

LEADERSHIP Excellence

In Government

Fall 2011

**Employee
Engagement**

*Hole in
the Soul*

*Executive
Coaching*

Value of VALU

*Independent
Contractors*

Alice Muellerweiss
Dean of VA Learning
University

WWW.TMGOV.ORG



Value of VALU

Shaping tomorrow's VA.



by Kay Boatner

TRANSFORMING POTENTIAL into Performance:

It's more than a tagline

for the Department of Veterans Affairs' investment in people, talent development, and training. It's a vision—realized in large part through the evolution of the VA Learning University (VALU).

"When Secretary Shinseki issued his call to action—build a leading 21st century organization to better serve our veterans—we knew our people needed to be at the core of that transformation and that they needed a *robust learning environment* that enabled them to excel no matter their position or role," said Alice Muellerweiss, Dean of the VALU.

With more than 320,000 employees, the VA impacts people's lives daily—be it through medical delivery, educational and loan assistance, medical claim processing, life insurance, caring for homeless veterans or burial services, to name a few functions.

VA careers often span more than one of those functions in more than one state. "Our diversity creates a unique environment to build a long career at VA; and the more diversified our experiences are, the better the service we can provide veterans," said Dr. Arthur McMahan, VALU's Deputy Dean and a veteran himself. "To support our commitment to career mobility, we needed to establish a few benchmarks in the form of core and leadership competencies, career mapping tools, and a learning environment that supported shift work, workers in rural locations, and the other complexities our staff face."

Dean Muellerweiss gathered input from leadership and staff: "We needed to understand *each department's current and future needs* as well as *leadership and competency gaps* so we could create training and professional development programs that impacted every line of business in a positive way."

The outcome that year was staggering, with almost 206,000 instances of training, exceeding the goal by 71,000; and 90 percent of participants shared positive job-based, post-training reviews, linking their enhanced job

performance to their VALU training.

Recently, the U.S. Distance Learning Association honored VALU with its *Best Practices Gold Award* for VALU's Military Cultural Awareness Program, a 90-minute module aimed at helping staff understand the nuances of military branches. "It brought so much about our veterans to life for me" says Arminda Guerrero, a training technician at the Topeka VA Health Resource Center. "It shifted my perspective on our mission, and the needs of the veterans I engage through our call center."

Asst. Sec. for HR/Administration, the Hon. John U. Sepulveda, expanded on VALU's impact: "Beyond the benefit to VA employees in helping them navigate their careers, VALU has become a *critical business partner* in helping leaders address their most pressing challenges."

In October 2010, VALU launched its *change academy*—a program that put some 750 employees through a robust change leadership program over two weeks. Creatively working around barriers such as shift work, mobile clinics and emergency care, almost 80 percent of the facility went through the training.

"The outcome was amazing" said Bonnie Pearce, Assoc. Director for Patient Care Services at the Jack C. Montgomery Medical Center, "We faced some resistance at first, as our staff was concerned that patient care may suffer, but the VALU team worked with us delivering training programs in shifts. We saw an incredible shift in collaboration. Professionals who normally would not talk freely to each other began to share thoughts about patient care. We all adopted a new language and a stronger bond emerged."

VALU is looking to establish an Executive Training Advisory Board. Co-chaired by Dean Muellerweiss and a CLO from one of VA's business lines, the board will establish a governance process to meet the needs of VALU's customers to rapidly address training issues, refresh or develop new policy, and find the most efficient ways to deliver training.

Almost 60 percent of VA's leaders will soon become retirement eligible, and there is a *sense of urgency* to ensure the transference of knowledge and skills, resulting in a workforce of engaged employees providing world-class services to our nation's veterans. LE

Kay Boatner is an Associate Editor at the Center for Human Capital Innovation (CHCI). Visit www.TMGo.org.

