



TEAM AWARD

Army Contracting Command – Redstone Arsenal (ACC-RSA) Executive Director Joseph A. Giunta Jr., front row center, poses with his team at the Army Acquisition Executive’s Excellence in Leadership Award ceremony at the Pentagon on Jan. 9, 2024. The ACC-RSA team, led by Giunta, took home two categories during the annual acquisition awards event. (Photo by Henry Villarama, Office of the Chief of Public Affairs)



RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT DAYS

| A look at one Army acquisition leader’s efforts to recruit and retain an engaged workforce.

by Brianna Clay

What’s the key to building an engaged workforce?

According to the executive director of the Army’s largest contracting command, it starts with fostering a workplace environment, whether physical or virtual, that creates “more green light than red light days.”

Joseph A. Giunta Jr., executive director and senior contracting official at Army Contracting Command – Redstone Arsenal (ACC-RSA), refers to “red light days” as those mornings when employees dread going into the office. “You want to create an organizational atmosphere

where workers want to go into the office—where they don't drive to work hoping to hit every red light on the way just to delay the start of the workday," he said.

Giunta's job is to lead his command's workforce into the future and ensure mission success—and it's a future that looks very different following the COVID-19 pandemic. ACC-RSA is the largest contracting center, with over 900 contracting professionals. Roughly 100 of them operate remotely, Giunta said, and it's a trend leaders must embrace without being held hostage to a corporate or command climate of convenience.

Army AL&T magazine sat down with Giunta in November to discuss his approach to recruiting and retention in the post-pandemic environment.

AL&T: What nuances in trends are you seeing in the workplace environment and recruitment within the command?

GIUNTA: In my experience, historically, when recruiting someone from an outside location, candidates frequently asked for relocation incentives. Prior to COVID, that seemed to be the greatest challenge we faced in the recruiting process once we found the right person for the position. Fast-forward through COVID, and it's no longer about relocation incentives. Now, the question we get asked is, "Can this position be offered as remote?"

Of course, we can hire remotely if we authorize that as part of the hiring action, but we can't do everything remotely in our business. I don't believe remote work or 100% telework will ever replace the need to work closely and face-to-face with our mission partners, but it does offer us flexibility for recruiting and retention purposes. We've been able to move work around from a remote employee if we need to have someone who must engage in a more face-to-face exchange with our mission partners, but that's been an exception. Our remote employees are extremely valuable to us, but they represent a smaller portion of our larger workforce. The contracting workforce is a unique functional career field, and it takes a significant amount of on-the-job training and "hands on" experience to fully develop a contracting professional. To that end-state, we use remote positions to augment our workforce, and frankly, that can be a challenge in the post-COVID employment culture.

AL&T: As a civilian workforce, we're experiencing both inter-agency competition and private industry competition, and the post-pandemic environment has exacerbated those challenges. How has ACC-RSA faced those challenges?

GIUNTA: It might surprise you to know but we don't lose a lot of our contracting professionals to industry. Generally, we pick up more folks from industry than we lose, and there are various reasons for that. I believe government employment offers greater stability than industry, and I think the operational tempo is more consistent. Lastly, we have an awesome mission and supporting the Army and our Soldiers is very satisfying.

On the other hand, we do compete with other governmental organizations, whether it be DOD or other federal, state or local agencies who can offer the same stability with competitive pay. There are two major hubs for Army contracting or contracting professionals in the federal government: [Washington] D.C. and Redstone [Arsenal, Alabama]. It's getting more challenging in Redstone because other federal agencies have either moved here or have expanded and they have significant contracting workforce requirements. We are surrounded by competition: the FBI, NASA, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the Defense Logistics Agency—even my higher headquarters, which is located across the street from my center. It's always good to have your folks go to your higher headquarters and expand their professional opportunities, but when they leave our organization, their departure creates a talent gap. The contracting career field is very volatile, highly competitive and desirable. It takes roughly 10 years to develop a truly capable, fully competent contracting professional, so our competition proactively recruits our best and brightest—what we call journeymen—because they are a highly sought-after asset. So, our challenge is more interagency, I guess you'd say, and I think that will always be the case.

AL&T: How do you mitigate those losses?

GIUNTA: The government uses a variety of pay and evaluation systems, and that's both a blessing and a challenge. A significant portion of the acquisition community is in the Army Acquisition Demonstration Project (AcqDemo) pay and evaluation system. My supervisors—at least in Huntsville—are in AcqDemo, but most of my employees are in DPMAP (DOD Performance Management and Appraisal Program). AcqDemo provides a great amount of flexibility to recruit and compensate high-performing employees. Most of my competition at Redstone utilizes AcqDemo or an equivalent system. That makes it extremely challenging to compete when recruiting critical positions. For example, it's hard to recruit and retain employees who work secure environment contracting, because they are required to operate in a SCIF (sensitive compartmented information facility), so I'm trying to transition part of that workforce into AcqDemo. I would love to put the entire workforce in AcqDemo, but there are funding



WORKFORCE CHECK-IN

ACC-RSA Executive Director Joseph A. Giunta Jr. addresses the workforce during a quarterly town hall at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. The ACC-RSA workforce comprises more than 900 contracting and acquisition professionals. (Photo by Sarah Martinez, ACC-RSA)

challenges associated with the transition process. Using a different pay and evaluation system where it makes sense is one of the ways we try to mitigate attrition and enhance recruitment.

The other is putting programs and policies in place that incentivize the workforce to stay. For example, we have a shadow program. Not every organization allows their employees to shadow with the senior leader, so I use that as a retention and career-enhancement tool. I also have a policy called the “three-year rule,” which

allows any employee to request an internal rotation after three years, no questions asked. The only person who can deny a move is me, and I’ve not denied any. I’ve been here about five years, and we’ve had roughly 50 employees request to rotate. This policy allows an employee to take on new challenges without having to leave the center. Let’s say it’s an employee supporting our aviation programs, and they contract a certain way, normally sole-source contracts. This employee would like to work on the installation side and learn that part of Army contracting. Well, after

three years in their current position, he or she can request a rotation. We always have vacancies, due to natural attrition, so they can move within the organization, grow professionally and enhance their resume.

There are valuable team members who work successfully within their strengths, and there are those who need to be challenged. These are the people who want to learn new skills and seek out new challenges. This offers them that opportunity, so they don’t grow bored and start seeing red lights. I charge my supervisors to

know their employees and to create an environment where every employee wants to come to work every day so they can support the mission, grow personally and professionally all while interacting with their teammates. It is all about creating more green light than red light days.

AL&T: When it comes to opportunities, what do you think appeals to job seekers at different experience levels? How do you attract diverse groups?

GIUNTA: When I assumed this position, we were bringing in about 25 fellows a year. We've made a concentrated effort in the last two years to bring in at least 50, and there are a lot of reasons for that. The competition is taking our talent, so we've got to grow our own. If you grow your own talent in a green-light atmosphere, they begin to embrace your culture. If you like where you work and the people you work for, you tend to stay in that organization. It just makes sense.

We also do a demographic survey every year and I get to see just how diverse we are as an organization. I believe diversity is a strength when it brings different people with different ideas and experiences to the team. We lead the Army Contracting Command in many categories to include the number of women in leadership positions and the number of African Americans employed at all levels within the command, including senior levels of leadership. But we also have areas where we can improve. I'm sending my recruiting teams to schools we haven't visited in the past, such as universities in Oklahoma, which are likely to have a greater number of Native Americans within the student population, or to Puerto Rico to increase our access and exposure to the Hispanic population there.

We've spent a lot of time and effort to share with a more diverse audience our mission and our purpose so they can appreciate the value of contracting command in hopes they will understand that they can make a significant impact as part of our team. Certainly, we worked hard to support our nation during COVID, so we share that story so the younger generations can understand how they can serve our country as a Department of the Army civilian. You cannot watch the national news without hearing a reference to something that's in our portfolio. That shows how important our mission is to our Army and our nation.

I also host branch and division chief meetings monthly with my junior leaders. We talk about whatever is on their minds. I also do the same with all my nonsupervisory workforce quarterly. That is one way a senior leader can be open and accessible

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to his or her workforce, and it's a great way to hear what's going on across the command.

AL&T: Lastly, the line between government employment and military service gets blurry in the public eye. As a civilian workforce, how can we distinguish ourselves in the job market?

GIUNTA: When you go to a college campus as part of a recruiting visit and put up a bunch of signs around your kiosk talking about the Army, there are people who may walk through that space and say, "I'm not going over there. I'm not joining the Army." As a result, they may never meet with my workforce who are there to recruit Department of the Army civilians. It's a tricky wicket. We've got to do a better job at educating the public on the outstanding opportunities that exist in serving as a Department of the Army civilian. Recently, one of my employees came up with a novel idea. Could we do a local commercial and talk about Department of the Army civilians working at ACC-RSA? That may be a bridge too far, but it's a great idea and it's out-of-the-box thinking. There are good ideas out there. Finding ways to tell our story is essential in recruiting the best and brightest talent in support of providing the best products and services to our Army.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

For more information on Army Contracting Command – Redstone Arsenal, go to <https://acc.army.mil/contractingcenters/lacc-rsa>.

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