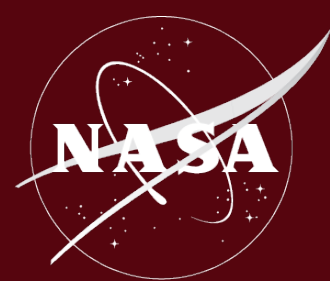


STENNIS SPACE CENTER

Profiles in Leadership



As a young girl, Dinna LeDuff Cottrell, a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, felt her dream job was to become a teacher. As she progressed through middle and high school, Cottrell excelled in math and science classes. Between her junior and senior years of high school, she participated in a program introducing students to the various fields of engineering. From this experience, Cottrell developed a keen interest in the field of electrical engineering. In August 1986, as a college student, Cottrell began her career with NASA. In May 1991, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After graduating, Cottrell remained at Stennis, serving as a data systems computer engineer from 1991 to 2005. From 2005 to 2009, Cottrell served as the Stennis deputy chief information officer, responsible for day-to-day oversight and management of information technology (IT) operations at the center. In 2009, Cottrell transitioned to her current role as Stennis chief information officer, providing leadership, planning, policy direction, and oversight for the delivery and management of NASA information and IT resources at Stennis. She also oversees IT services and operations for the center's computing infrastructure.

How would you describe the Stennis culture and environment?

I would describe the Stennis workforce as a large, diverse family. We spend a lot of time together, and it is important for each person to feel valued and respected. I have been with Stennis for quite some time, and I am thrilled to work here.

What is your biggest career challenge so far?

The biggest challenge of my career has been facilitating our office's participation in the recent NASA Mission Support Future Architecture Program initiative, which shifted the agency's organizational structure to a more vertically organized model. I really take pride in being able to answer questions and tell colleagues what the direction is and where we are going, because there can sometimes be a lot of uncertainty now that we "graduated" from the program. Getting everything in our office aligned with the agency transformation to ensure adequate and consistent implementation has been an important undertaking.

What advice would you give an aspiring leader?

Employees rising through the ranks might be faced with an assignment or task they might not necessarily want to do, but the task is a part of their job. My advice is when you are given an assignment and it is a new challenge that perhaps makes you feel a little nervous, you should approach that assignment as an opportunity. By embracing it, you can make it your own and you can put your mark on it, and in the end, you might really surprise yourself.

Did you have a mentor early in your career?

Yes, my initial hiring manager, Charlie Whitehurst, was an early mentor. He was my inspiration because he believed in me and saw the potential in me. Sometimes, when we are young, such as in our early 20s, we do not know we will be doing great things in our life or see that yet. Having that early support was awesome. My hiring manager had confidence in me to know I could do it.

What is your advice to students?

Study hard, and do not give up on your dreams. Persevere through the hard classes. Keep moving forward.



Dinna LeDuff Cottrell Chief Information Officer

What are some important leadership attributes?

A leader is someone who cares.

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A leader is a mentor.

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A leader is someone who is willing to work hard and rewards others for their hard work.

•
A leader demonstrates, or models, what he or she wants employees or followers to do.

•
A leader serves as a teacher but also stays teachable.

•
A leader demonstrates his or her ethics, morals, tenacity, and dedication.

On what aspect of your career will you look back on most fondly?

There are many things. Our office enabled millions of Americans to watch the historic Green Run test fire in real-time. Our office helped Stennis employees effectively work remotely in the midst of a global pandemic. Our tools enable a better work-life balance. I am proud of all that we do.