

CIGIE Fellows Cohort Training Activities – November 2020

On November 17, the Honorable Susan S. Gibson, Inspector General for the National Reconnaissance Office met virtually with members of the CIGIE Fellows Program to share in her professional journey as a female leader.

Ms. Gibson's career began as an attorney in the 1985 male dominated Army. Simply being a female attorney in the Army at the time set her apart from her colleagues. Despite wanting to be an appellate court judge in her youth, she fell in love with her role as an attorney in the DoD Intelligence Agencies and eventually retired after many years of service. While in the Army, she earned both a Masters in National Security and Fiscal Law and later became the IG for NRO.

She had always imagined herself as an appellate court judge, being an IG was not on her radar. She described her professional career path as unconventional and encouraged the CIGIE fellows to not get discouraged when their life does not follow a linear path. "You have to embrace the knot in your stomach: If you're going to apply for a job, and the thought of doing that job gives you the knot in your stomach, embrace it. That's where you're going to grow."

Ms. Gibson shared her perspective on the difference between a leader and a manager. A leader works with people to take care and empower them, while a manager allocates resources and ensures the completion of the necessary day-to-day tasks. It is important for a leader to motivate and take care of the people they lead. Ms. Gibson added that she looks for people who know their strengths and weaknesses and do not have to be told what to do.

She drew parallels from the book *The Better Angels of our Nature*, by Steven Pinker to how people adapt to change in life. The book discusses how challenges in life do not get fixed at once, but if individuals strive to elevate themselves, the tide will rise slowly and change will occur. Change is hard, however, expectations, must be tempered." To that end, she discussed, maintaining a work-life balance is also important for endurance. Good self-care is one of those elements of the work-life balance, "it's like when you need to stop and put gas in a car." This also applies to leading people she added, your followers need permission to put gas in their tanks.

Ms. Gibson left the fellows with one final thought: To trust your gut and go with it. If you did something wrong, figure it out and keep moving forward.