

Matt Vance has been working for the UK Ministry of Defence since March 2007.

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Life on the other side

How's Boeing viewed by a customer? What's it like to work for that customer? Here's a look.

Editor's note: Boeing employee Matt Vance and Simon Harwood of the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence have been participating in an exchange, known as a "secondment" in the United Kingdom, over the past two years (see Page 24 of the March 2007 Boeing Frontiers). As Harwood wrapped up his assignment in June and Vance nears the end of his in the first quarter of 2009, Marc Sklar of the Frontiers staff asked them to share with Boeing employees lessons they've learned about the customer/supplier relationship.

To: My fellow Boeing employees
From: Matt Vance (on assignment to the UK Ministry of Defence)
Re: Bottom line—customer respect!

I'm the first U.S. defense contractor who's been permitted to second (pronounced "s-kond," which is a more formal word for "loan" or "exchange") into the UK Ministry of Defence. My MOD assignment has been a 180-degree change from my work at Boeing. For 20 years I've been a supplier on the defense and commercial sides of Boeing. As a

participant in this exchange, I am a customer—the MOD. Specifically, I am working for the MOD's Deputy Director for Science within the Command Control and Information Infrastructure (CCII) directorate. The directorate has responsibility for all CCII decisions across the MOD.

Two experiences have made me see the difference between being the supplier versus being the customer—and understand the value of listening to and respecting the customer. The first was when the MOD participated in three marketing and sales meetings with suppliers. It was illuminating, as well as disappointing, to observe how all three companies were unclear in their motives and objectives, especially considering the substantial time they had spent with their customer.

The second experience was a meeting with a hand-picked supplier consortium. We were bluntly told by the lead vendor that our key idea was "just plain wrong." My MOD colleagues and I were surprised and offended and felt disrespected by the vendor. The experience gave me a deeper appreciation for the customer's

voice. In addition, it was a vivid reminder that if you disagree with the customer, it should be handled discreetly and professionally.

In another case, after we, the customer, made the effort to travel to the supplier's location, the supplier openly challenged the direction the MOD had chosen. As you can imagine, this reinforced to me what we hear so often at Boeing: Listen to our customers, respect their time and perspectives, be clear with your objective and ensure a cordial dialog.

I've been treated well by my hosts. I have been badged as a British civil servant, not as a foreign contractor. I'm accepted by the teams that I support and the teams that I'm a member of; however, I do not sound like a Brit—yet. Though lately, many people who meet me here in the United Kingdom ask if I'm Canadian, so some change must be happening!

What I've also taken away from my experience is a broadened respect for diverse perspectives and ways of doing things. Diversity will always contribute to a superior product or solution. I'll be quicker to listen than comment and not so quick to judge. Bottom line:

customer respect! All things considered, isn't business done first with people we trust and respect?

To: Boeing employees
From: Simon Harwood, UK Ministry of Defence
Re: An outsider's look at Boeing—from the inside

I know these are overused idioms, but ... my two years at Boeing have flown by—probably because time flies when you're having fun.

What a wonderful culture Boeing has fostered! I'm glad to have been part of it. I've learned a lot that will help me when I return to my work at the UK Ministry of Defence and have a few suggestions that could make Boeing an even greater company.

The idea behind the interchange program that I've participated in is the exchange of staff, skills and ideas between the UK Civil Service and other sectors of the economy. Participants experience what it's like to work in a different environment and culture and see how challenges are met in a non-government organization.

It has been very interesting to see how Boeing responds to customers. Based on my work with the Analysis, Modeling, Simulation and Experimentation group, working with customers to examine their needs, I think industry (not just Boeing) has some way to go in providing answers and solutions that are focused on delivering the ability to carry out an activity—as opposed to system- or platform-specific answers. Thankfully, groups like the AMSE organization will be able to provide such answers in years to come.

From my experience of being the supplier (at Boeing) rather than a customer, I've come to the conclusion that the customer is not always right, and the supplier does not always have the answer. Thus, we need to listen to each other carefully and make suggestions respectfully. Another suggestion: Don't wait for the RFP. Take the bull head-on. I am pleased to see some of the work Phantom Works and Advanced Systems are doing in this area, but we need more.

As I now leave industry and return to the customer community, I have two thoughts for the defense and aerospace industry at large:

- Recognizing that compliance with the

International Trade and Arms Regulations is a must, industry needs to significantly improve how it works within ITAR when dealing with U.S. allies.

- An examination is needed of the industry's skills base. There are not enough big-picture people. Also, industry needs to look at age groups. For instance, where are the young people?

Boeing—I'm glad to see—is taking an active role in addressing these challenges.

There are a number of things that make me sad to return to the United Kingdom. It's not just that the temperature in Southern California never seems to drop below 55 degrees Fahrenheit (13 Celsius) and that gas in the United Kingdom is about \$10 a gallon. It's that I feel so at home with the Boeing family. Boeing has a wonderful work environment. There are so many opportunities for Boeing employees to advance and better themselves. And, it seems that Boeing realizes that people work to live, not live to work. This is not the philosophy in many work environments.

Thank you for making my stay so enjoyable and productive! ■

marc.a.sklar@boeing.com



Simon Harwood (right), a UK Ministry of Defence employee, recently completed his “secondment,” or exchange program, with Boeing. He is joined at the delivery ceremony for the 6th UK C-17 by Nigel Beresford, Boeing UK C-17 program manager, and Royal Air Force Wing Commander Simon Edwards. TONY ROMERO/BOEING