

# The People of the CIA ... Women in Leadership: Stephanie O'Sullivan

*This is the first article in a two-part series about women in leadership at the CIA. It focuses on the experiences of Director of Science and Technology Stephanie O'Sullivan. Our second article will feature Chief of Human Resources Cindy Bower.*

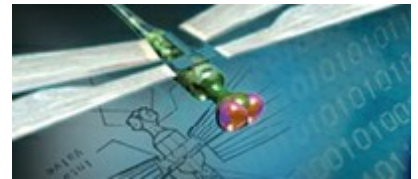
Throughout her career at the CIA, Stephanie O'Sullivan's eagerness to learn has taken her from one exciting engineering job to the next. And in 2005, that drive and dedication took her to her current position as the [Director of Science and Technology](#). After O'Sullivan joined the Agency in 1995 as a system engineer, she kept getting asked to apply for jobs at different management levels.

"I would pick jobs because I wanted to learn something new or I wanted to work for someone that I could learn something from," she said. "I was mostly just trying to learn new and different things, and get up every day feeling like it made a difference that I came into work."

## Making Something Out of Nothing

From a young age, O'Sullivan wanted to make a difference in the world. She chose engineering as her way to make an impact.

"I wanted to become an engineer because I liked to build things," she said. "I loved the idea of creating something that didn't exist before."



In a management position, O'Sullivan may not be as hands on as she was before, but she still draws enjoyment from witnessing the work of those she manages.

"When I see a team go out and build something new, take it out to the field and operate it, I get the same charge out of their success that I used to get when [as an engineer] I would go home at night and think, 'Wow, look what I did today,'" she said.

## Woman at Work

As a woman in a predominantly male profession, O'Sullivan has experienced the ups and downs that come with being in the minority.

At an engineering conference in the early 1980s, O'Sullivan was the only female in an audience of 500.

"The problem with this was that it was a pretty boring conference," O'Sullivan said. "A lot of the men were getting up and sneaking out. And I'm sitting there thinking, 'I can't do that! I'm the only woman. Everyone would notice if the woman snuck out.'"

The flip side of being one of the few women in engineering is that when O'Sullivan speaks, people listen.

"If I was in a meeting with 20 men and I spoke, people would listen," she said. "Who knows what they expected to come out of my mouth, but at least I got a chance. If I were one of those 20 men in the room would I have had the same chance?"

## Molding the Minds of the Future

During her time at the Agency, O'Sullivan has been both a mentor and a mentee. One important thing she discovered from her mentors is that the CIA is filled with people who are passionate about their work.

"They want to teach you. They want to tell you about what they did and how they did it," she said. "And so, the thing is that you have to have the courage to ask."

Since O'Sullivan has become a mentor, she's been able to learn even more from her protégés.

"I've learned more from the employees I'm mentoring than I think they did from talking to me," she said.

O'Sullivan advises her mentees to take advantage of as many opportunities at CIA as they can.

"The DS&T has to be one of the most unique places to work in the world," she said. "There's absolutely no excuse for ever being bored. If you get to a place where you aren't learning or you don't think there's anything more you can contribute, there's something else you can go do. And there aren't many work places in the country that are like that."

One piece of advice O'Sullivan always imparts to her protégés, especially young women, is to find a balance.

"The mission at the Agency can consume you," she said. "We invest a lot of money and time into the people we hire. We don't want them to burn out. We want them to be in it for the long run."

O'Sullivan's way of finding balance was making sure to have the weekends off to spend with her husband, who used to work on the West coast during the weeks.

### **Looking to the Future**

In addition to mentoring young employees at the Agency, O'Sullivan would like to find a way to reach young women in engineering. This is of the utmost importance, especially since the number of women in engineering is down.

"We don't make the right pitch about engineering to young women," she said. "We need to show how engineering can change the world and contribute to society."

At a recent Society of Women Engineers conference at Cornell, O'Sullivan noticed that there were more women interested in biomedical and biomechanical engineering than standard engineering.

"You could see that they were attracted to those kinds of jobs because they could seek the clear link about how what they did everyday could make an impact on society," she said. "You can have the same impact on society in an engineering job with the CIA. This is a way for you to work to serve the greater good. In our case, it's working to protect the country."

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