

# THE BULLETIN

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## '82 Grad Kristin (Wahlner) Arnold 'Wrote the Book' on Team Dynamics

Author of three books (including the recently published *Team Energizers: Fifty Practical Team Activities*) and numerous articles on team development and facilitation, Kristin Arnold, '82, has recently moved her company, QPC, Inc. from the Tidewater area to Fairfax, Virginia. Kristin and QPC specialize in coaching executives and their leadership, management and employee teams, particularly in the areas of strategic, business and project planning, process improvement, decision-making, and collaborative problem solving.

Married to CDR Rich Arnold (Ret), '82, and the mother of Travis and Marina, Kristin Arnold is also an enthusiastic and creative businesswoman. The new book is the third in The Extraordinary Team Series, which includes *E-mail Basics: Practical Tips to Improve Team Communication* and *Team Basics: Practical Strategies for Team Success*. Kristin wrote the books to incorporate ideas she and her friends created and used in their facilitation work. Two more in the series are planned: *Team Openers and Facilitation Basics*.

With a BS degree in Government from the Coast Guard Academy and an MBA (Marketing Strategy) from St. Mary's College, Moraga, CA, Kristin spent her first years in the Coast Guard

on the Gulf and West Coasts. Her arrival in Virginia in the late 1980's marked her introduction to formal facilitation and energized her passion for teams — the genesis of her current work. As she describes it, "the Coast Guard was just getting started with "TQM" [Total Quality Management] and they read the job description for a facilitator. That seemed to sound like what I was doing in my real job as Chief of Reserve Training (D5), so they sent me to the ODI training. Unfortunately, that training was geared to developing a "facilitative trainer" versus a team facilitator — big difference.

"The Coast Guard threw the first batch of 'trained facilitators' (including me) into our first teams ... and we all failed miserably (at least in my mind). We knew a lot about TQM theory and the tools, but we didn't have a clue about how to facilitate/guide a team. So ... I launched a personal inquiry so I wouldn't have to face failure again. In the meantime, I developed a facilitation skills course that helped our fellow facilitators and that was the genesis for the facilitation training I still use today!"

The consulting firm Kristin founded, QPC, Inc., developed from that experience and Kristin's work with reservists in the Fifth District.

"I started QPC in 1992 as a result of some community work. I was active in the Hampton Roads Management Quality Council and served as editor of their newsletter. A few folks respected the facilitation work I did in the community and asked if I could train their folks to be facilitators.

"As the Chief of Reserve Training, I would work with reserves on the weekend which would give me two days of comp time during the week," Kristin explained. "So I could 'work the business' during those two days off. And the reality is, there isn't that much of a calling for full-time facilitators in the Hampton Roads



area." The situation was ideal for a start-up. About a year later, she left active duty and focused on the developing business.

When asked, Kristen described the most challenging aspect of her work as "the fact that every team is different. You can't really trot out the 'typical process' and just go into autopilot. Every team deserves 101% of my energy and that can be grueling at times when you

have back-to-back assignments."

A surprising challenge for her was "the 'back office stuff' — e.g. computer programs, training and access, professional development, administrative support, paying taxes, etc. I am now responsible for this, have to pay for it and it consumes massive amounts of time."

Despite these challenges, Kristin really enjoys her work. "Knowing that I make a difference — and that's tough to know as a facilitator — is very rewarding. I work with the teams and they typically develop agreements or plans of action for moving forward. I have no control over what happens thereafter. Hopefully, I have set them up with structures to hold each other accountable, but you just never know if they are successful. So I follow up a month/quarter later to see how it's going. No one is ever 100% successful (because other things/crises arise that need to be taken care of or the situation changes and they need to tweak their plan), but it's great to know that they are making forward progress when they wouldn't have done anything if we hadn't come together!"

Enjoying your work is one of the pieces of career advice Kristin offered cadets and junior officers. "Do what you love ... life's too short to waste time just going through the motions. And if you don't know what you love to do, think through the things that you excel at — what are the qualities and attributes that really excite you/energize you? Then figure out how you can integrate those attributes into your work."

And finally she encourages us all to "Surround yourself with people who love/like and support you. Sometimes we have 'toxic people' in our lives ... and they don't really make your life better/richer. Surround yourself with positive people/influences on your life and your life will be positive!"

Kristin seems to follow her own advice. She comes across as upbeat and positive about her work and her life!

(For more information about Kristin, QPC, Inc., or Kristin's books, please visit [www.qpcteam.com](http://www.qpcteam.com).)

