



An Interview with Derek Jenkins of Huntington Ingalls Industries



By **THERESA A. KIRCHNER, Ph.D., MBCP, MBCI**

Derek Jenkins (Derek.Jenkins@hii-co.com) is responsible for security and emergency management at Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII), ensuring the company meets all federal, state, and local government security and emergency management requirements. Jenkins earned a bachelor's degree in sociology with an emphasis in criminology from the University of Virginia. He joined Newport News Shipbuilding in 1985, working with the nuclear engineering department. He is also a community leader and mentor to teenagers and young professionals, with service on the boards of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Virginia Peninsula, An Achievable Dream Academy, Y.H. Thomas Athletic Association, Newport News Police Foundation, and Christopher Newport University's Center for American Studies.



KIRCHNER: For those of us not familiar with Huntington Ingalls Industries, please give us an overview of the organization.

JENKINS: We are America's largest military shipbuilding company and a provider of professional services to partners in government and industry. For more than a century, HII's Newport News and Ingalls shipbuilding divisions in Virginia and Mississippi have built more ships in more ship classes than any other U.S. naval shipbuilder. We also have a technical solutions division which provides a wide range of professional services through its fleet support, mission-driven innovative solutions, nuclear and environmental, and oil and gas groups. HII is a global organization which employs more than 41,000 people operating both domestically and internationally.

KIRCHNER: What is your role with HII, and what is your primary goal?

JENKINS: As director of security and emergency management for HII, I'm responsible for ensuring the company meets all federal, state, and local government security and emergency management requirements. My primary role is to build a security team that is best-in-class across industry, trained, and dedicated to serving the entire company community as a full partner, consistent with HII's mission, values, and principles. At a high level, my goal is for employees to come to work and feel safe each and every day.

KIRCHNER: In terms of achieving that safe workplace, what are some threats of which you want people to be aware?

JENKINS: Examples of the wide range of threats we prepare for are vehicle accidents, workplace violence, compromised access (someone getting into the facility who is not authorized), catastrophic failures (where mutual aid may be needed), travel

issues, etc. Those issues are part of our day-to-day environment. Our HII security team has the subject matter expertise to evaluate the wide range of potential incidents, and that's what we bring to the table every day. At the forefront of everything we do is "duty of care"—not only for employees but our assets, our facilities, and the HII brand.

KIRCHNER: Expand a bit on the concept of "duty of care." What do you mean by that?

JENKINS: Duty of care, from a security and emergency management perspective, means we have measures in place to mitigate risk. We perform our due diligence so if something bad happens, we've got processes, procedures, and protocols in place to render aid and assist our employees. A few years ago, our president and CEO, Mike Petters, sent the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's "Run, Hide, Fight" video out to all employees across HII. He did that because he wanted to increase awareness. That's duty of care. We take it to another level in terms of security because we're protecting classified information. We're protecting the warfighter. We're protecting the employee. We're protecting the assets. We're protecting facilities.

KIRCHNER: The local community doesn't always hear about that because you are successful in what you do.

JENKINS: That's the fortunate—and unfortunate—thing about our line of work. When we're successful, we don't broadcast it. When something does happen, people hear about it. Usually they don't have all the information or all the facts. If something systemic were to occur within or around a facility, our company is charged with communicating with our employees. If a true threat is out there, we work with corporate communications and the necessary state and federal law enforcement agencies to ensure that information is disseminated appropriately.

KIRCHNER: What keeps you up at night regarding your area of responsibility?

JENKINS: As a company, HII has the resources, procedures, protocols, and processes to respond to a crisis. Initially there are always numerous anomalies and unknowns in an emergent event. Not knowing the status of an employee and not being able to access our resources or infrastructure (equipment, first responders, transportation, communication, etc.) to support our employees and community due to a host of variables inherent in responding to an event are things I think about.

KIRCHNER: Can you share an important lesson you learned from 9/11?

JENKINS: I realized that fear had become an infrastructure. In any state, city, community, or building, systems (infrastructure) such as water/waste distribution, power and electrical, transportation, and information systems enable a business to run properly. When one of those systems is disrupted, this can severely impact day-to-day operations. Shut off water in any building for an extended period, and work will stop. Imagine the cascading effect of fear on a grand scale. If you instill enough fear in people (employees), they will stay home, leave work, leave the area, cause congestion on roadways, and overload cell towers trying to connect with loved ones. Add to that the implications of compilation theory—one system (infrastructure) not being maintained cascades to another. This creates disruption to services which will not be provided, resulting in stoppage of operating systems.

KIRCHNER: What can employees do to support you and promote security?

JENKINS: When you recognize an employee and do a “wellness check” (make eye contact, say “hello,” and assess the response), you also acknowledge that employee. At the same time, you may realize “something’s not right.” I believe “duty of care” includes greeting everyone—not just the security personnel or someone in uniform, but everyone you pass. I think that’s huge. Making eye contact and saying “hello” is not only a wellness check, it is a validation we are “one HII.” In this business, we accumulate a wealth of knowledge through listening and observing. We must pay attention to each other.

KIRCHNER: You began your HII career 34 years ago, in Newport News Shipbuilding’s Nuclear Engineering Department, and have been promoted to positions of increasing responsibility during your career. Does it feel different now, working as an executive for “corporate”?

JENKINS: To be honest, I’ve missed the day-to-day tactical stuff, but now I’m influencing resources through relationships. This position requires more visionary and strategic thinking in terms of how we support all divisions of the company and create a transparent environment. We’re working very hard to increase our bench strength through direct support and teaming efforts. We’ve established a security council, and one of the goals we strive to achieve is a collaborative environment where we’re able to share resources across the enterprise in terms of expertise because all of us have a variety of competencies and skills others may, or may not, also have. We want to be as transparent as possible.

KIRCHNER: Mike Petters, whom you mentioned previously, says, “We want to disrupt ourselves before anyone else has the chance.” HII has a transformation strategy to capture efficiencies and synergies across the enterprise with specific focus on the material value stream, technology, and digital strategy. When you talk about collaboration within your division, it seems that a lot of what you’re doing is transformative.

JENKINS: It is. That ongoing transformation effort empowers employees across the enterprise to work together to enhance

their jobs and optimize results. For example, if we promote sharing of resources, that means we can do more with existing resources without having to expand the organization. Some of the ways to achieve that are through leveraging subject matter expertise, selecting the right technology, and choosing the right platform for implementation. That is transformative in terms of the way we think and how we work together, and it is critically important as we progress.

KIRCHNER: What dynamics do diversity and inclusion contribute to the corporate environment?

JENKINS: Inclusion in thought and collaboration is vitally important. We must constantly find new and different ways to be relevant in what we do for the company in terms of handling industrial security, crisis management, first responders, and classified contracts. To develop a superior industrial security/crisis management program, we must build the team based on what we want to bring to the table for HII. Our people come from all types of law enforcement and the military, and they include those with experience, those straight out of college, and those who learned on the job and grew their careers. We’re a compliance-driven organization, so we are constantly in communication with the regulators and federal agency partners with whom we work. That creates diversity and inclusion because you’re working with different people, different opinions, and different expertise in a variety of ways every day.

KIRCHNER: What did you learn from the experience of playing football in college that you apply to the work you do in security?

JENKINS: At the University of Virginia, we believed “if you practice well, you play well.” That’s a good sports analogy if you play a sport and a good music analogy if you play an instrument. It also holds true in corporate America, and that’s what we stress with the security team. We have a saying: “Prepared to act based upon sound planning, principles, training, and discipline.” We bring a disciplined approach to execution on game day. If you practice well, you’ll perform well. You’ll execute. That’s the train of thought we work to establish.

KIRCHNER: When you look back on your history with HII, which accomplishments stand out?

JENKINS: While I’ve grown as a person and professional, I’m most proud of the relationships I’ve built and maintained with co-workers and peers. Some of my dearest friends are here at HII and in the industry. I have the opportunity to connect with both new and old friends on a daily basis and believe relationships are what drive an organization like HII to success.



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