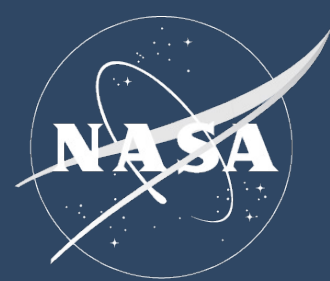


STENNIS SPACE CENTER

Profiles in Leadership



John Bailey and his wife were driving home from the New Orleans area in 1998 when they passed the sign for NASA's Stennis Space Center. Noticing the marker, Bailey commented that he really should learn more about the work done at Stennis, since the center operated right in his Mississippi Gulf Coast backyard. He also made a comment regarding the remote location of the site and what it must be like working at such a remote site. At the time, Bailey was working as a Department of Defense civil service employee at Keesler Air Force Base. Just a few weeks after the conversation with his wife, Bailey received a call about a job opportunity at Stennis. By the end of the year, he was a member of the NASA team on site. In the ensuing two decades, Bailey has served in various Stennis roles, including as director of the Stennis Engineering and Test Directorate. He became the Stennis associate director in May 2018 and deputy director in December 2020. In April 2024, the Mobile, Alabama, native became director of Stennis.

How would you describe the Stennis culture?

The thing that strikes me about Stennis is the dedication of the employees and the hardworking, "get-the-job-done" mentality – very flexible, adaptable, creative. The culture is friendly, family-oriented, and makes one feel like they are home. You are accepted from the start and people are always willing to help.

How would you describe diversity at Stennis?

It is a very diverse organization – diversity of work, diversity of people. There are tremendous opportunities at Stennis. Most everyone has many "other duties as assigned" and pitches in to do whatever is needed. You get opportunities to see and do a lot of different things that you would not necessarily get to do at a larger center.

What has been the biggest challenge in your career?

Stennis offers you many career opportunities to do different and diverse things, but there are pros and cons to having all those opportunities. You can end up moving from one opportunity to another without taking the time to apply what you have learned. So, one of the challenges is just trying to figure out how to take advantage of opportunities and still stay focused enough to be good at what you do. That was one of the challenges I had to overcome – that urge to want to do it all – and just get focused on a few things and make sure I was really good at those and, then, take it one step at a time.

What are some important lessons you have learned?

Make sure to do the small things right – do them right and do them well.

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Be flexible and willing to adapt.

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Be willing to listen.

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Be willing to do your best in all situations. When you accept a job or commit to a task, no matter what, you need to do it the very best you can.

What makes a good leader?

There are certain traits that are born in people that may make leadership more natural or easier, but I also think there is a lot that can be learned. In my opinion, the best leaders are typically people-focused and care about seeing them grow. My focus has always been on the people. If the employees enjoy what they do, understand why they are doing it and its importance, and how it relates to the goals and objectives, then you create an environment for success.



John Bailey
Director
Stennis Space Center

What is your view of leadership?

Can you get a group of people, regardless of size, focused and interested in meeting whatever goals and objectives that you are trying to accomplish? Can you get them there by them wanting to do it? Team sports taught me so many lessons about leading by example, and leading by example is really my philosophy. You have to be willing to do what it takes to be successful, to pitch in and do the little things, to be a part of the team. Obviously, you need certain traits. You have to be credible in your background, trustworthy, honest, open, willing to listen. I think if you can relate to the people you are trying to lead, you will be much more successful in leading.

What are you most proud of about your career thus far?

The thing I am most proud of is the people I have helped succeed in their careers. It is great being successful or meeting goals and objectives, but I really enjoy seeing people grow and achieve their career goals. If I can have a little role in that, that is what makes me most proud.