

A Talk with Tish: Leading with Integrity

By Jacqueline K. Schultz

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Letitia “Tish” A. Long is the Chairman of the Intelligence and National Security Alliance (INSA), a non-profit trade association whose mission is to provide a “nonpartisan forum for collaboration among the public, private, and academic sectors of the intelligence and national security communities.” Letitia Long served as the fifth Director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), and was the first woman to lead a major U.S. intelligence agency. She began her career in Naval Intelligence and then proceeded to serve as the Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence, the first Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence Policy, Planning and Resources, the first Chief Information Officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Deputy Director of the DIA before leading NGA.

“Leadership is about building teams. Teams are formed from relationships and relationships are built on trust.” – Letitia A. Long

BACKGROUND

What prompted your decision to join the Navy and initially made you interested in the intelligence community (IC)?

For clarification, I was not in the Navy, I served as a civilian employee for the Department of the Navy. I attended Virginia Tech to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering. I needed to pay for my education, so I participated in the Cooperative Education Program. This is a five-year program where you spend your first and fifth years studying full time and the middle years alternating semesters going to school full time and working full time. It is a great way to gain practical experience.

I grew up in a family committed to public service. Both of my parents and three of my siblings worked at the National Security Agency. After graduating I spent six years working at the David Taylor Naval Ship Research and Development Center as a program manager developing Acoustic Intelligence (ACINT) systems for submarines. This is where I learned about the importance of building teams.

I then spent the next six years working for Naval Intelligence and even managed some of the programs I had worked on at David Taylor. This work was highly classified. As a result, I had the opportunity to work on a program from end to end. What I mean by that is we put the program together, justified and defended it on the Hill, received the appropriation, developed and installed the equipment, worked with the customer and received and analyzed the data. It's unusual to work the whole life cycle of a program from one job and I was very fortunate to be able to do that.

CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Your career has been defined by firsts: as the first Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, the first Chief Information Officer at the DIA, and the first woman to lead a major U.S. intelligence agency. How have you charted your own path when there was not a clear precedent?

Let me start at the beginning. I was one of eight children (with five brothers) and having seven siblings taught me a lot about teamwork. It also taught me to speak up. My parents never made a distinction between what the girls could do versus our brothers. Therefore, I didn't think twice about going into engineering. I loved math and science and it was where the jobs were. However, it was not where the women were. Nor were they at David Taylor Research Center. I was the only woman in my division of about 75 people. That said, I was accepted – as I was at Virginia Tech. I don't recall having any issues – even working on submarines in the 1980s.

I learned the importance of teams in achieving success and that teams are built on relationships. I worked hard, built a solid reputation, built a network - and called upon it when I needed to. My network consisted of my peers and teammates, and just as importantly, my mentors. I had several mentors from early in my career and added to that set of mentors over the years. I still reach out to some of them today.

I also learned to take risks. I took risks when applying to jobs. Each successive job was just a little bit out of my comfort zone. This undoubtedly helped me in

my selection to Senior Executive in Naval Intelligence when I was just 34 years old – the first woman to be promoted to senior executive in Naval Intelligence. I spent four months in that job and then went to DIA. I spent 18 months at DIA and then went to the Central Intelligence Agency for three years. Then I went back to Naval Intelligence as Deputy Director (the first woman) and then to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The risk was not only the increased responsibility, it was also the fact that I had to resign from each position and then reapply elsewhere. It's easier and much more common to move around today than it was back then.

I understand that you were serving as the Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence on 9/11. Are you willing to describe what it is like to lead during a crisis?

On the day of the attacks, the Director of Naval Intelligence, RADM Rick Porterfield was scheduled to testify on Capitol Hill. Therefore, I conducted the morning meeting that day, from the operations center in the Pentagon, which consists of an intelligence briefing on overnight developments of interest to the Navy. Sixteen minutes into the meeting, the first plane hit the North Tower and we turned on CNN to watch the coverage. A few minutes later we resumed our meeting – remember we all thought it was a small plane off course that had hit the tower. When we received notice that the second plane hit the South Tower, we turned the news back on. I will never forget that one of the senior Navy Captains in the room looked at me, leaned over, and said “We are under attack by Al Qaeda”.

After a few minutes, I left the briefing center to see what information the Chief of Naval Operations required. He was not in his office, so I returned to mine. About 20 minutes later, the third plane hit the Pentagon. We evacuated. I tried to go back to the operations center but could not get there because the plane had flown into the exact area where we had just been. We lost eight magnificent Naval Intelligence personnel that day.

Our priority the rest of that day was to account for everyone. We mustered in the South Parking Lot and I sent everyone home except for our Executive Officer. We eventually ended up in the Marine Corps Intelligence Headquarters in the Navy Annex. We did not even have a recall roster with us. I called my husband and he faxed us one. RADM Porterfield walked back from Capitol Hill and joined us. By midnight, we were able to locate all but seven of our folks. (The eighth would not be identified until some weeks later as a Naval Intelligence reservist who had been in the ops center in his civilian capacity.)

After midnight, I visited the spouse, with a chaplain, of one of our unaccounted-

for personnel. The spouse was magnificently brave. It was the hardest thing I had ever done before, or since, then. What was it like to lead during that time? I believe that RADM Porterfield and I showed a lot of compassion and a quiet determination to re-constitute what we had lost – our watch – and pivot Naval Intelligence to support the Global War on Terrorism. We attended a lot of funerals in the following weeks. 9/11 was a shared experience that forged bonds that remain today.

How did the attacks impact mission mentality?

Many people rededicated themselves to the mission after the attacks. There was an increased sense of urgency. The 9/11 Commission drove the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) which resulted in the creation of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), the National Counterterrorism Center, greatly increased information sharing and Joint Duty Assignments. 9/11 was really the event that put the Intelligence Community (IC) on the path of increased collaboration by pointing out three flaws: a lack of an information-sharing system, laws that prevented information-sharing between law enforcement and the intelligence community, and a culture of not sharing information. The IRTPA sought to overcome that.

The government is often criticized for putting many agencies in silos or making inter-agency cooperation difficult. What is an example of a time you collaborated with another agency or initiated a partnership that led to a successful outcome?

The operation to take down Osama bin Laden (UBL) is a great example of IC collaboration at its finest. I had been the Director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) less than a month when several NGA analysts discovered a compound they believed to be where bin Laden resided. The IC had been searching for UBL for over a decade. NGA, working with NSA and CIA, searched an area based on a tip-off and came up with several likely compounds – eventually honing in on the one that the operations team would successfully raid.

POST-GOVERNMENT SERVICE

What do you miss most about public service in the government and now as the Chair of INSA's Board of Directors, why do you believe in the importance of public-private partnerships?

I miss the mission and the people. I stay in touch with the people. The

Intelligence and National Security Alliance (INSA) provides one way for me to stay connected with the mission. INSA brings the government together with the private sector. The government cannot meet mission needs alone. INSA provides a platform which enables the public sector to outline their priorities and needs and enables a critical conversation between the two entities.

What emerging trend/technology do you foresee as the next critical threat to U.S. national security and how can the IC today best counter it?

Information and data assurance. The sheer volume of information available to an analyst today, from so many new sources, is simply overwhelming. Artificial intelligence is an emerging technology already being employed in the IC. Used properly, it is an opportunity to help the analyst sift through the information to find patterns and discern what is of most importance.

A threat related to the volume of information is disinformation and misinformation. How does the analyst know the efficacy of the data? How can the IC be assured it is reporting the truth? Disinformation campaigns are being waged by both nation states and non-nation states. Whether one is trying to influence our elections or sow discord over race relations or even misinform citizens about the coronavirus, these campaigns tug at the very fabric of our society. The IC needs to address this head on - call it out when it is identified and call it out publicly.

PERSPECTIVE FOR STUDENTS

What are the top leadership traits that students should cultivate?

Integrity is the foundation for everything we do and, at the end of the day, everything we have. Any subsequent leadership traits build upon integrity. The three leadership traits that reinforce integrity are reputation, self-awareness and courage. Guard your reputation; it is your currency. Self-awareness involves knowing who you are – knowing your strengths and weaknesses.

Accentuate your strengths and work on your weaknesses. You need trusted advisors to tell you the truth. (The more senior you are in your career; the more people will try and flatter you rather than tell you the truth.) Finally, you need courage; courage to make the hard decisions, courage to speak truth to power, and courage to stand up for your folks when things don't go exactly as planned.

What role have mentors played in your career?

Mentors have played a huge role in my career. They have been sounding boards, rendered much needed advice, and opened doors for me. I have had and continue to have many mentors. Everyone should cultivate multiple mentors. Mentors should be different than you. They should be different in background and experience. If they were just like you, it would be as if you were taking advice from yourself. Sometimes you want advice that gives you the immediate reaction of “I would never do that.” It makes you think outside your comfort zone – which means you are growing. I still rely on my mentors today. We are never too old or too wise to need advice.

You’ve worked in high positions in a heavily male-dominated sector. What advice do you have for young women looking to be heard when their voices are so often discounted?

We used to say it was enough to have a seat at the table. We now know it is vital to not only have a seat at the table, everyone also needs a voice at the table. A recent BYU study shows that there are still biases and cultural norms that prevent women from being heard. One way to be heard is to have a majority of women in the room. That is often not feasible based on our numbers. What you can do is to have an ally in the room. A woman – or even better, a man – who will repeat and emphasize your good points. For all the men reading this, you can have such a profound impact when you take on the ally role. I commend the BYU study for all to read.

Looking back, what has been the most rewarding part of your career?

The most rewarding part of my career has been seeing those I have mentored rise up in their career and be successful and happy.