



# NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL-INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Corporate Communications

nga.mil | 571-557-5400 | publicaffairs@nga.mil | FB: NatlGEOINTAgency | @NGA\_GEOINT

**Remarks as Delivered by  
Sue Gordon  
Deputy Director, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency  
for  
2nd Annual African American  
National Security and Intelligence Summit  
June 13, 2015**

---

Thank you, Joanna, for that kind introduction. And thanks to everyone who has worked so hard to put together this summit. These things don't just happen — people MAKE them happen. So let's hear a round of applause for the organizers. Look at all the bright shiny faces here on a glorious Saturday morning! I am so happy to be here with you.

You know you're on to something special when you have so many who choose to commit personal time to its purpose. We have all chosen to serve our turn in the intelligence and national defense communities, and today we are all here to make those communities stronger — and ourselves better — by deciding to develop the highest quality, most engaged and ultimately productive workforce possible.

You see, we know the secret — it is all about mission, but mission only happens with people...you...us.

So, what I thought I'd do today, because it's a weekend and I am less guarded on weekends, is to talk straight to you, as leaders and as individuals serving this nation we love. I am going to spend zero time being careful about what I say. I'm going to give you my very best truth about the moment we face, the responsibilities we have, the opportunities that abound (if we take advantage of them) and the things you can do to "optimize your potential and impact."

I'm going help you think about the different demands on leaders and on individuals — so you can excel as both. And then I'm going to open it up for questions because I'd much rather hear from you than listen to me! Sound good? Let us be up and doing!

What a great moment to be in our business! It is a crazy complex, uncertain, dynamic, dangerous, almost chaotic world. Yesterday's knowledge, systems, processes and solutions just aren't sufficient. Neither are the abilities and skills of the women and men who serve the nation.

THIS moment demands near constant innovation, comfort with ambiguity, new expertise, better problem-solving and faster decision-making. It demands that leaders

create the environment where everyone with talent wants to be and where anyone with ability and effort can succeed. I will tell you that I feel so strongly about this responsibility that I live it every day and I challenge each who are graced with opportunity to do the same.

It demands that each of us be our best, every day. And that's on each of us. Regardless of the goodness of the environment in which we find ourselves. We must "succeed anyway." We cannot allow ourselves to believe that our performance is dictated by others. But, the best part is that we don't have to go it alone.

Find a mentor, inspire a sponsor, build a network. Events such as this one provide a perfect opportunity to begin, or to continue, or to improve along this path.

### *Responsibilities*

Let's talk for a minute about responsibilities — and how those differ depending on the role we're in.

Focus on results. As leaders, we must understand that this only happens through people. People first, mission always.

As individuals, we need to remember that the organization gets to have its say — that we are there for purpose. Mission first, people always.

Fair and equitable treatment, including in project assignments. As leaders, we must set the conditions of inclusiveness, to hire good people and let them be good, and to let people feel the weight early.

As individuals, we have to keep our eye on the ball, to remember that the organization doesn't have personal motivation, and that when given a job, we should go big.

Excellent training for all. As leaders, we have to not just demand results but provide the training that positions our people to succeed.

As individuals, we cannot treat it as a check-box exercise but rather an opportunity to learn something.

Competitive selections. As leaders, we have to open up jobs and open up our minds to what excellence looks like. It's not just experience that determines success.

As individuals, we have to be great at representing our skills so that they can be seen in the context of the job at hand.

And, inspiring creativity and diversity of thought as key to impact. As leaders, we have to judge ourselves by the impact — or consequence — we create through creativity and diversity of thought.

As individuals, we have to have the confidence to bring our best selves to the task at hand.

But if we have responsibilities, we also have great opportunities.

Develop mentors. We are all travelers, none go their way alone. Seek out advisers, people with a different perspective, with more experience, those who will tell you the truth. Throughout my career — I can tell you I've had none, and I can tell you I've had infinite.

First one was my first Branch Chief. Mentors can help you see what you can't see, keep a steady strain, and offer a no-cost ear. How do you get one? Be open. Keep your head up. Ask, yes, but also learn from everyone.

Inspire a sponsor. Sponsors can provide transportation when straight-line progression won't do the trick. Though I can't think of a single sponsor over the course of my career, there is no doubt that people — many people — have taken a chance on me. Michael Morell, Stephanie O'Sullivan.

Hard to GET a sponsor, but perform so that people want to advance you — for practical or aspirational reasons. My best advice is to be open, to be big, to be curious and to be good.

Develop a network. This is a connected world. It's a fast world. It's a world of knowledge and awareness. To be really present in it, to be able to act in it, you need a network. I have a huge one — because I'm old and have worked a long time. But, it's narrower than it should be for its size. And, you don't want to wait 35 years for it to organically grow.

Get out there — and in lots of "theres" — and be as much of an "includer" as you want to be included.

### *Best Advice*

Collectively, we can make a difference. I am invested in your success because we are invested in the nation's success. So, here are a few of my best lessons learned from my journey that might help you along your road of optimizing your potential and impact.

Trust yourself more than you trust the system. Step out. Do the work to be good enough, but then take a chance. And, learn to do this early.

Be open. We love to complain about how the government is stuck. But, look to yourself first, are you stuck in the ways you've always done something? Remember the only thing that matters is whether we are having impact. You **MUST** be willing to change if the moment demands it. Consider the possibility that what you think you know isn't all there is.

Turn obstacles into opportunities. Believe. It's a choice and it's powerful.

Take ownership of your career. The system doesn't really care that much about you — but it does NEED you.

Say yes. Sometimes it's just a line in the sand, but make it real.

The key to happiness is believing you have choice, the key to success is understanding there are consequences and you don't control any of them.

Remember what I said about organizational needs. How many times do you want to take a job, but not have to pay the cost? Understanding this has allowed everything in my career.

And, there is so much other wisdom to guide you on your journey:

- Michael Jordan — I've failed over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed.
- Eleanor Roosevelt — No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.
- Bill Gates — Life is not fair, get used to it.
- Oprah Winfrey — Do the one thing you think you can't do. Fail at it. Try again. Do better the second time. The only people who never tumble are those who never mount the high wire.

Just like these leaders who have advice based on knowledge and wisdom, this summit offers the opportunity to generate positive discourse, ideas, suggestions and recommendations to help you and our communities succeed.

And, take what you learn today, what you decide today and share it with others. This is a terrific opportunity to learn and grow. Use it!

I will leave you with this thought. The NGA motto is "Know the Earth...Show the Way...Understand the World." I think if we squint at it, we can use it to inspire today and what you do beyond.

- Know the Earth — Be good and be present in the moment.
- Show the Way — Bring someone along, be generous in thought and deed, so that we all get there. Be positive, honest and respectful.
- Understand the World — Don't have a myopic view. Pick your head up and be aware that you are in a system that has its own force and vector.

I am so honored to be here with you—to serve with you. What you do, every day, makes a huge difference.

Now, go forth and do good!

**END**