

Prevention Officer Career Guide




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PREVENTION OFFICER CAREER GUIDE

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On Friday, October 15th 2010, President Obama signed into law the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010. The Act appears to impact various aspects of this Guide. In light of some of the requirements in the Act, the following guidance is provided.

The Authorization Act places requisite qualifications for the Prevention Department Chief (marine inspector PLUS marine investigator OR marine safety engineer). The Act also requires a Marine Safety Workforce Assessment Report be provided to Congress this year. This Assessment will validate current numbers of qualified candidates for the Prevention Department Chief position; there may exist some gaps. As we work to develop a sufficient number of officers to fill this key position in accordance with the new law, the guidance provided herein still pertains for high performing Prevention Officers that may not have the requisite qualifications but still want to compete for and fill a Prevention Department Chief position. Bottom-line, this guide is applicable; opportunities may exist that this guide speaks to and we are working to increase the number of opportunities in the future (see below).

Also, in light of the Authorization Act's intent, we relooked at the premises on which Prevention Officers Career progressions are based to create a basic precept for future career planning. Analogous to "every soldier is an infantryman, or every marine is a rifleman," every Prevention Officer should be a marine inspector. That is, future Prevention Officers will be required to have a basic marine inspector qualification. To that end, an inspection apprentice program for all incoming Prevention Officers will be established to provide basic marine inspector qualifications before moving into investigations, facilities, waterways management (includes ATON), or advanced inspections sub-specialties at a Sector. This will facilitate future Prevention Department Heads having a basic understanding of marine safety inspections plus one or more other sub-specialties under the Prevention missions.

In the meantime as we continue to fill Department Head vacancies in accordance with the Act and aforementioned guidance, and as we establish our apprenticeship program, we will also work with Congress to amend authorization language to allow the Sector Prevention Department Chief to be a marine inspector AND one of the following: a marine casualty investigator, OR marine safety engineer, OR waterways operations manager, OR port and facility safety and security specialist. We believe this approach meets the intent of the current Act and keeps the doors open for deserving and diversely qualified Prevention Officers to compete for the Department Head position.

Please be reminded, this guide is primarily for those officers who desire a Prevention career. We realize some officers may rotate through a Prevention billet, especially at a Sector, that may have a different career path or career aspirations, and that is OK.



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About this Guide

The purpose of this guide is to capture and present the most relevant topics for successful career management within the Prevention program. The guidance given herein is intended to assist officers in planning a career as a Prevention officer that will lead to command opportunities and assignment to key leadership positions. It should be noted that there are additional sources of career guidance available to the officer corps and that this document is intended to supplement those resources, with a focus on the Prevention officer. Inasmuch as this guide is broad reaching and expansive, there are intangible considerations unique to every officer's career that may not be fully referenced or discussed in this guide.

PPLE

Performance, Professionalism, Leadership, and Education (PPLE) are the cornerstones for promotion and assignment opportunities throughout the officer corps. These elements are timeless and apply equally to the Prevention program. Although sustained high performance is the single most important factor that will ensure your long term career success, it should be characterized by all four elements of "PPLE." As such, you should consider how these four performance dimensions are integrated into your career and assignment history. You may find that not every assignment lends itself directly or equally to these dimensions. As such, it is incumbent upon the individual to proactively consider these elements in the course of executing your duties.

What is the Prevention Program?

The Coast Guard's Prevention program is responsible for maritime safety, maritime security, maritime mobility, and environmental stewardship. This includes, but is not limited to: inspection of commercial vessels, ports and facilities, foreign flag vessel inspections (port state control), oversight of uninspected vessels, marine casualty investigation, waterways management, navigation and boating safety, bridge administration, and vessel documentation. At a Sector, the Prevention Department consists of three divisions: Inspections, Investigations, and Waterways Management. The Inspections Division manages the regulatory and inspection aspects of safety, security, and environmental protection for vessels and facilities. The Investigation Division initiates inquiries into marine casualties, pollution, and boating violations. The Waterways Management Division controls aids to navigation (ATON), safety and security zones, regulated navigation areas, ice breaking, the vessel traffic system, and the automatic identification system (AIS).

*Professional Competence (3e):
ability to acquire, apply and
share technical and
administrative knowledge and
skills associated with description of
duties.*

Specialist or Generalist?

Prevention officers are specialists; they have to be. As the Prevention program is technical in nature, interaction with the public to enforce regulations require the knowledge and skills of a subject matter expert. Therefore, the focus of your first few tours should be in developing Prevention competencies as described by the Marine Safety Manual and the Officer Specialty Management System. The progression of becoming a Prevention specialist begins with developing com-





petencies by attending “C” schools, completing personal qualification standards (PQS), job qualification requirements (JQR) and conducting on-the-job training (OJT) under the instruction of a qualified individual. It is then furthered by experience and continued education. Initial assignments within Prevention are crucial in establishing your technical expertise as a Prevention specialist.

The Broadened Specialist

Once your technical expertise as a Prevention officer is developed, you should expand your knowledge and experience into other areas, thereby broadening your specialties as an officer. This career management guidance has been promulgated in numerous career management documents and has never been more relevant than today.

Broadening assignments are commonly referred to as out-of-specialty (OOS) tours. For the Prevention officer, a broadening assignment can retain some association with the Prevention program (i.e., Port Auditor, International Port Security Liaison Officer (IPSLO), Yorktown Instructor, National Centers of Expertise, Contingency Planning, Command Center), but are most often not directly linked to the Prevention program (i.e., CG-82 program reviewer, Congressional Affairs, Coast Guard Liaison Officer). The long-term career value of these assignments cannot be overstated, as they will help develop you as an agile, adaptive leader of even greater value to the Prevention program. Broadening assignments will challenge you to learn how to operate in a new and dynamic environment, partner with new communities and stakeholders, and increase your effectiveness to create synergies both within and beyond the Coast Guard. Planning for broadening assignments is further discussed under *Timing*.

Teamwork (5d): ability to manage, lead and participate in teams, encourage cooperation, and develop esprit de corps.

Officer Specialty Management System

There are six officer sub-specialties within the Prevention program: Vessel Inspections, Marine Investigations, Waterways Operations and Management, Port and Facility Safety and Security, Auxiliary Operation Coordination and Marine Safety Engineering. Each of these subspecialties has an alpha-numeric designation under the Operations Ashore Prevention (OAP) specialty.

There are also two officer subspecialties contained within the Operations Afloat (OAF) specialty that have a nexus with Prevention program: Aids To Navigation and Ice Operations. Competencies attained in either of these subspecialties as an afloat operator are recognized by the Prevention program, specifically within the Waterways Operations and Management subspecialty. All of these subspecialties, both Operations Ashore and Afloat, are further described below. Developing expertise in more than one of these sub-specialties is highly desirable and will increase your competitiveness for key leadership assignments within the Prevention program.

Vessel Inspections (CG-OAP11): Vessel Inspectors ensure regulatory compliance with all aspects of U. S. and foreign flag commercial vessels. Vessel Inspectors make up the largest population of





the Prevention program. Assignment to a Vessel Inspections Division at a Sector is most common for new Prevention officers. Current plans are to promulgate three levels within this sub-specialty: Marine Inspector Apprentice (CG-OAP11a), Marine Inspector Journeyman (CG-OAP11j) and Marine Inspector Advanced Journeyman (CG-OAP-11m).

Marine Investigations (CG-OAP12): Marine Investigators investigate marine casualties, mariner misconduct and (un)suitability to hold a Merchant Mariner Document. Marine Investigators determine causal factors, recommend civil penalties and work to amend regulations to prevent casualty recurrence. It is common for this sub-specialty to be entered by officers with an established Prevention or legal background.

Waterways Operations and Management (CG-OAP13): Waterway managers interact with maritime operators and port users to ensure safety and facilitate commerce through the Marine Transportation System. This sub-specialty includes aids to navigation, bridge permitting, navigation systems and information, and ice operations.

Port and Facility Safety and Security (CG-OAP14): Officers in this subspecialty manage facility (both onshore and offshore) and container inspection programs ensuring safety, security, and environmental protection. This subspecialty conducts considerable outreach through advisory councils, safety committees, and industry stakeholders of the Maritime Transportation System.

Auxiliary Operations Coordination (CG-OAP15): Officers serving in this sub-specialty administer Auxiliary training and qualification programs, perform Auxiliary program management, and facilitate the operational use of Auxiliary forces. They serve in the capacity of an Auxiliary Liaison Officer or District Regional Auxiliary Coordinator. This can be a collateral duty, but is most often a primary duty.

Marine Safety Engineering (CG-OAP16): The Marine Safety Engineering sub-specialty develops marine safety standards and then enforces these standards through the Coast Guard's regulatory authority for vessel plan review. This sub-specialty typically requires advanced education in Marine Engineering, Fire Protection Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Marine Engineering Technology.

Aids To Navigation (CG-OAF11): Surface operators assigned to an *afloat* ATON unit will operate, establish, and maintain both floating and fixed ATON. Competencies gained in these *underway* assignments are applicable to the Waterways Operations and Management subspecialty within the Prevention program.

Ice Operation (CG-OAF12): Surface operators assigned to an *afloat* ice operations unit (depending on the Cutter class) will perform domestic icebreaking, conduct joint operations with the National Science Foundation. Competencies gained in these *underway* assignments are applicable to the Waterways Operations and Management subspecialty within the Prevention program.





Career Planning: Your First Two Assignments

Identifying your goals early on is a vital part of career planning. Every officer should aspire to key leadership positions and within the Prevention program this means Prevention Department Head, Marine Safety Unit CO or XO, and Marine Safety Detachment Supervisor. The path pursued in getting there takes planning and success will be a matter of performance, well thought out decisions and, at times, personal sacrifice.

With few exceptions, your first two tours as an officer largely define your career track. After completion of your first tour, nearly every job opportunity remains – Sector Prevention or Response, Aviation, Engineering or Afloat, as well as postgraduate school programs. However, after completing your second tour, the likelihood of forging a path to a new specialty becomes more difficult. If your first assignment is not within the Prevention program and you desire a career as a Prevention officer, it is critical that you communicate and discuss this with your supervisor and the assignment officer.

*Planning & Preparedness (3a):
ability to anticipate, determine
goals, identify relevant
information, set priorities and
deadlines...*

Whether you spend one or both of your first two tours in the Prevention program, the time spent must be dedicated to professional growth, training, and acquiring technical competencies. It is these competencies that determine your sub-specialties, which will further qualify you for assignments of increased responsibility within the Prevention program.

As you advance beyond these first two tours, exposure to staff, postgraduate and “payback,” and out-of-specialty tours are highly recommended. These tours offer you the opportunity to broaden your perspective and expertise, whether it involves mission support or acting as a subject matter expert to develop policy. The growth of competencies does not stop when you are assigned to these positions, and in fact, these assignments are just as important as those initial tours in developing yourself into a broadened specialist who can capably serve in key leadership positions.

The Importance of Qualifications

Officers with proper qualifications and training are the backbone of the Prevention program. Your career success and assignment opportunities will be made possible or limited by your qualifications. The highest performing Prevention officers will expand their professional development beyond the minimum and will attain qualifications beyond those required to perform the job. Time at a field unit is precious and goes by quickly; it should be leveraged to the fullest extent to attain qualifications. Make no mistake, qualifications are your ticket to success.

The Prevention program is supported by resident training programs at four levels: entry/basic, technical, mid-management, and executive. Following a resident training program, job competencies are achieved through completion of Personal Qualification Standards (PQS) and on-the-job training coordinated through the unit’s training officer. Once PQS and OJT are completed, a letter of designation will be issued. There are dozens of designations within the Prevention program, many of which are prerequisites for further qualifications. Consult the Training and Educa-





tion Manual, the Marine Safety Manual (Volume I, chapter 7), and the Competency Dictionary for further guidance.

Feeder Ports vs. Non-Feeder Ports

A feeder port is a Sector or Marine Safety Unit (MSU) with sufficient volume and diversity of commercial vessel types and/or other Prevention mission areas of responsibility to provide opportunities for training in at least four of the 17 Marine Inspection (MI) and Port State Control Examination (PSCE) competencies. Currently, there are 18 designated feeder ports. Feeder ports are staffed to train and provide qualified inspectors to fill MI positions throughout the Coast Guard. Junior officers assigned to a feeder port have a distinct advantage due to the opportunity for training and the ability to attain a greater number of qualifications and competencies. Assignment to a feeder port will typically result in a follow-on assignment as an MI or Investigating Officer prior to a staff assignment. Junior officers assigned to non-feeder ports should aggressively pursue additional training opportunities in order to keep pace with their feeder port counterparts.

Initiative (8a): ability to originate and act on new ideas, pursue opportunities to learn and develop, and seek responsibility without guidance and supervision.

Timing

Managing and executing a long-term career strategy is arguably the single most important personal responsibility of any officer. A solid understanding of timing-based assignment implications is important. Tour lengths relative to time-in-grade (remaining) are an important component of career timing. Selection for promotion often results in early rotation if not tour complete (i.e., more than 12 months remaining on your tour). Reassignments of this nature will involve many considerations and will be based on needs of the service, needs of the unit, as well as your own professional development and personal considerations.

Long standing assignment edicts have prescribed a balance between field and staff tours. Although exceptions exist, most officers transition back and forth between field and staff tours. However, junior officer (O-3 and below) are able to have consecutive field tours in order to focus on attaining competencies and sub-specialty development.

Occasionally, an opportunity arises within a unit to “fleet-up” into the next higher position within the chain of command. These opportunities can be the result of a promotion, an unanticipated vacancy, or simply a part of the normal assignment cycle. While they should be recognized as possibilities, they are difficult to anticipate and it can be extremely risky to make career plans based on the potential to “fleet up.” It should be noted that a “fleet-up” is ultimately an assignment decision made by an assignment officer at the Personnel Service Center.

As mentioned earlier, out-of-specialty assignments provide the necessary career broadening for future assignments to key leadership positions in the Prevention program and beyond. The timing of these assignments is an important consideration and is commonly pursued at the O-4 level. Many of these assignments have a shorter associated tour length (i.e., CG-82, Congressional Af-





fairs, DOD CGLO) and as such, the impacts should be factored into career planning. Timing these assignments within your career can be challenging, as you often have to sacrifice one career enhancing opportunity for another. However, they are a critical component of officer development and will greatly increase your viability in the senior ranks of the Coast Guard.

There are serious timing considerations associated with Coast Guard sponsored postgraduate training. In general, it is advantageous to attend postgraduate school following a field tour, regardless of the program. The reason for this is to mitigate the amount of time spent away from operations. Most Coast Guard sponsored graduate programs require a staff tour following the completion of graduate school as a “payback.” Together, postgraduate school and the payback tour can account for six years of your career, and all of this time is out of the field and away from Coast Guard operations. If postgraduate training is preceded by a staff tour, it could mean that you are away from Coast Guard operations for ten or more years. The result of this is that your viability and career opportunities may be in jeopardy, as your operational recency may be compromised and subject to question. Attending postgraduate school following a field tour will prevent this from happening.

Judgment (8b): ability to make sound decisions and provide valid recommendations by using facts, experience, political acumen, common sense, risk assessment, and analytical thought.

Postgraduate Education

There are numerous Coast Guard sponsored postgraduate training opportunities. The Prevention program sponsors six: Marine Engineering, Fire Protection Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Marine Engineering Technology, Oceanography, and Transportation Management. Any of these fields will further your expertise as a Prevention specialist and serve to broaden you as an officer. However, as a Prevention officer you are not limited to only these fields of study. Pursuing postgraduate education in a field outside of the Prevention program is one of the most overt ways to broaden your career. Legal, finance, acquisitions, and operations research (among others) are all fields in which Prevention officers successfully “break-in” to through the postgraduate training program. It is this process that can allow an officer to balance two specialties. Consult the Training and Education Manual and PSC (opm-1) for application procedures and prerequisites.

Marine Safety Industry Training

The Marine Safety Industry Training program is a unique opportunity designed to provide officers with additional marine inspection experience and knowledge from within the Coast Guard’s regulated maritime industries. Executed in conjunction with a PCS transfer, this TDY training is considered Duty Under Instruction. There are four principal areas of training: Merchant Marine Industry Training (MMIT), Marine Environmental Protection Industry Training (MEPIT), Port Safety/Security Industry Training (PSIT), and Investigations Industry Training (IIT). These programs involve assignments with industry for a period of three to twelve months and incur a service obligation of 3 months for every one month of training. Applicants must have at least three years of Prevention field experience, must be authorized to wear the temporary Marine Safety insignia, and should be tour complete for the upcoming assignment year. This highly competitive program





is greatly career enhancing and targets high performing LTs and LCDRs. The application process is announced in the fall via ALCOAST with general guidance contained in the Training and Education Manual.

Command Center Duty

Assignment as a duty officer in a Sector Command Center can be either a primary or collateral duty, depending on the sector. High performing officers will find this to be an extremely rewarding assignment; however, Command Centers do not represent a career track within Prevention and should be considered as career broadening that will greatly enhance future assignment opportunities. The Command Center duty assignment provides a bridge to understanding the Sector's Response missions. It will develop an officer's knowledge of the Coast Guard's search and rescue and law enforcement missions. However, long term assignment and follow-on tours at a Command Center will only provide nominal value in career development for a Prevention officer.

Contingency Planning

Contingency planning assignments are primary duties critical to the success of the Prevention and Response missions. These positions are career broadening and will give you exposure to decision making and leadership through actions taken by the Captain of the Port (COTP), Federal On Scene Coordinator (FOSC), and the Federal Maritime Security Coordinator (FMSC). Positions in contingency planning are often high profile as they work to strengthen Coast Guard partnerships with other federal and state agencies, local organizations, and the port's maritime industry. These assignments lead to qualifications in Maritime Contingency Planning (MARCEP) and Master Exercise Planner (MARMEP), and will broaden you as a Prevention officer. Contingency planning should not be pursued as a career track, as there is no recognized sub-specialty within the Prevention program.

Operations Afloat - "Cuttermen"

The key for assignment within the Prevention program as a Cutterman is to attain competency in one or more of the sub-specialties. This is common for "Black Hull Sailors," as aids to navigation is a core function of the Waterways Operations and Management sub-specialty. Depending on the port focus at any given sector, Cuttermen with an ATON background can (and do) compete for Prevention Department Head positions.

As a "White Hull Sailor," developing a sub-specialty within the Prevention program requires more overt career planning focused on shore duty assignments that occur in between afloat assignments. Longstanding assignment guidelines that are intended to balance staff and field opportunities for all officers can make this endeavor particularly challenging, as both specialties require field assignments and experience.

Without one or more developed competency in at least one of the Prevention program's sub-specialties, assignment within the Prevention program to key leadership positions is unlikely. Future senior leadership assignments within the sector construct for Cuttermen (both black hull and white hull) can be realized at the Deputy and Sector Commander level where broader assignment





considerations are made that are not necessarily Prevention program sub-specialty driven. As always, sustained high performance built around Professionalism, Performance, Leadership, and Education is the key to long term career success as a Coast Guard officer.

Reassignment Within a Unit

Officers who find themselves in assignments that provide limited opportunities to develop Prevention sub-specialties should pursue reassignment within the unit as discussed in ALCGOFF 228/09. Sustained high performance and attainment of full qualifications associated with your current assignment will increase the likelihood that you are afforded this opportunity. Officers may also find themselves reassigned within a unit in order to optimize operational readiness, match skill sets to positions, or provide valuable cross training opportunities. In either case, it should be noted that reassignment within a unit is a formal process that is authorized only by an assignment officer at the Personnel Service Center.

Adaptability (3d): ability to modify work methods and priorities in response to new information, changing conditions, political realities, or unexpected obstacles.

The Unanticipated Assignment

Because the assignment process is governed by the needs of the service as well as the needs of the individual and the needs of the unit, you may be given an assignment that was not part of your personal career planning, or was unanticipated. Regardless of where or what the assignment is, it should be noted that there are no “bad assignments.” Each billet is necessary and serves a vital role, and there are unique opportunities within each assignment that should be exploited. Should the assignment be outside of the Prevention program, consider it an out-of-specialty tour that will provide the career broadening that is necessary for senior leadership assignments.

It's Your Career

You are constrained only by your own motivation and initiative. The Coast Guard has a long history of providing opportunity and resources to those who show trained initiative, combined with aptitude and foundational competency. The Prevention program embodies this philosophy. The most recent edition of the Marine Safety Manual provides appropriate context for these ideals:

“While the command is ultimately responsible for the success of the marine safety training program, that success depends in part on individual’s initiating and carrying out their training duties and responsibilities. Marine safety programs provide the resources, commands provide the opportunity, and the individual provides the motivation and initiative.

“Drive the program; do not sit back and ‘let it happen.’ Set realistic goals, place them on a timetable, then stick to them.”

To assist in this manner, the Coast Guard has recently expanded the requirement of the Individual Development Plan (IDP) to all officers O-4 and below. This interaction between senior and





subordinate compels individuals to establish informed goals and promotes discussion to formulate a plan on how to accomplish them. As a junior officer, you should fully embrace this process and take advantage of its potential. Make your desires and aspirations known to your supervisor; he/she can assist by providing you the resources and opportunities necessary to achieve your professional and personal goals.

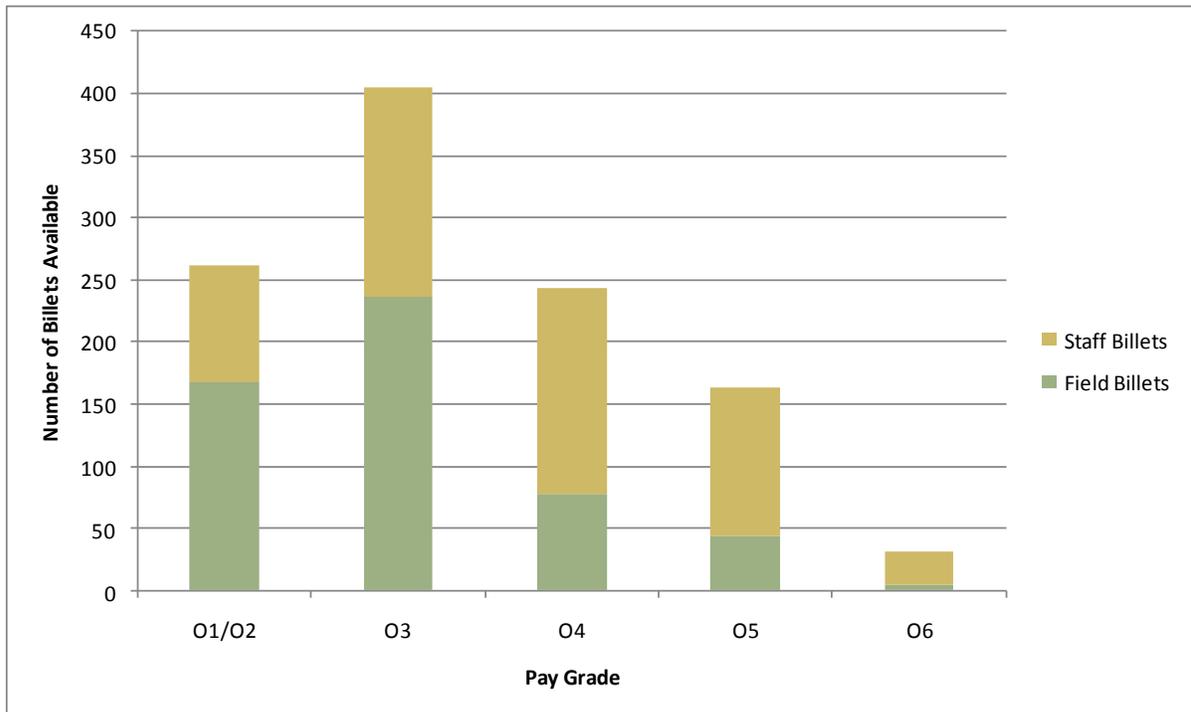
“To keep in mind that our countrymen are free men and as such are impatient of everything that bears the least mark of a domineering spirit.”

Alexander Hamilton
1790





Prevention Billets by Rank



Prevention Career Guidance Rules of Thumb

- Performance-Professionalism-Leadership-Education: the four edicts for promotion and assignments.
- Vessel Inspections (CG-OAP11) is the principal sub-specialty within Prevention.
- Feeder ports offer the greatest opportunity to attain competencies.
- The more competencies you have, the more assignment opportunities you will have.
- Five years of field assignments and 4 competencies earns the Marine Safety Specialist Designator pin.
- Prevention specialists should pursue broadening assignments to increase competitiveness for key senior leadership positions.
- The best time to go to postgraduate school is when departing a field unit.
- Postgraduate studies in a specialty outside of Prevention is the most common way to balance a dual career track.
- Timing – timing – timing. A career needs to be planned, as there is limited time at each pay grade.
- Pursue the most challenging assignments: To the risk-takers go the spoils.



Career Planning Examples

