MARGARET (PEGGY) A. FOCARINO
Deputy Commissioner for Patents, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO),
U.S. Department of Commerce

Under Peggy Focarino’s direction, the USPTO has pioneered many new programs, resulting in improved employee morale and increased productivity. She has led numerous e-commerce initiatives, including the revamping of the electronic filing system, which saved the agency more than $12 million. Her efforts to forge new cooperative agreements and work-sharing projects with intellectual property (IP) offices abroad have increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the patent search process for inventions filed in the U.S. and overseas.

During USPTO’s largest expansion to date, Focarino helped to recruit, train, and build a diverse team of examiners through such staff development initiatives as the Patent Training Academy. This university-style training program is now being replicated by other IP offices around the globe and has earned ISO 9001 certification.

Focarino has served as USPTO’s chief negotiator on several key contracts, including a collective bargaining agreement using an interest-based approach that was ratified in record time.

I started right out of college in 1977 as a patent examiner. I didn’t know much about intellectual property, but I fell in love with the mission and have been here ever since. I was the only woman in a group of 100 examiners. I didn’t want to close any doors for the women who would follow me so I was determined to do my job—and do it well.

Today I enjoy looking around our offices and seeing the diversity of the workforce, especially all the young people who work here. They could be making more money in the private sector, but they are here because the mission is so important.

By granting patents, we put innovation in the hands of people who can create jobs and social benefits. We’ve granted more than seven million patents in our history, serving everyone from big corporations to small “garage inventors.” You never know when something is going to be the next big thing.

Although I didn’t have any formal management training before I came here, I knew that I wanted to be a manager. I was intrigued by the challenge of motivating people to do more. I empower people to make decisions, come up with new solutions, and, I hope, develop and grow in the process. Anything that I’ve accomplished as a manager is because the people who have worked for me have had the right skills and talents.

As our organization has grown, our workforce has become increasingly virtual. Training and expanding the number of telecommuters has been a huge challenge. But now we have 1,800 patent examiners working from home full-time and another 2,200 working part-time. To facilitate the transition, we are creating wikis, blogs, share-point sites, and other tools to make it easier for our examiners to communicate and collaborate.

I have a strong interest in succession planning. I want to make sure that the person who takes my place does a better job than I could ever do. I consider that my number one job.

—Margaret (Peggy) A. Focarino

Peggy Focarino joined the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) in 1977 as a patent examiner. She rose through the ranks, holding various positions prior to her current appointment as deputy commissioner for patents. Focarino has an undergraduate degree in physics from the State University of New York–Oswego and a certificate of advanced public management from Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.