

# STENNIS SPACE CENTER

## Profiles in Leadership



Growing up in Biloxi, Mississippi, Christine Powell was not entirely sure what she wanted to be in the future, but she knew she wanted to work with NASA. She had some interest in music but a deep fascination for space. Powell was a bit of a Trekkie. Star Trek and anything sci-fi-related always held her attention. When Star Wars came out, she stood in a very long line with her brother to see the film. Powell considered becoming an astronomer, but the idea of learning all the stars and planets intimidated her. Still, the movies and footage about Apollo missions, as well as shuttle launches and accomplishments, made her think that NASA was an achievable and worthwhile goal. After two years in community college, Powell transferred to Mississippi State University. The university offered a cooperative education program, which coordinated internships. After Powell and a friend attended a job fair, she found herself interviewing for possible student opportunities with NASA's Stennis Space Center. She subsequently received a co-op invitation with the Stennis Propulsion Test Group. From there, she has built a career that has fulfilled her childhood aspirations of working with NASA.

**What is the most important lesson you have learned during your NASA career?**

For me, the importance of communication, inclusion, and just having a common vision is the most important lesson learned. It is so easy to miscommunicate or have misunderstandings, especially when you cannot see each other. It is very easy to send an email and think you are conveying one message. However, without being able to include the tone, body language, and dynamics that go along with it, the message can be taken entirely differently than you intended. It is also hard, sometimes, to capture technical content in an email or a memo. It is just so important to communicate

clearly. Having a diversified peer group also is key. Including other people with different perspectives and different experiences as part of that communication is very helpful in avoiding misunderstandings. The diversity of the Stennis workforce allows us to view challenges from different perspectives and helps the group establish and maintain the common vision.

**What would you say to young people who might be considering a NASA career?**

A NASA career is within everyone's reach. There are so many different roles and functions within the agency itself and even more with our support contractors. Every single one of those roles is important to our mission. I would encourage anyone seeking a NASA career to determine what your passion is. Know what makes you excited or what piques your interest. You could probably find some path in the future that leverages or allows you to explore that passion in a way that supports NASA. Do not limit yourself. Step outside the box a little bit and look for opportunities you have never considered. Maybe you are good at something you never realized. Maybe there is something that you never thought you might enjoy that actually turns out to be something that you are very passionate about doing.

**How would you define leadership, and what are the most important qualities a leader can have?**

Leadership is not necessarily limited to certain positions. Everyone, no matter what the position, can have leadership qualities and can conduct himself or herself in a way that leads, whether through influence or authority. A leader is someone who tries to help create a vision for



**Christine Powell**  
**Manager**  
**Rocket Propulsion**  
**Test Program**

others. Maybe you are a team member, and there are people around you who just are not clicking and moving in the same direction. Leaders strive to help create or confirm the common vision for the group. Leaders also try to find ways to enable not just themselves but the people around them to be successful. Finally, leaders should take a step back and look at the bigger picture to validate whatever they are doing, whether their team is moving in the right direction.

**What are you most excited about for the agency and Stennis?**

I am definitely looking forward to the Artemis I launching and the continuation of Artemis. Getting to the Moon and on to Mars opens the door. There is so much opportunity out there. Supporting the commercial crew program and the technology development efforts related to autonomous systems is bringing the future into focus. I am excited to be part of NASA, and am so proud of the role we play in enabling this future.