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Board duty presents a tremendous opportunity for professional and leadership development, learning many new points for ourselves, within or outside our respective communities, as well as bringing back to our commands all this newly acquired valuable knowledge and experience. These are essential in taking care of our records, mentoring our Sailors, and enhancing our effectiveness in present and future leadership roles. I'd certainly recommend that all JOs volunteer to serve on the APPLY Board, or any other statutory or administrative selection board for that matter, as assistant recorders. Varying with communities, some panels last longer than others, but typical board duty could run between two-to-three weeks, working hours could be expected to be from 0700 to 1900 daily, and half-day on Saturdays. Depending on progress, some days could be a little shorter, and some longer. Here are some lessons I learned during my recent experience as an assistant recorder on the APPLY Board. These are certainly by no means inclusive, but I thought they might be noteworthy to share with our readership.

1. Send in correspondence as early as possible. Correspondence goes through several QA and validation stages before being scanned into service records and hitting the board rooms. Take the deadline, as advertised for very good reasons, seriously. There were many packages received the day the board convened, and even some more afterward. These were just too late to be of any benefit. Ensure the correspondence package is clear, legible, and professional. There were copies of very poor quality that weren't at all readable. Remember, we're presenting ourselves to the President of the Board, a two-star admiral. Professional appearance, or lack thereof, of a package says a lot about its sender.

Lessons Learned from APPLY 06

2. Be judicious, realistic, and relevant in your submissions. Missing FitReps, personal decorations of NAM or higher, unit's significant awards (MUC), college diplomas, especially graduate degrees, AQD such as NOBC, JPME Phase I, or P.E. license are essential examples. If awarded an NOBC, just sending in the approval letter is sufficient, no need to submit the entire 20-page NOBC application package. There were more than 5,700 eligible records to be considered in APPLY 06. Typically, an assistant recorder had about ten minutes to scrub a record and associated correspondence. Note 5,400 requires that a correspondence package must be submitted, via regular mail or fax, with a cover letter signed by the applicant. Direct third-party submission, no matter how positively wonderful of an exceptionally strong endorsement, doesn't count.

3. Cover letters should be simple, concise, and straight to the point. Significant break in service or gap in FitRep continuity (more than 90 days) most definitely deserves a clarifying explanation. Unexplained discontinuity simply said the applicant just didn't care and showed a lack of desire to engage. However, it is neither practical nor desirable to send in a ten-page résumé or a "pick-me" letter and expect a briefer to decipher and construct one's selling points. The idea here is to make it easy on your briefer, he or she has about 10-15 minutes to review and mark up a record, and about 60 seconds to advocate it to the board.

4. A drop in ranking on one's first FitRep at a new rank or a new unit was no great cause for alarm so long as one continued to recover by "tracking to the right" and "breaking out in traffic," i.e., consistently improving performance trend from P to MP to EP, rising above reporting senior's group average and/or cumulative average. The Board were very aware and understood the typical circumstance in which the newest or most junior member of the group had to compete against other more established and senior members.

5. As unit COs, we have to make the hard call, taking care of those who deserve

to be taken care of, and for others, calling a spade a spade. There were many instances where unit COs had left all the EPs, or even MPs, on the table. When a one-of-one FitRep was rated a P or an MP, it made one wonder about the member, and in some case, the reporting senior. Take great pride and care in developing our Sailors personally and professionally, and set them up for success.

6. Move forward & up, not backward. Don't go back to one of the previous units only to take the same job already held once before. Normal rotation every two-to-three years would be healthy. If one had stayed a bit longer but shown increasing roles and responsibilities, this is considered as normal progression. Occasional out-of-community assignments would also be considered beneficial for professional experience diversification and for the good of our greater Navy.

7. Command early & often (the longer you wait, the harder it gets), and stay engaged as productive contributors and leaders. Besides CO tours, assignments with major staff, AADC, JFACC, or JFMCC to demonstrate joint warfighting skills were also considered valuable. There are many great opportunities out there for JOs, and do not hesitate to apply. If not selected, do not get discouraged. At the very least, use the experience to calibrate one's competitiveness, perform an honest self-assessment, implement adjustment as necessary, and reapply again.

The work was thorough, fair, and most demanding, in both quality & quantity. The competition was keen and intense. Do take advantage of the record review service offered by the NRA. For a nominal fee, one can hardly find another investment with a greater return, many times.

The above notes & observations were collected during the first half of the APPLY Board, scoring a confidence factor to each & every eligible record, also known as "rack & stack." In the next article, I will share with you some more experiences from the slating (or assignment) process during the second half of the Board, i.e., matching faces to places. ↴