Early in my shipbuilding career, I was drafted from the waterfront to be part of a team that worked to maintain timely funding for the construction of the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76). One of the many lessons I learned from that experience was the value of diversity and inclusion (D&I).

It was especially empowering for me because I had a seat at the table with men and women with different areas of expertise, different educational and work backgrounds, different lengths of service, and most importantly, different ideas about how to proceed. The amount of respect in the room for everyone’s unique experiences allowed us to make really, really good decisions on behalf of the company.

So why am I sharing this story?

Because Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII) is one of the many companies — large and small — taking important steps to bolster D&I in the workplace. For us, that means creating an environment in which the least-empowered person in the room feels confident enough to speak up and share his or her views.

While there is a compelling business case for D&I, we embrace it at HII for the same reason we value safety, ethics, compliance and other foundational elements of our culture: because it’s the right thing to do. And as the largest industrial employer in Virginia and Mississippi, we are compelled to stand up for what is right — not just within our company, but in the real world we all share when the work day ends.

Similar to our ethics philosophy, we demonstrate our strong commitment to D&I with our “tone at the top.” In fact, our three divisions manage unique D&I programs through their human resources and communications departments, but our corporate office takes the lead in establishing that tone for more than 300 vice presidents and directors throughout the company.

Our “leadership journey” began in 2014, when we invited Dr. Martin Davidson, the senior associate dean and chief diversity
officer at the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business, to speak about “The Business Case for D&I” at our annual leadership offsite. In subsequent years, our leadership meetings — always held in Atlanta — have featured Dr. Walter E. Fluker and guided tours of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site (2015) and the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel (2017); Dr. Andrea Young and a guided tour of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights (2015); Dr. Chris Adkins (2016); and Soledad O’Brien and a D&I program at the Fernbank Museum of Natural History (2018).

We also made D&I the subject of our annual Enhancing Personal Leadership training for vice presidents and directors in 2015. “Courage To Make a Difference” featured another presentation by Dr. Davidson (“Doing Diversity Differently: Leveraging Difference to Grow the Value of Huntington Ingalls Industries”) and robust discussions on “Why This Topic, Why Now?” and “What’s Keeping Us from Being a World Class D&I Company?” Also of note: In 2016, we named our first corporate director of D&I.

In the end, the ultimate measure of success is going to be whether we as a company are successful or not. The real issue is: Are we able to get the best decisions? Are we making decisions that we would not otherwise have made, but for the fact that we are inclusive?

This is something we’re serious about at HII. We’re committed to it, and I am personally committed to it. It’s an imperative not only for the future of our business, but also for the communities we serve and our nation as a whole.

www.huntingtingalls.com/employees/diversity/