

Making DoD an Employer of Choice

René Thomas-Rizzo



Now, more than ever, the Department of Defense (DoD) needs to attract the nation's top talent to be part of the uniformed and civilian DoD team. The United States faces new and unpredictable global threats to its security. As emphasized by Secretary of Defense James Mattis in a Jan. 20, 2017, memo when he came on-board, we will ensure that our military is ready to fight today and in the future; and we are devoted to gaining full value from every taxpayer dollar spent on defense. We absolutely need the very best people to join the uniformed warfighter ranks. We also need the nation's top talent for critical civilian support missions—such as acquisition. A highly capable acquisition workforce, comprised of the nation's top talent, is critical to ensuring that our military is equipped and ready to fight and that DoD gets full value for every taxpayer dollar spent.

Today's acquisition workforce professionals are more capable than ever before. Workforce certification credentials and education levels are at an all-time high. Recent analysis shows that DoD is effectively controlling costs on acquisition programs better than at any time in the last 35 years—the highly capable acquisition workforce contributes to that success.

Thomas-Rizzo is the director of Human Capital Initiatives in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics.

However, our work is not done. Thirty-five percent (about 40,000) civilian members of the acquisition workforce are eligible to retire or will be within the next 10 years. While DoD has strategically rebuilt the early and midcareer workforce, we must do more to strengthen the new-hire pipeline—attracting the nation’s top talent to join the civilian acquisition team. DoD offers a wide variety of career opportunities in support of acquisition—including program management, engineering, contracting, logistics, financial management, science and technology, information technology and more. While the nation is very familiar with the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, observers commonly associate the Services with a uniform. Unfortunately, they are not nearly as familiar with the great DoD

can contribute to our national defense—for instance, in acquisition—is an opportunity we must not miss.

While we must do a better job in promoting public awareness of the abundant available civilian opportunities, we must combine that success with attracting and then competing with industry in hiring that talent. Today, industry proactively exercises its advantage in hiring top talent. Industry has aggressive marketing and outreach programs, robust college student internship programs, the ability at college recruitment events to make on-the-spot job offers with competitive salaries and modern workplace environments. DoD is working hard to increase its hiring, compen-



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civilian career opportunities in positions that support our men and women in uniform. Therefore, our goal is to make DoD an employer of choice. We are launching a branding campaign to communicate and educate the public about DoD civilian career opportunities in acquisition.

Our Challenge and Opportunities

We absolutely must answer the following three questions:

- How can we familiarize the nation’s top talent with the great civilian opportunities across DoD and how can we compete more effectively for that talent?
- How do we communicate the exciting opportunities to the next generation of acquisition professionals?
- How do we attract seasoned professionals with key skills from the private sector who are looking for ways to serve their nation; and, how do we attract college students to DoD?

During my recent visits to colleges and universities, from the East to the West Coast, I found a clear, significant and broad lack of understanding of the DoD organization and of awareness about the multitude of DoD civilian career opportunities. Again, when most people think of DoD, usually through films, advertising and news media, they think of warfighters on the front line defending our freedom every day. However, our civilian workforce designs, procures, tests, delivers and sustains the most technologically advanced warfare systems in the world to ensure the warfighters win and come home safely. Helping the nation understand the great ways civilians

sation and benefits flexibilities to become more competitive. It is most important that we communicate the incredible opportunities we offer for prospective employees to serve our nation and make a difference. We can and must compete successfully for top talent.

The DoD acquisition mission is the largest buying enterprise in the world. The acquisition workforce will invest more than \$1 trillion in taxpayer dollars to equip and sustain the warfighter over future years, with employment opportunities in 6,000 locations and 163 countries. Civilian members of the Defense Acquisition Workforce will have access to excellent educational and professional development, tuition reimbursement, student loan repayment, worldwide travel, superb health care and generous amounts of leave and retirement options. Simply stated, DoD has great benefits and a great acquisition mission—we have the tools and programs in place to compete for top-notch talent. We must seize the opportunity—and we can do so, by strategically leveraging industry best practices, such as improved branding of DoD acquisition civilian opportunities, implementing student internships and new hiring authorities, and continuously improving our approach to taking care of today’s acquisition workforce.

Of course, this must all follow from a thoughtful human capital strategy. This past year, DoD released the 2016-2021 Acquisition Workforce Strategic Plan. This plan was developed through a collaborative effort across the DoD that included the military departments and our Defense agency partners. Leadership across the board is very enthusiastic about the plan as

it provides strategic goals that all components and functional leaders can use to strengthen and shape their workforce.

The plan establishes four strategic goals:

- Make DoD an employer of choice.
- Shape the acquisition workforce to achieve current and future acquisition requirements.
- Improve the quality and professionalism of the acquisition workforce.
- Continuously improve workforce policies, programs and processes.

Goal No. 1 is the cornerstone of the strategic plan. Attracting the best possible talent, including those experienced in the private sector with critical in-demand skills, is the foundation for shaping the acquisition workforce to meet current and future requirements (Goals 2 and 3). Branding, getting the word out on the rewarding acquisition civilian career opportunities, and leveraging other industry best practices are keys to achieving this goal.

Branding and “Getting the Word Out”

The first and most important step in making DoD an employer of choice is to “brand” the acquisition workforce’s profession and mission. Effective branding helps the audience understand who we are, what we do and what they can expect from the organization. It’s a promise of sorts that helps establish a reputation and differentiate us from other brands in a crowded marketplace.

Our brand will convey that a career in DoD acquisition means working in support of our men and women in uniform, gaining value from every taxpayer dollar, designing and developing dominant warfighting capability, and ultimately contributing to our national security. By associating a career in acquisition with excellence, professionalism and service to the nation, we believe we’ll draw top talent to apply for student internships and jobs in the Defense Acquisition Workforce.

Our branding plan is designed to target three primary audiences: college students and recent college graduates looking for a rewarding career, civilians experienced in private sector careers and interested in public service, and current DoD employees.

College Students: Industry is offering internships as early as the sophomore year. DoD branding needs to reach college students who are interested in internships. Also, Congress has provided new hiring authority for student internships through the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). In combination with using this authority and expanding college student internships, DoD can better compete with industry for talent—attracting and hiring students who will gain experience and be better prepared upon graduation to join DoD’s acquisition team.

Combined with a robust internship program, a highly effective hiring pipeline must include broad awareness of DoD acquisition job opportunities by other talented college students who will soon or already have become graduates. We can do so by adopting an aggressive regime of campus visits that tell the DoD acquisition workforce story in a compelling way. We must also continue efforts to improve use of direct hire authorities and reduce the time-to-hire so we can effectively compete with others for the top talent. Our next steps include leveraging social media across all audience demographics; continued implementation of the 2018 college campaign and engagement plan; improving our measures of outcomes and adjusting messaging as appropriate. We also are researching ways to establish a College Acquisition Internship Program to leverage the FY 2017 NDAA college student direct hire authority, provide centralized support to components using and then hiring interns, and support a significant expansion of acquisition college student internships across DoD components.

Private Sector-Experienced Professionals: Our nation’s defense needs industry professionals’ experience! We seek professionals who wish to answer the call to public service and support the critical mission to equip and sustain the warfighter by contributing their expertise and experience. Doing this requires a strategic communications plan to leverage recent NDAA hiring and exchange authorities. We also need to leverage the opportunities afforded by our presence at selected job fairs and recruiting events. We also must establish a robust social media presence that gets the DoD acquisition story to this audience.

DoD Employees and Veterans: Effective branding of DoD careers will boost awareness within DoD of the opportunity to contribute through the acquisition mission. In addition, the branding will motivate the current acquisition workforce, as it brings together the big picture story on the great acquisition mission and the workforce’s contribution to the warfighter and taxpayer.

Continuous Improvement—Taking Care of Today’s Workforce

It is clear that DoD must become more competitive with the private sector in attracting, hiring and retaining the nation’s best talent. But, it is also important that we take care of today’s workforce professionals—which in turn will improve recruitment and retention, not to mention workforce esprit de corps and satisfaction. As described above, we will improve both our branding and outreach. We will also work hard to continuously improve our development strategies for today’s acquisition workforce. We will seek ways to offer competitive compensation and incentives and reward outstanding talent by promoting initiatives such as tuition reimbursement and student loan repayments. We can help improve work-life balance by developing, implementing and promoting policies and programs that improve the workforce quality of life. Finally, we will strive to ensure that our workforce has the skillsets to achieve technical excellence through training, proper job

placement, advanced educational opportunities and thoughtful succession planning.

We will work tirelessly to sustain our recent workforce investments and resulting quality and capability improvements. We will improve analytics for acquisition workforce planning and decision making. We are working to continuously improve management and the investment in acquisition professionals using the Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund. We also will continue efforts to expand and provide the DoD civilian acquisition professionals with a premier, contribution-

based, personnel management system through the DoD Civilian Acquisition Workforce Personnel Demonstration Project.

Our nation expects the acquisition workforce to successfully equip our military to fight and win today and in the future and to gain full value from every taxpayer dollar spent on defense. To ensure that success, we can and must strengthen our efforts to attract and hire the nation's top talent to be part of the civilian DoD acquisition team. We can do this by making DoD an employer of choice. 

The author can be contacted through rene.k.thomas-rizzo.civ@mail.mil.

Defense AT&L Honored Again for Excellence

Defense AT&L magazine in June 2017 received an APEX Award for Publication Excellence, its fourth consecutive annual APEX award.

Defense Acquisition University (DAU) President James Woolsey congratulated the magazine staff for its consistent commitment to making *Defense AT&L* an award-winning magazine and a powerful communications tool for getting information directly to the Defense Acquisition Workforce.

"*Defense AT&L* magazine is instrumental disseminating important information throughout the Defense Acquisition Workforce," Woolsey said. "In the coming months, the magazine will also be an invaluable tool for new Pentagon leaders as they take advantage of the magazine's reach to communicate directly with the workforce. I am proud to let them know that this award-winning, high-quality magazine is one of the many communication tools we can offer them."

APEX 2017—the 29th APEX Competition Annual Awards for Communications Professionals—received nearly 1,400 entries, for work published in 2016 or early 2017. There were 304 entries in the category of magazines, journals and tabloids. Entries in this category, among others, included the *AARP Magazine*; the American Council of Engineering Companies; Amtrak; the Medical Association of Alabama; the University of Alabama; the American Bankers Association; Disneyland Resort, Anaheim, California; Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida; Drexel University in Philadelphia; and the *Journal of Financial Planning*.

The APEX awards are an annual event sponsored by the editors of *Writer's Web Watch*, published by Communications Concepts Inc., a consulting group in Springfield, Virginia. The judges included editors, publishers and consultants.

Defense AT&L was recognized for its September-October 2016 special issue, which featured a wide range of expert authors and was devoted to the various programs and institutes developed and promoted by the Department of



Defense to promote Advanced Manufacturing capabilities—including additive manufacturing, or "3D printing."

The award names Benjamin Tyree, *Defense AT&L* magazine managing editor; Tia Gray, *Defense AT&L* magazine art director; and the editing and production team of the DAU Visual Arts and Press. Contributors to the magazine's regular work include Debbie Gonzalez, Frances Battle, Nina Austin, Noelia Gamboa, Michael Shoemaker and Collie J. Johnson. DAU Visual Arts and Press is led by Randy Weekes.

The outstanding articles contributed by DAU faculty, military Service experts, industry partners and the Office of the Secretary of Defense make *Defense AT&L* magazine the "go to" journal for the Defense Acquisition Workforce. The magazine's body of work includes 27 columns by Frank Kendall, former Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, written from 2012 through early 2017. For his outstanding contributions to improving acquisition outcomes and enhancing workforce communications, Kendall was inducted into DAU's Hall of Fame on June 15. (See article on Page 42).

From the editors and staff of *Defense AT&L* magazine.