

News from the PACE committees

Partnership to Achieve Comprehensive Equity



December 2015

Aspiring Leaders Program

PACE is piloting a new career development program to expand opportunities for all staff to grow their careers within King County Metro. While there are many training programs available across the county, most occur during the day and tend to focus on office or administrative work environments. Hourly operational staff often need to have their positions backfilled to participate which creates a financial disincentive to offer development programs to these employees.

The Aspiring Leaders Program is different than other training programs because it is available to all employees, on all shifts and is designed with all types of workplaces in mind, not just office environments. ALP was recently piloted in the Rail Section (see next article), and participants shared very positive feedback about their experience and the potential to support career development and staff engagement. Based on the pilot results, the next step is to scale-up ALP for full deployment across Metro.

ALP includes a robust self-study component as well as a mentorship opportunity with a Metro leader. The self-study component explores many aspects of modern leadership and supervision placing a strong emphasis on creating a welcoming, supportive, culturally-competent and highly engaged workplace. The mentorship opportunity involves the mentor and mentee meeting periodically to engage in structured conversations focused on the self-study content both parties are reading. Research shows that mentoring is one of the most powerful tools for advancing diverse individuals up the leadership talent pipeline.

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Bernice Mimms, aspiring leader

Over the summer, the Light Rail Section piloted the Aspiring Leaders Program (ALP). The verdict from both mentors and mentees: it was a big success! Amanda Nightingale, who leads Rail's Training & Organizational Development team, interviewed one of the mentees, Bernice Mimms, Business & Finance Officer, about her experience.



Aspiring leader Bernice Mimms

Amanda: Why did you decide to participate in this program?

Bernice: I first learned about the program from Michael Avery, Manager of Light Rail, who has been championing the effort to launch ALP in Metro. As he described the program to me, I became interested in participating. I had been thinking about taking classes that I could apply to a leadership role or higher level positions. When the program was offered in Rail, I applied and was accepted.

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Aspiring Leaders Program continued from page 1

“The greatest challenge will be encouraging enough formal leaders to sign up to be mentors” says Jonathan Halperin, Metro’s Workforce Development Manager. “We will need many more mentors than mentees to make this program successful – otherwise we will be limited in how many mentees can participate.”

ALP program lead, Shanette Landes, believes that “millennials like myself have a lot of respect for those who have gone before us. We have a strong desire to develop and learn from the generations before us. The great thing about this program is the opportunity to learn from leaders who have been in the ‘trenches’ and can guide us through their own experiences.”

Please note that all program activities occur on the mentee’s own time (i.e., it will not be paid time) and Metro makes no promise or guarantee that completion of the program will result in job advancement. Rather, this program is meant to help participants learn about the opportunities and challenges associated with a career in leadership.

For more information about the Aspiring Leaders Program, please contact: Shanette Landes, shanette.landes@kingcounty.gov

Aspiring leader Bernice Mimms continued from page 1

A: How would you describe your overall impression or experience?

B: I think ALP is a very good program. It gave me a nice overview of what King County supervisors and managers encounter when managing employees. I liked going through the program one-on-one with a mentor. I felt obligated to read the materials and spend time discussing the content of each chapter, more so than if this program was offered in a classroom setting with time limits. The program allowed us to set our own schedules and work at our own pace as long as we completed the program within a reasonable time frame. I think the self-study manual is very good and I will keep it for future reference. I also think it should be available to all King County supervisors and managers as a refresher.

A: Which parts of this program did you find most valuable?

B: Going through the program one-on-one with a mentor who was not in my same department was most valuable for me. As I discussed the chapters with my mentor, she was able to draw on her experience as a supervisor in another department, which can be different than my own supervisor’s experience – very nice to hear a variety of perspectives.

A: How do you think participation in this program will help you clarify and achieve your career goals?

B: The program answered questions that I have had about becoming a leader. After completing the program, I am still interested in taking on a leadership role. Even though ALP is a program for future leaders, there are chapters in the book that I feel would be very valuable for all employees to review.

A: Any other thoughts you would like to share about ALP?

B: The program is a very good starting point for anyone considering becoming a supervisor. It answers questions about the role, and highlights issues you might not have thought of before, such as handling complaints and grievances and developing effective teams. I think anyone considering becoming a supervisor or manager should take this program.



All work locations now have PACE information placards up. Look for outreach campaign dates to be updated and posted soon.

PACE Spotlight: Abdi Elmi, Transit Operations Base Chief

1) Tell us about your background and how you came to work for Metro.

I am originally from Somalia. I lived there until civil war broke out in 1990 and my family and I became refugees living in a camp in Mandera, Kenya. At the refugee camp I started working for Doctors Without Borders as an interpreter and translator. In 1996 I was granted the opportunity to come to the United States and I took it.

I started out in Nashville, Tennessee, where I got a job as a janitor and began working on my GED so I could have more career opportunities. I was promoted to supervisor, and took on a second job in a warehouse, all while working on an associate's degree in accounting at Nashville State University.

In 2009, my family and I decided to move to Seattle for more opportunities. I got accepted to the Foster School of Business at the University of Washington and earned a bachelor of arts degree in business in 2014. While I was attending school I worked a few part-time jobs in order to support my family. In 2012, I was hired as a part-time operator (PTO) for King County Metro. I loved being a bus driver because I am a people person. Just when I went full time, the chief position opened.

2) Why did you want to apply for the chief position?

I had recently graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in business and had been applying for management and business positions outside of the King County. I was looking for a position where I could use the skills I obtained from both my previous experience and new degree. I heard about the chief positions opening via word of mouth. I was handed the information packet at a dispatch window. I got lots of encouragement from my fellow co-workers, chiefs, and supervisors to apply.

I had not applied for any chief position openings before, partly because of the perceived "required pathway" of part-time operator, to full time operator, to first line supervisor and then to chief. I knew I had the experience, skills, and knowledge to help this organization and that I met the qualifications that King County was looking for. I had taken the time to get to know this organization and what the chief job entails. It was still unusual for a PTO to think that they could be promoted to chief. There were many doubts among everyone up and down this



organization that a person could make that jump and have the skills to do the job effectively. This perception motivated me even more to do well.

I also saw that there were not very many minorities or immigrants in the system. We have a growing number of operators from around the world. You see a lot of diversity in the people that are doing the work, but not much representation of that diversity at the front line or management side.

3) What was helpful about the recruitment and selection process?

My education from the Foster School of Business prepared me to succeed in the application process and position. In addition, the information and support provided from Human Resources was very nice and I utilized the help offered as much as I could to make sure I was the most prepared I could be. I think the best thing

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that was done in this recruitment process was having an interview panel that was truly diverse. This made the interview a little more comfortable and I felt like the process was fair. I was very excited to make it to the interview part of the process because I knew that I would be able to display that I had the skills that this position required. The recruitment and selection process was transparent and the decision makers were diverse.

4) What additional training have you received since accepting the position? Do you have mentors?

I am still doing onboarding classes. Before my new role officially started, I shadowed a chief to start my transition. I have an officially assigned mentor, Mike Thornton, but I also have many other unofficial mentors who have all helped me in this new role. I have also been fortunate to work with three new chiefs who were hired at the same time. These chiefs have been acting chiefs before and they support and help me anyway they can every day. I want to personally thank all of the great chiefs, dispatchers and, especially, admins at East Campus for their support.

5) What part of the chief's job do you find most meaningful?

I love working with people. I like problem solving, helping others with issues and seeing my operators leave my office smiling, even if we had heated conversations about something that could lead to discipline. I make myself available to my operators whenever they need to talk to me. It's all about the personal interactions I have with others. Even when I am performing discipline, I try to help the individual along to understand the policy and work together with them to find solutions to problems.

One thing I have realized now is that I am seen as a role model. I never thought of things that way before. Many people were surprised a PTO even made it to an interview for chief. I have been more than happy to share my story so that more minorities and immigrants can be inspired to apply for leadership positions.



March 2015 PACE Retreat

Change starts with you!

The PACE committees want to hear from you! We cannot do our job without your help. Please contact us and let us know what you think about equity and general problem-solving at King County Metro. Let us know about issues and/or concerns or a suggestion you think may be helpful. Contact PACE at pace@kingcounty.gov, metro.kingcounty.gov/PACE or 206-205-8000.

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