

## Facing Unexpected Challenges - Ambrosia Patterson, July 7, 2023

My name is Ambrosia Patterson and I am the Change and Transition Program Manager for the FBI at Redstone Arsenal. So, you know, in a place like the FBI, with gun-toting agents and computer-toting engineers and calculator-toting budget analysts working on digital forensics and cybercrimes, a title like mine; I made up that title. I mean, it maybe doesn't really seem to fit in with the norm of what you would expect from the FBI. So, yeah, I definitely made up that job title, and I'll tell you all about that. It was because I identified a gap in what the organization was doing.

But before I jump into that story, just wanted to share with you some of the strategies behind what it is that we're doing on the Arsenal for the FBI. We share this in the form of five strategic pillars that our leadership has come up with.

So, you know, again, a quick little rundown of the FBI at the Arsenal. We have 3 billion dollars to build, plan, and construct things here. There is no other program in the FBI that is resourced at that level with the exception of what we spend to pay our people. Not even what we spend on casework is resourced at that level, so it's a lot of money. And we definitely have a method to our madness in the form of these five pillars.

So, our strategy starts with a fun historical fact. And maybe some of you know about this, the more speeches like this Alicia and I give around town. The FBI has had a presence at Redstone since 1971 - I think a lot of people probably know that at this point – in the form of Hazardous Devices School, or HDS. So, all state level, federal bomb techs in the country train there.

That initial presence was augmented in the mid-2000s, and this is when Shelby's assistance starts to roll in, that \$3 billion. It was augmented when our Terrorist Explosive Device Analytic Center or TEDAC moved here out of a literal garage in Quantico. So think about that. They're literally in a garage. Now into a set of four beautiful purpose-built buildings on the arsenal.

So, we refer to everything at HDS and TEDAC as falling under our Counter Improvised Explosive Device Center of Excellence (That's a mouthful) Pillar. With HDS and TEDAC we provide a whole-of-government capability to exploit terrorist IDs and train bomb tech responders. So, that's the first pillar.

The second, third, and fourth pillars really turn the future of the FBI at Redstone, and I'll read them to you here now. Pillar Two: at FBI Redstone, we aspire to build enterprise and applied technology, or next-generation technology and analytics capability to address emerging threats. Pillar Three: Advanced and Specialized Training. We aspire to build a place that will teach and grow both our own and our partners' knowledge, skills, and talent needed to face 21st-century challenges. And then Pillar Four: really bringing in that partnership piece. We just want to acknowledge our partners, like here at UAH. You guys are amazing partners to us, amongst others in town.

So at FBI Redstone, we're working to make multi-discipline synergies with other government agencies, industry, and academia. That's a big part of our strategy here. And as you can imagine, under these three pillars fall thousands, thousands, of tech, analytics, and engineering jobs moving out of the national capital region and creating lots of new advanced and specialized training roles on the Arsenal.

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We're not just lifting and shifting. We're really taking this opportunity, building these tech-focused buildings to really re-envision, you know, are we doing things in the right way? And let's make the right way down here.

So, you know, those roles include engineering roles in digital forensics, counterterrorism analytics, data analysis, cybersecurity, just to name a few. And one of the things we say all the time in the FBI is that we can't pay our people private sector salaries, but we can give them those true, purpose-built buildings with all of the technology that they could ever desire to facilitate their mission. So, again, that's exactly what it is we're doing here.

Included in our upcoming portfolio of facilities is an amazing innovation center that's set to open in spring of 2024. And that was a really big part of our focus over the course of probably the last six months. We have a lot of people in D.C. who are what we call "letter holders." You know, they're getting letters saying that they need to move, and they don't usually want to move. It's only about 10% of our people who want to move here.

So Alisha and I do a lot of what we call "Kool-Aid Work" with those people, trying to get them to see, you know, the art of the possible, the magic here in Huntsville. But that innovation center, truly it's going to be amazing. It's going to include a one of a kind kinetic cyber range. Cannot even believe that I'm saying those words right now.

A kinetic cyber range, in which we'll be able to simulate cyber-attacks, and a number of technology buildings dedicated to training investigators of the future and to top it off an advanced research development center. So we are really building the FBI that you see on TV, here at the arsenal.

So, back to my made up job title. As the leader for change and transition to move the FBI to Redstone, I'm responsible, Alicia is responsible. This is our responsibility to help people within the organization and outside of it, such as yourselves, understand our plans and see what we like to call the "art of the possible." Right?

Looking into your eyes, looking into people's eyes up in D.C., and I say "Look at this field. Look at this pole of red dirt. Look at this collection of ant hills. Someday. Someday. You got to believe it. This will be all of the amazing facilities that I just talked about." I do that on a daily basis, and it is exhausting to do that.

You know, a little secret about me, I don't like to talk in front of large groups of people. I think I've become weirdly comfortable with it at this point. And you know, that speech, giving that speech, trying to convince somebody that this could be a good idea is really, really hard. It's emotionally hard. I've been through it myself. Like, that's just- that's so rough. And I'm getting to the stride point now, where I'm almost like tired of giving the speech.

But then I just look at someone very excited about what I'm saying. I have to be excited too, so that feedback look is just amazing. So, you know, I help shape people who will not only believe in this dream but make it a reality. Don't just think about these buildings, but how can you come and make this part of your journey and help us be this amazing vision that we want to be?

So, speaking of looking into people's eyes, I'm going to tell you guys about our last pillar. And it's probably the least exciting-sounding pillar but it's the one that means the most to me as a human being.

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So, it's pillar Five: Strategic Realignment – Agility to Align FBI National Assets and Capabilities to enhance mission resiliency and continuity of operations.

I've talked a lot about what the FBI is building here, but I haven't told you how I personally got here. So, I'm not from Alabama. I'm from a small coal mining town in Appalachian Ohio where there's pretty much nothing going on. I went to college in Cleveland at Case Western Reserve, another good engineering school.

And at the time I thought Cleland was a big city. I think I was there for about two hours and I realized it probably wasn't the big city that I wanted. No shade to anybody from Cleveland in the audience. But, you know, it wasn't for me for the long term, did four years there. And after that, I moved directly to D.C. and started working for the FBI in 2004.

This is the only thing I've ever done. I managed a country club swimming pool before joining the FBI. So the FBI has been my whole life. My husband works at the FBI. My son, he's nine. He's now realized what being an FBI agent means, and he's like, "I want to be in the FBI." So, you know, we were in D.C. for 15 years when the FBI told me in 2019 that I needed to move to Huntsville. Alabama, which I had only visited twice before. I came in 2005, pretty hazy on that trip. That was a long time ago, and then for a recruiting trip in 2018. And then they asked me to come here.

So lots of things happened right before we moved to Huntsville. So, I went through some personal difficulties. I had a miscarriage, and I got pregnant with my second child. I received feedback from one of my son's teachers that he is what we now call, "neurodivergent." Which she didn't put it in those words. Her words to me were, "There's something wrong with his brain as a four year old; I'm a teacher." teacher told me that; he's gotten all the testing. Now, he's probably going to be working in a place like this in a few years if he doesn't join the FBI. But, you know, that was really hard news to take.

I got a major promotion. I got that budget officer job. So, you know, new baby, being responsible for all that money. That was a lot to take on. We started the major renovations at our tri-level house in Springfield, Virginia. We took down walls. We were building a new kitchen. It was going to be amazing. And I- somewhere in the middle of all that sadness and craziness and excitement and worry and celebration, I got a phone call from my boss asking me to move myself, my family, and my team to FBI at Redstone.

So that's a lot of stuff at one time, right? And when Bob [Dr. Frederick] asked me to come share my story with you, he asked me to hit on the idea that the students here are going to face unexpected challenges. You guys are going to face unexpected challenges. You've already faced unexpected challenges, and it'll probably just get worse over your lives.

But there's hope, there's hope. I know that was really encouraging. So, you know, asking my 36 employees to move to Alabama was definitely an unexpected challenge for me. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life, personally or professionally. We were kind of talking on the tour before about how you learn things in school and then there is putting it into practical application. I took very advanced organizational behavior classes when I was at Case- like with preeminent people in the field, and then putting it into practice.

You know, 15 years later, and the FBI telling people to move to Alabama, it wasn't exactly as the textbook had laid out. We can just say that. So, you know, my heart still hurts today, thinking about

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looking in the eyes of those employees and telling them that they were going to have to relocate out of a city that were probably born in , a place that they had never left.

You know, they're from D.C. They were born and raised in D.C. and I'm telling them, like, "Let's move to Alabama. This is going to be awesome!" But in their minds, that's not what they're thinking. They're thinking, "Alabama," and I think we all know what I mean when I say they're thinking, "Alabama." Right?

With its history and its reputation, and sometimes it's well-deserved, sometimes with positives, lost. You all clearly appreciate this place and what it has to offer. Economic opportunity, fun things to do in your free time. I have a better personal life here than I ever had in D.C. A world-class education at a place like UAH.

This is amazing, right? Right here in Cummings Research Park. This is an awesome, awesome place to be. But my employees are not in a place of appreciation when I had this conversation with them, you know? And the really hard part was that they were an amazing team. Budget teams in the government... It's very like- There was no class for federal budgeting in college. You just have to learn it on the job and it's a very deep level of knowledge. And they were the best at their jobs in the entire federal government, hands down.

And I will never forget the day I gave them the Alabama news. I talked earlier about the magic of seeing the dawning of a hopeful look in somebody's eyes and watching the cloud of shock and the cloud of scared, uncertainty, anger, and so many other things enter my staff's eyes that day is just a moment that I will never, ever forget.

Of the 36 people on my staff, four of us made it to Alabama. Yup. And the 32 new friends that we hired in the process when we got here made an already amazing team better. They really did. So, you know, we think about resiliency. That's a really big word, right? Resiliency. Mission Resiliency objective achieved with the move. Pillar five have been achieved.

But the personal resiliency that I and everybody else had to build, whether they came here or not, that resiliency that we had to build in the process of this transition was life-changing. Whether they came here or not. They definitely got a life lesson out of that. So I hope I've given you all some empowerment vibes today. I don't know.

You'll get through your challenges in life, and the challenges are coming your way, but to me empowerment means a lot of things. It means inspiration. It means inspiring action. Inspiring action that is appropriate and will meet the objectives of those who sent you on the mission that you're on. You got to meet that commander's intent. Inspiring you hearing what the FBI is building today.

I hope I've served a little bit of that and a little bit of education on what we're building. I hope I've empowered you a little bit to be brave, to follow your dreams. One of my taglines is, "Do big things." I hope I'm giving you all some "do big things" vibes. Whether big things is changing the word or just getting through the rest of the day or for me, getting through the rest of this speech so that I can go have a cocktail. Tonight is my 11<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

Whatever I've given you today, thank you. Thank you all for your time. I really appreciate it.