Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Beth McCormick, the senior most civil servant in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs in the State Department, has emerged as a true mentor to numerous Bureau employees who seek a role model in navigating their careers in public service.  She has a strong sense of devotion to employee development as a critical piece of effective continuity of government – from the most junior, entry-level employee to the new managers to the more senior executives in the Bureau.  Her willingness to take on this mentoring and coaching role is made more remarkable by her extraordinary workload; for many people in her position, mentoring and employee development would have been an extra duty, dismissed during busy or stressful times.  For Ms. McCormick, it is a “must-do” priority, and she inspires others to do the same.

Ms. McCormick’s work with one office in particular demonstrates her exceptional skills.  When she began as a senior official in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, one of the offices within her portfolio was in crisis.  Almost a decade of poor office leadership, constant foreign policy crises driving an unsustainable operational tempo, and a poor record of recruitment and retention had left the office with low morale and inadequate capability to perform at the high level expected by the Assistant Secretary.  Ms. McCormick approached the situation with energy, creativity, and a can-do spirit, recognizing that without employee development, the institution at large would not thrive.  She worked closely with the office management to develop a recruitment and retention plan to fill all of the empty positions, provide training to the newest employees, and take care of existing employees.  She has applied her experiences from the Department of Defense and has adapted these ideas to the State Department context.  During this process, Ms. McCormick has counseled and guided the office leadership – mid- and senior-level executives – in developing a plan.  She clearly has seen this project as a learning experience for her team, one that allowed her to develop further their management skills.  She drove this process in a manner that will institutionalize employee development, not simply come up with a band-aid solution to the problem of the day.

Most recently, she encouraged the managers of this office to develop a detailed plan to accommodate teleworking or alternative work schedules – programs that have demonstrated impact on employees’ quality of life and job satisfaction, but which are too often dismissed as too hard or too disruptive by managers.

During the past year, Ms. McCormick counseled her staff when there were setbacks, and she championed their successes to senior leadership.  In short, she is a tireless advocate for this recovering team.  Indeed, the office is already quite different than it was just one short year ago, a speed and degree of change which is remarkable given the typical constraints to making any changes within the existing bureaucracy.  The office is operating at nearly full employment, with new employees gaining necessary training and improved morale levels.  It is an office that is producing critical work during a time of several political-military crises, and indeed, is a key part of the Bureau’s efforts to drive political-military policy in the Department and interagency.

Beyond her efforts to mentor her own team, she served often as the Department of State’s representative to various DoD-led political-military dialogues owing to her extensive knowledge of the substantive issues under discussion, and her well-established working relationships with both the U.S. Government and foreign partner representatives. This list includes bilateral forums with the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Peru, and Nigeria. During the Defense Coordinating Committee with Pakistan in August 2010, Ms. McCormick stepped in to co-chair the Security Assistance Working Group with a two-star Pakistani official when the DoD officials were pulled into other impromptu meetings. She effectively led the discussion on security cooperation, including expertly explaining the steps the U.S. Government had already taken to address Pakistani requests to become a country prioritized to receive excess defense equipment, putting them on par with several other key countries.

Further, Ms. McCormick actively participated in the Defense Senior Leader Development Program, serving as a Talent Development Executive for three 2010-2011 candidates. She also served as the Executive Sponsor for the Multi-National Seminar in July 2010, the third in the series for the 2009-2010 candidates. She worked collaboratively with Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the program sponsors from the Civilian Personnel in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and faculty and support staff from Georgetown University, to present a detailed lecture on security cooperation, and in developing a comprehensive strategic issue activity related to a “secure and stable Iraq,” including all the required readings and detailed questions for the students to evaluate in breakout groups. Ms. McCormick has continued her commitment to the Defense Senior Leadership Development Program by serving as the Executive Sponsor for the Interagency Seminar, scheduled for April 11-15, 2011. As such, she has developed the strategic issue activity focused on a whole of government approach to the issue of counter-insurgency, as well as organizing a Purple Panel of executives from the Departments of State and Defense, and remote lecture by the Brig Gen Nagata, Deputy Chief, Office of Defense Representative Pakistan.