

**NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

NATALIE V. SAIZ  
INTERVIEWED BY JENNIFER ROSS-NAZZAL  
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ROSS-NAZZAL: Today is August 15th, 2012. This interview with Natalie Saiz is being conducted in Houston, Texas, for the JSC Oral History Project. The interviewer is Jennifer Ross-Nazzal, assisted by Rebecca Wright. Thanks again for sharing time with us this morning. We certainly appreciate it.

SAIZ: Thank you very much.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about coming to work at JSC as a Co-op [Cooperative Education Student Program]. How did you find out about the opportunity here in Houston?

SAIZ: I was going to school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the University of New Mexico. I was interested in human resources [HR], and I didn't really know how to get into the field. I had been reading about it, and one of the things that I recognized is that you really need to have experience in order to get into human resources. So I went to our career services office at the university. I was looking for opportunities, and I found two opportunities. One was here in Houston for the Johnson Space Center, and one was at IBM in New York. IBM at that time, in the mid '80s, was just a huge company, a very powerful company, unstoppable, that kind of thing. I was thinking, "Wow, that would be awesome to work for IBM." But it was really really far away. I came from a small Hispanic family. I didn't think there was any way my parents

would let me go to New York. But then at the same time Johnson Space Center was an amazing place, and I didn't really think I could work here, because I wasn't a scientist or engineer. I really thought that this was mainly for technical people.

I had been on a trip to Johnson Space Center when I was a sophomore in high school. I was involved with Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA). I made it to the national competition that year, and nationals was in Houston. We came on a tour of Johnson Space Center as part of the DECA trip. I was here competing as a sophomore in high school. The tour opened my eyes a little bit. I had been here, and it was familiar. I still wasn't sure NASA would hire me, because I was thinking I didn't know that they had anybody other than scientists and engineers.

I never really dreamed of working for NASA. I never really thought about it at all, but the fact that I came here on a tour, I think, was something that made it a little bit more possible. So I applied. I was very very happy I did, 25 years later.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What did you do during some of your rotations here?

SAIZ: I worked in the Human Resources Office. I did two rotations, and I worked as a human resources rep [representative]. Basically you're assigned a specific organization that you support, and you try to learn and do everything HR-related for that organization. You go to their staff meetings, and you support the mission of their organization. You deal with reorganizations, hiring people, development, workplace conflicts, or moving people from one organization to another. So I was assigned various organizations, and I realized that it was going to be beneficial to rotate to support different organizations, because then you get a really good Center

perspective. I did that my first tour. Then I worked in the training and development group the next time I toured and was involved working with a senior employee that was involved with the leadership development programs here at JSC, and I got a little flavor of that.

Then I got a permanent job offer and I came here right after college. It's been really great. I feel very privileged to have worked here, and I still do actually.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, it's a great place to work.

SAIZ: Yes it is, really is.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Would you give us a brief overview of your career since you've been here at JSC?

SAIZ: Sure. I started off in the Human Resources Office and I was an HR rep, as I said. I tried to work a lot of different organizations. The one organization I worked in the most was Space and Life Sciences. At the time we only had one female director of an organization, and that was Dr. Carolyn [L.] Huntoon. I supported her as her HR rep. I was very excited to do that, because I felt like she was a real role model for everyone, particularly women, at the Center. I think there was a little bit of a kindred spirit, because we were both women. Yes, she was technical and I was mission support, but at the same time I really feel like she took me under her wing to help me out. When she became Center Director, that was really exciting for me as well.

I worked a lot with Space and Life Sciences, so I got to know the employees and the organization very well. Then I worked other organizations such as Space Station Freedom and

Engineering. I worked a lot of the staff offices as well, so it was giving me a really good perspective of the entire Center and the different organizational cultures and the different people. Even to this day I'll see people at the cafe or out in the mall, and it goes back to when I was an HR rep working with them on different issues.

I then I became a supervisor of the Human Resources Management Branch. First I was a group lead in Engineering. I was supporting Engineering, and then I became a supervisor for about five years. Then we created a different branch within HR, the Human Resources Operations Branch, and I became the branch chief of that organization. Then I got selected about a year later to be the Assistant Director for Human Resources. I was essentially the third person in the organization.

As soon as that happened there was someone that ended up retiring from the organization. Then my boss was moved to another position, because there was another opportunity for him. At the time our Center Director was General [Jefferson D. "Beak"] Howell, and he asked me to serve in an acting capacity as the HR Director. I had only been in Building 1 for five weeks. Being at this level for such a short period of time, I felt it was very much a sink or swim situation. For me I felt it was very high risk. Sometimes I would go into a meeting, and I wasn't really sure how everything was supposed to happen at the senior executive level. I fortunately had a couple people that guided me as far as helping me understand the culture and the norms and how to work at this level, because I really hadn't had that training yet.

At the time I was part of a leadership development program, and I had just been selected a few months before I was asked to serve as Acting HR Director. One of the requirements was I needed to go to NASA Headquarters [Washington, DC] for a period of time, a minimum of six months to a year. But General Howell was relatively new as our Center Director; he'd only been

here for a short period of time. So I wasn't sure if this was the right thing for me to do, and plus I was acting in the capacity. The job wasn't mine yet. So I went into his office and I said, "I'm part of this leadership development program. I'm supposed to do a rotation. Would you like for me to withdraw from the program?" I always admired General Howell. He's always been a really great leader, and I still actually quote his "rules." He has Beak's rules, and I still quote them.

He said to me, "Well, tell me why you want to go to NASA Headquarters." That's where I picked. I decided in that moment it was really important to complete the program. I wanted to go to NASA Headquarters.

I said, "Well, I want to build relationships at Headquarters. I have relationships with certain levels, but I don't really have them at the levels I need to in order to be an effective HR director. I think once I get up there and have this time to really understand a little bit more about the agency perspective and establish those relationships, I'll be a more effective HR director."

He listened and then he said, "Okay, well, I think you should go ahead and go to NASA Headquarters and do your rotation."

I said, "Okay. Thank you. Thanks for your support." I was hoping that he was going to say, "And your job will be waiting for you when you get back." But he actually didn't; he actually did not do that. It was really risky. I tell people when I talk to different leadership classes, when you take rotation assignments or when you need to go off and do something you need to do, there are no guarantees. There are no guarantees—you have to just step off on that limb and see what happens.

I left and I did what I told him I was going to do, and that was establish relationships. Fortunately at the time they had just hired the new Associate Administrator for Human Capital.

She was returning to the government after being retired for several years. Toni Dawsey worked at [NASA] Goddard [Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland] before, but she had been out of the workforce for many years. She commented that so much had changed, particularly how we communicate with one another.

One of the things I recommended to her is that she go out to the Field Centers—I was supposed to be supporting her—go out to all the Field Centers and meet the people and learn what they're doing and get their perspectives. She thought it was a great idea, and since I was supporting her I went with her on all those Center visits. It turned out to be a fabulous opportunity because I got to go to every Field Center, meet with the Center Director, the HR Director, and a group of employees. We also toured all the facilities.

I felt like when I came back I had a really good agency perspective. I saw all the Centers and had insight into their cultures. One of the things that I continue to tell people is that what I learned from that experience was that there are a lot of really dedicated and passionate people all over NASA. Every Center has that. Sometimes you tend to think that you're the only Center that has that passion and dedication but it's everywhere within NASA. That's an important lesson to share.

A few months before I came back, General Howell was going up to Headquarters, as he did frequently, and he contacted me and asked if we could meet. I said, "Well, absolutely." So we sat down and talked. At that point before I came back he asked me if I'd be the permanent HR Director. I was very happy that he offered me the job and I said yes. So it's now been eight and a half years since I've been the HR Director.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I'm curious about how HR has changed over the years. Of course you continue to support and sustain the workforce; you assist with things like hiring and other things. Have things changed as a result of technology or other ideas that have come about?

SAIZ: Yes, I think the Johnson Space Center Human Resources Office is unique. When I started working here I realized that it was a very different human resources office. I think one of the big differences that I saw immediately was that there was a real value in trying to learn the customer's business and talk their language and really be involved with them, where you attend staff meetings and you know the people and you're not just this organization that's sitting on the side waiting for things to come to you, but reaching out there. We have always strived to be partners with our customers. The way we've put it is we want a seat at the table. We want a seat at that strategic table. So that's something that we have tried to emphasize. We have heard many people say that our organization does do that, and we are very involved with I think almost all the big initiatives.

One of the things with our current Center Director, Mike [Michael L.] Coats, has told me before is that when he wants to get something done he'll talk to Human Resources, because he knows we'll make it happen. For example our inclusion and innovation effort at the Center has been a huge effort that we've been intimately involved with.

Also with the Program and Project Management Development Program [PPMD], which was a leadership development program we started at JSC but ended up becoming an agencywide program that we ran for about three years; a huge initiative that has really paid off. We had a technical advisory panel that was helping us with PPMD and we worked with the real legends of NASA. We had Arnie [Arnold D.] Aldrich and Tommy [W.] Holloway and Glynn [S.] Lunney,

Jay [H.] Greene, people like that that were really strong advocates and real partners with us trying to help us with the curriculum. I think that we have always had that mindset of engaging the customer and working as partners, and I think that's made us more effective as an organization, particularly a human resources organization.

Now with regard to technology, that has definitely been extremely helpful because we can get information out a lot more quickly. We have consolidated and have information in one location. I have a small group of people here at JSC in my Human Resources Office that work information systems for HR. They do different applications and different things that are very unique to the field.

As a matter of fact, most of their development efforts have been picked up by other federal agencies like Department of Interior, different agencies that we have worked with. For example, we automated the benefits statement that now all federal employees can see online. That was something we started here at JSC. They've done a fabulous job of combining the technical requirements with the HR application and bringing those together. We have a real unique opportunity here and also service that we're providing the agency. That's been something that I think has been very different in our office as well.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You manage the civil servants here at JSC, but do you have contact with program management from the contractors or unions? You talked about some of the work that you've done that has been implemented by other federal agencies. Do you work with Department of Labor and other federal agencies to make sure that you're following federal guidelines and regulations?

SAIZ: Yes, we do, actually. A lot of the regulations and guidelines comes through NASA Headquarters. So we do work very closely with NASA Headquarters and the guidance that they provide, different things that are changing, whether it's hiring, the different hiring opportunities, or hiring paths through our co-op program or other things that we do.

We stay involved that way. We do have a local union here. It's AFGE, American Federation of Government Employees, and we have a real strong partnership with our union. That's also something that I think is unique at JSC because we have a true partnership with our union. It's not a contentious relationship. It doesn't mean we agree with everything, but at the same time we get together and we have very practical conversations. I hate to say it but that's not the way it is everywhere. I think that holds other organizations back.

One of the areas that I try to emphasize is relationship building, whether it's the EO [Equal Opportunity] and Diversity Office or the union or other Centers or our customers. We start with relationship building. Working with others is the only way you're going to get anything done. So that's something that I really try to do as Director of HR.

But anyway back to your other question about the contractor HR companies. You're correct. We're in charge of the civil servants here as far as the HR services, but as far as the contractors, our team is 12,000 or so. We have a group of people called the HR principals, and those are HR directors from the other contractor companies. We've been meeting with the HR principals for several years. It started off with my predecessor, but we kept that going, and it's really evolved now where we have a rather large community that gets together about once a month or once every six weeks, for about an hour meeting. We usually meet at the Gilruth Center, and we have different topics that we cover.

For example we did a lot around Constellation transition and the Space Shuttle transition, trying to get a lot of communication out, working collaboratively on job fairs and what could we do for the contractor community. They were the ones hit the hardest with the contractor layoffs after Shuttle retirement. So we did a lot with workforce transition.

One example of when our HR principals came together was right after Hurricane Ike. When Hurricane Ike happened, one of the actions that our Center Director talked about is how are we going to account for our entire team, how are we going to make sure that everyone is safe and able to return to work?

The day after Ike hit, we called a meeting with the HR principals. Frankly I wasn't expecting as many people to show up. I thought we'd have five to seven people that would show up. It was I think a couple of days after the hurricane. It was in Room 945 here in Building 1. We walked in, and it was standing room only. We had another meeting that afternoon, and it was the same number of attendees but with different people. So we realized that we had a lot of support, and we had a big network that was already established, so we felt like that was really beneficial.

Learning from that Hurricane Ike as far as how we can utilize that HR community I think really made us realize that we needed to rely on that through the transition efforts too. That's where I think we really started focusing on our Shuttle transition and Constellation transitions.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You emphasized the importance of building relationships. I understand that you helped design and implement the Joint Leadership Team [JLT] here at JSC. Can you talk about that team? Tell us what it is and why it's important.

SAIZ: Yes. That happened under General Howell initially. At the time we had just received the CAIB report, the *Columbia* Accident Investigation Board report. Of course one of the elements was talking about the contractor–civil servant relationships. I don't remember exactly what it specifically said, but it was something that really resonated with our Center Director, General Howell. We talked about how do we have a better working relationship with our contractors as far as open communication and dialogue and building more trusting relationships? There were several of us involved with this: the Associate Director of Management, which was Randy [K.] Gish; our Deputy Center Director, Bob [Robert D.] Cabana; and General Howell. I'm sure there were several others as well. I happened to be at the meeting where we were planning our organizational retreat.

Somehow the idea came out of having a leadership team comprised of contractors as well as civil servant leaders. We had that initial retreat and it turned out to be really fabulous because everybody was finally together talking about issues that were not about technical and budget and cost/schedule, that kind of thing. It was about relationships, and how do we work together, how do we treat each other, and more importantly how do we trust one another. One thing that I think was very helpful was that General Howell came from industry, and since he was a contractor before, he had a broader perspective. I think that really helped. I think that's something that Mike Coats has brought too. His industry perspective has been extremely helpful. When Mike Coats came on and he saw that this Joint Leadership Team was already in existence I think he realized just how unique that was and he wanted to continue that and keep it alive.

As a matter of fact right now we're going through another survey with the Joint Leadership Team now a year after transition. A year after Shuttle retirement, we're going to issue another survey and see where we are. I think there's some peaks and valleys with the Joint

Leadership Team. Sometimes it's stronger than others depending on what issue you're dealing with, but I think that it's been important to keep it alive and making sure that you have that open dialogue.

ROSS-NAZZAL: The Astronaut Selection Office falls under HR. I understand that you oversaw the selection of the 2004 astronauts, which was pretty important because that was the selection of the educator mission specialist group. Can you talk about your involvement in that effort? Or were you primarily just assisting Duane [L.] Ross whenever he needed help?

SAIZ: I always feel a little uncomfortable when people talk about the astronaut selection. Because yes, technically it is in my organization, but Duane is an institution all by himself. I feel like during that process I learn from Duane. I don't really feel like I can take any credit for that. But I do think that I was able to learn from Duane, and he's the type of person as you all know that will sit down and have all the patience in the world with you and explain things to you.

I was on a panel to evaluate the educator applicants with Leland [D.] Melvin for the 2009 class. He was the head of that sub-panel. It was very very exciting for me, and I learned a lot. Then to be part of the final interview panel chaired by Peggy [A.] Whitson was exciting too. Now this year as we're going through this process I'm also going to be on the initial interview panel as well as the final.

The interview panel is mainly comprised of astronauts because that's what we're selecting. They have a better idea of what the job is, obviously, and what kind of person they're looking for to be spending time in space with, but I think there are a lot of things that I can bring to the table from a human resources perspective. Fortunately a lot of the people that we're

working with are very inclusive and they do listen to your opinions. Yes, technically our office is in charge of the integrity of the process and making sure that we're doing everything that we need to be doing to ensure a fair process, so we do take that very seriously. Duane has done a fabulous job. We're currently training Anne [E.] Roemer to take that over eventually when Duane leaves because Duane cannot do this forever, as much as we'd like him to.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand that the White House was interested in the selection. Did that pose any challenges for you as you were working on that effort?

SAIZ: Actually not for me, because that was really focused more on the Astronaut Office. That's probably something that you'd have a better answer from one of the astronauts on that one. So that would probably be a Peggy Whitson question.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand in 2009 you were actually on the selection board. So how did that differ from your previous experience?

SAIZ: I think it was mainly being more involved from reviewing initial applications, screening candidates, and serving on the interview board. Just looking at that, just being part of it, and then being part of the conversation and the dialogue afterward was very exciting and interesting. I got to know a few of the astronauts which also added to a positive experience.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's a huge task, from what I understand.

SAIZ: Yes it is. It is a lot of work, and they do a really good job with it. But it's a process, and it just takes quite a long time to go through it. We're trying to bring some technology efforts to that area right now too so that we can review the applications from a laptop or an iPad. That will also reduce paper and the need to all go to one location to review the paper files. We need to bring technology into that process a little bit more, which we're currently doing.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Talk to us about the post-*Columbia* [STS-107] period. I understand for instance that you were responsible for hiring about 250 people to bring some technical expertise to the Center after the accident. Would you talk about why that was necessary and how you achieved that goal?

SAIZ: Yes. That actually was the result of the CAIB investigation as well, about bringing some of the technical experts back onto the civil servant side. That was a very stressful time, I would say.

We had a huge effort that we needed to go out and hire people, so we had various teams working with the organizations. We really had to focus all our efforts on hiring, because we tend to hire about 100 to 120 people a year, mainly co-ops. That one particular year we were hiring a lot of the more senior people, more journey level, so we really had to adjust the focus of the entire office. We had to shift the way we were doing things because we wanted to complete this work as quickly possible, doing our part in the return-to-flight efforts.

We couldn't do as much organizational support for retreats and reorganizations and other things like that because we really needed to focus almost all our efforts on just bringing people on board as quickly as we could. It's funny because sometimes when people know you're not

hiring many people, they wonder what you do. They wonder well, what does HR do if you guys aren't hiring? I'm shocked, because we're involved with so many efforts.

What I don't think people realize is that HR has a good read on the pulse of the Center, because we're out in the organizations and we have a close connection with the employees. We have a lot of organizational culture responsibilities. When I talked initially about this inclusion and innovation initiative, that's been a lot of our effort. What that basically means is how do you have a more engaged workforce? We want everyone to feel engaged and everyone to feel valued at JSC. Because if they don't feel that way, then we're really not going to achieve as much as you possibly could. We want employees to come to work feeling motivated and believing this is the best place to work.

Even though we have ranked high in the best places to work category with the government-wide Employee Viewpoint Survey, there's definitely pockets of areas that we could improve on. That's our whole reason for trying to have an engaged workforce.

ROSS-NAZZAL: The people you were hiring, were they primarily in Engineering to fill those voids?

SAIZ: Primarily Engineering and S&MA [Safety and Mission Assurance], also Mission Operations Directorate [MOD]. Those were the main areas that we were hiring in, with some Space and Life Sciences as well, so most of the hires were in the technical fields.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did the Center get additional funding for those billets?

SAIZ: I think we got an additional increase in our FTEs [full-time equivalent]. I don't recall though exact numbers. It's been several years, but our ceiling was augmented in order to have the additional people on board.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Were they temporary hires or were they permanent?

SAIZ: No they were permanent hires. They may have started off as temporary or what we call term employees, but most of them all became permanent.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's a lot of people to process in one year.

SAIZ: Yes. That's true. It was a big workload.

ROSS-NAZZAL: More than double.

SAIZ: Yes, it was a big workload.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You talked with us about going up to NASA Headquarters for that short time period. I understand originally you were working on efforts to engage the workforce for the new Vision for Space Exploration. Can you talk about what you were working on?

SAIZ: What I was working on when I went up to Headquarters—it ended up being a nine month assignment. But what I was mainly involved with was working on agency transition plans. I

had a team comprised of different Center representatives, mainly in Human Resources, to talk about what kind of work our employees were going to be doing. At the time we were calling it unfunded FTE or available for new work employees. A lot of it stemmed from what charge codes do we use, and what are we authorized to work on. At the time Sean O’Keefe was our Administrator. I think one of the things that I was really trying to do is communicate as much as we could with the Centers and the workforce.

It was very dynamic. There was a lot of uncertainty. Centers weren’t really sure where they were going to end up with their ceilings and their workforce levels. It was frustrating actually, because I felt like we needed to be more transparent in our communication. But I think that was part of the experience that I needed to learn. I realized the complexities that Headquarters deals with and the political realities of being in DC. Also having to answer questions from a lot of other federal agencies on a daily basis—OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and OPM [Office of Personnel Management], GAO [Government Accountability Office], there’s always reviews of different groups coming in. I think Headquarters people have a very challenging job, and sometimes I think it’s often very underappreciated by the Field Center employees. I have a real appreciation for Headquarters because they do a lot to protect the Centers. Sometimes they don’t always explain to us how they’re protecting us, but they actually are. I thought it was a really good experience because I was frustrated in that environment, and I remember Toni Dawsey, who was the AA [Associate Administrator] for Human Capital, she said, “This is exactly what you need to be learning, how it is to be up here.”

So I thought it was invaluable. I didn’t really feel like I was accomplishing all I wanted to get done, but I think a lot of it was that learning environment that I was in. Things move a

little slower sometimes and sometimes really at warp speed. So it depends what it is that you're doing.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I'm sure you were happy to come back to Houston.

SAIZ: Yes, I was very happy to come back. I did enjoy my time in DC. It's a very vibrant place, and it's a lot of fun. I would like to maybe end my career there working at Headquarters because I think it's a really important thing to do. I did enjoy it, but we had small kids at the time. We just didn't think that was going to be a real family-friendly environment for us, so we decided to come back. We also felt strongly about being back at JSC for the return-to-flight mission, STS-114.

ROSS-NAZZAL: We were just there recently in traffic. It's horrendous.

SAIZ: Oh I know. It's terrible. We have our kids involved with soccer and other things. That would have just been really hard and complicated to do the things we wanted to do with our kids.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Absolutely. I understand you were also working on something called OneHR. Did that go along with the idea of OneNASA?

SAIZ: Yes, it was, actually. Well, this is interesting, because I had completely forgotten all about that. How did you even find out?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Well, we try and do research before we talk to people.

SAIZ: OneNASA was an initiative that came out of a program, a leadership development program. That hit our organization of how do we do OneHR, OneNASA. So I was involved with trying to develop a human resources competency model for the entire agency. I think that we made some progress. We started with a competency model here in HR, and then we were trying to bring that across all the different Centers. That was something that was important to my boss up there. It was also very much in line with the OneNASA initiative. I think that has in many ways come a long way. I think there is a lot more communication, a lot more collaboration with other Centers, not just in our area but in the technical community. I think the Constellation Program did a phenomenal job of really engaging the entire agency. Constellation in particular did a fabulous job with really having a OneNASA kind of approach or integrated agency approach.

OneNASA, as with any initiative, lost its momentum. Right now we're trying to rebrand our inclusion and innovation into something else. After a while people get tired of that catchphrase and they need something else to take its place. Maybe it evolves to something else.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Can you explain what you mean by a competency model?

SAIZ: Yes. One of the topics we would often talk about were the qualities we look for in our potential hires coming into HR. For example, can they give good presentations? Can they write well? How do they build relationships? Things like that. It was basically a map if you will.

Not necessarily a map, but maybe a strategy that one can follow to make you successful in the organization.

We got together as a team. I was a part of the original team, and we wanted to finally document what it took to be a real effective HR professional at JSC. We developed a competency model, and that has been living and breathing and we've evolved it as needed over the years. I'm really proud of the fact that it's lasted for so long, and we still utilize it when we interview employees and discuss during develop discussions. To us that defines a well-rounded HR professional. Competency models are very common in academia. There's competency models for program and project managers, and competency models for systems engineers and things like that, so we wanted to develop one for human resources.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You've also come up with an idea—I've seen posters around the Center with Luke Skywalker and other people—the idea of YODA [Your Opportunity to Develop Another]. Can you talk about why that idea was so important to you to develop?

SAIZ: Yes that's been really a lot of fun. There were a lot of things that fell into play there. One goal of the inclusion and innovation initiative is we wanted to get employees more involved. That's the idea of having an engaged workforce. So we formulated what's called engagement teams, and there were different topics that the engagement teams looked at. One was mentoring. We already had a mentoring program, but we were noticing throughout the years that the participation rate was actually decreasing. Not as many technical mentors were signing up for the program. So we felt like we really needed to reboost or give our mentoring program a new face, a new brand, a new way to get the word out. We formed an engagement team, which was a

team comprised of civil servants and contractors across the workforce, and they came up with different ideas for us. We had people from my office on the team as well, and this engagement team actually came up with the idea of YODA, Your Opportunity to Develop Another.

We loved it. We thought that was a fabulous idea, so we took it and ran with it. The team actually presented it to the owner, which was Human Resources, because we run the mentoring program. At the same time I'm on the board of directors at Space Center Houston, JSC's visitor center. It just so happens that that year they had a fairly extensive exhibit about George Lucas. So they had *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and they had *American Graffiti*, they had the car out there. They had the script from some of the *Star Wars* movies and that kind of thing out there. Then they had a lot about *Clone Wars* too. I happen to be on the board of directors, and here this is happening in my organization about revamping the mentoring program. I said, "We need to contact Lucasfilms and we need to tell them what we're doing and also see if they're willing to allow us to use Yoda as our symbol." We wanted to get pins and printed certificates. We just felt like it would be really nice to have Lucasfilms know that we were doing this at NASA and also to ask them for permission to use Yoda. We needed to get that legal permission.

It worked out really well because Space Center Houston had contacts that we could reach out to, and we were excited about it. Lucasfilms was very excited that NASA wanted to use Yoda, so they gave us those permissions and we are able to use Yoda as our official logo. As a matter of fact you may not have noticed it, but when you were sitting outside there's a big picture from *Clone Wars* and those are the signatures from people that are either the cast or the crew of *Clone Wars*. If you take a moment to just read some of the inscriptions, they wrote some really neat things about NASA. They came out on a tour and then sent that to us just to have for the office. That was neat.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Has mentoring then gone up substantially?

SAIZ: It actually has. We're going to start our next cycle here soon. We try to provide a lot of excitement as far as the kickoff and provide more structure throughout the year. We're always trying to improve it to keep the interest and motivation going. One of the things that we do when we have the kickoff and you first meet your mentor, we have some people that are dressed up as Darth Vader and Princess Leia and Luke Skywalker and different characters. As a matter of fact my deputy, Brady [A. Pyle], dresses up as Darth Vader. If you walk by and look in his office, which is right here, his Darth Vader costume is hanging up, because he wears that periodically. We actually try to blend in some fun as we go along.

Then we do that at the end as well. We all dress up in character, and we actually present the pins and present the certificates. We have a speaker that comes in at the beginning, at the end, and gives very detailed helpful instructions on how to establish a relationship, and how do you meet, how do you manage your time, what topics can you discuss, what are the rules of engagement so to speak. So we are seeing a really big increase in the number of participants. We're trying to keep that alive and well, and I think YODA has really helped us do that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How do you determine who gets put with which mentor?

SAIZ: Well, the protégés need to fill out an application. It's a relatively easy one to fill out but they need to define what their objectives are. What are they really trying to achieve in the mentoring relationship? Then we identify mentors, and they meet. We talk with them about

what is it that you can provide someone, what are the areas that you're willing to mentor. For example one of the things that I like to mentor people on is work-life balance. I like to do a work-life fit mentoring, because I've had to deal with that my whole life, my whole professional career. I like to talk with people and help them through some of their challenges, maybe offer my experiences as examples that may help. Also just different things that I'd be willing to talk about.

Then we have a panel of people that look through the different protégé applications in the mentoring. We do that three or four times before we actually finalize the mentor and protégé. We do ask the protégé for their top three choices as well. We have a listing of all the mentors that are listed. Then we make sure that there's not one person that's oversaturated with too many protégés. We just have a limit on how many they can mentor in a year.

Then we close. We actually end the mentoring relationship because we want people to find other mentors. It's not supposed to be a lifelong mentor or coach, but it's supposed to have a beginning and an end, and then you move on to something else. You can obviously still meet if you want to but it's not part of the formal relationship.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Great program.

SAIZ: Yes it's a lot of fun.

ROSS-NAZZAL: In 2007, in Building 44, there was a shooting, and the press got a lot of coverage on that. What was the Center's reaction to that and HR's involvement in the aftermath?

Thinking about solutions for the safety of employees for instance, or counseling for employees, things of those nature.

SAIZ: That was definitely a very sad time for the Center. I remember that I was in our Center Director's office at the time. I was in a meeting with him. I remember my phone was ringing. Actually it was buzzing. I found out later it was the Division Chief that was calling me. Pat [Patrick S.] Pilola, who was the Division Chief of Avionics, was calling me. I was in the meeting with the Center Director, so I didn't think I should answer the phone, because I'm here with my boss.

But then at that point the Director of Engineering walked in and said that there's been a report of someone with a gun in Building 44. Mike Coats and Steve [Stephen J.] Altemus said, "Well, let's go over there." I think the SWAT [Special Weapon and Tactics] team had already been called, so I came back to my office. I immediately got in my car and started driving over there. They were all stationed down by the fire station area. We went over there. The EAP [Employee Assistance Program] was there. We were waiting to see what was going to happen. They were trying to account for the employees and see who was there and who wasn't there. Fortunately there weren't as many people in the building as there could have been because they were having an all-hands meeting in Building 2. The division happened to be going through a reorganization, and they were announcing the new leadership of the organization. So a lot of the people were out of the building, which was very fortunate.

But there were definitely still some people in the building that were left and they were trying to account for everybody. One of the things that I really appreciated about Mike Coats is that he surrounds himself with a leadership team that he relies on for advice and consultation.

What should we be doing? I remember very distinctly that Linda Beverly, who was a spouse, was at the gate. Someone had called her to tell her that there was a shooting in her husband's building.

She was out at the gate wanting to come in. Of course she needed authorization to come in. I remember that there were a small group of us that were standing around Mike Coats, probably about six people. The question was one of the spouses is outside the gate. Should we let the person in? This is probably a little awkward, but most of the people were saying that they didn't think that we should let her in yet because we really didn't have much information at this point.

We didn't know if Dave [David Beverly] was even the victim, and we didn't know anything definitive at that point. So should we let spouses in? Was she just one of many that was going to come? We didn't know. So most everybody was saying well, I don't know if this is a good idea, we probably shouldn't do this. I remember I was the only person that said, "You absolutely need to let her in. You need to let her in, and you need to bring her over here."

I was very pleased that Mike Coats then looked up at security and he said, "Yes, let her in." Now he probably was going to decide that anyway. I'm not saying that I changed his mind or anything, but I appreciate that he was getting advice from not just the SWAT team people. They did a fabulous job—I'm not trying to criticize them in any way—but it's just that there are different perspectives that people have. I think HR does bring a different perspective, and a perspective that I think should be listened to, because I think we do have a different view on issues.

So she came in. She was in a room with the EAP counselor. One of the counselors was there. As difficult and as sad as the situation was, it turned out to be a really, really, really good

decision, because she did not have to hear about this on the news. The Center Director is the one that told her that her husband had been killed. He went in there and did it himself. Really I just remember watching Mike Coats. I'm getting emotional. I just had so much admiration for him, because he was just so caring and compassionate. That was a true mark of his leadership.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I know that all of us were extremely concerned when we heard what was going on, especially those of us who worked off-site, wondering what was going on.

SAIZ: Fortunately a lot of us had already been through this training called Critical Incident Stress Team training that Jackie [Jacqueline E.] Reese does through the EAP Office, Employee Assistance Program. A lot of the HR reps, including myself, had been in this training. It came after 9/11 [September 11, 2001 attacks] where you go through a training where there's a catastrophic event or something bad that happens, and it's a way to bring people together and talk a little bit about what happened and then help them. It's not like extensive counseling or anything, but it's a way to talk about it and then identify those that may need more help. They can go home and not feel like—they've at least talked about it with their coworkers. We had a lot of people in my office that were trained for that already.

So we used that. It was a very good skill we already had because we could do that now with a lot of the employees around the Center and talk with them about those things. We utilized that same training after Hurricane Ike as well. Many employees had lost their homes so this training was very useful as well.

In getting back to the shooting, one of the things that we talked about is that people really need to know what their avenues are. What are their avenues for raising issues, raising

concerns? What are the complaints? Interestingly enough, we had already been working with different organizations, with the EAP, with Legal, with procurement, the union, and the ombuds. We had already been working with them on resolving issues and displaying the avenues on our website.

We could develop something within a couple of months right after the shooting, and we put that out as much as we could. We still utilize it today and we still talk about it quite often in leadership classes and all-hands meetings. Mike Coats is a really firm believer in everyone having an avenue to go to, to seek help when needed.

But going back to the shooting, I remember obviously a lot of emotions, a lot of different emotions, anger, sadness, frustration, all the things that you see in a death, and in a catastrophic event. One of the things that was helpful is I already had an HR principal community. I called the HR principal community together very quickly and we got information out and we talked. We tried to get them information, because the whole team wanted to know what was going on. I felt like my role was a lot about communication with HR leadership of the contractor companies. Then, because of my involvement on the JLT I also knew the head manager of that particular company. One of the things that the company wanted to do was to do some sort of service for the shooter as well. I remember that I was very supportive of that because while you can never justify what that person did, there were a lot of people that worked with that individual that needed to have some closure, needed to have some time together.

I remember there were very intense emotions of some people, very angry that the contractor would have a service for this person. It was held at the Hilton Hotel. I went as well, and I thought it was very well done. It was very short. There was a few people that spoke. I noticed that the employees that did attend really appreciated having a place to go and grieve

together, because there was a grieving process for the shooter too. I think HR has to be very objective and very open-minded and has to bring that to the table and give that other perspective. It's very easy for some people to get on a track where they're just like okay, I just want to see this one side of the story. So I thought that was a very good thing the contractor did for their employees as well.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Talk to us about the ability of employees to raise grievances. What was put in place just a few months after that shooting?

SAIZ: It was mainly trying to bring visibility to the avenues as far as where can people go if they can't resolve their conflicts or they feel frustrated or they don't feel like they have a voice. We want people to have a really good relationship with their supervisor, and that's the most important relationship you'll have at work. Every so often you can't resolve a conflict, and we should be able to allow employees to raise issues, and they should have different places to go to talk about things. We've been really trying hard to explain this. It's on our home page. It's called resolving issues, and it's like a gear chart where there's different gears, meaning that we identify where civil servants can go, where contractors can go, because we're under different regulations or different management.

It goes through our ombuds, our union, our Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office. It just talks about the different issues or concerns that each of our offices handle. Then it talks about the different ways to report safety issues or waste; fraud and abuse is the IG [Inspector General], that kind of thing. So it's just all in one location, and it actually was recognized as one of the best practices of having that put together in one location. That was nice.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned Hurricane Ike several times since we've talked. I understand from Duane that you really helped a lot of people who were displaced after the storm. Can you talk about your efforts?

SAIZ: Yes. Actually that was a really difficult time as well, but it was actually very rewarding as well. One of the things that our Center Director asked as soon as the storm passed is, "Okay, how are we going to account for everybody?" We were just starting out, and we all came up here in Building 1, our team. We started working with organizations to make sure that we had identified that everyone made it through the hurricane safely. It took a lot of work. It was a lot of manual work.

We had the HR principals that got together. They were all reporting on their companies. We were in the process of not only trying to account for them but also trying to identify how much impact they had. We decided to categorize employees either red, green, or yellow. Red basically meant that they had lost their home and they couldn't live in their current condition. Yellow was a temporary situation like if they didn't have power. Then green was they were okay; they got through the storm okay.

We also came up with a concept of employee recovery advocates. We call them ERAs. It was almost like a trusted person within the organization that would volunteer to be an employee recovery advocate that would go to that individual that was considered a red category and try to see how they can get their basic needs met.

For example Duane Ross was an employee recovery advocate. He was a recovery advocate for one of our employees within Human Resources who had a lot of flooding in their

home. So Duane volunteered to be the ERA for that person, so he went over there and took them a meal and provided water and said, “Okay, who can I call, what insurance companies can I call, or what kind of help do you need,” and even charging their cell phones and doing anything that needed to be done. Obviously the person going through all that has a lot on their mind. They have too much to do at once. So we came up with employee recovery advocates. Actually later on Boeing wrote it up as a best practice in the newsletter across the entire nation, that they thought that was a really neat idea. That was really neat too.

Then we set up a rest and relaxation place out at the Gilruth. Since so many people in the area had lost power, we came up with the idea. I went down to Mike Coats about a day later, and I said, “So many people have lost power, but our Gilruth has power. So we want to set up a rest and recovery place for people to come and use their computer. IRD [Information Resources Directorate] took a bunch of computers out there. We want to put computers there so people can look up their insurance companies and make phone calls and find places to come in and work on their houses.”

Then we had the big ballroom open with the big screen; we had some TVs in there. We had some basic things like water and a few snacks that we had in. We opened the showers, and people could take showers there. They could come and rest and get a break from the heat, because it was hot. It was in the middle of September.

I was really really proud of our organization because we came together. We didn’t have a plan necessarily for all those things I just mentioned. Now we do have a plan, but we didn’t have a plan for all those things I mentioned for Ike. We basically, me and my team, worked here trying to account for everybody. People showed up in my organization with food, and they just came up here. We started all trying to figure out what do we need to do. Let’s go off and run

with that idea. Let's do this or that. So it was really nice. Actually after we went through all that Mike Coats did recognize the organization with a Center Director Gold Coin award. That's it right there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh, nice.

SAIZ: There's some nice photos there. That was really fun. It was a bad situation but it turned out to be very very rewarding. We've followed up with it, and we developed a system called NASA Cares, which is an automated employee accountability system. It's now turned into the employee notification system. It's called ENS. We've been testing it. It's now picked up across the entire agency. There's an iPad application, and what it does for you is you can push information out. Like Center Ops pushing information out, okay, this is what's happening. Then you have to log in and say I'm either safe or I'm not safe or whatever the situation is. Then you could hit a button and it shows who's in certain zones based on their ZIP codes and where they live, and you can identify who are the red people, the yellow, and the green. We've taken that whole concept, and we're hoping we don't have to use it, but we have worked really hard since Hurricane Ike to develop this automated tool to make it a lot easier. The nice thing is the entire agency has picked up on it too, so they have it available too to all their employees. That was developed out of my office with IRD.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You've mentioned so many innovations that have come out of this office that have been picked up by NASA agencywide or other federal agencies. What do you attribute that to?

SAIZ: I think that we have an organizational culture in our office where ideas are encouraged. I think that we are very flexible and nimble. We do respond to situations, and then we are always trying to think, “Okay, whatever I develop here, can this be transferred to other Centers?” I think a lot of the other Centers do that as well. [NASA] Kennedy [Space Center, Florida] does that pretty well too, as far as trying to come up with other ideas that can be shared as best practices. We’ve learned from other Centers, like our rotation mobility board that we have where we look at people coming in the Center and outside the Center to do rotations. We got that from Goddard. That was a best practice from Goddard.

I think we have a culture where we can either come up with the idea ourselves and share it, we don’t hoard it or try to protect it, we really try to share it, or we get ideas from others and we implement them, and we don’t have a mentality of it’s not invented here. We may tweak it a little bit, but the thing is I think save all the time and energy, and let’s just get something that works. I think a lot of that has just been ingrained in not only us, but a lot of the other places too.

ROSS-NAZZAL: In 2004 the President was at NASA Headquarters and made the announcement that the Shuttle Program would retire in 2010. I understand that several years before that deadline hit you started thinking about workforce transition. Would you talk about your decision to implement some sort of transition here at the Center well before that deadline hit?

SAIZ: Actually we had a very good team because we talked about the fact that it was going to take several years to really transition the workforce. There was a balance with really needing to

obviously keep the right people and the number of people on the Shuttle Program as you were still downsizing it and had to eventually transition everyone.

We had a really strong partnership with the Shuttle Program management team with John [P.] Shannon and before him [N.] Wayne Hale, and one of my staff members, Sue [Suzanne] Leibert. I met with a leader in Space Shuttle and we said, “We really know this is a partnership for the transition. I’d like to have one of my employees work in your organization half the time and then half the time they work in our organization to bridge that gap between our organizations, because we need to be working hand-in-hand on this. Obviously you guys have mission-related needs and then we have the people skills as far as people processes to transition everyone.”

We established a relationship. We already had a good working relationship, but we established more of a formal partnership early on. We wanted to do that because we know it was a shared responsibility. So we worked very closely with the Shuttle Program. We had a Human Resources rep and a Human Resources development rep that would meet with the management very frequently and came to the table with different ideas on like interviewing everyone, talking about their plans and what was their timing and when would they be interested. We wanted to communicate once again as much as we could. So we developed a website, a Shuttle transition website, and we had a lot of information there. A lot of my staff, almost everyone was working Shuttle transition. For at least the last year or two it was almost the whole office, in different capacities.

It all started about five years before. It really did. We’d have a few people starting off, and then we’d add more people, and then we’d have more services. Every year we were figuring out how we needed to step it up as far as our Shuttle transition.

The person that I mentioned, Sue Leibert, she was the one that was working half-time on Shuttle, half-time in our office. She actually got a more expanded role as well where she was the human capital lead for all four human spaceflight Centers. That also helped too because the Shuttle Program as you know is comprised very heavily from four Centers in particular and had workforce in other areas too, but mainly Kennedy and Marshall [Space Flight Center, Huntsville, Alabama] and Stennis [Space Center, Mississippi] and JSC. So that was very very helpful too to have that partnership.

We did a lot from that level but then we also did a lot at the Center level. The website I mentioned, we had something that became very very popular called Fact or Fiction, which people could write in rumors they heard. Are we going to have a buyout? Are we going to have a reduction in force? I heard this is happening, that's happening.

We made a commitment to answer every one, and we did it timely. We didn't run our answers by Legal. We didn't stop and say okay, Legal needs to review these. Another Center had called and said, "Hey, we understand you have this. Our Center Director wants something similar." They were asking us the same thing. "Are you running your answers by Legal?" We said, "No, we want to respond quickly and with what we know. We'll address the 97 percent of those. The 3 percent or even 1 percent, the ones we get wrong, we'll have to deal with those." We just felt like that would slow us down. We have great legal staff. I'm not saying that. It's just that if you have to put it in legal language, then it's going to slow you up.

We wanted to err on the side of being responsive, so we had a team that worked on the website a lot. There was a lot of work put into that, really putting different features there. Then we developed something called the Job Opportunity Bank [JOB] that we wanted everyone at the Center to post their vacancies, even if they were at the same grade level, because one of the

themes that we wanted in the transition was transparency. We wanted everything to be transparent, because what we didn't want is people that were working Shuttle to the very last mission to feel like someone had forgotten them or someone else is taking the new jobs, and I'm going to be the last one here and I'm not going to have a good job when I'm done. So we wanted to have a lot of transparency, and that's why we did the JOB tool. Of course a lot of this was all a result of the strong partnership between the Shuttle Program management and our organization. They supported all of our initiatives that we came up with. They gave us the support we needed.

We could develop all these great tools, but if no one used them then they wouldn't be very effective. It wasn't easy. There were some organizations that were hesitant to put them in, that didn't necessarily want to put their jobs in. We got a lot of buy-in from the Center and made the case why this was important, and why transparency was so important to this transition effort.

We evolved, and now we're still using our JOB tool, but it's been used for different positions that we have now. The other thing that happened is, as you know, Constellation came in, the new Vision for Space Exploration. Then unfortunately very shortly thereafter it was canceled too. We had been working for five years for Shuttle transition and then we were really shocked about the Constellation transition. Fortunately we had a lot of the tools already in place that we could quickly apply to the Constellation Program.

The thing we didn't have though is we didn't have identifiable new work, because a lot of our Shuttle transition efforts were focused on the Constellation work. That was going to be the follow-on. Now that Constellation was canceled we didn't have the identified new work that they were going to do.

At the time we weren't sure if MPCV [Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle] was going to survive or not. Finally I think a whole year later, maybe longer, it was decided, but at the time we didn't know. So there was a lot of uncertainty.

I think one of the things that made it really work well is we had strong support, as I said, but also we had a lot of communication. My philosophy is you need to just get whatever you know out there. People are educated and they're going to read about it in the paper, so you might as well be the one telling them what you know or don't know. If you don't know, just say we don't know yet. I think that really went a long way. I tend to forget what a big deal that was, but it really was a big effort. It really was.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How did you keep people in technical positions in the Shuttle Program? Obviously some people, they probably wanted to find a job and make sure that they would be secure after the program ended. How did you keep people in MOD or the Shuttle Program working till that last mission?

SAIZ: I think a lot of that is attributed to their leadership in the organization, so to Paul [S.] Hill in MOD and to John Shannon in Shuttle. They both are very effective leaders and they I think instilled a sense of commitment and loyalty, and people really wanted to stay to the last Shuttle flight. There was a feeling of accomplishment and achievement and being able to say I'm part of the last mission.

I think a lot of that was attributed to their actual leadership in the technical organizations. The fact that I think we were reaching out to them, talking with them about the fact that we're

working on other jobs for them and communicating with them I think helped. Ultimately that was really attributed to their leadership that they had in their organization.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Would you talk to us about some of the partnerships that you established? I was thinking about the Houston Technology Center or the Aerospace Transition Center, which I think I'd seen.

SAIZ: Nancy Tootle is someone that we worked very closely with. She was working with the Aerospace Transition Center. She set up several. One was in the HEB grocery store parking lot off of El Camino Real and Bay Area Boulevard. We worked with her very closely on setting up a location where outplaced or soon to be outplaced employees could go and get resume advice and interviewing practice. Nancy would organize different industries altogether to come out and interview employees. There was a whole lot of work put into how do we transition the workforce and where do they end up.

Now we don't have statistics on how many people actually received jobs through that, but we have a lot of anecdotal stories of a lot of successes. I think one indication honestly is—we probably have to back this up with a statistic or something from a real estate company. But I haven't seen where there've been so many houses that are on the market and they just are foreclosing or they can't move, or I haven't seen a big wave of people leaving the community. So I think a lot of people did find jobs, but it is a very technical workforce and I think everyone wanted NASA engineers. A lot of them went to the oil industry and petrochemical and just oil and gas overall. Fortunately in Houston we have a lot of big industries that could utilize NASA engineers. I think that all went very well. It was a very insurmountable huge task, but there's a

lot of dedication and effort from a lot of different partners. So I'm very pleased with all the work Nancy and her team did.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Let's shift gears a little bit. I wanted to ask you about the comprehensive wellness program that the Center has. I understand that also falls under HR. Can you talk about that effort? It seems to be much more prominent in these past couple of years.

SAIZ: Yes, it actually has. I'm really pleased with that too. We have a partnership with Space and Life Sciences through the occupational health group primarily. This effort came originally under General Howell. When you were having all this transition and what was going to be happening, we wanted to focus a lot on employee wellness. We went to the Center, and we made a pretty compelling argument that we really needed to revamp our fitness facilities and we needed to revamp our offerings to the Center.

The Starport/Exchange Operations is under my office in Human Resources, and I'm the chair of the Exchange Council, that is comprised half contractor leadership and half civil servant leadership. We had talked about a strategy of really trying to expand that, so we had our fitness facility completely revamped. The Center supported us on that. As a matter of fact we named our fitness facility Beak's Body Shop, which has a really nice plaque out there, because he was a real strong advocate for that effort. We have continued to try to offer as much as we can with educating employees. We just opened a yoga Pilates studio just last week or so. It only holds 20 people. I understood this morning that 30 people showed up for the first class. So we're like oh my gosh. We don't have a big enough studio. It was neat that we didn't have 2 people but we actually had 30 people.

Then we also worked very hard to provide free membership if you will. People can use it for free as long as they fill out a health risk assessment, because we wanted data. We worked with our Legal Office on this, and we have an agreement through the Mayo Clinic where we input our data and they do trend analysis for us on whether or not employees' wellness is improving or not. You just have a self-assessment you take, and it identifies your risk factors, like if you smoke or if you drink or different things that you do that are things that might increase your risk for cardiovascular disease. We have a really capable staff. Actually Karen Schmalz is our manager of the Exchange. She came from the Constellation Program. She was one of the ones that we placed to another job. Karen had a real strong project management background and business background, and that's what that job really is, project management and business. It's like they run their own business because they don't get any appropriated money out there. It's nonappropriated funds. They have to be self-sustaining.

They have catering out there, and they're in charge of the food services, the cafes, Cafe 3, Cafe 11, the gift shops on site, things like that. I'm very very happy with that as well. We're a little bit in danger right now of losing some people with our budget cuts, but I'm hoping we can sustain this wellness effort, because I think it's having some big payoffs.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's a great facility. I try and use it every morning. My husband uses it too.

SAIZ: I'm glad to hear that, yes, it's great.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's good. I've noticed that there's a lot more classes now that are being offered, nutrition and other things.

SAIZ: Yes we're offering a lot of that. They have tours of the grocery store. You've probably seen that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes.

SAIZ: Help you make better selections of your food and stuff. So it's real practical things I think. So it's good.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, it's a nice benefit, nice perk. You did mention Starport and the Exchange Council. I think I had read that you had taken over EAP. Would you talk about that?

SAIZ: Actually, I have not. I have not taken over EAP.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh you haven't, okay.

SAIZ: No. EAP is part of Space and Life Sciences still. I have a very strong relationship with Jackie Reese though, who is the head of EAP. We have stayed in close contact, but they really need to be part of a separate entity, which is the medical sciences area.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Talk to us about the Center Director Program Manager Forum, which I understand you also initiated. That's pretty invaluable.

SAIZ: It's not happening as often anymore. That's not a forum we're using as much. We did for several years. It was important at the time because when we had three large programs here, the Shuttle, [International Space] Station and Constellation, and then because of the way the governance structure works, those three individuals report to Headquarters and they don't report to our Center Director. Yet they're located here at the Center. So there were so many issues that we found ourselves constantly saying well, what does the Shuttle Program Manager think or what does the Constellation Program Manager think, what does the Center Director want to do. We had all these—a little bit of competing—definitely competing priorities, and also different views. I remember I went to our Center Director and I said, “We need some sort of forum where you guys get together and you guys just sit down and talk about key issues, whether it's HR issues or people issues or how you're going to staff them.”

When Constellation was staffing up, Shuttle and Station were very worried about pulling their key leaders out of those roles, because they had missions to achieve too. One thing that I had suggested to Mike Coats is I said, “It seems to me if you get together, the leadership of the organizations plus you as Center Director, and talk.” It started out talking about key leadership positions that needed to be filled in Constellation, but then it evolved to a lot of different topics.

So we set up those meetings about every other month. It would be sometimes at 7:00 in the morning because you couldn't get everybody together at the same time, and be the three program managers and Mike Coats and his deputy, and me, because I was in charge of the agenda. It actually worked out really well because I had great insight because I was part of working the agenda and organizing the meetings. Oftentimes it would just provide huge amounts of information that I could work with as far as doing follow-on work.

It got to the point where the program managers just would not miss. They would come in from vacation or they would ask to adjust the meeting because they really wanted to be there, it was an important topic. That went on for quite a while, until Constellation went away. Now we still have some; not only do we have Station, but we have a few others. But honestly we don't utilize it as much anymore, but that was how it first got into play. I was really proud of that too because that was a good way to bring the leadership together. It really goes back to my philosophy of relationship building, because you've got to get together and talk about the issues rather than being frustrated with each other, and you never really get in a room and say what do we need to do as a Center or as an agency.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand that you're the first woman head of HR here at JSC, and also the first Hispanic. Would you talk about your commitment to diversity at the Center?

SAIZ: Sure. Actually it's interesting because when I was an HR rep and an office chief, branch chief, I never really aspired to be the Director of HR. I knew that only men had had the job before, and I was intimidated by the fact that I wasn't sure how much time it was going to take and I wanted to make sure that I was also committed to my family and not having my family sacrifice because of my job.

I really had aspired to be the Deputy Director. I really wanted to be the Deputy. But then because of everything that happened and how it transpired, as I described to you earlier, there was my opportunity. I realized at some point that if I really wanted to have some big Center-wide impact then I needed to not be the Deputy; I needed to actually be the Director, because as Director, you decide what projects to work on. You decide what your organization is going to be

working on as far as the priorities. I really wanted to emphasize flexible work schedules, have more of a work-life fit. So we had advocated to having more flexible schedules here at the Center, which I think a lot of people are using, more telework. We think we're using a lot of that as well. That was having that family-friendly environment and culture.

I also wanted to spend a lot of time working on diversity and inclusion. That's been very much a follow-on, if you will, to the whole transition effort, because it's all about transparency. It's about transparency of people knowing what opportunities are out there. Can they put their name in the hat to apply for certain jobs? It's all about having that engaged team. So we have done a lot.

When Mike Coats first came in he talked about having diversity efforts as well as benchmarking, this is how the Inclusion and Innovation Council came up. We recommended that to him, to set up an Inclusion and Innovation Council. He did, and he set that up, and he chairs it. We originally had suggested the Deputy Center Director chair it. We presented him the idea and the concept. I remember his answer was, "Well, why can't I chair this?" We're like "Great, yes, you definitely can if you like, that's your call." So that really added a lot to it as well.

The whole diversity initiatives have been focused on the engaged workforce, the engagement teams. I use the example of the YODA team. There's also a team looking at our rewards and recognition. There's also a team working on barriers to innovation. It's not just out of our office. A lot of people in the Center are working on that.

Then now we have Employee Resource Groups [ERG]. Employee Resource Groups are something that's relatively new. It's been the last year or so that we've instituted these employee resource groups. We've had something similar in the past, but there's a little different focus

now. We did a lot of benchmarking with private industry, Texas Instruments, Georgia Power, different places, to find out how to put these in place, that are really focused on your business and providing business solutions. We have an African American group, we have a Hispanic group, an Asian group. We have an LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender] group called Out and Allied. We have a human/systems integration group as well; it's more technically focused. We have five ERGs. Those are I think going really well. We have someone on my staff, dedicated staff that works those, Carolyn Green-Fritz.

We have an I&I Office now, an Inclusion and Innovation Office in Human Resources. It's only comprised of three people, but it's the organization within HR that keeps all the stuff going.

ROSS-NAZZAL: When you came in 1987 you pointed out that there was only one female head of a directorate, and that was Carolyn Huntoon. How do you think opportunities for women in leadership roles have changed at JSC over the years?

SAIZ: I think that women have a lot more opportunities now definitely as you can see from the demographics. I think that one of the things that happened is that a lot of the men that became leaders, they had children, they had daughters. So their daughters were trying to break into professional fields, and they were seeing some of the struggles of their own children. I think they started paying attention a little bit more to their own work environments. Mike Coats talks a lot about his daughter who is a high school counselor. General Howell would talk about his kids. I think that they started realizing wow, we need to look at our own environment. So I

think they were a lot more willing and a lot more receptive to those kinds of flexibilities, and just that overall philosophy.

When I first became the Director, General Howell would have a meeting every morning at 7:30. There was five people that would come to it: the Deputy Center Director, Associate Director, HR, and I can't remember who the other person was now. It was always really a challenge to get here at 7:30. It was a struggle because I had three kids, I had small kids. I was like, "How am I going to do this?" It was very hard and challenging. We'd finally get into the room at 7:30. I'd make it there, and I could tell none of them had those stressors that I did, getting into work.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Were you the only woman in the group?

SAIZ: Yes, I was the only woman in the group. I could tell none of them were thinking about, "Ooh, did I pack that baby bottle and did I remember the pacifier?" But I didn't want to say anything because I didn't want to be disinvited to the meeting or just say well, if you can't make it don't worry, you don't have to come, because then I would have been left out of key decisions and I wouldn't have that seat at the table.

After about six months of a lot of work doing that, I did feel like I had earned enough credibility that I met with General Howell, and I said, "Is there any way you could make your meeting at 8:00? Because I have to get my kids to daycare, and it's just a little easier for me. A lot easier for me."

I remember he said, "Natalie, why didn't you tell me before?" He says, "Sure, we can move this meeting to 8:00, no problem."

The thing is, though, it never ever entered his mind that that would have been a challenge for me. Finally I guess having the courage to bring it up and not just accept that I'll just not go, because it would have been fine if I didn't go. It wasn't like I was a key person necessarily, but he cared enough to make that change. I really appreciated that.

Another person that was really helpful to me was Leonard [S.] Nicholson, who was the Director of Engineering. For several years I was an HR rep supporting him, and then prior to that he was the Shuttle Program Manager for many years. You may have interviewed Leonard, I'm not sure. Now he's at Boeing. But when he was the Director and I was supporting him in Engineering, I had just had my first child. We had adopted our oldest, and then I had my first child really close together. I came back from my leave, and I just said that I was going to be working part-time. I was going to work 32 hours a week. We had a weekly meeting, and I asked if we could start the meeting at 9:00, because of the different daycare issues. I said, "Is there any way we can start the meeting at 9:00?" His deputy was sitting there, and it was real interesting. I love him too, but he said, "Well, I don't know. Is it possible?" He wanted to push back, because obviously that was going to be an impact to him. Leonard just stopped him and said, "No, we will start the meeting whenever you want to, Natalie."

I remember just being so affirmed by that, because he was very accommodating, and it only lasted for six months, and then I came back to work full-time, and then I could go back to resuming our meeting at 8:00. But he was very accommodating to me, and I'll never forget that he was very supportive of that. I've had a lot of people that have been very flexible, so I wanted to make sure when I got into position like I have now that I would institute some of those things and sell those things to the directors and say this is why it's valuable. If you give people a lot of flexibility in their jobs and give them the ability to manage what they have to at home before

they get here, they're going to be more focused when they get here. They're not going to be distracted and thinking about all the things they didn't get done. You build commitment in your organization. They may not want to leave, because if they go to another organization and they don't have those flexibilities they're going to be more inclined to stay where they're working. So I think that's how you keep good people, building that commitment. I try to tell people that and managers that when they get a little nervous about workforce flexibilities, that you have to trust your employees and that's why. I think it's worked well.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, I think you have—is it maxi?

SAIZ: Maxiflex. Yes. Which you can vary your hours and there's just different things you can do.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Talk to us about what you think your greatest accomplishment has been since you've been working at the Center.

SAIZ: That's tough. First of all I think it's probably the two that I've already talked about. The whole workforce flexibilities and having an environment where—and it's not that I've obviously done this by myself, because there's been a lot of help along the way with technology for one. Technology has really helped tremendously, and the younger generation wanting some of these flexibilities. Also I think society allowing fathers to be much more actively involved; they want flexibility too. It's not just the woman's responsibility to do things at home or to take kids to the doctor's office or whatever. I think that all these changes in society have really helped. I think

that really trying to have an impact with a work-life balance and allow people to have those opportunities have been something I really focused on.

The other thing is going to be that inclusion and innovation, primarily the inclusion piece, trying to build trust with your supervisor and have good dialogue and doing a lot of giving feedback on how do you do that for people that are not like you. It's sometimes intimidating to give feedback to people that are not like you. Sometimes people are afraid to do that. So providing a lot of those tools and really trying very hard to do that. Those would be the two areas that I would hope would be long-lasting, that would continue, those two areas.

As far like as a tangible initiative, I would probably say the Shuttle transition would be the biggest thing that I would say I'm most proud of as far as our organization as a whole working on, in close collaboration with the leadership in the Shuttle Program.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned earlier that you do mentor folks. You talk about the importance of work-life balance. What do you tell people?

SAIZ: What I tell people first of all is that their work-life fit is really individually defined. What may work for me may not work for you, and vice versa, so there needs to be enough flexibility to do what makes sense. For a while there, what I would do is I would leave at 4:30 every day—this is when my kids were younger—go home and do the things I needed to do with the kids, and then spend time with them. When they were so young they'd go to bed by 8:00. So if I had waited and left work at 6:00 or whatever, 6:30, I'd only have a very short period of time with them, so I made a commitment to leave work early. Then what I would do after they would go to bed is I'd spend an hour or two doing my e-mail.

I would send e-mail or read my stuff I needed to do, or whatever it was I was doing. What I try to tell everybody, though, is I said, “Okay, because I’m doing e-mail at home, that’s my way to balance my work-life balance. Because I’m sending you an e-mail at 8:30 does not mean I need you to respond to me at 8:30 at night. That’s when I’m putting in my time.” So I didn’t want my work-life fit to impact someone else’s, and then they now felt like they had to be working longer hours because I was working at night. Really, I’m leaving early and they may still be here. So I try to explain that to people, and I also try to tell them that they need to watch out for what they’re doing, making sure it doesn’t impact someone else, because that’s not really fair either.

Then I also try to tell them that they need to take the time to do those really special things. They don’t want to have regrets on that. There are very very few things I think that you can’t adjust. Obviously if there’s a Shuttle flight or something where you’re actually a flight controller or flight director or whatever, okay, you can’t adjust that. But for example, on the first day of school, which is coming up, I make sure that I don’t set up real important meetings that morning in my office, because I want everybody to feel like they can go see their kids off to school on their first day. If they want to go to the first day of their kids’ school, they should have the flexibility to do that and not have the pressure of, “What am I going to do because this meeting is set up and I can’t go to my kids’ first day of school?” I don’t want anyone to miss that.

But if they choose not to I’m also not saying, “Why aren’t you there?” Everyone’s situation is different, and they have to decide what’s important to them. Not everyone has kids. So it could be that they’re taking care of their elderly parent, or they really just want to exercise

every morning. That's important to them. They need to be able to have that flexibility or whatever it is they do.

I try to tell everybody define your own work-life fit. What does that mean? It changes over time. It changes over time in what your priorities are. Also don't let it impact others as far as I described in the e-mail situation. Also don't put your evaluative statements or your views on someone else, because it's a very individual thing. That's what I try to explain to people. So to me that means having a lot of options. We should have as many options as we can. I know that some things you cannot move and you absolutely have to do something—like I said when it's mission-related—but to the extent we can I think we need to model that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Do you think JSC culture has evolved over time to accept that?

SAIZ: I think some pockets have very much so. Some pockets are very very flexible. I think as women and as men that are balancing professional spouses as well as far as that's their life now, they may not have the traditional woman that stays at home, I think as they're getting into leadership positions they're more willing to do that. I don't think it's everywhere. I think we still have areas where it's a little bit more old-school where they want to see you at a certain time; you need to be physically in the office. But I think that that'll slowly change. It's changed a lot already. It's interesting, because I spoke to a leadership class last week. We were talking about these flexibilities. I said until those organizations where they don't do these things change, they're not going to be able to keep those people. Those people are going to see other situations and say well I would much rather work in this other organization because not only do they have

interesting work, but I have a lot more flexibility on doing my work. I think eventually it'll become a business need for them.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What do you think has been your greatest challenge since you've been working at JSC?

SAIZ: I think that over the years it's sometimes difficult to be a mission support person, a human resources professional in predominantly a technical organization. Everything here is measured by technical expertise, and technical expertise is very valuable and very important. So I think that having to always prove your credibility or to have that credibility and to prove your value has always been a challenge.

It's been something that I work on every day to add value and not be a hindrance, or not be that bureaucrat. I really feel proud that our organization has done that very well. It's about staying connected with your customers, because the ones who are not connected with them, then I think they lose their effectiveness. Some people that come here, visitors, and other Centers even, they're surprised that I'm on the same floor as the Center Director, that I'm on the ninth floor, and that this is where our office is. I think that that's a little bit of an example of how much we're relied on, because I go down the hall at least four times a day for a meeting or for something that I need to talk to the Center Director about or the Deputy Center Director. I think that I'm probably the only Center HR Director that is not located with their employees, because my employees are in Building 20, and now they're moving to Building 12. But that's always a challenge.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I do understand that.

SAIZ: Yes, I'm sure.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Rebecca, did you have some questions for Natalie?

WRIGHT: Just have a couple, and one staying on the topic of culture. You mentioned about the advantage of having your HR reps embedded in the different directorates is that they learn that culture. Can you give some examples about how the different directorates have different cultures and how you bring that information back and use that to help determine what you're going to do across the board?

SAIZ: I'll try to think of an example. One is when I worked in Space and Life Sciences, I really love the Space and Life Sciences directorate. I really still have a real kindred spirit with them, because they're an organization that is really focused on technical credentials with PhDs and MDs. They are an expert in orbital debris. Well, this is when ARES [Astromaterials Research and Exploration Science] was part of Space and Life Sciences. But anyway, they're an expert in whatever the technical discipline is.

They really are very much programmed in that regard, whereas if you work in a different organization, let's say it's Engineering, I feel like that organization, they're more project-oriented, and they're more how do we work as a team, but with engineers. I find that engineers are a lot more willing to ask the questions and push back than the Space and Life Sciences employees. Scientists really rely on and value expertise and technical credentials. The engineers

really want to know why. Show me where. Show me the mathematical equation that this is true. They want to do that.

I'm not probably giving you a good tangible example, but it's just knowing how they process information and how they value information helps us tailor the things we do for that organization. We go into a Mission Operations Directorate differently than we would an Engineering Directorate, differently than Space and Life Sciences. If you go into a Mission Operations Directorate, it has to be very structured and very much, "These are the steps that you do. This is how we're going to do an early out implementation plan." It has to be logical, well laid out. We may have a flow chart. Just giving the example of something that you have to apply to the customer that you're dealing with. It doesn't mean that we have 10 different ways of doing it, but we just have to be able to present it in a way that resonates with that customer base. That's what I mean.

WRIGHT: The only other thing I was curious about was NASA and especially JSC right now are maybe facing some years of redefinition or reinventing. How are you and your organization preparing for these next years until things are a little bit more focused? How are you dealing with all those issues that are coming up from the employees and actually from the management as well?

SAIZ: I think it goes back to a couple of things, one is the transparency and one is communication. Trying to get the word out, as much as we know, internal communication. We have that as a shared responsibility with External Relations, so we work that. Having frequent

manager meetings. For example, Mike Coats meets with all the managers quarterly, and we help develop his talking points.

Try to get him to address things that we're hearing in the organization that are a concern to people. So we try to keep that pulse of the organization and raise that to senior level management so they can address it. And having those forums so that the leadership can talk with them.

It is definitely challenging, the fact that there's a lot of talk right now. Really what is the future of human spaceflight? Are we going to have a future in human spaceflight? I think that it's a tough time. I mentioned earlier we use some of our technical advisers for PPMD like Arnie Aldrich and Glynn Lunney and folks like that. When you sit down with people like that and they've said many times, "Natalie, we have been through this many times. This is not the first time that NASA has been faced with this." So you got to realize that the Center is going to get through this.

You got to keep doing what it is that you guys are doing and don't think that—I guess what they're trying to say is don't pretend or don't feel like you're a victim right now, because this has been the history of the space program. They really have provided really good perspectives. It's probably been one of the funnest things that I've done, working with these legends in the space program, as far as like PPMD, because they've just been really dedicated in sharing their knowledge and wanting to spend time giving you as much help as they can. So that's been nice.

WRIGHT: Thanks.

SAIZ: Sure.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Well, we have about five minutes.

SAIZ: Having I been talking this long? Oh my gosh. That went by fast.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's funny. People will tell us, "I don't have two hours' worth to say." It's like "Oh, it's two hours already?" It usually flows by pretty quickly.

Is there anything else that you would like to talk about today? I know we only have a few minutes left, but anything we may have overlooked or something that you think is really important about your career? Or anything you have implemented that we may have overlooked?

SAIZ: Well, I can't think of anything, but probably when I read the transcript I'll think of something then. I can't think of anything right now but I'll look it over carefully and maybe have someone else look at it too and see if there's something I left out. Thank you very much. I really enjoyed this. I appreciate you including me.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Well, thanks for participating.

[End of interview]