



New Director: "I Think it is Going

By Dick Cole,
Chief, Public Affairs

You cannot help but notice his smile immediately. The other immediate impression you get is how young he looks.

"Hi, I'm Charlie Williams," he said as he stretched out his hand. "Come on in, have a seat and let's talk."

I took a seat on the sofa as he sat down in a chair to face me, still wearing his suit coat. "Sir, you can lose the jacket if you would be more comfortable; I would like people to see you the way we see you most the time," I said.

"That's great. I like to be comfortable," he said as he sat down again.

With that, we were off on a pleasant 45-minute conversation. Clearly, Williams enjoys his new job and speaks with enthusiasm about being the new Defense Contract Management Agency director. He also spoke with passion about his career, his family, a love of travel and even admitted to a love of tennis.

Williams hails from the Nashville area, as does his wife, Tujuanna. "My extended family is still down in Tennessee, so we go to the Nashville area frequently. That's probably where I'll retire — somewhere in central or eastern Tennessee." For now, however, he is happy to be at the helm of DCMA.

Did he ever imagine himself leading DCMA?

"Absolutely not!" he said with a broad grin. "As you know, this job has been a general officer position for quite some time. Keith Ernst was the first person to hold this job as a senior executive. I remember when the position was civilianized, saying, 'If the department ever decides that they want to keep that as a civilian position, it is a job I would be very interested in.' I think it is going to be a phenomenal job."

Williams comes to DCMA from the Air Force, where he most recently served as deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for contracting, in the office of the assistant secretary of the Air Force for acquisition. What does he think of DCMA now that he has been on the job a couple of months? "I'm very impressed. I'll tell you now, I think the agency, under a very stressful resource time, has done, and continues to do, phenomenal work in getting products delivered to the warfighter."

What are his biggest challenges right now as the new director?

"From where I sit, at this point, first, we have to fix the human capital piece. Whether it is how many folks we have in terms of numbers,

that we have the right skills and competencies or that they are in the right places, we have to pay attention to our human capital," Williams explained. "In addition, we have to be able to go out, recruit and hire," Williams continued. "We have to attack this human capital piece from all different directions, and we're going to need to push really, really hard to get some things fixed. That's my biggest challenge. That's my number-one priority."

What does Williams do for fun?

"We get in the car and go to New York because my daughter loves New York," he said with another broad smile. "I spend enough time at work that I simply try to do my best to spend as much time as I can with my two daughters and my wife. That's not a lot of time sometimes."

Williams believes the greatest strength he brings to his new job is the ability to get people together, focused and moving toward a shared vision. "I think I bring a sense of calm to an era of chaos. I am able to dig through the chaff and get down to the most important issues, yet do it in a way that helps people focus," said Williams. "I also bring 25 years

"We need to know what our core capabilities are going to be, no matter where you're located, and what you can deliver to that customer who walks in the door."

— Charlie Williams Jr.

to be a Phenomenal Job™



New DCMA Director Charlie Williams Jr. in his office at DCMA headquarters in Alexandria, Va. (Photo by Julia Wyant, DCMA Public Affairs)

of experience in the Department [of Defense]. My understanding of the DoD acquisition system and my experience as a contracting officer are all strengths that I bring with me to the job.”

Williams admits that, sometimes, working with people that way can be challenging for him. “One of my weaknesses is that I’m an introvert, and I have to work hard to get people working together,” Williams said. “That’s something you would find more often in an extrovert. I would offer that introverts are great listeners, and I think listening is a big part of bringing people together.”

Williams does not envision any immediate organizational changes. “My sense is that, as we’ve gone through our various organizational

changes over the years, it has led to some fragmentation in our effort to reach a common purpose. That fragmentation is not helpful and creates risk,” he said with a concerned look. “So, we need to take the leaders that we have and get them focused on moving in a particular direction in a unified way.”

“What we need are folks to step up to be leaders. In addition, not just the senior leaders but also every leader — every person in the agency is a leader — wherever they are in the organization has to help us find the way forward. I need people to step up and be counted,” he said.

Williams advocates the principles set forth in Jim Collins’ book *Good to Great*. Five years ago, Collins asked the question, “Can a good company

become a great company and, if so, how?” In *Good to Great*, Collins concludes that it is possible but finds there are no silver bullets.

Collins and his 21-person research team established a definition of a good-to-great transition involving a 10-year transition period followed by 15 years of increased profits in 11 of the 1,400 companies to make the Fortune 500. At the heart of the findings about these companies’ stellar successes is what Collins calls the Hedgehog Concept, a product or service that leads a company to outshine all worldwide competitors, which drives a company’s economic engine and inspires passion in the company. While the companies that achieved greatness were all in different industries, each engaged in versions of Collins’ strategies.

Williams wants to develop “Level 5” leaders in DCMA by following Collins’ strategies and wants the agency’s employees to “get on the bus.” “I believe we have to get on a single sheet of music as to what our priorities are. We need to know what our core capabilities are going to be, no matter where you’re located, and what you can deliver to that customer who walks in the door. We need to figure out what that is and deliver it consistently at a high level of quality, every time, so that we, too, can go from good to great.”

Editor’s note: To read the full transcript of Dick’s interview with the director, check the “DCMA Express.” 