but everything I've done, you know, along the way, whether I'm in school or, in a different assignment that's not aviation, you know, I've always had mentors along the way that's helped me, guided me, challenged me, and, assisting me throughout.

So, I'm eager to continue to pay it forward and share my experiences, as part of someone else's journey, and thank you again for this great opportunity.

**Jim Buchman:** Well , thanks , Colonel Yang . I appreciate what your comments and in particular , I think you made a point that it's worth repeating that whether you're a mentor or being mentored , it's not all about hearts and flowers and , and happy thoughts at times . Sometimes the best mentorship is the harsh realities and the very , although constructive , very blunt criticism and constructive criticism that that we all need . And so that , that's really important . I'm glad you brought that up. So thank you for that .

Okay, our next panelist is Command Master Chief Neal Olds. He's from the Naval Service Warfare Group Southwest with the US Navy, based out of San Diego. So, Command Master Chief Olds, welcome to the panel, and the floor is yours.

**Command Master Chief Neal Olds:** Thank you very much. Good morning, afternoon, evening, as everyone has said. And again, thank you very much to Anita and the rest of the group for inviting me to present today. I, you know, I think back when I talk about mentorship, and I think back to when I joined the Navy, which feels like a thousand years ago, but, the, you know, mentorship wasn't, you know, mentors weren't. It wasn't a thing that we really talked about, right? It wasn't, hey, you didn't have to worry about checking in and saying who your mentor was. You didn't get assigned a mentor, with that name attached to it.

But, you know, I started out in the Navy, as a submariner, you know, I did 20 years in the submarine force, and what I, when I look back at it, I think about it all the time, is we absolutely had a mentorship process in place. You know, when you checked on board your first command, you were assigned a CDA. And that CDA's sole responsibility was to make sure you understood the ropes, understood how the day-to-day things worked, and most importantly, understood how to get qualified. Because in the submarine force, if you're not qualified, you don't matter. So that was one of those things, like, that early on.

And as I look at it now, I think about all the incredible mentors I had during that timeframe who, who kind of guided me along the way, because I was, you know, and I'm sure there's a lot of people who are out there that can sympathize with me, I was not a rock star early on in my, in my life. I had tons of challenges, tons of things that were probably not the best way to go about doing things. And, and I needed a lot of that, that guidance. And, you know, sometimes, you know, sometimes just small shifts of, "Hey, you need to do this better, you need to do that better." Sometimes I needed that, that sit down of like, you know, the hard and fast, "No, really, you are, you have to focus on these things to get better."

And I think that was, you know, that those really laid my groundwork. And frankly, I didn't, I mean, I could spend an hour just talking about all the people who've had an impact in my life.



Joe Fuller, he was my retired, my first chief, who taught me how to be a mechanic; Dave Fleck, my next chief, who really taught me how to lead; and then, you know, my first captain as a chief who really laid the groundwork for me for, you know, the next 20 years of my life, Admiral who was just was very good about the understanding, all right, hey, here's when I give you some tough love, here's when I give you some just, "I want you to think about this and get back to me on how you think you should move ahead on these things," which I think is absolutely key in a good relationship, a good mentor-mentor, mentee relationship.

You know, you mentioned to Mr. Buchman, earlier on, about everyone's a leader, and we've talked a lot about peer leadership in the group. And I think that's one of the things, you know, in the military, there's a natural transition to being a mentor because, a lot of times, it's based off what your rank is and your ability to influence people. And you know, you, you, that's one of your absolute duties as a, as a leader is to, to mentor your junior personnel and give them all the tools they need to succeed moving forward. Some of them are, you know, willing to receive those, and other ones are not.

And that goes back to me, one of the things that I definitely learned during this is, yes, you can have an assigned mentor-mentee relationship, but without a doubt, the absolute best relationships that exist are, they are no-kidding relationships where there is a mutual respect back and forth. It's not a, it's not a directed thing. It's someone coming to find you, for whatever reason, to talk about something that they want to develop on or improve on in their chosen, you know, topic at the time.

and I've been continually amazed over my time in the military that, well, yes, I get lots of questions about, "Hey, how to succeed in the military," During the timeframe. It is more so, "Hey, how do I get better at life?" Which I think those are all intermingled things. Is if you're, if you're good at your job, you're going to be, you're going to develop skills that are going to help you in your life. And if you're good in life, you're going to be successful at your job. And I think that's been one of the, the things that I have always...

Now, in my position, with, you know, 34 combatant vessels and 15,000 sailors that, that I can have an impact on, that's what I've been continually pushing forward is everything is about the relationship. It's, it's not about going to the person who's going to give you kudos all the time and tell you how great your life is and tell you how, you know, you're, you're a rock star, you're doing things. Like, I think the best mentoring relationships are those having hard discussions. And you know, you never want somebody who's always telling you you're great and you're always a winner. You want somebody who's going to give you viable feedback for you to improve.

We've mentioned a lot about how impactful the mentee and mentorship relationship is. I am also a very data-driven person. In the job, you know, we have to, we're always competing for resources. I don't think there's anybody on this panel that would be denying that that's always a thing. So when you compete for resources, you have to have data that shows things are, you know, value-added.

You threw out a lot of numbers, Mr. Buchman, about, about things, and I will tell you, just in my small swath, one of the, one of the biggest challenges facing the military is, is the unplanned losses, you know, sailors who don't finish their first tour of duty due to a num-, any number of reasons, be it the inability to adapt, conduct, trouble, things like that. And, you know, in our year of being stood up, we've, we've been collecting this data. And what we're finding is that, and, and 68% of the cases, the people who don't have the... You are 68% less likely to separate from the Navy without completing your first tour if you don't have, or if you have a mentor. So that mentor is key in, in that long-term development, especially in those first-tour sailors. And a lot of them don't know what to deal with, don't know, don't know what to look for. So we, you know, that's been a focus point for us, is hey, we, we need to establish a no-kidding dedicated program. Not, not forcing it, but definitely explaining the benefits to it so that we can get people on board, because the younger generation, that we're, you know, we're dealing with right now, is 100% prone towards they'll find something online and, and they can use that mentorship. So we've started steering that to, to be a more productive relationship and kind of giving keys, not as a, "Hey, pick this person as your mentor," but, "Hey, here's what you should look at in a mentor."

And I think that's been one of our biggest, in my mind, what I think has been the biggest impact over all my time, is, is looking at, "Hey, who, who is going to give me the most valuable advice on whatever the area that I want to improve in?" And I think, that's the thing I always want to pay forward to everybody else is, you don't have to just deal with, you know, the person you're assigned, look for everybody. And it can be about whatever topic you want, you want to look at. I think, I think that's absolutely one of those things, to push forward. And it's always what I try to, to look at.

So, mentorship is important, and I think that, I'll be honest, I don't think, I don't think enough people utilize it the way it should be utilized, but I think we're all getting better about it. And this is, this, this event, I think, is going to be one of those rock star kind of things. I need to get folk, I need to get more Navy involved in it, so I'll keep pushing on that one. Thank you very much.

**Jim Buchman:** Well, we certainly hope it's going to be a rock star event for everybody that's involved and getting something out of this. And I appreciate your, your comments, Command Master Chief Olds. In particular, and I want to reiterate this, because it was, it, it really caught

my attention if, if those of you in the audience didn't catch it as it went by, he cited that 68% of the Navy folks in their first enlistment are less likely to separate if they have a mentor. Think of the dollar value that has. The money we invest in people, to assess both officers and enlisted and civilians into the Department of Defense, how much money it takes to bring somebody on board, to spend money to train and develop them over the years, and then to retain them, that whole HR life cycle we were talking about before. Think how much money you're saving if two-thirds of the people you were able to retain, in large part because they're involved in having a mentor, someone to tell them, at a very young age, what's right, what's wrong, dust them off when they make a mistake, and push them forward and, and encourage and be very blunt with them. How many of us are the beneficiary of that kind of support in our own careers?

If you really stop and think, you haven't thought about this, I encourage everybody, after we're done here, when you reflect back on this, think about all the people that have impacted you over your career, both personally and professionally. And what size auditorium or stadium would you need to have if you brought all of them together magically in one place for you to say thank you? How big of a venue would you need? I think, for many of us, that would be a pretty big size venue. So that, that is another way to, to frame the perspective and the value of investing in others, particularly the younger folks.

So, appreciate your comments. I do see, speaking of comments, I see that the questions are flowing nicely in the chat function, so I will encourage you, as we continue on with our panel, stories, that if you have questions, please continue to, to, to add them in. And my team, in the background, is distilling through them, and we're going to get answers either audibly here in our session, or if we don't get to it, we'll find answers to the questions later on, and we'll tell you where to go to get that resource, but I want to encourage you to keep typing them in because I already see some questions flowing, and some really good questions too, that we're going to try to get to here in a little bit.

So for now, let's go on to the fourth member of our panel. This is Ms. Elisa Ruth Nelson. She's the Team Lead for Human Capital Strategy and Organizational Development Directorate within the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, or DSCA, which is in the, in the org chart, they fall under OSD policy's purview. So, Ms. Nelson, I'm going to turn the floor over to you for your comments, and thank you for being a part of our panel today.

**Elisa Ruth Nelson:** All right, thank you, Mr. Buchman, Anita, and the rest of the team supporting this event. It is an honor to be here with all of you today, and I virtually stand before you, not just to talk about mentorship as a career strategy, but a profound, transformative journey that can change lives, reshape futures, and unlock the boundless potential within us all.

When I first encountered the concept of mentorship, many, many years ago, I didn't fully grasp it. My outlook was limited. I initially thought mentorship was solely for those pursuing or tapped for positions of leadership because, quite frankly, that was how it was presented. I wondered, "Isn't mentorship just a means for the ambitious?" But I later realized that mentorship is about so much more. It is about being recognized, understood, and guided in ways that uncover our deepest truths. It's about finding individuals who help us unlock our true potential and celebrate our unique journey.

Yeah, initially, I believe mentorship was for a select few, but I know better, and my experience has been eye-opening and full of growth. My approach, when I decide to seek a mentor, I seek individuals who see me, understand me, and guide me in a way that helps me uncover the truth within myself and celebrate who I am. And that required observation over a period of time. I never rush into a mentor partnership.

Mentorship is not a privilege reserved for those in leadership positions. It is a necessity for any and everyone who dares to dream, who dares to reach beyond their current reality. And that reality is defined by you. It is about creating a legacy, about passing the torch from one person to the next, ensuring that the light of knowledge, wisdom, and experience burns ever brighter.

Think about it: Mentorship is more than just professional development. It's about unlocking potential. It's about finding someone, or individuals, who believe in you, even when you struggle to believe in yourself. It has... It's about someone who challenges you, supports you, and helps you navigate the complexities of your career, and in some cases, your personal life.

When I have been asked to become someone's mentor, and that was as recently as last month, there were three things I highlighted to that person that I would provide to that person, and these are the same three things I use to determine if a person is a good fit for me as a mentor.

So, here they are: first and foremost, seek authenticity. Find a mentor who is real, who is unafraid to show their vulnerabilities, and who encourages you to embrace your own. Authenticity builds trust, and trust is the bedrock of any meaningful relationship. A true mentor does not sugarcoat reality. They present it in all its rawness because they believe in your capacity to handle and grow from it. A mentor who shows their true self gives you the courage to show yours. So, this bond, built on mutual trust, allows for the growth of both mentor and mentee.

Second, embrace tough love. The best mentors do not pat you on the back. They push you to be better. They tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear.

I remember a moment when I was overwhelmed and struggling to connect with a leader on a way ahead for a project many years ago. My mentor sensed my frustration and said, "Elisa Ruth, let's look at this situation from a different perspective." The steps my mentor took in unraveling

the situation was rough and tough. I felt incredibly vulnerable, and it was agony because I just wanted out, and I wanted an answer to just move on. But in the midst of the chaos, with emotions running high, I chose to surrender and let my mentor strip away the clutter, revealing the clarity and truth I needed to see. In doing so, I realized I had champagne problems: issues that seemed significant but were minor when viewed in a broader context and emotions set aside. It was a revelation that helped me focus on what truly mattered and navigate the situation with renewed clarity. To this day, I use the same technique to evaluate what matters most.

Thirdly, look beyond. Choose a mentor who is not intimidated by your potential to surpass them. A true mentor derives joy from your success, seeing it as an extension of their own legacy. Now, I'm a Star Wars fan, and as Yoda said in the movie *\*The Last Jedi\**, "We are what they grow beyond." This quote embodies the essence of mentorship. It's not about holding you back, but about propelling you forward, beyond what even your own mentors have achieved. A mentor who fears your success is not a mentor, but an impediment. Real mentors revel in your victories, seeing them as a testament to their guidance and support.

Mentorship is a powerful legacy. It's about more than just personal achievement. It's about cultivating a culture of continuous growth, support, and excellence. It's about ensuring that we, as a collective, are always pushing the boundaries of what is possible.

Let me share another quick personal story. My circle of mentors have always been my rock, my guiding light. And there was another time when I was at a crossroads at work, struggling to engage with a leader who seemed to be on a completely different wavelength. I was once again getting in my own way, and I was lost in a forest of frustration. I wanted to be heard, to be seen by this leader, but I wasn't hearing it from my mentor, the advice that I was given. Finally, my mentor's advice wasn't resonating with me until they gave me a dose of tough love. They asked me, "Did I tell you to give your leader your credit card number, expiration date, and the three numbers on the back, or the four numbers on the front if you're using an American Express card?" That stark, real moment snapped me out of my self-imposed haze and made me realize that I was overcomplicating things. It was the tough love and realness I needed to find my way and see the bigger picture. This tough love, this no-holds-barred approach, was precisely what I needed to confront my own shortcomings and rise above them.

My mentors saw me struggling and knew that coddling would not help. Instead, they gave me the unvarnished truth, and it changed everything for me.

In conclusion, mentorship is not just a professional relationship. It is also a transformative journey. It's about unlocking potential, embracing authenticity, and creating a legacy. I urge you to take action: First, invest in yourself by speaking out and by seeking out—excuse me—and

building a network of mentors, plural, if you haven't already. Understand that you don't need to be on a path to a senior leadership role. Your journey is uniquely yours, and through mentorship, you might uncover your true calling and rekindle talents you've kept dormant for too long. Second, aim to be a mentor who truly sees, understands, and guides others, helping them discover their own truths and celebrating them for who they are. While there are guidelines for successful mentoring relationships, there is ample space for creativity, for meeting individuals where they are, and for helping them rise.

So, let's not just talk about mentorship, let's live it. Let us be the light that guides others to see their own brilliance. Together, we can create a legacy that will inspire and elevate future generations. Let's ignite the fire of mentorship and let it burn bright for all to see! Thank you again for this opportunity.

**Jim Buchman:** Well, thank you, Ms. Nelson. There's a lot that you offered in, in a very short time there. I really appreciate that. And, you know, I'm kind of getting, I'm kind of getting a sense, maybe some of you in the audience are getting it too, that we can make a lot of different taglines that come out of some of these messages and these stories we're hearing. And the one that resonates with me, I would offer, from what Ms. Nelson said, was this idea about embracing tough love. That's not easy to do, right? You get, you get feedback that's not exactly what you want to hear, but it might be the most important thing you get in that time that sets you on a path to success in your future. And as mentors, we often don't know when we might be offering that kind of tough love to somebody at the exact right time and, perhaps transform, as Ms. Nelson talked about, transformative journey, transform their journey for the better. We may not ever know that happens, but just in those interactions, the time and the moment at times that we invest in somebody else, what a difference we can make.

I noticed that, and, and the, the questions are coming in the chat pretty regularly. I appreciate everybody's participation with that. And some of the questions are, are revolving around, how do I, what kind of characteristics do I look for in a mentor? And Ms. Nelson offered a number of those, from her perspective, talked about seeking somebody who's real, someone who's listening, authentic to you, believes in me as an individual, understands and guides me. I think those are really, valuable responses to some of the questions we're having. We'll probably circle back on this question in a bit too, and get some other perspectives from other panel members as we go forward.

But for now, let's bring in the next member of our panel, and that is Ms. Deborah White-Johnson. She's the Director for Emerging Systems, Enterprise Solutions, and Standards within the Defense Financial Accounting Service, or DFAS, based out of Indiana. So, Ms. White-Johnson, again, I welcome you to the forum here, and, turn the microphone over to you to offer your story.

**Deborah White-Johnson:** Thank you so much, Mr. Buchman. I'm really excited to share my story and insight with everyone, that's on this forum today. I participated in formal and informal mentoring for many, many years, both as a mentor as well as a mentee. At this point in my career, 34 years in the department, I believe it's my duty to mentor and coach, giving back, paying forward, and preparing tomorrow's leaders to serve long after I'm enjoying my retirement.

So, when I began my career, I didn't have my... I was fortunate to have members that encouraged me, guided me, and challenged me. And with that encouragement, I was able to achieve my multiple degrees and certifications. And a very special peer mentor had mentioned to me, early in my career, that the key to those windows and doors of opportunity that we, I would like to open, was to have all of the necessary education, certification, training, and experiences that I needed for my career path. So, I need to, I needed to know where I was headed, where I was wanting to go, and then make sure that I have all the I's dotted and all the T's crossed to open up those windows and doors that I wanted.

So, that's the primary message that I share with all of my mentees, helping them to be prepared for whatever career that they desire. We help to chart that path together.

So, I've been with DFAS my entire career, and within DFAS, I've been blessed with the opportunity to work in a variety of positions, from accountant, financial analyst, in the training and procedures department, in our IT corporate systems, performing Lean Six Sigma and, and program and project management, and many more positions. But what this has done for me is that it's given me a wide range of experiences and equipped me with the wealth of knowledge to share with the, the folks all across our agency, as well as outside of DFAS as well.

So, I'd like to highlight the benefit of long-term and short-term mentoring. So, some mentoring participants may be anxious about committing to mentoring because it, they may not have the time, right, for a long-term relationship. And mentoring can be either long-term or short-term. It just really depends on the mentee's needs.

In my current mentee roster, the longest mentoring relationship I have is 6.5 years, since 2018. I know this is a long time, but let me tell you the story. So, this mentee that came in was new to DoD and needed support and acclimation. And then, over time, we moved to ensuring marketability and being competitive in the DFAS environment. She came into an entry-level position and a technician... you know how it can be to simply get your foot in the door, but, but she was an experienced person from the private sector. She had so much to offer, and she was trying to find her way in, in this new environment, and figure out how, how can she bring her talents and offer them in this new environment. So, together, we worked, you know, on ensuring that she could get all of the additional education and skills and training and

experiences that she needed. And now, she is in the GS-11 position, in her second year of that grade, and now ready to compete for GS-12. So, our conversations and our frequency has reduced to every other month instead of meeting once a month, and we currently have no plan to end our relationship. Honestly, I want to get her to that GS-13 level before I recommend that we either conclude our relationship or continue to reduce it. That natural next, next step would be to take it to a quarterly, occasional tune-up, as I call it, with my mentees.

I have had as many as 17 or 18 mentees at any given time, and so a long-term relationship, relationship such as what I just described is very unusual, and I really couldn't afford to do that for everyone. So, most of my relationships have very specific purposes. Once we achieve the purpose, we review, and we conclude, allowing for periodic, you know, outreach or follow-up.

So, one of my short-term mentoring sessions was a shared mentoring experience. In DFAS, we often tag in another mentor to support very specific needs. Not everyone can be everything to a single person. This began for me about five years ago. We had one of our senior leaders, give me a heads-up to expect a call from someone, and he said that the staff member had some questions and that I was better suited to help them with those specific questions. And so, that staff member utilized both of us to get what they needed.

Last year, a staff member was requesting support with ECQ review. Her mentor recommended that she reach out to me specifically for that support. We worked specifically through the ECQ worksheets that I had developed. We performed a gap analysis, we identified the type of work experiences that she needed to fill those gaps, and we completed that in approximately three months. This information helped her decide on next steps in her career, and then she recently moved into a position that will fulfill many of those gaps that we discussed. And so, that relationship has now matured into that, into that periodic check-in, just to see how things are going.

Other short-term support has been, "Hey, I applied for a job, I made the cert, and I want to prepare just in case I get an interview. Can you help me?" Well, of course, I can. So, I run them through my interview prep sessions, typically about three or four sessions, depending on the urgency, and, of course, the timing of the interview.

So, my recommendation is to have an upfront conversation regarding the needs and, and available capacity and making a clear plan of understanding what that mentoring relationship will be, and once the goal is achieved, we can move towards ending the session. This can avert the sometimes awkward mentoring breakup discussion, right? It, it's like, "When specifically is this over?" It can be hard to do, but if you have that, if you have the conversation early, and you have it already worked out, then you know, "Okay, we've completed this, we can conclude the relationship and, and move forward."



So, thank you. Thanks again so much for allowing me to share my insight and story with you. Back to you, Mr. Buchman.

**Jim Buchman:** Well, thank you very much, Ms. White-Johnson. I'll tell you what, if anybody had any doubt about the, how much it resonates with the individual panel members to be involved as mentors, all you gotta do is hear when she says she had 17 or 18 mentees at a time. And when you heard her say that it's her, she feels like it's her duty to mentor, it was a pretty powerful statement to show, really, the value, the meaning, to her and to many others that mentor.

I also like the fact that, that she broke down for us the difference between short-term and long-term mentoring because there are very differences in how you can go about and approach that. There is no "one size fits all" in a mentoring relationship. It's all tied to what the individual mentee wants and needs to get out of that relationship. So, it's very tailorable. I appreciate that perspective too.

So, let's move on to our, our final panel member, who is Mr. Kelly Mayo. Mr. Mayo is a member of the Senior Executive Service, and he's the Director for the Defense Criminal Investigative Service within the DoD Office of the Inspector General, based out of the Mark Center in Alexandria, Virginia. So, Mr. Mayo, thank you for your time and your willingness to join the panel, and I'll turn the microphone over to you now to tell your story. And sir, I think you might still be muted.

**Kelly Mayo:** I'm not. I think I'm not now. How's that?

**Jim Buchman:** Yeah, you're loud and clear. Can you hear me?

**Kelly Mayo:** Okay, outstanding. You know that old saying, "They saved the best for last"? Not in this case. My colleagues kind of blew it out of the water, so you're getting seconds from me, but, they, fantastic stuff, and I'm old, and, and I appreciate it. So, I'm going to kind of do some, something different about this. I just, I can't do what those folks just did. But let me tell you something: I'm not supposed to be here. I am not supposed to be here talking to you people because this is not how I was raised. I was raised in a violent home, and in a period of time, when I was in high school, I was homeless. I was going nowhere fast, period. And that's why I'm not supposed to be here.

So then, I had no options after high school. My sister took me in, so I wasn't homeless anymore, but then I graduated. I had no options. So, I joined the Air Force. I wanted to be a medic, and I became a medic in the Air Force. And at my first duty station, I had all these senior NCOs telling me things that I could do, and, and they saw something in me. I didn't believe in myself, and I just kind of bummed around, just, you know, anyway.

Well, throughout my career, after I was a medic, I joined OSI, and I really enjoyed that. I really enjoyed that. And all of a sudden, I had all these, a number of people whom I respected saying, "Hey, Mel, you, you're worth something." I said, and my internal, I said, "No, I'm not. I know where I came from. This is, this is as good as it gets for me." But they kept picking at me and picking at me and picking at me. I finally realized that, you know what they were doing? They were mentoring me. I didn't understand it, but they, it finally clicked for me. And the, the gentleman who means the most to me, I won't mention his name, but he was a lieutenant colonel, and he's the one that said, "You need to go to Officer Training School." And I said, "Well, I, males don't go to Offi-, training in school. My brothers both served in Vietnam, as in, infantry guys. We don't do that." And he said, "You need to go to Officer Training." So, I got to Officer Training, and I got commissioned. I started to believe in myself because of the people that believed in me and saw something in me that I had no, no idea that I had.

And that, and that's kind of my story, but it continued through my career. It's a lot of things I was still anxious about, but these, these men and women said, "Hey, you've got something." And I was, it, it, so it means so much to me. I'm the Executive Champion here in the OIG. I've been here for six years, for the mentoring program. I'm going to tell you something, ladies and gentlemen: This is the most important thing you will ever do in your career. I don't care what your job is. Anybody can do your job. They can figure out your job, but if you take the time to mentor those people that need it and will, and are willing to hear from you, it's the most important thing you'll ever do in service. That's my opinion. You don't have to agree with it, but I've been doing this quite some time.

So, smash cut to where I am today. I have, I currently have three mentors. And you know what? They're all women, and they're all my age. I'm going on 50 years in the DoD. I know that's kind of sad, isn't it? That's, the old guys got to get out of here, but I enjoy it too much. Bottom line, I have three mentors. All of them are, all of them are women, and all of them have different ethnic backgrounds. And you know why I have that? You know why I have women with different ethnic backgrounds? Because everything they tell me is kind of contrary to what I believe. And I, and, and, and they make me smarter. First of all, they're women. I don't think like a woman. I've been married for 46 years. My wife can tell you I don't think I'm a woman because she tells me all the time what I'm doing wrong. Bottom line is, my wife's a mentor, but the...

So, it's important to understand the gravity of this, of this program. You will, you will, as protégés, or protégés, as you know, like they call them mentees, protégés, and or, and mentors... It will be gratifying. But you know, it's hard work. It's not easy. It's not easy, ladies and gentlemen. You've got to really sit down, you've got to talk, you've got to discuss, and I, and I won't keep you up in here, but I want to tell you a couple of things.

Understand, as a mentor, understand this: If you're a mentor, you're never driving the car. If you're driving the car, you missed the boat. You sit in the passenger seat, and you're sitting in that passenger seat, and you give... You give some small directions every once in a while: "Slow down, move on." You don't... Your job is to listen. If you don't listen to your protégés, then you're failing. And you... It can't be about you. It has to be about them. It's, and it's... You're always just giving them small pieces of advice that helps them get where they need to be.

And again, I'll say it for the last time: It'll be the most rewarding thing you do because they will never forget you. My first mentor, as, Senior Master Sergeant Scotty King... I had one stripe on my shoulders, and he saw something in me, right? And I still remember him. That was back in 1977. And I still remember him. And I can tell you every single mentor I've had since then. And I'm standing... I'm sitting here with you folks today only because of them, not because I was some, you know, rock star because they thought I had something. They saw something in me.

So, again, let me say this one last time, and I shut up: As mentors, understand the impact you're going to have on someone's life. It's going to be... It's going to be a change for them that they'll always appreciate, or not, if you're not successful, but they will always remember you. I remember when I, you know... That they'll say, "You know why I'm here? Because this person saw something in me."

So anyway, that's all I have to say, and I, I wish you the absolute best. It's, it's the most rewarding and the most difficult thing you can do, and I appreciate it. You have no idea how much I appreciate it. Thank you very much for your time and your attention, and now we'll go back to whatever's next. Thank you.

**Jim Buchman:** Well, thank you, Mr. Mayo, for those in-, insights. And I'll tell you what if that didn't resonate with you after you heard that, I don't know what else we can say to convince you about the power of mentoring. That was compelling. You know, to hear a member of the SES that's worked his way through for 50 years of service, both in uniform and, and in Civil Service now, to tell you that you shouldn't even be here if not for people that informally guided him when it felt like picking at him, that just gave him the guidance to make him better and to help him see things in himself that others saw that he didn't see. And not only that, but to continue now, at this stage of his career, to have multiple members, mentors himself. I think that's really powerful, and I really appreciate the, the insights that you just shared, sir.

And now... So, you've heard from all our panel members, you've heard their stories, and you've been offering questions in the chat. I appreciate you doing that. We're going to get to that now, and we're going to offer some of these, as we go through. We'll try to get as many of these as possible, but I know we won't get to all of them, but we're going to give you answers one way or

the other, if not now, when we get to post them on this site that I'm going to share with you in a little bit.

But let's start off with this one because this one's intriguing to me, and it's going to be Colonel Yang, I'm going to, I'm going to give this one to you, and there's a reason why. So, you, and you as a Coaching Program Manager, and both of us as federal coaches, and we both do mentoring, we understand and have to deal with frequently this question around: What's coaching, and what's mentoring? So, I'd like you to take that one on, if you could, and explain to the audience that may not be familiar, what is the difference between coaching and mentoring?

**Andrew Yang:** Absolutely. So, again, this is Lieutenant Colonel Yang. I have the pleasure to serve as the Army Coaching Program Manager here. So, that, that is actually a very, very good question. That's a question that we do field, pretty often, and, we do, talk about, often, and, distinguish the difference between a coach and a mentor.

So, as we all heard, mentors, I mean, just BLUF, you know, mentors provide the guidance, the advice, you know, oftentimes are someone, in a senior position with experience, expertise in the field that you're either in or looking to get into. And the different... With that, and a coach, a coach, may not necessarily have to have that experience or expertise in the same field that, that you are in.

...or holding. So, what, what a session, mentor, session can include is a lot of advice, and just, you know, kind of directive, like, "This is what I would do, this is what I've done," prescribed, you know, to the mentee.

And what a coach would do in a session oftentimes is, you know, provide no advice, or, or any, any of that, may just ask a lot of questions, you know, leading questions, questions to where it's going to make you think. You know, questions where, you know, they, they will have no experience in your field, but ask you a question and make you think. And oftentimes, you can walk away with a solution, that you come up with yourself. So, that's the big difference between a mentor and a coach.

**Jim Buchman:** Thank you for that. And hopefully, those of you that were kind of curious, that helps solidify the difference. It is very... It's the most commonly confused. And even before I became a coach, I confused it myself. So, I appreciate you offering that perspective, and hopefully, I clarified it for any of you out there.

Here's another question, and I'm going to direct it to you, Command Master Chief Olds, because I recalling some of your comments that stuck out with me, you had made the, the distinction between an assigned mentor and somebody that's non-directed. And I found that was a really important point to bring up. So, this particular question asks: How do you go about choosing a

great mentor, and how do you trust that he or she will give you the best advice for your professional development?

**Command Master Chief Neal Olds:** Well, thank you for the question. I think, you know, when we talk about the assigned mentor, and you know, I've been keeping track of all the questions that are coming up, and, it is, I really think a lot of times the assigned mentor is something that's in the start, of that relationship. Normally, when you get to an organization, someone who can kind of help you, again, that, that learn the ropes, you know, the "sea dad," the "sea mom" type of thing.

As far as like, I think sometimes those can be very beneficial, but I also think that it's all... It's very much something to get your feet wet into the whole mentorship process, and you know, feel out kind of what you're okay with, how you think the relationship should go, because I personally don't think there's a right or wrong way. I think the mentee really kind of drives the bus on what they, what they would like with regard to the mentorship relationship, whether they are looking for, you know, hard and fast advice, or looking for just like validation of things that they've already kind of thought through and looking for opinions.

I think a lot of times, when you're looking for that mentor, it is, it is 100% a relationship thing. Sometimes it's going to hit hard, and, and you're going to be like, "All right, this is the one I like. I'm going to be coming back to this person a lot. I'm going to be, you know... I want this to be a more formal kind of thing." Sometimes it's just 100%, you know, it can be just a... Frankly, a transactional.

So, I, I, I always tell people, look for that relationship. Like, "Hey, is this someone that you can, can picture having long conversations with?" And maybe not even long conversations, but just, "Hey, am I, am I... Do I feel like I am getting value-added out of our conversation?" I think that's the biggest thing, to, for a sustained good mentee-mentorship relationship.

**Jim Buchman:** Okay, thank you for, for taking that one on and offering those additional insights. I think that was really helpful. I want to offer another question, and we'll start off with you, Ms. Moore, but if any of the other panel members want to add in any of their perspectives, feel free to just jump right in to do so. But I offer this to you because it pertains to issues with supervisors, and I think you, as a Senior Executive member service member, might be able to give us some interesting perspectives here.

So, the question is: How do I request a mentor, especially if a supervisor does not see mentors in a positive light, or if a supervisor does not believe in your growth?

**Crystal Moore:** All right, thank you for that question. I'll start out for the Department of the Air Force, if any of you on the line are part of the Department of the Air Force, we actually have a system called MyVector that you can go out to for mentoring matches. So, you can go out and

search for people who are registered who want to be mentors, and then you, as a mentee, can go and do a search based on criteria that you're looking for in a mentor to be matched with a mentor. And then, you have the ability to reach out to that individual through that system, as well as create, mentoring goals and things like that.

For the other agencies out there, if you don't already know, I would check first to see if your agency has something similar that allows you the opportunity to come and try to be matched with a mentor. If that's not the case, then start to observe people that you think might be good mentors. Maybe it's in a meeting, that they display things that are interesting to you that would make a good mentor. Ask other folks in your organization if they have ideas.

I don't think that you have to feel like a supervisor needs to be your mentor. And maybe, in some cases, it's best not to have your mentor be your supervisor. And that relationship between you and the mentor is yours alone. So, if your supervisor isn't supportive of it, that's something that you can set up on your own, outside of your supervisory chain. And maybe, in some cases, you'll feel more comfortable as well going out to the, outside the supervisory chain.

And if you have, private organizations within your functional area... For finance, we have... I know they changed the name now, so I'm going to get it wrong, but it used to be, the... I'm getting it wrong now. But, it, you know, you have private organizations... Be part of those organizations where you can meet people in your own community, that might be mentors for you as well, or maybe out in your, in your community outside of your job, such as your church, and things like that. There's lots of ways to find mentors, that doesn't need to be in a specific system like we do have in the Air Force.

**Jim Buchman:** Thank you, ma'am, for that perspective. That was helpful. I don't know if anybody else... Unless anybody else has another insight they want to offer from the panel, I'll just go to the next question. And, and hearing none, let me ask that question. In fact, I'm going to offer this to the entire panel. So, if any of you have insights, please chime in. This one, for everybody, is... One of the hardest parts of the mentoring process is finding that particular mentor or mentee, that a combination that fits. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. So, this person that asked the question is interested in hearing what initially drew each of you panel members to the particular mentor that may have had the greatest impact on your career or life.

**Deborah White-Johnson:** I would like to share, if that's okay.

**Jim Buchman:** Sure, Ms. White-Johnson, go ahead.

**Deborah White-Johnson:** Yes. It goes back to what Ms. Moore said about observing, you know, I really observed the, my mentors, and I sought them out, because I was impressed with what I saw, because I liked what I heard. I've also had mentors that I've gone to be that opposite

person that Mr. Mayo had mentioned, right? Be that person that is unlike you, because I need that other point of view.

So, I, I would really recommend keeping your, you know, ears and eyes open, and if you see someone that you feel... And they don't have to be a Senior Executive, they don't have to be directors, they can be, you know, even, even peers that you talk to that maybe they just have, you know, that, that additional experience that you want to glean from, or they carry themselves in a certain way, right? Of professionalism that maybe you would like to learn or help to emulate. And so, be on the lookout for people that you feel that you might click with, or that you may really, really benefit from the insight. And I would recommend then reaching out to them to see if they have time, you know, to support you.

**Command Master Chief Neal Olds:** I, I'd like to add on to that as well.

**Jim Buchman:** Sure.

**Command Master Chief Neal Olds:** So, one of the absolute best mentoring relationships that I ever had was it was not something that I initiated. It was something that I had going to what Mr. Mayo talked about, is like people looking and seeing things in you that you don't necessarily see in yourself. And I literally thought that this this individual was not a fan, and just out of the blue, like, sat me down one time, you know, just, actually, more on a passageway, made a comment, and it kind of hit, because I was just, I was in a, I was in a mode that, you know, I was in a mood that time, and it, it sank with me, you know. It, it synced up, and I was like, "Okay, well, maybe I need to, maybe I need to talk to this individual more." And, and, I mean, it absolutely turned out being, you know, a person I talked to for a good 15 years, as I progressed, through all my different assignments. And you know, always, someone... For him, it was absolutely one of those things that I would get the no... Like, there will be no pulled punches, which was what I needed at that time in my life, of like, "All right, I, you know, I could have a bunch of people who were kind of giving me the, the, the, the good stuff, and you know, still give me good advice, but, you know, he was going to give me, like, all right, hey, the, the, the what for" if I was not necessarily making the best choices, or, or thinking through a problem correctly.

To me, the moral of that story is, is, you know, don't ever burn a bridge. Like, you never know where you are going to build a relationship that is just going to be, you know, this phenomenal thing that's going to assist you as you move forward in your life. So that's just the thing, is you know, absolutely observe, but at the same time, like, you'll never know when it's going to come from, and always be willing to take a chance to, to develop that relationship.

**Jim Buchman:** Thank you.

**Command Master Chief Neal Olds:** Thank you.

**Jim Buchman:** No, thank you for that perspective. You just offered another tagline if we were building it out: "Never, never burn a bridge." And that's so true because you never, ever know when that bridge might become the most valuable thing to you, and it might have come from that nugget of wisdom you got from somebody, either in a formal mentoring role or an informal. Anybody else have anything to offer on this question before I move to the next one?

Okay, hearing none, Ms. Nelson, I want to, I want to offer this up to you. And the reason why I'm directing this next one to you is because you were very specific in talking about some of the, the characteristics of a, of a good mentor that you found through your experience. You offered a lot of different ones, and this is kind of along a similar path, but the question is: What key qualities or traits should a mentee cultivate to maximize their learning and growth from a mentor? And how can they effectively engage with their mentor to build a productive and mutually beneficial relationship?

**Elisa Ruth Nelson:** Okay. Thank you so much for that question, Mr. Buchman. You know, when it comes to maximizing their learning, meaning the mentee, their learning and growth from a mentor, I, yeah, there's some, some key qualities come to mind, and traits.

First and foremost, that person should be curious and eager to learn. They should maintain a strong desire to learn and continuously seek knowledge and insights from their mentor. Something else that comes to mind is open-mindedness. I mean, being open to new ideas, perspectives, constructive feedback, that's essential to their growth. Another thing that I want to bring up is, every mentee needs to be resilient and, have perseverance. You know, we all have setbacks, and we have challenges, and our mentors can help us through it. But, as a mentee, we've got to have a positive attitude and a willingness to push forward.

Another trait or a characteristic, self-awareness. You got to understand who you are, and what your strengths are, what your weaknesses are, embrace them, and then, you know, seek those, seek in those areas for improvement, by leveraging their mentorship relationship. Another thing that a mentee needs to have is proactiveness, taking the initiative, and being self-driven and seeking guidance, not just sitting back and letting the mentor pour into them. And lastly, I would say responsibility and accountability, taking ownership of your own development, and being accountable for your actions and progress. I hope that helps.

**Jim Buchman:** I'm sure it does. And I really love how you summed up when you emphasized accountability, because we all have a need to be accountable to ourselves. It... Nothing's given to us. We, even if we're in a great mentoring relationship, it's not up to the mentor to do all the heavy lifting. It's up to us, as a mentee, to take charge of our reality and do whatever it is we're trying to do with that. And that means being accountable, first and foremost, to yourself. So, I, I appreciate that aspect of what you just offered.



Mr. Mayo, I'm going to give you the next question, and the reason why I'm going to direct this one to you is because you were very clear, in your powerful story, about how you benefited from mentoring early on in your career and how you still are benefiting today as a member of the Senior Executive Service. So, this question asks: Often, we think of younger people just starting a career as needing mentors, but often, individuals who are mid-career, or anywhere in their career, would benefit from having a mentor. It seems mentorship is essential if one is interested in continuing to build their career. So, what recommendations might you have for someone who has never had the benefit of a mentor before?

**Kelly Mayo:** Get one? I'm kidding. It's... Never had one? Well, it's... You can... That's a tough question. I mean, it's just because I don't know what the avenue is, right? Where they're looking for? But if you want to... Someone in your life, someone in your, in somewhere in the workplace, or in your life, you'll find that they're endearing to you. You'll find, you'll see the aspects that you're looking for. Maybe it's compassion, maybe it's understanding, all those things. And also it may be someone who's... Some tough... We had this earlier, about tough love: Somebody that will tell you the truth, and, and it won't hurt, but you, but the only... That person that's looking for that is going to have to deal with what they get. And, and in so doing, it's, you know, it's... It can be a crapshoot. And there's... There... Put it this way, ladies and gentlemen, there's no perfect thing, right? There's no perfect, and we can't get perfect.

But I think it, if a young person's looking for something like that, and, you know, I see it... Candidly, my grandson is a, is a sophomore in high school, and he is being mentored by a teacher. He didn't ask for her, but he was asking about things, and she now is talking to him. So, if it's a young person, that young, or even younger, I mean, a little bit older, you just have to know what you're, what you're about. And when you're picking someone, do not... Don't, don't select someone that is going to tell you what you want to hear. And I was young... We were all young once. And remember, we wanted to hear what we wanted to hear. You, you're, you're going to have to take some, you know, significant inventory of who you are, as best you can, as a young person, and then mold that to the person that you want to be mentoring you, and, and see. But it's, but it's... It could be fraught with peril, but that's okay, because peril in life is good, as long as you, as long as you master it.

So, kind of a long-winded discussion. That's, that's a tough question, you know? That's a tough question, but I think that's the best I can do.

**Jim Buchman:** Yeah, it is tough, sir. And it really depends a lot on individual circumstances and pre-, and preferences, but I do appreciate the context, and I think that was quite helpful. I'm going to offer this question to anybody on the panel. I really like this question, and this may not be an easy one either, and I bet every one of you, as a mentor, may have experienced this before in your, in your journeys too. So, the question is this: What strategies might you

recommend for a mentor that has a mentee that approaches a relationship as kind of fill-in-the-square, more obligatory in nature? For example, if they're in a specific, professional development program that requires them to be a mentor and they only have one because they're told they have to have one. How do you break through to those tough ones that just don't seem to be bought into the value of, of being mentored? And that's to anybody who wants to chime in.

**Elisa Ruth Nelson:** I can start.

**Jim Buchman:** Sure, sure. Go ahead.

**Elisa Ruth Nelson:** All right. I would say you need to build rapport and trust, get to know them. Take time to understand their, their interests, their goals, and concerns, if they're willing to communicate that with you. Establish trust, create that safe and supportive environment, make it relevant. You know, sometimes when you're trying to reach someone, you need to meet them where they're at. You hear that a lot. You hear that quote a lot. But, find ways to, you know, relate to their interests, you know, their career aspirations... And look, if they don't have any, there is something there. Sometimes we just have to dig a little bit to find out what that is. And also, consider using practical applications, provide real-world examples that they can relate to, and practical applications of skills and knowledge, to discuss with them. So, those are a couple of things that I would, I would, I would bring to the table: Build rapport and trust, make it relevant, maybe clarify expectations and goals, and, have, you know, engagement, with them that's active and, and interesting.

**Jim Buchman:** Thank you, Ms. Nelson. Anybody else want to add your, your thoughts on this question?

**Crystal Moore:** I'll add... This is Crystal Moore.

**Jim Buchman:** Sure, Ms. Moore. Go ahead.

**Crystal Moore:** So I would just add two things. Number one, definitely, as Ms. Nelson mentioned, get to know the individual and listen to what it is that might be of interest to them. So, one of the first times that I did a career counseling with an individual, I thought I knew that they, what they wanted to talk about, and so I went into that discussion talking about all the things they should do in their career, and what we looked for in the Air Force. And at the end of my spiel, they said, "Thank you for that. I have one question for you." And it had nothing to do with what, you know, what I just spoke about for 10 minutes. And so, I learned a really good lesson in that first career counseling that I really need to bring out and talk to the individual about what might interest them and what they're looking for.

And then, the second piece, and this could apply to anybody, and I think we have some of the questions in here about, you know, "How do you go about setting up what... How this relationship is going to go?" is talking to the individual about what the expectations are for the relationship that you're going to have. And even if the individual is in a program where they're directed to have a mentor, it's still really good to have a conversation about what is the internal soul-searching that they would like to do, and what do they hope to get out of the relationship, even if it's something that's been directed to them, for a program that they're in.

**Jim Buchman:** Thank you. Thank you for that. Did we have somebody else that was going to offer a perspective? Mr. Mayo?

**Kelly Mayo:** I've had a lot of these, and I've got a formula for people who had to come out because they have... And all I say is, "Hey, tell me about yourself. Tell me about yourself." And I engage, and I don't say anything. "Tell me what you're about, you know? Tell me." And, and, and I keep that up, you know? I don't say anything. And, and that... They, they come around, because it's like... And I've had several meetings with them, and they finally realized... Here's what it is, in my opinion, my opinion: If you show that you care about these people, they will open up. If you really sincerely listen to what they're saying, and you can discuss those things with them, and you can make a huge difference, but it takes a while. You have to be patient. But eventually, they come and say, "He trusts me," or "She trusts me." You now then will get the real person talking to you.

Of course, I was a, I'm a federal agent, doing it a long time, and had a lot of this stuff, and bad people, but nonetheless, they trusted me too, unfortunately. But it, it works if you just listen to them. And it might take three sessions, and pretty soon they realize, "Hey, this person really thinks I'm about something. I'm going to, I'm going to kind of take advantage of this."

So, anyway, thank you for that. That's a good question.

**Jim Buchman:** Well, thank you, for that response. And I'm going to go... We're going to transition to what will end up being the last question we talk about here verbally in the session. All the questions that you've been putting in the chat, folks, we're going to address, and I'll get to that, how we're going to do that in a minute or so. But this will be the last one we talk about. I think this is a perfect transition to get to how we're going to wrap up our session today, around the, "Okay, now, so what?"

So, here's part of this, "so what?" So, can you... And this is open to any panel member that wants to offer... Can you give tips to people who want to be mentors? And what should they do to get mentees and be good mentors?

**Command Master Chief Neal Olds:** I mean, I'll, I'll throw a couple of things out there is: One, be available. And let people, you know, know that you are available, not afraid to have discussions.

I think, you know, everybody's talked about that, as the, the genuineness of, of, of what you do. I think Mr. Mayo hit it on the head, because I think a lot of mentee and mentor relationships literally just start with a kind of a conversation, like, "Hey, how are you? How's things? You know, tell me, tell me a little bit about yourself." And then that just starts that building rapport.

So, I think to me, that's what I, you know, when I talk about people mentoring, is, it's got to be personal. It can't be mechanic, it can't be robotic, as far as like getting mentees. I will say that I think once you do those things, as, once, you know, people start seeing that you are very available and a very genuine person, that stuff just kind of happens. Before you know it, you've just got... Like, like you've got people where, "All right, now I, now I need to go back to class to learn some time management skills for the mentees that I want to talk to."

So, I think those are the two big things, is that be available, and, and be genuine.

**Jim Buchman:** Well, thank you for that. Anybody else have anything to add?

**Deborah White-Johnson:** I would like to add something.

**Jim Buchman:** Sure. Go ahead, Ms. White-Johnson.

**Deborah White-Johnson:** Fortunately, within my agency, we do have that matching opportunity, where we have a tool that, if we would like to be a mentor, we can sign up to be so, and we put our profile out there, and then, and, and then people can review the profile, and you get matched up. And so, that is a benefit for the agencies or services that have that. Another thing is, people talk, you know? I've had quite a few folks come my way that say that their coworker, or their friend, or, you know, they ran across someone that I mentored, and it could have just been one of those quick hit, you know, short-term mentoring sessions, that we solved some particular issues, or did something very specific, and they'll say, "Such and such said that you helped them. Can you help me, too?" And so, those are the couple of ways I'd like to add to what has already been said.

**Jim Buchman:** Thank you for that. Colonel Yang, were you going to add something, too?

**Andrew Yang:** Yes, I was going to offer, you know, one of the things as, you know, this is a practice, you know, even as a coach, you know, very important as a coach, but, you know, I think it applies just as much to a mentor as well, you know, is active listening, you know, where the practice of, of... I mean, of course, we, we're all going to listen, but really concentrating on and focusing on active listening, where, you know, you're, you're not only listening to what they're saying, but their, their emotions, their cues, their nonverbal cues, all these things, you know. It, it continues building on that relationship between, a potential mentor and, and a mentee, you know, and asking those clarifying questions showing that you're concerned, you care, you know? And, and, you know, kind of, kind of giving them your whole focus and attention. You

know, because, eventually, I mean, this, this builds that relationship to where, you know, two, three, four, five sessions later, or even sometime later, you know what I mean? It's like... I mean, I think it's, it's rare that you're like, "Hey, you are my mentor. I am your mentee." It's really just often, you know, just developed, or just becomes that type of relationship, you know, or... So, I think that the, the use and practice of active listening...

**Jim Buchman:** So true and so relevant. And the notion about listening, importance has kind of been woven throughout the different comments that we've had today from the panel.

So, we've, we've come to near the end of our session here, and I really want to kind of reemphasize some of the keys, some of the key points that we, that have come across, hopefully, that, to you. First of all, I think we all owe a great debt of gratitude to the panel members that offered their perspectives today. Just rich in storytelling and explaining how it's impacted them both as a mentee and a mentor, and giving us advice on how we could go about our pursuits as either a mentee or a mentor.

So, a super debt of gratitude: Thanks to Ms. Crystal Moore, Mr. Kelly Mayo, Ms. Deborah White-Johnson, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Yang, Ms. Elisa Ruth Nelson, and Command Master Chief Neal Olds. The wealth of information you shared really... This a success, I believe. And I'm sure... Although we can't open our microphones, I'm sure everybody that participated in this got something out of it of value. So, thanks to the six of you for, for being willing to spend time with us today and make this a success. So, thank you.

For everybody else, I offer these perspectives. You know, this has been a great hour and a half that we've talked about it. We've, we've hit a lot around the idea of mentoring and celebration of DoD's National Mentoring Month.

**Jim Buchman:** But now we get to the "so what" part. And so, what is it that we all are going to commit to now, moving forward? One of my personal goals for this session was the hopes that each of you, in some way, shape, or form, would feel inspired, empowered, and maybe a call to action, in some way, shape, or form.

Might you want to pursue being a mentor, if you're not already? Might you want to pursue getting a mentor and being a mentee, to help your own professional and personal development? Might you be in a position to help us advocate for the building of a culture of mentoring across the department? Do you have a way to help advance mentoring as a force enabler, as we develop leaders and professionals from all over across the department? How do we integrate mentoring into existing professional development programs that may not have a mentoring component? These are just a few things that come to my mind as we conclude. And it's incumbent upon all of us to make sure that we identify how we can play a role in this.

You heard Mr. Mayo say, "This is one of the most important things you'll do in your career," and that resonated with me. I hope it did with you. That's almost a call to action, isn't it, in a way that we can say that, "Hey, this is really important," how we pay it forward to others around us, in, in a, in a, in a department that is really entrusted with a very important mission, the defense of our nation. And we, we all have... We all have a, a, a stake in that, and we have a part in it. And a large part of that is maybe around the, the topic of mentoring.

So, how do you get involved? Well, there's a couple of things that I want to leave with you as you go along. First of all, I was going to say Anita's going to post some references in the chat, and you've heard us talk, for the past hour and a half, about Anita. "Who's Anita?" you might be wondering. Well, Anita Tsuhako is our DoD Mentoring Program Manager. She's on my team, and she does a fabulous job, as my whole team does, but Anita's really put a lot of time and effort and sweat equity into making this happen, this whole month celebration, in particular this past hour and a half we spent together. So, thank you, Anita. I'm not going to ask you to come on camera, but thank you for doing what you've done and making this so successful.

So, for everybody, Anita is going to be posting, if she hasn't done so already, some resource references in the chat. And one of the things she's going to do is, she's going to post a web link that's going to help you if you want to figure out, "How do I get involved in mentoring?" Maybe your organization already has an established mentoring program, but there are many out there across DoD that do not. And so, to make sure everybody has an opportunity to, to find ways to get involved, she's going to post that web link, and you can go there for more information. So, that's one thing.

We're really excited, we're on the cusp, almost there, of having a formal mentoring portal, if you will, or a tool that can help connect mentors to mentees. We're calling it "DoD Mentor Connect." We think it's a game-changing platform that's going to help anybody in the department find a mentor or be a mentor. And it's going to be coming soon. I can't tell you exactly when, but we're in the final stages, and we've gone through... Anita's gone through a whole series of tests. I think we've got it just about ready to launch. And when it does, you'll hear more information because we'll be happy to announce that. But be on the lookout for that information, because that's going to be pretty exciting, and we think, in many cases, it's transformative.

If you have any questions about today's program or you want to know more information about mentoring, Anita is also going to post an email, a group email for our mentoring program, in the chat. Feel free to connect there with us and ask any questions. If you want to get involved, if you want to know more information, if you want to volunteer, in some way, shape, or form, that's a great place to go to connect with Anita, connect with us, on how you can become more involved.

And then, we also have our website, the DoD Mentoring website, which Anita's going to post in the link, if it's not there already. And there's a lot more that you can learn there about mentoring in general. So, again, lots of ways you can get involved, lots of resources, answers to many of the questions that we didn't elaborate on are going to be posted on those resources you'll find at the web, web link in the chat. Not sure exactly... We'll try to be as expeditious as possible when they're going to be posted, but very short order.

And I can't thank all of you enough for taking the time to spend with us. Again, I hope you found some inspiration and motivation somewhere, in, in some of the comments that we've talked about. We really, really need all of us to find a way to, to pay it forward and contribute in whatever way we can. Fully recognize our jobs are very busy, but I think we, we have to find time for this. It's so important. It's a whole month. That's why we've made it National Mentoring Month. I appreciate your time. Thank you for that. And, if we can do anything to help you on your journey, you know how to get ahold of us. So, thanks to all of you. I appreciate your time, and this concludes the session for today. So, good luck, everybody.