



(U) Interview with a DISL

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(U//FOUO) As part of our "Senior Exec" series, we decided to ask a DISL to answer some questions related to his job. **Gregory Wessel, Technical Director for SIGINT Development**, was nice enough to oblige:

• (U) Question: What do you consider the role of a DISL to be? How does it differ from that of a GS employee or a DISES?

(U//FOUO) The DISL over the last years has taken on two roles; one of a Technical Leader and one of a Technical Expert.

(U//FOUO) A DISL Technical Leader works at the office or group level formulating strategic vision, making architectural and framework recommendations, ensuring technology transformation and workforce technical health, steering technical requirements in development efforts, and looking out for the health and well-being of the mission. They also create mechanisms to interact with the workforce, enablers, and outside technical boards to ensure that the best technical advice is obtained on any issues. They serve as a sounding board and sanity check for new technical ideas and recommendations from the workforce and assist the DISES in running the corporation.

(U//FOUO) The DISL Technical Expert is a recognized expert in his/her field, possessing both the breadth and depth of expertise in the skill sets related to his/her areas of specialization acquired via formally documented and peer-acknowledged academic qualifications and mission work. Of considerable importance are personal and team accomplishments, achievements in their field of expertise, continuous learning to stay on the cutting edge. One of the major functions a DISL should perform in the mentoring of junior and senior analysts throughout the agency.

(U//FOUO) The DISL differs from a DISES in a number of ways. A DISES has a contract with NSA to lead/manage people and change, build coalitions within the building and with partners/customers, and develop and employ business acumen to acquire and administer human, financial, material, and information resources to run the corporation. A DISL is responsible for the technical leadership and expertise to aid the DISES in carrying out his/her duties for NSA.

• (U) Question: What is the best part of being a DISL? ...the hardest part?

(U) The best part of being a DISL is having the ability to influence the decision-making processes, provide technical advice and guidance, and drive technology transformation at the office and group level for the corporation. In addition to those listed above, being able to provide technical leadership and mentoring to other agency employees is exciting and rewarding.

(U) For DISLs who are more technical experts in their fields, being recognized as that is very satisfying in itself. But more important is making breakthroughs in areas that have remained difficult challenges for the Agency. Having a parking place is also a major perk for a DISL.

(U) The hardest part of being a DISL is not having the governance authority to make decisions. This is still seen as one of the DISES roles for the corporation.

• (U) Question: What are the "must have" talents a person needs to succeed as a DISL?

(U) Depending on the type of DISL (leader or expert), they need to have a broad range of technical talents or be very deeply entrenched in their area of expertise. The DISL needs to have

the ability to provide technical guidance to help influence decision-making by the DISES and have the talents to mentor and guide others careers. In addition, the DISL needs to have the attitude that their opinions and technical advice are valued by the corporation and should be heeded.

- (U) Question: What advice would you give to someone who would like to become a DISL? What training/experience should that person seek out?

(U) Anyone wishing to become a DISL needs to either have broad technical leadership abilities with a proven track record of technical accomplishments or have deep technical expertise in a discipline and be a recognized go-to person by other agency employees and seniors. Those who become DISLs are often ones that don't shy away from the hardest problems facing the agency and instead make significant contributions.

(U//FOUO) The only formal training program for DISLs is the [Senior Technical Development Program](#) (STDP). The STDP is a career development program structured to build NSA's technical/professional leaders for the next decade. In addition to the formal program, a DISL want-to-be can take leadership training through the NCS and also technical academic training to enhance their technical skills and expertise.

(U//FOUO) *We hope to interview a DISES next... stay tuned!*

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