



AFCEC Lean In Circles foster professional, personal growth

By Air Force Civil Engineer Center

In January 2016, AFCEC's first Lean In Circle was established with a small group of female coworkers and associates, formed to provide peer mentoring and foster personal growth. Lean In Circles resulted as an outgrowth of a 2013 book by Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, called "*Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead.*"

According to the author, women hold themselves back in big and small ways by lacking self-confidence, not raising their hands and pulling back when they should be leaning in.

Lean In Circles are small peer groups that meet regularly to learn and grow together. There are more than 30,000 Lean In Circles in 154 countries. And it's making a difference: partners report that more women are taking the lead and more employees are talking openly about gender issues. The Department of Defense (DoD) has sponsored Lean In as a professional activity, embracing Lean In practices to encourage women to empower themselves and help them achieve their ambitions.

The goal is foster a sense of community and promote peer mentoring through the formation of small groups (10-15) that meet regularly. Through use of guided discussion and sharing sessions, the group grows, learns, cross-feeds, inspires each other and shares each group members' successes and challenges.

The AFCEC-San Antonio Lean In Circle is now led by Erica Becvar, AFCEC National Environmental Policy Act Division Chief. Members are from AFCEC, the Air Force Personnel Center, Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, Air Education and Training Command and the 502nd Air Base Wing. The group is predicated on a set of shared values. They meet monthly, during on and off duty hours. Each member takes a turn at setting up the meeting location and discussion topic. Sometimes meetings are conducted in conjunction with a potluck lunch utilizing an office conference room; other times, the meeting might be held over a Zoom call or include dinner at a restaurant.

Always, the discussions have stated purpose and a degree of structured activity, as each member is responsible for leaning in and participating, sharing their experiences and knowledge.

Sometimes, a group member leads the discussion, and members come having performed research on a particular topic, such as when Karen Cavada led a discussion regarding how women need to be aware of how their verbal and non-verbal communications affect the message they're trying to provide; others in the group also provided input on associated reading assignments.

Guest speakers are also often invited, such as when member Lisa Schmidt of AFIMSC's Installation Support Directorate invited Brig. Gen. Laura Lenderman of AETC to share her Leadership values and career lessons learned.

Most recently, Rhonda Hampton invited Robert Moriarty, director of AFCEC's Installations Directorate and the next Secretary of the Air Force for Installations, to share his advice on how to grow and succeed in your career.

The AFCEC Lean In Circle is striving to help others establish their own Lean In groups. The aim is to encourage others to build a network that inspire others and to be inspired, to find a mentor and be a mentor, and to build leadership skills.

These circles are best composed of peers or near peers, and ideally should not include supervisory relations. If anyone is interested in starting their own Lean In Circle, please contact Becvar at erica.becvar.1@us.af.mil. The AFCEC-San Antonio Lean In Circle encourages all interested prospective new Lean In leaders to start now, be brave, and check out how they can "Lean In" at <https://leanin.org/?r=44431996>

