Dr. Curtis J. Tompkins

U.S. Department of Transportation

Developing Leaders and Managers

Developing leaders has long been part of the career fabric that Dr. Tompkins has woven during his 45+ years of service. During that time he served in a variety of roles reaching as far back as the early 1960s when he was the Commander of the Virginia Tech Regimental Band and provided leadership training for the younger cadets. All six of his associate deans of engineering at West Virginia University became Deans and three of those became University Presidents. He has been a mentor to countless young faculty -- as well as students -- as a Dean and then as a President. He led by example and provided a role model example of leadership. During his 13 years as a University President, he and his wife hosted students and faculty at their home for meals three to four times most weeks. Therefore, it was natural for Dr. Tompkins to bring his nurturing approach to the roles he has played since joining the Federal government in 2004.

One of the most significant innovations supported and led by Dr. Tompkins at the Volpe Center was the creation and implementation of the Leadership Development Program for GS-12/13 employees. The first rendition of the 18-month program included competitive selection of participants based on a rigorous application and peer review process. Selectees were given a copy of a book entitled “*Strengths Finders*” published by the Gallop Organization (which Dr. Tompkins had used during his University Presidency to counsel students, staff and faculty) and secure access to an internet assessment instrument through which a participant’s five major strengths were identified and an Individual Development Plan was suggested. Each participant chose a Senior Executive at the Volpe Center to serve as a mentor during the 18-month program, and a flexible prescribed mentoring protocol was conducted on a set schedule. Dr. Tompkins served as a mentor to several GS-12/13 participants, as did the five other Senior Executive Service (SES) officers. Participants met monthly as a group with Dr. Tompkins and discussed leadership-related topics chosen by the participants. When Dr. Tompkins moved to Washington to revamp and lead the University Transportation Center (UTC) program, the Leadership Development Program participants testified that the program and especially direct interaction with Dr. Tompkins had meant much to them. The program continues at the Volpe Center and has been streamlined to 12 months in length. Dr. Tompkins considers this program as one of his most significant legacies.

The rigorous Project Management Training program created by Dr. Tompkins at the Volpe Center included leadership skill development aimed at honing the executive judgment of Senior Managers regarding high stakes projects undertaken for Administrators across Department of Transportation (DOT) and other Agencies. One of the core problems experienced at the Center leading to Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviews was inadequate executive oversight involved in the selection and acceptance of work. The eagerness of a fee-for-service

Dr. Curtis J. Tompkins

U.S. Department of Transportation

Developing Leaders and Managers

organization to accept multimillion dollar contracts had led to occasional poor decision making

regarding the feasibility of successfully accomplishing major tasks with a set amount of funding,

a definite completion date and a set of sometimes unclear expectations (occasionally by Congress) of what was to be done. Dr. Tompkins brought a new level of rigor to the Volpe senior management group. Regular Senior Review Board meetings were required in which all senior executives took a hard look at risks early in the life of a major project from the pre-acceptance stage through the “infant mortality” startup. This ethos was a change that was welcomed by most Volpe personnel and embraced by the senior leaders and managers. Subsequently, many of the managers involved have been promoted to higher levels of responsibility and have imparted the need and rigor of the improved approach. As a result of all of these achievements within Volpe, employee satisfaction surveys showed significant improvements in 2006 over previous years.

Dr. Tompkins implemented a rotational approach to several positions at the Volpe Center to provide exposure to senior level decision making by GS-15 staff. This included the positions of Chief of Staff to the Director and Deputy Director; Director of the Center-wide Project Management Program; and Director of the Business Development Office. Dr. Tompkins also provided funding for executive coaching for GS-15 and SES leaders to enhance their leadership skills. He brought in several highly effective consultants to work with Volpe senior management on teambuilding, communication, and interpersonal skills.

With the UTC Program, Dr. Tompkins has emphasized individual professional development plans with all employees and has provided many opportunities for employees to grow and thrive. For example, one GS-12 employee has led the development of a new monthly RITA (Research and Innovative Technology Administration) Transportation Innovation Series of distinguished speakers from the UTCs. A GS-14 employee has developed a monthly Spotlight newsletter highlighting specific accomplishments of one UTC per issue. Another GS-14 employee has taken responsibility for managing the National Workforce Development Initiative. Yet another GS-14 employee has accepted responsibility for leading a DOT initiative regarding Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) involved in transportation-related education and research.

As part of the UTC Program, Dr. Tompkins is leading one of the most significant organizational accomplishments: the development of a comprehensive National Transportation Workforce Development Strategy. The development of this strategy involves all of the Operating Administrations of DOT and is in collaboration with the Council of UTCs, the Department of Education, and the Department of Labor. A National Summit on Transportation Workforce

Dr. Curtis J. Tompkins

U.S. Department of Transportation

Developing Leaders and Managers

Development is being planned for Spring 2012; ten regional summits have already been held. This initiative will be one of the most significant legacies of Dr. Tompkins’ public service.

Dr. Tompkins is able to impart his philosophy of leadership development through his key involvement in this endeavor.