

INTERVIEW GUIDANCE FOR OFFICER ACCESSION PROGRAMS

by Coast Guard Recruiting Command, Officer Programs Branch, 2005

This guidance is designed to help both applicants and command supporters better navigate the application process for Temporary and Reserve Officer Commissioning programs. The Coast Guard Personnel Manual (COMDTINST M1000.6 (series), articles 1.B.8 and 1.B.9) offers further information on the interview process.

During the course of assembling an application for consideration by a commissioned officer accession selection panel (e.g., Officer Candidate School (OCS), Direct Commission Engineer (DCE), Pre-Commissioning Program for Enlisted Personnel (PPEP), etc.), an applicant must submit to an interview by a board of Coast Guard officers. In many cases, the interview is the only significant personal contact with the applicant reported by Coast Guard officials to the selection panel membership.

The primary purpose of the officer accession interview is to assess an applicant's leadership potential, communication skills, character and intellectual development, commitment to the principles of health and well-being, and, most importantly, their ability to align with Coast Guard core values.

In view of that, there are three very important facets to every interview:

- The responsibilities of the applicant
- The responsibilities of units and commands
- The responsibilities of the members of the Interview Board of Coast Guard Officers

THE APPLICANT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

What are the responsibilities of applicant? In other words, what should an applicant do to facilitate the successful completion of, and a favorable endorsement from, his/her officer accession interview?

First and foremost, applicants must remember that they are applying for an extremely competitive junior executive position – as a commissioned officer – and must, therefore, prepare accordingly. So, before the application is started or the interview is scheduled, an applicant should pause and answer two questions for themselves: “What is a commissioned officer?” and “How do I know I can be a commissioned officer?” Reference materials, including dictionaries and encyclopedias, define a commissioned officer as *“any person in the armed services who holds a commission sanctioned through execution of an oath or affirmation which, by the very act of execution, grants the individual authority to undertake certain functions and empowers that person to assume a position of authority or command.”* Interestingly, even though John Paul Jones, the father of the American Navy, dictated the “Code of a Naval Officer” in 1792, each of its principles fully supports that definition and holds true today. “The Code” remains the best representation of what, and who, an officer is and what an officer should be. Take the time to locate and read “The Code.” While you're at it, also read the oath of office administered to newly commissioned officers, as well as the verbiage contained in a commissioning certificate. Review the Coast Guard's Level 1 Officer Evaluation Report (OER) to gain an awareness of the functions and responsibilities expected of, and therefore measured, in a commissioned officer.

Also, consume a few non-Coast Guard, non-military readings such as that found in Peter Drucker's *"The Effective Executive"* (ISBN: 0-06-091209-70). *"Character In Action: The U. S. Coast Guard on Leadership"* (ISBN: 1-59114-672-0) by Donald T. Phillips with ADM James M. Loy, USCG, (Ret.), and *"Be-Know-Do: Leadership the Army Way (Adapted from the Official Army Leadership Manual)"* introduced by Frances Hesselbein and General Eric K. Shinseki (USA Ret.) (ISBN: 0-7879-7083-2) are military in nature and are also solid, executive-level professional development pieces. Finally, do not hesitate to seek awareness and insights from those commissioned officers and executive leaders that you know and respect; talking with them will help you develop the paradigm needed to frame and complete a competitive application for commissioning.

In addition to information contained in the Coast Guard Personnel Manual (COMDTINST M1000.6 (series)) and this guidance packet, there are numerous publications on the market that discuss job interview preparation or that offer advice on how to successfully assume and perform in an executive level position. There are also publications available that will help an applicant learn as much as possible about the organization they are seeking to join. Applicants should ensure they have referenced one or more of these publications prior to their interview.

- *"10 Insider Secrets to a Winning Job Search: Everything You Need to Get the Job You Want in 24 Hours - Or Less"* (ISBN: 1-56414-740-1), by Todd Bermont
- *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2005: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers"* (ISBN: 1580086152), by Richard Nelson Bolles
- *"The Coast Guardsman's Manual"* (ISBN: 1-55750-486-7) by George E. Krietemeyer, CAPT, USCG, (Ret.)

Many other resources are also available to assist an applicant with preparing for their interview.

After they've completed their research via print resources, an applicant should seek opportunities to participate in as many rehearsal or "mock" panel interviews as time and availability of people will allow. This exercise allows an applicant to become familiar with the panel interview method and to gain confidence in responding to an array of questions presented in a unique format, without the anxiety that can accompany the actual, formal qualification interview. Sponsoring units and individuals – also known as the applicant's parent command and mentors, coaches, and champions – can assist their applicant by arranging and preparing for simulated interview panels and afterwards providing honest, analytical feedback and advice from which the applicant can improve and refine their performance.

FIELD UNIT AND COMMAND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Officer Interview Board's recommendation and comments, paired with the command endorsement, other letters of recommendation, and an applicant's self-reported credentials, are a selection panel's ONLY view into a candidate's suitability for commissioning as an officer in the Coast Guard. The interview, therefore, becomes one of the most important aspects of the application package, and can be, especially during very competitive selection cycles, a determining factor in final selections for offering commissioning appointments to an exclusive few candidates. Because of the importance of the interview, field units and commands – the

convening authorities of Officer Interview Boards (including mock boards) – are asked to keep foremost in thought that to support and/or participate in an Officer Interview Board is to make a direct contribution to shaping our service’s future officer corps. Candidates chosen by officer selection panels will be those junior officers that, in as soon as three to six months after the interview, will join your wardrooms and perform alongside you and your team members as the leaders and managers of tomorrow. Therefore, we must all work in concert to ensure that we put forward for consideration, and ultimately select, only those candidates most suitable for commissioning, or for positions as officer trainees.

Understandably, the interview process represents the area in which field units and commands can make the most significant contribution to this process. Therefore, do not hesitate to encourage and empower your officers – both senior (O-4 and above to perform as Interview Board Presidents) and junior (to gain the experience of representing our service in support of a unique human resources mission requirement), as well as those with degrees and specific skill sets in professional areas including engineering, legal, merchant mariner, aviation, and intelligence – to champion and take part in the officer interview process. Remember, officers in direct professional or personal contact with the applicant, or those in the individual’s chain of command, cannot be members of that applicant’s official interview board.

With 19 ways to become an officer in the Coast Guard (yes, 19!), field units and commands may unavoidably find themselves in constant “interview board” mode. To mediate the potential onslaught of requests for interviews from applicants, field recruiters, and your own Education Services Officers (ESOs), the following management suggestions are offered:

- Feel free to devise an annual schedule of Officer Interview Boards. For example, perhaps four to six times per year, the command could offer the opportunity for anyone pursuing a commission to accomplish their interview requirement at that command. The schedule could be widely published through the command’s first line of contact, the command ESO. A schedule of this type would allow all applicants, with proper planning, the opportunity to fulfill one of the most important aspects of the application process and still meet their desired commissioning program’s application deadline.
- Consider developing a central roster of officers who are eligible to perform as members of interview boards. Annotate, among other things, the officer’s specialty and the number of interviews in which he or she has participated during the past year. From the roster, a command coordinator, typically the ESO, can, via a pre-established method such as numerical precedence, alphabetical order, a lottery system, etc., select and appoint interview board members to fill the mandated positions that will occur according to the above schedule, four to six times per year.

There are also other efforts that will streamline conducting Officer Interview Boards. Proactively taking these, and other management steps, will allow units, commands, and their members to better plan their time, not be taken advantage of in the execution of a very important process, and to experience the least disruption possible in their daily optempo. On the other hand, both ESOs and field recruiting staff will also be better able to plan their schedules and control their mission requirements. And, last but not least, applicants will benefit from a standardized, planned

procedure enabling them to have a positive experience in what is overall a fairly stressful process.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INTERVIEW BOARD MEMBERS

The members, and particularly the president, of the Officer Applicant Interview Board have a range of important responsibilities, all of which culminate in the final goal of providing an impartial evaluation of an applicant's leadership potential, communication skills, character and intellectual development, commitment to the principles of health and well-being, and, most importantly, the applicant's ability to align with Coast Guard core values as either a prospective officer trainee and scholarship beneficiary or as a Coast Guard officer.

Please remember that it is not the responsibility of the interview board to disqualify an applicant; the Coast Guard Recruiting Command is the ONLY disqualifying authority for commissioning program applicants. Therefore, interview board members receive ONLY the same items in an application package that a selection panel member receives. This excludes medical, legal, or security checks and other qualification information. Interview board members should conduct their assessments from the information contained in the applicant's narrative, transcripts, and letters of reference and/or command endorsement, as well as from the information obtained from the applicant during the interview. It IS the responsibility of the Interview Board to provide a clear, substantiated, and collective "Recommended for consideration" or "Not Recommended for consideration" decision to the Officer Selection Panel, via the Officer Programs Applicant Interview Form (CG-5527, Rev. 06-04), available via the USCG Adobe Forms Library. No previous version of this form is authorized for inclusion in a commissioning program application. Treat the CG-5527 as an OER-type document; provide ample commentary to support the numbers. View excessive white space as a deficiency in the overall evaluation of your applicant. Otherwise, acknowledge that the selection panel will draw its own conclusions in the absence or in the dearth of commentary. Note that applicants are not provided access to their completed CG-5527 at any time.

Interview board members are cautioned to be especially cognizant of the experience and maturity level of their interviewee in relation to the program the interviewee is applying for. For example, a 20-year-old college sophomore candidate interviewing for the CSPI program, (a training program in which officer trainees have two years to be nurtured, trained, and developed) should be held in a different regard than a candidate who has, in addition to a four-year degree, multiple years of work experience, and is interviewing for the Direct Commission Engineer (DCE) program. That DCE candidate will be expected to complete accession training (DCO School), report to their first unit, and be knowledgeable enough in their craft that they can begin to contribute immediately to the accomplishment of their unit's mission. On the other hand, besides participating in their first panel-led interview, the CSPI candidate may be participating in their very FIRST interview, ever! They will be inexperienced and nervous; they may do or say things that are unnerving or that appear not to be in direct alignment with the behaviors of a commissioned officer. But the goal of the interview board is to assess whether or not that CSPI candidate has a passion for the Coast Guard, the potential to be a leader and manager, and has demonstrated personal values that are in direct alignment with Coast Guard core values.

The bottom line is that the Officer Accession Programs Applicant Interview, communicated via the CG-5527, is one of the most valuable portions of the application package in that it is a selection panel membership's only significant personal insight into an applicant's suitability for enrollment in an officer trainee program or for immediate commissioning as an officer. It can, in fact, be a determining factor in final selection for a commissioning program. Being a Coast Guard leader is not easy. It is a huge undertaking to find those applicants who live up to Coast Guard core values; display leader attributes; are competent, courageous, and mature; and who act in a way that they would have their people act. Therefore, we are depending on each of you to help us out.

Further information can be obtained from your ESO, local recruiting office, or the Coast Guard Recruiting Command.