Ten Steps to Winning Your First DoD Contract

1. **Enlist Your Support Network**
   - DoD established the Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), which is administered by the Defense Logistics Agency, for the specific purpose of helping small businesses learn about doing business with DoD.
   - Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) provide aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners free one-on-one training in business plan development, finance, and marketing.
   - The Small Business Administration’s Procurement Center Representatives (PCRs) help small businesses obtain federal contracts. They review agencies’ acquisition strategies to ensure that small businesses get their fair share of contracting opportunities.

2. **Understand the Rules**
   - Review the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS). These rules, which govern DoD acquisitions, are complex and it is very important to understand them. Also, each military branch has its own regulations as well.

3. **Register in beta.sam.gov**
   - Don’t overlook the Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) profile of your SAM registration. This database is also used by government buyers seeking specific small businesses.

4. **Target Your Market**
   - Find your niche. Don’t try to be everything to everybody. You should only market your products and/or services to potential customers that buy what you sell. Also, you may need different marketing strategies for different customers within DoD.

5. **Create Capabilities**
   - Create a capabilities statement that summarizes your experience. Be sure your capabilities statement lists your CAGE code and has no typos or grammatical errors.
   - Your longer capability briefings should be tailored to the specific customer you are meeting and demonstrate how you can address their challenges, including how your service or product has a positive impact on a Program Manager’s cost, schedule, and performance.

6. **Identify Prime Contracting Opportunities**
   - You should also review agency procurement forecasts. The Small Business Administration’s Subcontracting Network System bridges the gap between businesses seeking small businesses and small business seeking contracting opportunities.
   - The Advanced Search on usaspending.gov lets you search the federal award data — including contracts, grants, direct payments, loans, and other types of awards — for both prime recipients and sub-recipients.

7. **Bid on your First Contract**
   - DoD’s Small Business Professionals (SBPs) are advocates for small businesses. An SBP should be your first point of contact inside an agency. Do not request a meeting with an SBP unless the agency they support buys what you sell. For an existing requirement, you should request a meeting with an SBP at least 18 months before the contract expires. SBPs help you prepare for meetings with Contracting Officers and Program Managers.

8. **Get in the Game! To succeed, you need to be resilient. You may have only 30 days to put together a top-notch technical proposal that is awardable.**
   - You may wish to start with simplified acquisitions. Procurements are typically set aside for small businesses under simplified-acquisition procedures. One way to find such procurements is to search for “simplified acquisition” on beta.sam.gov.

9. **Provide Stellar Performance**
   - 9. Congratulations! You’ve Won!
   - 10. Now you must perform. Have a plan for executing your contract to DoD’s high standards from day one!