



"Nothing is permanent but change," Heraclitus 500 BCE

Change is a daily part of the human existence. Heraclitus' philosophical writings from more than 2,500 years ago have been further interpreted to state that in order to survive, change is necessary. Those musings may have been penned on parchment in 500 BCE, but they are just as true today. And, so it happens with USASMD/ARSTRAT and the National Security Personnel System (NSPS). We instituted NSPS in March 2007 and it was a major change in how we evaluate civilian performance and how we reward that performance.

However, when we implement new ideas that change the way we operate, there are ample opportunities to learn new lessons. During our town halls, there were a number of persons who voiced concern about how NSPS was being implemented at USASMD/ARSTRAT. While I believe that NSPS is being executed ethically and by people with the best intentions, I also believe we must be transparent about how we evaluate performance and how we reward people for their performance. To that end, I directed the Business Initiatives Office to gather information on the attitudes of our workforce toward NSPS.

An online survey was conducted of all USASMD/ARSTRAT personnel covered by NSPS. Some of the key survey findings are enumerated below:

- 1) 72 percent of the command's NSPS personnel feel that personnel practices have been negatively impacted by the system's implementation.
- 2) 58 percent across the command see the pay pool process as unfair.
- 3) Negative opinions of NSPS are more intense in elements located outside Huntsville.
- 4) 57 percent submitted additional comments with 6 percent positive, 14 percent neutral or mixed, and 80 percent negative.

A major misconception is that there is a forced distribution of ratings or a quota system in the pay pool process. First, DOD prohibits forced distribution. The fact is that the pay pool rates each individual appraisal based on what is written in the objective section of the evaluation. If clarification is needed about what is written, the pay pool contacts the respective rating official. Bottom line: the overall distribution of ratings is not revealed until the pay pool has finalized their decisions.

I appreciate the feedback at town halls and the candor provided by those participating in the survey about NSPS. To provide better transparency and to mitigate any perceptions of bias, I have asked the staff to implement the following initiatives.

- 1) We will conduct the staff pay pool panel in Colorado Springs this year. The intent is to alternate the location between Colorado Springs and Huntsville.
- 2) The staff pay pool has been reconfigured to have equal representation from Colorado Springs and Huntsville with three members from each location.
- 3) Additional training was conducted by the Chief of Staff and G1 to further explain the performance appraisal and pay pool process.
- 4) We will ensure that all personnel have access to NSPS and pay pool process information, especially those without access to the USASMD/ARSTRAT Commandnet.

These initiatives should help improve the perceptions associated with the NSPS process at USASMD/ARSTRAT.

Again, I appreciate the candor and feedback we receive at our town halls. Communication is important in a learning organization, more so now as we operate in an environment where the velocity of rumors is directly proportional to the speed of a "Send" button.

Thank you for all you do.

¹ Heraclitus was a Greek philosopher from Ephesus (near modern Kuşadası, Turkey) who was active around 500 BCE. Graham, Daniel W., "Heraclitus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/heraclitus/>>.

² Ibid.