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Taking Care of Number Two

Most CO's enjoy writing fitness reports (FITREPS) and evaluation reports (EVALS) on top performers. It's a great chance to say "thank you" for a job well done, while providing a springboard for mentoring future career progression. NAVADMIN 049/97 permits ranking in the comments section; "Ranked 1 of 46" not only is acceptable, but also is a great silver bullet (just don't violate any of the "Ten Deadly Sins" of FITREPS – see my September 2003 column). But what about number two?

Granted, "ranked 2 of 46" is pretty impressive. But what about the Sailor who is 2 of 5? Or 2 of 3? Or 2 of 2? At the Apply Board, less than a third of applicants get pay billets and roughly ten percent get command. The advancement opportunity to E-7 last year for SELRES was 21 percent. For E-8 and E-9, it was 11.5 percent. Finishing number two seems to place one out of the running.

Not necessarily.

There are ways to write a #2 FITREP or EVAL that can still make it a winner. Forced distribution causes reporting seniors to make hard decisions on EP and MP rankings. Only 20 percent can receive EP's; the #2 Sailor in summary groups of five or less can be no higher than an MP.

For larger summary groups with more than one EP, should you state a ranking of #2? For more than two EP's, I recommend

you do. For exactly two EP's, consider leaving it out; a board may give that Sailor the benefit of the doubt. Boards rarely view a FITREP alongside peers in the same competitive category. However, that isn't a license to rank two Sailors #1 – that's indecisive and dishonest. You can assign the same trait average to your #1 and #2 Sailors. Be careful, though, lest it appear you cannot make decisions.

If your #2 Sailor in a competitive category is #2 in your unit, say so. Consider an opening line of "Ranks #2 of 46 CDR's of all designators." Or all ranks. Or both. The larger the comparison group, the stronger the ranking. Officers selected for promotion receive a separate competitive category – 2 of 2 may not be impressive, but 2 of 16 CDR's is.

An XO should always receive a #1 ranking, or it is considered adverse. The exception is if XO's rotated midyear. State this in the comments to ensure the #2 XO isn't penalized. If a Sailor is #2 to the XO, say so. That is usually the best non-XO's can do; this makes the Sailor #1 of troops in ranks.

For detaching officers, a periodic O-4 or O-5 FITREP coincides with the traditional 30 September rotation date. Although it is possible to game the system by detaching someone a few days early, FITREPS ranked 1-of-1 are usually less valuable than those ranked 2-of-X (when X>2). Also, the Bureau is quite adept at catching these games. Any suspect summary groups result in ALL of the officers having their FITREPS delayed from their official record, possibly affecting their competitiveness at boards.

For O-6's, you have a special opportunity to write a FITREP on your #2 captain for the period 1 August to 30 September. Presuming that officer has done something of significance (and the #1 officer possibly has not), write a letter extension to the #1 officer's FITREP (who is already in good shape), and write a 1-of-X "EP" FITREP on your #2 captain. This shows an upward trend; and boards will notice the move from #2 to #1, and from MP to EP.

Selection boards advance Sailors to E-7, E-8, and E-9 much in the way boards select officers for promotion. Therefore, ensure that EVALS for your Sailors receive the same attention to detail as FITREPS. E-6 (and sometimes E-5) EVALS are key reports for the CPO board. Note that the BUPERS copy is the official record copy for E5-O6 reports. The Field Service Record copy is the official record copy for E1-E4 reports. Thus, write your E1-E4 EVALS for your Sailor, but write your E5 and E6 EVALS for the board.

Other great ways to qualify a #2 report:

- "Ranked #2 against much more senior officers."
- "Onboard only four months; clear #1 performer" (this is risky; this Sailor better be #1 next time).
- "Ranked #2 of all LCDR's I've seen in 25 years."

The bottom line is not to put all of your energy into the #1 report. Few Sailors have perfect records; and, with a little bit of effort, you can help keep those near the top highly competitive. Your Sailors deserve nothing less. ⚓

Ask Yourself This Question

Is my service record up-to-date for promotion? Naval Reserve CAPT, CDR, LCDR Staff Corps promotion boards meet in March. Line CDR and LCDR boards meet in April and May. Order and review your record today! If you are too busy, we'll do it for you. For more information on this member service, go to our Web site <www.navy-reserve.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=929>.