

The People of the CIA ... Women in Leadership: Cindy Bower

This is the second article in a two-part series about women in leadership at the CIA. It features Chief of Human Resources Cindy Bower. To learn more about women in leadership at the CIA, read the first article in our series about Director of Science and Technology Stephanie O'Sullivan.

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During her 31-year career at the CIA, Chief of Human Resources Cindy Bower has experienced a wide variety of jobs across the Agency. In fact, she has worked in every directorate with the exception of one—the National Clandestine Service. Bower was able to take advantage of numerous opportunities because she had a supportive mentor and an extensive network.

Down a Winding (Career) Path



Bower started out at the Agency in 1978 as a document analyst in the Directorate of Intelligence (DI). After moving to another job within the DI, in late 1985, her former office director and mentor called and asked her to take a plans officer position on the DI management staff. At first, Bower wasn't thrilled with the idea because it involved budget management and she wasn't particularly fond of math, but she soon realized that it was the perfect way to broaden her horizons.

"This job really opened up a lot of doors for me," she said. "It provided me with the skills I needed to be competitive for a variety of senior positions later in my career."

In 1988, Bower got another call from her mentor. This time, he was working as the office director at the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC). He wanted Bower to take a job at NPIC. During the next four years, Bower immersed herself in different job opportunities at NPIC—two staff jobs and two management jobs.

Bower thanks her mentor—and the contacts she made through her mentor—for providing her with unique opportunities at which she could excel. She recognizes and values the guidance her mentor gave her throughout the years.

"At the end of the day, he showed me a whole new perspective of the organization, which allowed me to see the decision-making process at the highest level," she said. "His guidance provided me with new skills that allowed me to move more easily across the Agency."

Giving Back

Not only is Bower a product of a successful mentoring relationship, but she also strives to inspire young Agency employees by serving as a mentor. Bower has participated in a few different mentoring programs at the Agency.

One program, sponsored by the [Office of Diversity Plans and Programs](#), provided Agency employees with the opportunity to engage with senior leaders. Bower's group consisted of several new employees who were interested in gaining insights into the Agency's culture and getting some useful career advice.

In addition, Bower participated in an office-level mentoring program that was focused on employees who are trying to figure out their next career move.

"We spent a lot of time exploring their opportunities," she said. "This may mean that they need to go back to school or they need to explore an entirely different career field."

Bower also regularly participates in individual mentoring. For example, Bower mentored a summer employee who has gone far in her career. Bower encouraged her to apply to the Agency. After she joined the Agency, Bower continued to give her career advice and watched her thrive.

"We talked a lot about the right moves for her to make in her career," Bower said. "Some of those decisions resulted in her not getting promoted as quickly, but ultimately put her on the career path she wanted to pursue."

Advice for the Next Generation

For people who are interested in working at the Agency, Bower offers several keys to success.

First, work hard and become known for something.

"It sounds very basic, but really it's the ticket to moving ahead," she said. "This can be anything from having a good academic record to receiving awards for public speaking or athletics. These kinds of accomplishments show dedication and commitment."

The second thing Bower tells people is to learn to be an effective communicator.

"A lot of what happens at the Agency is accomplished because of effective communication," she said. "It's very important to be able to write effectively, make a good presentation, negotiate, or argue your case effectively if you're trying to convince others of the value of your ideas."

"I can't tell you how many times I've seen an application that says, 'I'm a perfectionist,' but when you read the resume, it has several typos."

Third, Bower emphasizes maturity.

"Maturity can be demonstrated by holding a job, serving in the military, or paying the bills on time," she said.

Bower also says that overseas experience and foreign language skills are a plus for any applicant.

"I was a Russian language major and it's what got me through the door—even though I never used it," she said.

Having some fun is the next on Bower's list.

"There are too many exciting and interesting opportunities here to ever be bored," she said. "At the end of the day, you have to be able to enjoy what you are doing, laugh at your mistakes, and learn from them."

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