



ALICIA E. CORREA

COMMAND/ORGANIZATION: Joint Program Executive Office for Armaments and Ammunition, Project Manager Close Combat Systems

TITLE: Project management officer

YEARS OF SERVICE IN WORKFORCE: 17

DAWIA CERTIFICATIONS: Practitioner in engineering and technical management

EDUCATION: M.S. in engineering management; B.S. in industrial engineering, both from New Jersey Institute of Technology

TAKING MEASURES

From quality engineer to project management officer, Alicia Correa attributes her career achievements to the invaluable lessons she learned along the way.

The first lesson, she said, is the importance of a team. “You never have to figure things out on your own,” she said. “There is a huge network of mentors and people who came before you who are knowledgeable and willing to help you achieve your goals, people who possess different skill sets or experiences who can help you accomplish a task and even influence your career. Building those connections is important not only within your career, but also for your personal growth.”

This leads to Correa’s second lesson: the importance of constantly pursuing self-growth. “What you think you want today may not be the same in five years. What measures are you taking to evolve? It is important to always strive to improve and avoid remaining stagnant.”

Correa noted that so many people grow conformant in their roles but never seek to expand beyond what they already know, so “they stay in the same position for 30 years.” Obtaining advanced training and diversifying your knowledge base can add value to your career and to your life, and she recommends “seeking new opportunities in areas that challenge you, such as developmental assignments,” which can help broaden your resume and expand your skill set.

“I know that I have so much more to learn, and I lean on my mentors and the wide range of advanced trainings to continue to define my career objectives,” she said. “By doing so, I can continue to achieve milestones in my overall success.”

As a project management officer, Correa’s main responsibility is to manage the schedule, cost and performance of the 66 mm vehicle-launched smoke grenades and the launched electrode stun device programs within Project Manager Close Combat Systems (PM CCS), Joint Program Executive Office for Armaments and Ammunition (JPEO A&A). The 66 mm vehicle-launched smoke grenades offer obscurant screening to protect Soldiers and vehicle platforms from enemy detection and improve their survivability within multidomain operations.

“The performance of these obscurant grenades could be the determinant on whether someone’s family member makes it back home from completing their mission,” she said. “I have family members serving within the U.S. Army, and other branches of the U.S. military, and I take their safety very personally.”

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Serving within this role, Correa also works with sister services (U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy) as the single manager for conventional ammunition, ensuring collaborations with multiple stakeholders from different organizations.

“Collectively, our mission is to ensure that product is ready for fielding, and that we create and maintain a plan to sustain and refresh these products over their life cycle,” she said. “My role is critical in providing the best capability possible to the men and women who put their lives on the line every day to serve and defend our Nation. We are not all on the battlefield, but we can all do our best to contribute to their success.”

Correa’s Army career began with an engineering role at Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey in 2007. “I was eager to find a promising career in engineering, so when my friend from college mentioned she referred me to her supervisor, it was music to my ears,” Correa said. At the time, she was working at a small company as a quality manager with only 75 employees, but knew she wanted more in the long run.

“I tried my luck and sent my resume to the branch chief and within months I started as a quality engineer in the DEVCOM Armament Center Small Caliber Ammunition Branch,” she said. “This was a great opportunity for me as it provided me so many development opportunities, taught me about leadership and furthering myself through advanced training.”

Correa has taken three courses in leadership development through the University of Pennsylvania Certificate Program, the last being in April 2024 called “Sensemaking and Judgement.”

“This course taught me about critical thinking and developing good cognitive habits to enhance problem-solving and decision-making skills,” she said. “One of the things that I gleaned from this course was learning about metacognition—my mind’s ability to be aware of its own thinking. We often treat problems from our own biases, which can lead to jumping to conclusions. However, learning about how these biases influence our decisions can help us to pause long enough to think and apply sensemaking to reach the best conclusion. This was a great course and I would highly recommend it to anyone seeking increased self-awareness and refining their leadership skills.”

An advocate of JPEO A&A’s mentorship program, Correa believes that advising junior acquisition personnel is vital. “I was super inquisitive when I started as a project officer, asking questions about all products, processes and even people. I believe

that much of the information we know about executing our jobs isn’t captured within documents or work procedures, which is why sharing what we know is so important.”

For example, Correa said recently a new team member was responsible for preparing and managing a Program Management Review (PMR) and had to coordinate with stakeholders from several different agencies. Constant communication was essential to obtain the latest program updates to be reported for this audience.

This was overwhelming, she said, but in “sharing information from previous years and advising him on prioritizing certain functions, he executed the PMR successfully.” Since then, she added, he has enrolled in DAU leadership training courses that she also completed, like “Presenting to Senior Executives,” which she believes will help him be more successful within his role at the program management office.

Outside of work, Correa is an avid sports mom. Her son, Mason, plays travel baseball, soccer, basketball and football, and after work she can usually be found at the field cheering on her son from the sidelines—humbly confessing she’s his “loudest fan.” Correa also volunteers at her church as a teens’ ministry leader responsible for facilitating monthly food drives in Newark, New Jersey. “In both capacities, the one thing in common with my work is that I take personal responsibility to serve and be involved in my community,” she said.

Correa also serves as a volunteer at the annual “Introduce A Girl To Engineering” at Picatinny Arsenal where students engage with different groups and learn about the different products produced or managed by the Picatinny team. She also participates in public forums at schools, including her alma mater, New Jersey Institute of Technology.

“My aim is to encourage young adults in pursuing careers in engineering,” she said. “Growing up, I did not personally know one engineer, let alone a female engineer; therefore, I have made it my personal mission to encourage young girls about the opportunities available for them through STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics]. I’d like to think that one conversation can lead to inspiring them to look in the mirror and see a future in engineering as well.”

—*CHERYL MARINO*