



“**BE**
COMPETENT.
BE
CURIOUS.
BE
CREATIVE”.

Subcontracting and supply chain expert—
and incoming NCMA president—
AMANDA CHRISTIAN shares lessons from
her career and longtime NCMA membership.

The career journeys and perspectives of contract management executives offer lessons and insights for NCMA members at all levels in their careers. For this reason, *Contract Management* has begun a new series of interviews with leaders from government and industry.

This month, we present NCMA CEO Kraig Conrad's discussion with Amanda Christian, senior vice president for subcontracts and procurement at CACI International and incoming NCMA president. They discuss lessons from Christian's career in subcontracting and supply chain management, her advice for acquisition workforce members, and highlights of her NCMA membership. This interview took place in February 2021 and has been edited for length and clarity.

KC: Thank you for being here, Amanda. To get to the position of senior vice president of subcontracts and procurement at CACI International, you must have really done some great things along the way. What did you plan? What opportunities did you grab, and what were some of the surprising paths along your journey?

AC: It all started at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. I was a supply chain management student there, and SAIC came to our campus to recruit co-ops. I had never lived in the Washington, DC area—I had never even been here. I thought, wow, I could go live somewhere else far more exciting than this cold weather and try something new. When I interviewed for the position and got it, I came down to the DC area for about

eight months as a buyer at SAIC. I loved learning the federal contracting space.

The following summer for my next internship, I went to Lockheed Martin to try out the contracts side. Ultimately, when I was graduating, I loved DC, I loved procurement, and I really enjoyed working with my manager at SAIC. I had a great position there in subcontracts, so that's where I started.

I worked at SAIC for 10 years. I went from an intern all the way to a procurement director with the help of great bosses and mentors. I volunteered for every type of project across the company and worked nights and weekends as hard as I could to get to know everything and everyone during that time.

I went back and got my MBA in the evenings. At about the 10-year mark, I got a call from CACI saying they were looking for a director of compliance, a competition advocate, and a small business liaison officer—three jobs all in one, but very exciting because I knew it was a company that was growing rapidly and had a bright future. I wanted to be a part of that, so I made the change.

At about the one-year point, the vice president of procurement position opened, and I applied and interviewed for it and got it. It was a big stretch for me because I'd been a director at SAIC, but I had not been over the entire company. All spend was under my purview, including not only direct-charge-program type of support, but also corporate infrastructure and everything that goes into it. So, it was an exciting role to be in.

I grew in that role for about 10 years before I was promoted to senior vice president. CACI grew from \$1 billion to \$6 billion [in revenues] in that time. I've worked on a lot of major mergers and acquisitions. I designed and rolled out a shared-service center with a team. One of the crazy things that I think about now is that I'm almost going back to my roots. We bought and integrated several product companies. With that, I'm going right back into full-scale supply chain again, so I'm going full circle—but it's full of challenges and I love it.

KC: That's an exciting story. It has all been working very well for you. You were selected as a 2020 *Washington Exec* Top 10 Contracting Exec to Watch. Even more important to us at NCMA is that you're our incoming president. Congratulations on both great accomplishments. What advice, based on your pathway, do you have for potential leaders such as those in our Contract Management Leadership Development Program (CMLDP)?

AC: Search for people who really believe in you and challenge you. Find good bosses. That has been the key to my development. I have had great mentors.

Interestingly, partway through my career, one of my mentors said, "You know, you need to build a bigger network. Maybe you should get more involved in NCMA. Maybe you should think about being a board member someday." Now here I sit, five years into my board seat, and I am president-elect. So, I listened to good advice. It's really important that you

surround yourself with good people who are really looking out for you and pushing you to do even bigger and better things than you thought you could.

The other big piece of advice I would give to CMLDP students is to pay it forward. One of my favorite things in the whole wide world is my supply chain intern program. I have always had an intern in my department—sometimes up to four, depending on the situation. I go back to Bowling Green State University: I interview supply chain students; I'm on the alumni board; I'm also on the department of management advisory council; I speak at events. I'm super involved with my alma mater. I love it. It's so important for me to help other students. I never would have been here without SAIC coming to my campus and recruiting me and bringing me to DC, so I want to do the same for others.

KC: This April, you'll be part of a panel at the NCMA SubCon Training Workshops to provide advice to women in contracting and cover other topics. Could you give us a preview of how you will advise the women in our community?

AC: In April, the Women in Contracting Forum is combined with SubCon. Those are two of my favorite topics. SubCon used to be called Subcontract Management Training Forum, and 2014 was the first year. I was invited to fly out to San Diego for the conference and speak on a panel with Rita Wells and Denyce Carter. It was such a wonderful experience. When I look back and think how NCMA had the

forethought to start a conference for subcontract managers, it was unbelievable at that time.

Although subcontract management falls under the contract management umbrella, there's one degree of separation. Our network is different. We have numerous audits. We have an approved purchasing system that we have to maintain. It was great to finally get our own forum where we could talk to each other, network, train, talk to other government people, and build those relationships. That's why I'm so passionate about it. I want to be involved in it every year because it's such an important community and I love to build on that.

You take SubCon and combine it with Women in Contracting. Now, it's fantastic! Women in Contracting is a free forum that NCMA is hosting for three consecutive months. The first one just happened in February and the topic was work-life balance. It was a great panel. March's will be "Women Supporting Women." Then the third one in April, which is the panel I am on, is "What Would You Tell Your Younger Self?" All important and fun topics with fantastic panel speakers, a lot of them are peers across the industry and in the government. Hopefully, we'll get another great turnout. I heard there were about 800 people that attended the first one. The enthusiasm and interaction there were truly heartwarming, so I look forward to it.

KC: You've mentioned a lot about subcontracts and certainly, in the world we're in today, subcontracting has taken on new importance. We

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keep talking about China's presence in security supply chains. Now we have to add to that the shortages due to the pandemic. What are the chief concerns that you have for prime federal contractors about their suppliers and supply networks today?

AC: Well, supply chain never comes without challenges, that's what we're all about. But you add a global pandemic and national security concerns all at once, and our job has gotten extremely hard in the federal space in the last year. But we're up for a challenge.

What I'm working on every day is the rapidly changing regulations. They're constantly evolving. I'm investing more and more resources to stay abreast of the changes with cyber security and Chinese telecom regulations. At CACI, we've developed a strong cross-functional team with supply chain, legal, government

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relations, our cyber security team, and security. We're all working hard to ensure that our infrastructure is not only compliant but the entire supply chain for those products and services, that are ultimately being delivered to our customers, are also compliant.

As a supply chain professional, I have built out our procure-to-pay system to look at our entire supply base, obtain information from them about their security capabilities, and store it. Based on their answers to us, we determine if they can even work with us, what type of products and services they can provide us, and what types of terms and conditions we need to flow down to them.

In addition to that, we can't just look at the first level. We have to look at third-tier and fourth-tier suppliers. We're tracking all of that information on multiple levels of the supply chain. Technology is so important in helping us do this because it is a huge undertaking, something that we haven't done in the past, and we're really working hard to make sure that we're doing the right thing for our customers.

Now you take that, you hear all the investment that our company is making, and then you think about our small business partners. They don't have all the resources that are available to a large company. What we've been trying to do for our small businesses partners is communicate with them. What are the changes coming? CACI sends out communications via our procure-to-pay system. In December, the executive director of enterprise risk management, and I provided training for our small business partners on the Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification and all the new cybersecurity regulations that are coming out. Small business partners must be prepared and come along with us through the security changes. It's not easy for them. We're definitely trying to help where we can.

KC: Are there other things you do to make sure those relationships are powerful and productive?

AC: We strive to have very meaningful conversations with our customers to understand what expertise and technology they need. Then, we find the right partners to help us create and innovate those types of products. It's really a team effort, to find those partnerships: it's procurement, it's our small business liaison office, it's business development, it's a department we have called strategic investments and partnerships. We're all talking to people, seeing what innovative products are out there that we can partner with to develop the best products for our customers.

When I think about partnerships, I not only think about our entire supply chain partners, but also our customers are our partners too. That red thread of our customer's needs and expectations must flow from the contract through the entire supply chain. Good partnerships means we need trust. We need solid deliverables that are defined in the contracts. We need fair, not overly burdensome, terms and conditions. Having strong partnerships through the entire thread is key to a successful contract for all teammates involved.

KC: Let's talk a little bit about the future. What do you think is the most important supply chain issue or issues that we are facing?

AC: Going back to increased regulation—I'm not saying that it shouldn't happen, but it often means a lot more investment by companies in order to play in the federal space. Because of that, some companies will not even entertain becoming a supplier in the federal contracting space. Government contractors, like CACI, are looking for those innovative companies to come work with us. As more regulations come out, some will leave our space or not want to be in it, unfortunately. We need their innovation so we can bring great products to our war fighters. This is something that we continue to work on.

The second thing, and we have seen this during the pandemic, is that as we start to contract and look only to domestic suppliers; there are only so many, and the demand is high. That inevitably increases prices

as there's not enough product for the high demand. And then on top of it, bad actors come in. So, you have to be very diligent about making sure that you're doing business with trustworthy sources.

KC: You mentioned the importance of technology. Certainly, we hear about RPA and AI being applied to contracting. What effects do you see for the industry contracting workforce and how do you plan to prepare the workforce for these changes in how they conduct business with new technologies?

AC: I've always been an early adopter. I have always used technology to enhance my department's productivity. We always have to do more with less, so I've definitely leaned forward in this area.

In 2013, we started rolling out a full-scale procure-to-pay system. I don't know any of my peers who were starting then. Some are just now starting. I have always been a big proponent of pulling as much data as I can, and to get the data, you have to have good systems. I have great people on my team and in order to continuously innovate, we collaborate and develop ideas on how to make things more productive with technology. I push them every year to come up with ideas. What are we going to do this year? What new technology can we look at?

About a year ago, we rolled out our first bot. We call it FARboto because it uses optical character recognition to read prime contract clauses, pull out all the *FAR* and *DFARS* clauses, then fill out our

schedules that are uploaded into our procure-to-pay system to flow down to all our suppliers. It saves a tremendous amount of time for our buyers and subcontract administrators, plus it's extremely compliant.

Change management is the key to prepare procurement professionals for technology changes forthcoming: bringing the people along through the process and having them volunteer, be a part of the thought process, and test it. For any supply chain professional this is music to our ears. Letting technology do the mundane tasks. We hate being paper pushers. We want to be the people in the room, negotiating, coming up with new master agreements, delivering huge cost savings. Technology takes away mundane paperwork and lets us focus on what we really want to be, which is good business people.

KC: In the advice that you would give to the acquisition workforce members about the future, you mentioned bringing ideas up the chain, making sure that you're prepared to deliver those things to your boss or your supervisor. Do you have any other advice for our workforce members?

AC: Be competent, be curious, be creative. What I mean by "Be competent" is: Have a great foundation. Learn everything you can, put yourself out there for stretch assignments, and learn all you can

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in the federal contracting space. You have to understand the differences among statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures. You have to understand your boundaries. Get your certifications, get educated, and just make yourself a well-rounded businessperson.

Once you have that foundation, be curious. Ask questions. Ask why. Ask why we're doing something. Push people to the limits. There's so much gray in federal contracting that if you have a great foundation and you're competent, you can really push it far and come up with great creative solutions.

That's my third piece of advice: Be creative. The reason we are here is to be great partners with our internal and external customers and whoever else we are serving. Honestly, creativity is what's needed in our field. Go out there and bring the best to the table. **CM**



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