

P R O

Seven Letters are an Easy G

By SGM Lena Williams

The Army's centralized selection boards choose NCOs for promotion, NCOES courses and elimination under the Qualitative Management Program. And while they have been convening for years, many NCOs still do not understand how these boards make decisions that are so critical to NCO careers.

Having served on consecutive centralized promotion boards for the past four years, I'd like to share my observations and views on what a board looks for in NCOs.

Just what do NCOs have to do to come out on top?

Remember this acronym: PROMOTE. It stands for performance (and potential), recruiter (and other "hard" jobs), your OMPF (Official Military Personnel File), memorandum (that can be used to correspond with boards), your official photo, training and education.

Let's look at each of these separately.

Performance & potential

This is one of the most critical areas any board considers. A recent DA summary of the latest SFC board lists performance and potential as the first item of discussion. It adds: "Selection boards continue to tell us that the NCOER (NCO Evaluation Report) gives them the information they need to make their decisions . . . performance remains *the* qualifying factor."

Performance and potential go hand-in-hand. If an NCO excels in all jobs, a board will conclude that this NCO can be expected to handle jobs with greater responsibilities. The NCOER is the key to verifying this performance.

Recruiters, et cetera

Recruiters, drill sergeants, first sergeants and similar jobs are commonly referred to as "the hard jobs." Success in these positions tells a board that an NCO is motivated and seeking challenges. Not everyone can handle the demands of these jobs, and not everyone is willing to tackle them. Those who do — and who do so successfully — are senior NCO material.

These jobs are also considered career enhancing because they give an NCO more experience than others in the same MOS. Varied assignments with progressive responsibility are equally important within an MOS.

OMPF

Your OMPF, plus your 2-1 and 2A forms, are vital documents. The 2-1 gives board members a quick glance at your career, including assignments, awards, special training and education. The 2A repeats some of the information from the 2-1, but it also gives an NCO's most recent SQT score, civilian education and NCOES completion or selection level. Both the 2-1 and 2A should be complete and up-to-date, and in-

formation from one document should agree with the other.

Similarly, NCOs should request a current copy of their microfiche files from the Enlisted Records and Evaluation Center at Fort Harrison, Ind., months before a board meets. NCOs must carefully review this file to ensure that it contains all NCOERs, awards and other required documents. It is equally important that this file excludes items that should NOT be there. I have seen files that contain Article 15s that belong to other soldiers and items (like relief for cause NCOERs) that should have been removed because of successful appeals.

Memorandum

NCOs being considered by a board may correspond directly with the president of a board; third party correspondence is not accepted. Correspondence can be a plus or a minus, depending on its contents. Its purpose is to call attention to information that is not otherwise part of an NCO's file, or to add documents that could not be included through normal channels.

Some correct examples: Explaining why you had a lengthy non-rated period that was caused by having four raters during a five-month period, including college transcripts that were not available in time to forward through personnel channels, or noting that your uniform does not include unit insignia or a patch because you are assigned to an organization that does not issue these.



Guide to Centralized Boards

Examples of information in correspondence that will backfire: An explanation that your extensive field duty prevents you from improving civilian education, an excuse that your MOS does not offer enough leadership and supervisory positions (when you have failed to volunteer for recruiting, drill sergeant, etc.), or calling attention to your outstanding performance and awards (i.e., calling attention to accomplishments when these should already be documented in your file).

Official photo

There is no excuse for NCOs not having current photographs before a board. Further, this can be the most important item seen by board members. If a picture is worth a thousand words, your official photo quickly and visually tells board members a lot about your appearance, bearing and ability to properly wear your uniform.

NCOs who fail to ensure that a current photograph is on file are usually assumed to be apathetic — or, perhaps, deliberately trying to prevent having their true appearance known to board members. It is no coincidence that photos are often missing from files containing NCOERs that indicate borderline compliance with height and weight standards.

However, when a soldier looks sharp in a photo and is properly wearing all authorized awards and decorations, board members are usually quick to give a high rating or to spend

more time looking for positive information in records.

Training

For purposes of this article, I'll define training as any military training or education. Most peers are about equal in this area, and the NCOES and promotion link assures this. So what can an NCO do to stand out? Take NCOES and speciality courses through correspondence, allowing you to complete courses sooner while also demonstrating motivation and initiative. Good grades and special honors in resident or correspondence courses also set apart outstanding soldiers.

Other training, such as airborne, air assault, master fitness, etc., also reflects motivation and initiative. But, if you've collected badges and patches and have avoided assignments that need these special skills, a board might view your training as a waste of money that did not benefit the Army.

Education

While the previous items are not necessarily listed in order of importance, it is appropriate that civilian education be addressed last, because it is often the final discriminator that determines who *does* and who does *not* get the next stripe.

The Army education goal is for all NCOs to achieve two years of college by their 15th year of service. How critical is this to you? A good indicator of your level of civilian education can be found by looking at statistics

from recent boards. If most NCOs in your MOS were promoted to the next higher grade with 15 years of schooling, that means that you would have to complete at least three years of college in order to be highly competitive. Some MOSes require more college than others. Regardless, earning good grades and taking courses that contribute to degree programs are helpful; this tells board members that you're seriously pursuing a degree and that you're not just taking courses in order to "look good on paper."

When all other things are equal, the decision of who to promote or not promote is often decided by the most obvious discriminator; civilian education is often that discriminator.

Of course, all that has been discussed here is important. But, if I had to choose the single most important item that every NCO should ensure is complete and accurate, it would be your OMPF. It is possible to be promoted with a missing or outdated official photo, or with a 2A that might also be less than perfect. However, if your OMPF fiche is missing, you can't even be considered for promotion. And, if your fiche is missing NCOERs, awards, etc., your chances of being selected are slim.

If you want insurance that you'll be competitive for selection — especially during the drawdown — just remember and practice this PROMOTE guide to success.

Williams is the School Secretariat sergeant major for USASMA.