COMMANDANT'S GUIDANCE
TO PY12 OFFICER SELECTION BOARDS AND PANELS

Ref: (a) U.S. Coast Guard Publication 1, Appendix C
(b) The Armed Forces Officer, National Defense University Press, 2007 Edition
(c) U. S. Coast Guard Commandant's Direction 2011

It is a remarkable time to be serving in the Coast Guard. We have the honor and privilege of performing meaningful work that is essential to the long term safety and security of our country. Our versatile and adaptable Maritime Service is operating in an increasingly globalized world that continues to present new threats and challenges of ever-increasing complexity, compounded by constrained national resources. At the same time, demand for our unique capabilities and leadership in responding to these dynamics has never been greater. To meet them proactively, we must cultivate and promote officers who possess the leadership skills and competencies to achieve mission success. Service as a Coast Guard officer is more than a job; it is a vocation. It is our expectation that officers will demonstrate a commitment to the culture and Core Values of the Coast Guard, and the traditions of Officers of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. References (a) and (b) provide in-depth background and guidance to meet this expectation.

Coast Guard officers work within a military structure, and our promotion system constantly renews leadership through the selection of our best qualified officers for service in the next highest grade. While many fine officers will be offered the privilege of continued service, the unavoidable reality of our system is that there will be very good and honorable officers who will not be offered the opportunity for promotion and in some instances continuation in our Coast Guard. This situation creates an obligation for every member of our selection boards and panels to be mindful of the sacred trust they bear for not only the future of our Service, but also the future of the individual officers under consideration. The following guidance is provided to assist our board members while also informing officers who seek opportunities for increased responsibility and leadership.

Servant Leadership

"Servanthood is not about position or skill. It's about attitude...Servant leadership is never motivated by manipulation or self-promotion. In the end, the extent of your influence depends on the depth of your concern for others."

...John Maxwell

Responsibility, authority, and accountability

In a military structure, promotions to the next higher grade mandate commensurate increases in responsibilities and authorities. Officers should aspire to command, command cadre, senior staff positions, positions of the highest responsibility within their specialty, or other assignments that provide them with successively greater levels of responsibility, authority and accountability. You should be particularly vigilant in your evaluation of records to take note of those who step forward to serve and succeed in positions accompanied by additional risk and rigorous accountability. Whether the assignment is command or duty in a position critical to our Service, officers who undertake broadening assignments gain valuable experience and exercise judgment that will pay dividends to our Service in the future.

We must respect our shipmates. We must encourage officers who believe in "service" before "self" or selfless service. We should promote leaders who know and understand the "pulse" of their people . . . leaders who cultivate and create positive command climates and work environments of care and concern. "Care and concern" is not just humanitarian interest in morale and welfare, it is also the ability to inspire, mentor, and encourage our people to greater levels of performance; to set the bar high. Likewise, leaders must display the strength of character to hold subordinates accountable for lapses in performance and/or behavior. Our ability to perform our mission ultimately depends on leaders ensuring their people are healthy, vibrant, well trained and disciplined. We need leaders who put people first and are looking out for their professional and personal interests . . . leaders who will "go the extra mile" to ensure their people are proficient at their jobs. Leaders should also be particularly vigilant to the concerns of Coast Guard families, concerns which have evolved over the past several decades.

At the same time, leaders must be mindful of the communities, industries, governments, and citizens that we serve. Alexander Hamilton's Letter of Instruction to the Commanding Officers of Revenue Cutters in reference (a) remains as applicable today as it was when he issued it on June 4, 1791. It's not about us; it's about the people we serve.

We should promote leaders who demonstrate the ability to forge, maintain and strengthen beneficial internal and external partnerships. We need leaders who can sustain key relationships to make our Service more capable and credible in local areas of operation, as well in the greater maritime domain. External partnering includes creating new relationships and strengthening existing ones through community outreach, responsiveness and open communications. The range of partners includes federal, state and local agencies, tribal interests, as well as appropriate academic, industry, non-governmental, sovereign and international entities. Internal partnering includes working collegially and cooperatively with various Coast Guard communities, such as operations and mission support, to ensure integration and unity of effort. Joint and interagency assignments and details are a force multiplier when well performed, and especially when officers leverage this experience to better our Service.

Finally, we need leaders who will always act ethically and be responsible stewards of our public resources, setting the standard for the highest levels of professional accountability; leaders who initiate, maintain and/or follow internal controls to ensure proper stewardship of our scarce resources; leaders who, when placed in a questionable mission execution or support situation, have the courage to risk saying, "No."

Honoring our Profession

We should promote leaders whose focus is on skillfully and safely performing our core roles and missions as defined in Pub 1 (reference (a)), while prioritizing demands to ensure mission balance and a high degree of readiness. Officers should select a specialty, and a sub-specialty, and continually work to gain experience, knowledge and proficiency in these areas. More importantly, officers must demonstrate the ability to transform their specialty knowledge and experience into effective leadership. We should promote leaders who demonstrate dedication to professional growth commensurate with their chosen specialty; show evidence of progressive development in their specialty as they ascend in rank; seek to master their craft, and apply their specialty skills safely, efficiently and effectively.

Emphasis should be placed on recognizing officers who demonstrate a commitment to continual learning and self improvement via the most appropriate means within their community, including qualifications, certifications or other professional milestones, and pursuit of advanced education. Authorship and participation in professional organizations are also an important part of lifetime learning.

All officers deemed best qualified for promotion should possess an attitude of selflessness, humility, professionalism and enthusiasm; live by our Core Values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty; seek responsibility, understand their authorities, exercise them judiciously, and ensure accountability.

We must also build an officer corps that draws strength from the rich diversity within our American society. Inclusion of diversity of talent, ability, ideas, and viewpoints—as well as ethnicity, gender, culture, color and creed—is vital to mission relevance, readiness and execution. An additional facet of our officer corps' diversity is the array of professional backgrounds, academic skills, and career experience, consistent with exceptional performance in circumstances characterized by high risk. Keep in mind the necessity to cultivate and grow expertise across the broad range of our mission support and mission execution duties, to ensure mission balance.

Diversity sparks innovation by incorporating new approaches and fresh perspectives to recognize, manage and resolve the complex and dynamic problems we encounter in the maritime operating environment. To attract and retain this diverse workforce, the Coast Guard needs leaders who are active participants in affinity groups and professional organizations, using knowledge gained there for mentoring and other meaningful measures that foster individual development. We need leaders who strive to

create a climate of equity where all individuals have the opportunity to prosper, advance in their careers and contribute their utmost to Coast Guard missions. Our leaders must realize that recruiting, retaining and growing a diverse, talented and highly skilled workforce strengthens our Service by enabling us to better perform our demanding maritime missions. This guidance should not be interpreted as requiring or permitting the preferential treatment of any officer or group of officers on the grounds of race, religion, color, gender or national origin.

FOR BOARDS CONSIDERING SELECTION TO O-3 AND O-4, AND PANELS CONSIDERING OFFICERS IN THOSE GRADES:

You should seek to promote officers to O-3 and O-4 who are consistently demonstrating the enduring core competencies and leadership qualities set forth in my above guidance. Look for leadership, accomplishment and adherence to our Core Values. Discount documented minor errors by placing a greater emphasis on subsequent performance that reflect lessons learned and most notably demonstrates an officer's potential to serve in the highest grade.

I have become concerned that junior officers and some senior leaders have developed the misperception that pursuing/obtaining postgraduate degrees is an acceptable substitute for gaining operational experience and proficiency in their specialties. Advanced education should augment one's sea bag, not fill it.

Officers at the O-3 to O-4 level should be establishing their specialty and progressively demonstrating technical competence and proficiency in their specialty through on-the-job training, formally recognized training or education, achievement of professional milestones, or any combination of these. For example: the time and study required for an officer to complete naval flight training and follow-on upgrade training to aircraft commander, or to complete requisite marine inspector training and qualification, or to train and qualify to become a commanding officer of a patrol cutter are all qualifications or certifications requiring an officer's full attention, and typically preclude the officer from pursuing additional advanced education opportunities. Therefore, obtaining qualification or certification of this type is commensurate with the level of effort and importance of earning a Master's degree, and should be considered as such. These officers should also be developing and honing their leadership skills.

a. Junior officers are expected to focus on development of professional knowledge, skills and experience in their chosen fields. Primary value to the Service lies in their ability to execute missions in a professionally competent and proficient manner. Technical expertise at the tactical level, and growing leadership abilities and experience, are highly valued attributes. The achievement of professional designators, formal certifications or recognition of superior performance are indicators of strong performance. Junior officers should be rated and advanced accordingly.

b. As officers progress in rank and experience, they affect a broader scope of mission activity; therefore, their developmental focus should shift from the tactical/technical to growth in leadership skills. Although officers will always approach problems with a view through the lens of their prior experience, they should rely more on a highly developed leadership skill set when designing solutions, particularly as their span of control increases. A broadening of experience beyond their initial specialty through joint tours, professional military education, advanced degrees, inter-agency experience, etc. are indicators of expanded knowledge and skill.

I expect reserve officers to demonstrate operational technical expertise at sectors, port security units and other units. Junior reserve officers should show solid progression in responsibility and operational experience.

FOR BOARDS CONSIDERING SELECTION TO O-5 AND O-6, AND PANELS CONSIDERING OFFICERS IN THOSE GRADES:

You should promote officers to O-5 and O-6 who are demonstrating excellence at achieving the enduring core competencies and leadership qualities set forth in my above guidance and who are otherwise the best in grade.

O-5s should be demonstrating evidence of mastery in their specialty and the analytical ability to solve complex challenges. They should possess strong representational, oral and written communications skills.

O-6s should have achieved mastery of their specialty and demonstrated an overarching understanding of our Service. They should be exercising strong representational, oral and written communications skills. These officers shall also have exhibited a commitment to the development and well-being of their personnel which may include a record of mentoring others, including reaching out into their field as well as diverse segments of our society.

O-5s and O-6s are given great responsibility and authority. Evaluate how they exercise it and whether they successfully lead teams to accomplish tasks. Look for innovation, vision and adaptability. Look for character and enthusiasm. Look for those who have demonstrated, taught and maintained good stewardship of our public resources. Look to promote leaders who exhibit the ability to complete major projects and initiatives vice merely proposing meritorious ideas or promising methodologies. Look to promote leaders whose contributions, whether made in a mission execution or mission support role, make an operational impact, achieve an operational efficiency or otherwise advance safe and effective mission accomplishment. Look for leaders who improved the proficiency of their people in accomplishing their missions.

To meet current and emerging Service demands, the Coast Guard continues to require more officers to remain within their respective specialty areas. Developing and

maintaining these specialized skills (e.g., law, finance, acquisition) requires currency of experience and continuous engagement in these competencies. Look for officers who possess the acumen, savvy and ability to navigate complex situations to protect our authorities, enhance our mission support delivery systems, recapitalize our fleet and ensure compliance with financial and legal requirements.

As officers move into senior ranks, they must also have an understanding of the major issues facing the Coast Guard in order to best contribute through their particular expertise to the overall needs of the Service. This understanding of macro Service issues can be acquired in many ways, through assignment diversity (e.g., different type of unit/different type of billet/different geographic location), participation in studies and task forces, and special assignments. Look to promote O-5s and O-6s who demonstrate understanding of joint, interagency, inter-governmental, not for profit, private and international sectors; and officers who have clearly demonstrated both a high level of technical competence and proven leadership abilities in demanding assignments.

I expect senior reserve officers will be experts in their individual mobilization specialty and more focused on the mobilization potential of those reservists in their span of control. Joint/interagency expertise at this level is demonstrated not only in assignments but aggressive pursuit of educational opportunities such as the Reserve War and Staff Colleges. Senior reserve officers should show diversity both in assignments and geographic diversity, and be equally comfortable in the Coast Guard operational environment as well as the DoD and interagency community.

FOR O-6 CONTINUATION AND SELECTION TO FLAG RANK

Flag officers and Senior O-6s are the leaders of our Service. They are the representatives of our Service to the public, the Congress, other armed services, cabinet-level agencies and senior government officials, international bodies and foreign governments, industry and other officials. They are overall responsible and accountable for the good stewardship of the resources entrusted to us by the American people.

You should give particular consideration to officers who stepped forward to take on the most difficult and challenging high-responsibility, high-visibility assignments and leadership positions. Whether in mission execution (particularly those commanding operational units), in mission support assignments, or serving in high-visibility details outside of the Coast Guard, these officers assumed additional risk, took on additional burdens and distinguished themselves as representatives of our Service. Required characteristics include: decisive, balanced and strategic decision making; poise, knowledge and presence that advance the reputation and excellence of our Service; political understanding, savvy and ability to impact national-level policy making as an advocate of our Service; demonstrated sound stewardship for public resources; and finally, humility . . . the basic characteristic of a servant leader.

In considering captains for continuation, the qualities we seek in flag officers should be manifested in our best-qualified O-6s.

Selection to flag also requires demonstrated embracing and advancing of the enduring core competencies and leadership qualities set forth in my above guidance. We need our flag officers to be those recognized leaders with impeccable service reputations and with whom subordinates, peers and seniors all seek to serve. They must have a passion for our Service, clear conviction of purpose and the demonstrated ability to act in a collegial manner.

Flag officers should otherwise be the very best in grade, whose record and reputation distinguish them as the brightest ~~and most~~ capable to lead our Service into the future.

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Commandant