African-American CAREER WORLD

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"Life is not about where you came from but rather where you are going and how you are going to get there," states Helena Brown.

HELENA BROWN

With Washington, DC's, Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (SADBU) Office of the Secretary of the Navy, deputy director for special programs, and senior procurement analyst, Helena Brown well knows the importance of building relationships. Actively engaged in the development and implementation of initiatives and strategies that enhance small business participation in the Navy's prime and subcontract procurements, she describes SADBU as the focal point for the Navy's small business programs.

"We are committed to help to ensure that small businesses nationwide, including women-owned, Hub zone, small disadvantaged, service disabled veteran-owned, and Native-American-owned small businesses, have the opportunity to provide quality, reasonably priced products and services to the Navy and Marine Corps. "Historically, it's small, rather than large, businesses that produce the innovations most helpful for maintaining the strength of our naval capability and the Navy's outstanding level of readiness," she remarks.

Having entered the contracting field in 1974 through an upward-mobility program, Brown has participated in a full range of mandatory procurement and related continuing-education courses. In addition to attending American University, she has the honor of holding certification as a member of the Navy's Acquisition Professional Community.

With a civilian rank equivalent to that of Colonel or Navy Captain, Brown has held a variety of contracting positions within the military services. It was a promotion to the head of the Procurement Branch in the Pentagon for the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations OP-09B31 in 1983 that led her to the Navy's small business program. The recipient of several prestigious awards, she values the most the Navy's Omnibus Award presented by the Secretary of the Navy for her outstanding contributions to SADBU and the Navy's Meritorious Civilian Service Award and Medal.

Noting that within the Navy the contracting field affords the opportunity for talented individuals with the right qualifications and training to excel as acquisition professionals, Brown stresses that rapid promotions are possible for experienced in-demand acquisition personnel, including small business specialists. Those interested in learning more about the Navy's contracting program can log on to http://dacm.secnavy.navy.mil/.

According to Brown, skills necessary for success in the contracting field include a thorough knowledge of procurement regulations, policies, and procedures. Verbal and written expertise, good people skills, and the desire to help others succeed are vital as well. She mentions, too, that an aging acquisition workforce within the Department of Defense will result in a significant number of job opportunities over the next few years, and that the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (manpower and reserve affairs) through the Senior Executive Service Corps has instituted programs to develop minority personnel, at the GS-14-15 levels, who aspire to leadership positions.

What Brown enjoys most about her work is helping to shape the Navy's small business policies. A dedicated employee, she thanks her parents for instilling in her a strong work ethic and her three children for their consistent support and motivation." There's nothing more important than spending time with your family," says Brown. "Success is empty without someone to share it with."

Her advice to others includes accepting a lower grade level in order to enter a field with upward potential and notes that the best advice she ever received was to never turn down a federal position that offers mandatory training. "Life is not about where you came from but rather where you are going and how you are going to get there," says Brown, who also believes in rewarding yourself along the way. AACW