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The Apply 05 Web site should be up and running by the time this magazine reaches you. Many detailed articles have already been written by experienced senior officers about the mechanics of the board and lessons learned; thus, I won't repeat all that info. What I can share with you is the JO perspective, my own as well as other JOs with whom I've come into contact.

The #1 prerequisite is that: An officer has got to register and apply in order to be considered for any billet; and, in the case of LCDRs and below, a command billet. Sounds simply trivia? Well, a midgrade LCDR, who had been a unit XO and got a thumbs-up from his supporting (formerly "gaining") command for the CO job, didn't apply in time. By the time he'd realized he had to "throw his name into the hat" via the Apply process, it was too late. The Web site was so jammed with last-minute rush traffic from other candidates that he couldn't get in on time. Obviously, another LCDR got the CO job even though he had been less experienced with the unit, the program, and the supporting command. The lesson learned: register early and don't wait until the last minute to select a billet on your wish list. A supporting command's endorsement will not result in an automatic selection by any means, certainly not a guarantee.

On the other side of the coin, if you decide to apply for a particular billet, understand what you're getting into and be very sure you're willing to accept that assignment, if selected. If the middle two letters of the RFAS code of the advertised billet are "AA", that means the billet

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requires an exact match of the officer's designator as well as his/her currently holding the indicated NOBC(s). An RFAS code of "AB", a little less stringent, means that the billet requires an exact designator match, but the officer can train toward attaining the indicated NOBC(s) once selected. Besides earnest technical qualifications, you should also ask yourself if you have the leadership experience to take on a particular CO job. Having been a unit XO or TO should give an officer the advantage of hands-on knowledge and experience of its mission, people, and other available resources, as compared to other candidates "walking in from the cold." Are you available and willing to fly across the country into the middle of a winter snowstorm on your own time and money? Do you know that a unit for which you're applying has only ten enlisted billets but 100 Sailors assigned (the other 90 are either CAO or IAP or "ghosts")? Even more challenging, you could very well be the only khaki in this unit. What about the conflicting demands of your civilian job(s), schooling, and/or family? Can you commit to the whole tour of 24 months without unforeseeable disruption? Understanding as much as possible before committing to "click-select" on the billet will give you a better chance of being a successful CO. I've seen officers changing their minds after being selected or quitting in the middle of the CO tour. These just caused all kinds of career implications (performance reporting) for the officers involved, chaos and disruption in unit leadership and operation, and was certainly not fair to other more committed candidates who competed for that same billet.

With all this said, I'd highly encourage all JOs, especially the LCDRs, to apply for command. Even if you don't get selected, it's still a good calibration of your competitiveness; and you might still have some time to take corrective actions. Many of you have most probably heard of the familiar advice: "Assume command at the earliest possible opportunity." I've

known quite a few top-notch JOs who have already held three or four CO jobs, which is quite impressive. These officers would fly on their own time and expenses from Arizona to Mississippi, from Texas to Indiana, from Oklahoma to Kentucky, or from Washington, DC, to the New England area for their CO jobs. They are, also, putting in a tremendous amount of time between drill weekends to take care of unit business, which typically have a sizable population of enlisted sailors. Why? A LTJG LDO once told me: "Nothing beats a CO job," and that's true. Besides the unparalleled pride, satisfaction, and rewarding experience of command, once you've held a CO job, your chances of getting promoted and/or another CO job is certainly improved. A selection board can look at you as an officer who's already been screened, tested, and with proven experience. The competition for command billets at the O-5 level has historically been quite stiff, one out of ten applicants. If you think you should wait until becoming an O-5 before going through the Apply process for your first CO job or any pay billet, you're in for an uphill battle. Looking further ahead, it would, also, be difficult for an O-5 to expect making O-6 without a command tour. Looking at the caliber of the above-mentioned top-notch JOs, you can reasonably calibrate out your expected competition. But then, some officers are content with just putting in their 20 years and retiring in the grade of LCDR. There's nothing wrong with this choice, which is a personal decision one might have to make, considering one's resources and other priorities in life.

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