

It's hard to believe that I'm about to retire after having been at Sandia for more than 37 years.

I joined Sandia in March 1976 after completing my Ph.D. in chemistry. As a staff member, I worked on a number of programs – from heat transfer fluids for solar central receivers to materials development for Excalibur, during the Strategic Defense Initiative days. The wide breadth of my assignments gave me the confidence and interest to pursue opportunities in management.

In the mid-1980s, I was promoted to my first management position, which was in a materials and chemistry department. I distinctly remember choosing to embrace the principle of making an employee's work life as straightforward as possible. In other words, I continually asked myself how I, as the manager, could assume greater administrative responsibilities so that my staff members could more easily focus on their technical work. This core principle has guided my entire management career at Sandia.

In 1986, I moved to a manager position in the Combustion Research Facility, where I have spent the balance of my career. Over the last 25+ years, I have assumed various management and leadership roles in the CRF, concluding with my dream job as director of 8300 and the CRF.

So what makes an effective leader? The answer to this question depends on each individual; there is no magic formula. I'll tell you what has worked for me, while admitting that I don't always follow my own advice.

A good example of this inconsistency can be seen in my efforts to avoid defensiveness. Early in my career, I frequently assumed that questions directed at me had a hidden agenda of challenging my expertise. Since then, I have learned – sometimes in painful ways – that people generally ask questions out of a genuine interest in learning more, rather than out of a desire to attack my point of view. Even today, I must still remind myself in meetings to listen attentively, seek to understand other perspectives, and refrain from dominating the conversation.

Another philosophy of mine is to treat people as adults and trust them to make good decisions. Too often I have seen the mistakes of a few result in policy changes that impact many of us. Unfortunately, that approach can spread to a center or even an individual department. To battle this type of outcome, I have worked hard to build teams where the members trust one another to make good decisions, thereby developing a more powerful result that benefits everyone.

Finally, I encourage each of you to be present, participate, build collegial relationships with all levels of staff, and not take yourself too seriously.

My last day on-site is Dec. 20. I will miss the work, the staff, and the intellectual stimulation. It has been a privilege to work with the staff at Sandia and to build relationships with others – whether in DOE, other national labs, universities, or industry.