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WORKING THE PROCESS

When Ben Little is not at his office at the Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation (PEO STRI), you can find him in his kitchen or working around his house. Both places provide lessons that he uses in his work as a systems engineer for the Product Manager for Virtual Training Systems (PM VTS). “In both of these areas, similar to being at work, you have to devise creative solutions to achieve your goal. When I have a home project I want to do or a dish I want to make, I research how to do it, buy supplies and tools and execute the process, with the final result of a completed project or a delicious meal. Similar processes are followed throughout the acquisition of a training device.”

Formerly the Product Manager for Ground Combat Tactical Trainers, PM VTS is assigned to the Project Manager for Training Devices, responsible for providing realistic training environments and equipment. PM VTS develops, fields and provides total acquisition life cycle management for precision gunnery, driver, route clearance, air and watercraft operation, satellite control and maintenance virtual training systems supporting institutional, home station and contingency operations.

Little is responsible for working with customers, stakeholders and contractors to define, develop and deliver training systems that meet cost, schedule and performance requirements and provide effective training to ensure the combat mission readiness of every Soldier that receives training. “Proper training can save lives, and without adequate training and training devices, warfighters will be ill-prepared for the duties and tasks they will face while deployed,” he said.

“Whenever I tell people about my job, the one thing that always catches their attention is the travel,” noted Little. “Traveling is a frequent occurrence on the job, and I’ve been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to travel to places I’ve always wanted to go—as well as some places that I never thought I’d go—and I have enjoyed them all.” Among the places he’s visited are Germany, South Korea, Hawaii and Alaska, often to deliver or upgrade a training system. “It’s really gratifying to see something we’ve worked on finally in the hands of the users, in different locations and for different types of training. It’s also gratifying to have the opportunity to get their feedback—hearing their comments and questions firsthand is invaluable.”

After working in industry for a few years as a contractor for PEO STRI, Little learned about an internship within the organization and decided to apply. “I saw working for PEO STRI as an opportunity to get closer to the fight and have a greater impact on the training devices we provide our Soldiers—to be involved with the development of training systems from inception to delivery to the warfighter,” he said. But he noted that his first acquisition position, engineering intern, came with a steep learning curve. “For someone who was recently out of college and wasn’t prior service, much of being an engineering intern was learning the processes and

BENJAMIN LITTLE

COMMAND/ORGANIZATION: Product Manager for Virtual Training Systems, Project Manager for Training Devices, Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation

TITLE: Systems engineer

YEARS OF SERVICE IN WORKFORCE: 9.5

DAWIA CERTIFICATIONS: Level III in systems engineering; Level I in program management

EDUCATION: B.S. in computer engineering, University of Central Florida



the lingo, as well as the roles of people and agencies within the Army acquisition community.”

Transitioning from private industry to the public sector also gave him a perspective on how both components operate in the acquisition process. “When I was working in private industry, the challenge was to work within the cost, schedule and performance constraints that were set by the client. Now I’m on the other side of that equation, as part of the team that establishes those parameters.”

For Little, one of the most important points in his career was the first time he oversaw a project from inception to delivery—in this case, an upgrade for a virtual gunnery training system. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command updated training standards, which necessitated changes to the system. “Being responsible for coordinating meetings with stakeholders, conducting negotiations with the contractor, holding working groups to develop the product, leading test events and delivering the product to the site was an exciting experience that gave me opportunities to learn at every point along the way,” he said. “The lead engineer on the program was always there to guide me if I had any questions and supported my ability to manage the project.”



SEEING IT THROUGH

One of Little’s most valuable experiences as a product manager, and a first in his career, was to shepherd the Stryker MGS Advanced Gunnery Training System, a major upgrade, from inception to delivery.



TEST FIRE

Little tests the Stryker Mobile Gun System (MGS) Advanced Gunnery Training System, which provides precision virtual gunnery simulation training for MGS crews and platoons. The system replicates the gunner and commander positions within the turret of the Stryker MGS vehicle. (Photos by Andrew Richards, PM VTS)

His biggest takeaway from the project was confidence. “For me, acquisition was far removed from anything I learned in college, so there was a lot to learn. But I worked through the entire process and was able to go to the lead engineer when I had questions. And when it was all done, I realized I had learned a great deal and was confident more in my abilities as a result.”

No matter the project, he added, “communication and teamwork are key. In any acquisition program, there is too much for one person to do it all and you have to be able to engage the resources around you. You won’t know everything, so ask for help. You can’t do everything, so learn how to prioritize tasks and delegate what you can.”

For Little, the biggest payoff in being part of the Army Acquisition Workforce is “being a part of the Army family, where career development and personal development are equally important. The amount of consideration and care that is exemplified through the recognition of career milestones, personal life milestones and camaraderie throughout the organization is unmatched. I’m grateful for the support that VTS provides to its workforce.”

For those looking to advance their careers, he added, “Don’t be afraid to ask questions, but be prepared to learn the information given. There are many Army acquisition professionals who came before you who have a lot of knowledge to offer. The more you can learn from them, the better an acquisition professional you will become.”

—SUSAN L. FOLLETT