

## **COMMANDANT’S GUIDANCE**

### **TO PY09 OFFICER SELECTION BOARDS AND PANELS**

**“Change is hard, but not as hard as recovering from a missed opportunity or the loss of confidence that comes when leaders fail to act.”**

**ADM Thad Allen**

1. Never has there been a more exciting or rewarding time to serve in the Coast Guard. The world is rapidly changing, and with it, we are confronting new challenges, threats and hazards, as well as significant opportunities. As we lead our service in this rapidly evolving world, we cannot wait to be prompted by external events, concerns by our stakeholders or perceptions that dictate the terms of change to us. We must be forward looking, adaptive, flexible and responsive to emerging concerns and trends to succeed. We must build a Coast Guard that continually senses change and continually adapts. We must be able to sense even the slightest changes in demand signals for our services. Building a new Coast Guard is not limited to transforming the organizational structure and our business processes. It means building leadership that will best position the Service for today and the future. It means continually assessing our skills and being engaged in lifelong learning regardless of rank or time in Service. Optimal mission execution requires much more than monitoring operations. Intelligence, curiosity, personal preparedness and critical thinking skills are prerequisites to success. We need officers who excel in this rapidly changing climate – leaders who employ innovative methods to solve problems; who work with partners within the government and their communities to best serve the American people; who understand the concept of managed risk, and who create an environment for subordinates that embraces change, diversity of thinking, and Coast Guard core values.
2. The Coast Guard today is more visible, trusted and respected than anytime in our history. It is our agility, adaptability and strong leadership that make this possible. But we should expect to be questioned continually in an era of intense oversight. To sustain the public’s confidence and our superior mission execution, while evolving to meet national, and even global, demands we need officers who can do the following:
  - a. Continually reinforce core values: Character is a fundamental condition and represents a personal standard of excellence. Officers must consistently reflect the Coast Guard core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. Integrity and transparency are foremost among the traits that we expect in our leaders. Through personal example, conduct, and decisions – every day, on and off duty – officers must instill the culture of our core values in their people. Our people demand transparency. This must become part of our culture.
  - b. Carry out the Commandant’s Strategic Intent: The Commandant’s Intent represents my priorities for the Coast Guard. They are Mission Execution, People, Platforms and Support. Mission Execution is why the Coast Guard exists, whether we are securing our ports, protecting the American public from all hazards and all threats, or being a responsible steward of the world’s oceans. We need to promote people who have the necessary technical expertise, management, and leadership skills to bring the Coast Guard strategy to life in our operations, support, training and workforce

- development, regardless of their specialty or the particular mission. Officers you select for promotion must be our best leaders and managers - capable of reacting and adapting to a dynamic operating environment and committed to igniting passion, motivation and innovation in our people. They must ensure that all Coast Guard men and women, whether in operations or support, military or civilian, active duty or reserve, know their critical role in mission execution.
- c. Think Innovatively and Act with Conviction: When confronted with a crisis, our people must assess risk, develop a plan, and take swift and appropriate action. We must select officers who have this bias for action, who can think on their feet and be innovative in solving problems. We need leaders who promote team play, exercise on-scene initiative and flexibility, and accept and manage risk, while exercising appropriate restraint. Look for major accomplishments and discount minor errors. Officers should be out in front, even if their methods or ideas seem unconventional, as long as those methods comply with law, regulation, doctrine, and core values. Officers should also apply these principles to those who work with them, encouraging innovation, and helping their people apply lessons learned for continuous systemic improvement. Active knowledge and demonstrated application of quality management principles are key indicators. We must focus on the effects we are trying to achieve rather than activities and levels of effort.
  - d. Be Capable of Operating in a Dynamic Environment: We are first responders, ready for all hazards and all threats in the maritime domain, every hour and every day of the year. We are ready today, and always preparing for tomorrow. Officers must be adaptable and flexible to meet these evolving challenges and should demonstrate those traits in all that they do. They need to see opportunity in change, be able to readily adjust to changing circumstances, and lead with optimism and energy. Change is a permanent feature of our Service.
  - e. Embrace Partnerships and Unity of Effort: We need officers who can operate and support operations in a linked and seamless fashion with partners, whether it is part of a major response to an event or in better serving the American public. We need officers who know how to form key and successful partnerships and coordinate efforts with DHS components; DOD; other federal, state and local agencies; and the private sector, as we work together to provide for the safety and security of the U. S. maritime domain. We value the experience gained in joint and interagency assignments when those experiences are applied to improve the Coast Guard. We must understand the commitment, passion, and resources that voluntary non-governmental organizations represent and incorporate them into our response doctrine. We must also be effective in the face of organizational stovepipes and hesitant partners.
  - f. Build the Future Workforce: To sustain superior mission performance and best position the Coast Guard for the future, we need an extremely well-trained, educated and diverse workforce. Diversity is not limited to the traditional areas of ethnicity, gender, color, and creed. Diversity is also the diversity of thought, experience, perspective, and culture. We need officers to lead the Coast Guard who value differences, who are culturally attuned to the world in which we operate and the

people in it, and who teach and mentor their people. Our officers must also be firmly committed to equal treatment and opportunity for all personnel, and through their actions, must promote diversity and foster cohesiveness and equal treatment in the workforce.

3. Regardless of the board or panel, you should consider whether an officer has made meaningful or extraordinary contributions within his or her area of responsibility, either in supporting or executing Coast Guard missions.
  - a. Our selection board system (commonly referred to as promotion boards) uses either a fully-qualified or best-qualified standard for selecting officers. Selection boards are designed to select those officers meeting the appropriate standard without regard to their particular specialty. There are no preferred career paths.
  - b. Assignment panels and selection panels may consider specialty skills and career paths in the context of the specific panel's purpose as part of broader selection criteria.
4. In addition to looking for those qualities I mentioned above, these are some of the things you should watch out for as you evaluate officers' records:
  - a. Billet Description: Given the changes in our organization over the past several years, many officers are serving in assignments that may not be fully understood solely by their titles. In your evaluation, ensure understanding of the full scope of the officers' duties and assignments; carefully review the "Description of Duties" block of the officers' OERs (block 2). You should pay close attention to the overall scope of authority and responsibilities for all positions, command and non-command, operations and support.
  - b. Assignments:
    - i. Board and panel members are reminded that while officers have input to their assignment process, ultimately, they are issued orders based on the needs of the Service. Boards and panels should not base decisions on speculation as to why an officer was assigned to a certain billet or duty status (i.e. Title 10, EAD, ADSW, etc).
    - ii. Because of declining opportunities for assignment of junior officers afloat, the decision was made in 2004 to discontinue sending all Academy graduates to sea. Many junior officers from other accession sources also do not have the opportunity to choose their initial career path. In this regard, boards and panels should avoid making value judgments about individual officers starting their careers afloat as compared to ashore. All officers are assigned to billets to meet specific Service needs.
    - iii. The Coast Guard's operational excellence requires an array of skills and expertise. Every specialty community contributes to our overall success. Each community is essential and provides its own path to leadership and technical proficiency, though opportunities for command may come at different levels

and numbers depending on the specialty. Boards and panels should not unduly emphasize operational or command assignments over key staff experiences.

c. Officer Evaluation Reports:

- i. Numerous officers are serving in joint and interagency positions where they may have non-CG supervisors. In reviewing performance for these officers, do not discount these records based upon the perception of unusually high or low marks or comments. Rather, consider the overall value these experiences bring to the Coast Guard as we look to build out Joint and interagency experience and talent. Reviewer comments are critical in these assignments and should be considered carefully.
- ii. Many officers are detailed to postgraduate or advanced/specialized training. While assigned to these duties, the majority of OERs will consist solely of their course grades. There will not be, nor is there expected to be, detailed performance information while assigned to duty under instruction.

5. FOR BOARDS CONSIDERING SELECTION TO O-3 AND O-4, AND PANELS CONSIDERING OFFICERS IN THOSE GRADES: Officers primarily develop their specialty/ technical/professional expertise in the O-1 to O-4 pay grades through assignments, on-the-job training, and formal education, or any combination of these. By developing expertise as junior officers, these officers not only contribute the expertise they have acquired, they lay the foundation for contributing to the Service at more senior levels.
6. FOR BOARDS CONSIDERING SELECTION TO O-5 AND O-6, AND PANELS CONSIDERING OFFICERS IN THOSE GRADES: By the time officers compete for promotion to these ranks, they are generally top performers in specialty. In addition to performing technical or specialized aspects of their assignments well, officers in the O-5 and O-6 grades must demonstrate that they possess the leadership, management, and professional skills necessary to obtain optimal performance from people. Today the environment in which the Coast Guard operates is increasingly complex and technologically oriented. To meet current and emerging Service demands, the Coast Guard is requiring more officers to remain within their respective specialty areas. As officers move into senior ranks, they must have an understanding of the major issues facing the Coast Guard as a whole 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 even within specialty, through assignment diversity (different type of unit/different type of billet/different geographic location), participation in studies and task forces, and special assignments which provide a more broadened and comprehensive understanding of issues important to our Service.

Because of the dramatically increased scope of authority and responsibility for O-5 and O-6 positions, officers you select to serve in these grades must be able to make the leap from hands on management of the day-to-day details to empowering their people to perform those functions, while they take a strategic view, including a broad understanding of the joint, interagency, inter-governmental, not for profit and private sectors. They must be capable of acting with vision in a complex and uncertain environment. They must have the ability to

maintain our multi-mission effectiveness and functionality with the capability to make risk-based decisions under stressful circumstances. They must demonstrate the public acumen and capability to work cohesively with our joint, interagency, and other partners to optimize mission execution. They must understand how Coast Guard budgets and business systems impact operational outputs. The qualities that we look for in Flag officers should be apparent in our best-qualified O-6's.

7. FOR SELECTION TO FLAG RANK: Flag officers greatly influence the success of the Coast Guard, both internally and externally. They serve as the Commandant's senior field representatives, Coast Guard program directors, and in positions of significant responsibility in other agencies and military services. They are members of the Commandant's senior leadership team and must contribute substantially to the advancement of Service goals. They increasingly represent not only the Coast Guard but the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, and federal government at all levels of government and internationally. They also represent the eventual succession of leadership of our Service.
  - a. Vision: The world in which we operate is not static. The President and Congress created and fundamentally restructured organizations and relationships to address and mitigate emerging national threats and vulnerabilities. Our capabilities, competencies, organizational structure and processes must change accordingly, and we need flag officers who articulate a vision, embrace change, work together and act boldly and decisively to execute shared objectives that have been determined to best serve the national interest. This vision cannot be developed and nurtured without intellectual preparedness and the ability to continue to learn while leading at the highest levels in the Service. We must have change-centric leaders to create and sustain a change centric Coast Guard.
  - b. Leadership: The future of the Coast Guard requires enlightened and empowering leaders in our Flag corps. They inspire our leaders and drive the direction of the Service and must be stellar examples of all that we represent. They must be our very best leaders who have demonstrated the commitment to achieving the Coast Guard's established goals and to empowering and nurturing the next generation of Coast Guard leaders. They have a special responsibility to be at the forefront of advancing initiatives that benefit our people. They should be devoted leaders who energize their people and clearly convey to every member of the Coast Guard Team how his or her role contributes to mission execution and by extension, to visible, tangible national outcomes. They should be leaders who are collaborative, transparent, and decisive.
  - c. Partnering: Selectees must have the ability to excel at forming tactical, operational and strategic partnerships within the Coast Guard and in the joint and interagency arenas, as well as with state and local government, the private and not for profit sectors, and the international community. When needed, these skills must be equal to the task of dealing with hesitant or uncooperative players. Similarly, selectees must be able to recognize when internal program-centric or parochial behavior defeats expected stewardship responsibilities and when necessary forge unified organizational solutions.

- d. Public Presence: Selectees must have the knowledge, presence, confidence, and bearing to represent the federal government in situations of national interest. They must demonstrate political savvy and a level of professionalism reflective of both the excellence of the Coast Guard and an ability to impact national-level policy processes. Flag officers must be articulate and persuasive advocates for the Coast Guard. Continuing intellectual development and external awareness of national and international political, economic, and social issues and trends over the course of a career enable this capability. Their performance should reflect these qualities.
  - e. Knowledge and Information Management: Intellectual preparedness is the fuel for vision. Selectees must have a broad and in-depth intellectual capacity to learn, retain, and apply knowledge. They must have keen analytical skills and the ability to readily assimilate elements of information regarding unfamiliar subjects. They must be able to make judgments on the quality of information provided through diverse mediums, and make good decisions in areas not within their area of expertise. This includes the demonstrated capability to understand, engage and employ emerging human networks linked by internet technologies. They must value and effectively use information as a leadership tool to gain alignment and empower others to achieve organizational goals.
  - f. Organizational Context: Selectees must have a demonstrated understanding of how the Coast Guard fits into the broader structure of the Department, Executive Branch, federal government, nation, and international community. Selectees must be able to identify the internal and external relationships that affect the Coast Guard and the Department, approaching each situation with a clear perception of external reality, and recognizing the potential impact of Coast Guard courses of action. The roles and responsibilities of our senior leaders have always demanded political acumen. Our current challenges require an even higher level insight and continual engagement to best position the Service for future success.
8. FOR BOARDS CONSIDERING SELECTION OF OFFICERS ON THE INACTIVE DUTY PROMOTION LIST (IDPL): Mirroring the Active Component, the Reserve Component continues to enjoy historic, rapid change and a highly dynamic working environment. Organization wide modernization efforts including the Reserve Forces Readiness System overhaul will change the Reserve Component landscape for years to come. Never before has the Coast Guard more closely relied on its reserve workforce and the IDPL officer corps leadership has never been as relevant. While my overarching guidance is also critical to choosing IDPL officers, board and panels should also be aware of some other critical factors. The current Reserve policy statement clearly lays the foundation for my expectations of the Reserve officer corps. Boards and Panels should focus on the mobilization potential of officers and how they have shown their capability to support Maritime Homeland Security, Domestic and Expeditionary support to National Defense, and Response to Domestic Disasters, both natural and man made.

Successful reserve career paths consist of having experience in largely two areas, the Sector operational community and the Joint Forces/ Interagency community. The challenge for the junior officer is to gather competencies that will allow him or her to successfully function in both communities. Junior officers should aggressively seek operational expertise and broaden their experience in the Joint/interagency arena. At the

junior ranks I expect reserve officers to demonstrate operational technical expertise at such units as Sectors and Port Security Units. Junior officers may be largely geographically stable but should show a solid progression in the operational aspects of the Coast Guard and diversity of experience.

The challenge for senior reserve officers is to show their capability to function at a level of ease and effectiveness in both Coast Guard and Interagency operations. Additionally, they must act as the bridge between the active and reserve components, showing administrative and readiness expertise to ensure seamless operational integration. As reserve officers become more senior, I expect that they will be experts in their individual mobilization specialty and more focused on the mobilization potential of those reservists in their span of control. As an officer moves through the pay grades, an increased level of competency and commitment should become evident. Senior officers should show diversity in assignments, less geographic constraints and be equally comfortable in the Coast Guard operational environment as well as the DoD and interagency community.

9. Officer selection boards and panels are, in fact, creating the future of our Service. Our people, above all else, have been the Coast Guard's strength for over 218 years. Members of these boards and panels are entrusted with the duty to ensure that our people continue to be our source of inspiration and excellence. The Coast Guard and the Nation are depending on it.