

NON-SELECTED
BY: ANONYMOUS

REJECTED

It was on a Wednesday when I found out I hadn't been selected for O-4.

The next few weeks were spent essentially wallowing in grief. I went through each of the stages of grief, even cycling back to repeat some of the stages I thought I'd overcome. First, there was denial and isolation. Denial wasn't an issue for me as much as isolation was. I didn't want to talk to anyone about it other than those who had also been non-selected. No one else could possibly understand what it felt like; I didn't want to open up to someone who was essentially going to pat my back and wish me better luck next time.

Then came anger....rage to be more exact. How could the Coast Guard do this to me? I'd given over 11 years of my life to this organization. I'd checked all the boxes – qualifications, graduate degree, even been selected (twice) for educational opportunities funded by the Coast Guard. There were no 'red flags' in my background. I thought through it all and reached my decision – it had to be my last OER. While not bad by any means, it wasn't extraordinary either. When I drafted my OER, I was coming back from maternity leave for my second child – exhausted, to say the least – to a job where I felt dissatisfied and unnoticed. My OER reflected all of that and my chain-of-command, all retiring within weeks, essentially signed off on it without making any changes.

After anger, came bargaining. "If only I had pushed the detailer to put me in a billet that was in my specialty," "If only I had cared more when drafting my OER," "If only I hadn't taken being selected for granted".....the list goes on, as one can imagine.

Depression may be the fourth stage of grief, but for me it was omnipresent throughout the process. At work, I would essentially spend the morning feeling empty, miserably messaging back and forth with a friend who'd also been non-selected. By lunch time, I would have perked back up, feeling hopeful that the next go-round would be to my advantage. That feeling of hopefulness would peter out around my children's bedtime; I would spend the evening concentrating intently on whatever was on the TV so that I could block out the feelings of worthlessness. Come the next morning, it would start all over again. It was a vicious cycle and, of all the stages of grief, this drained me the most.

Last came acceptance. While I'm fundamentally a person who recognizes that there's no point dwelling on the past, it took me months to stop doing just that. I'd never thought I'd be one of those people not selected so acknowledging that I was now a member of that club didn't come easily. The upside to finally reaching this stage was that I made the decision to reevaluate my career and the effort I'd been putting into it.

Throughout my life, I'd been someone who things just came to easily and that had caused me to become lazy in making others aware of my contributions. I've since realized that I can't leave it to others to infer that I'm a great officer, a hard worker; I have to endorse myself, ensure that the impacts of what I do are communicated up the chain. Being a reserved person, it's not easy but I'm trying. Hopefully, the next O-4 board will recognize that effort and reward me for it.

Leadership Competencies addressed: Accountability and Responsibility, Self Awareness and Learning, Personal Conduct