

*CAREER SPEAK is a six-part series being published throughout 2008 in The Reservist in support of a broader Reserve Junior Officer (RJO) Career Management Program initiative. The series discusses successful career strategies and important how-to's in managing your Reserve career. Enlisted members are also encouraged to read this series to gain insight, especially if considering the Selected Reserve Direct Commission program in the future. The first two parts, "Are YOU Running Your Career?" and "A Four-Step Process to Successful Mentoring" ran in Issues 2-08 and 3-08, respectively. Part three, published here, addresses some of the important success factors that generally have a significant impact on an RJO's first five years of service. Every RJO should develop their own career development growth plan that addresses these factors.*

## Part 3: Critical Success Factors for Managing Your Reserve Junior Officer Career

By LT Louis Dering  
Coast Guard Personnel Command (CGPC-rpm)

**E**ver wonder why it seems like some people sail easily through life and others always seem to hit roadblocks? The difference between the two people is that the first one has identified and is focused on completing critical success factors. These are the most important activities that must be performed well in your job, whether reserve or civilian. By accurately identifying these factors early in your career and specific to your specialization, you will be able to plot your short and long-term career goals and plans. These plans will focus your advancement and enrichment efforts with the added bonus of being able to measure your level of success.

We asked a wide variety of Reserve officers to identify success factors in **their first five years** as a Coast Guard Reserve officer. Listening to the voices of success, the following six critical success factors topped the list:

**1. Have a Good Mentor:** This individual is usually a successful/respected Senior Reserve Officer (SRO) that is interested and committed to your development. Mentors encourage, praise and set an example; they provide career direction and career advice plus institute a strong desire to strive higher. Mentors take an interest in the critical development of the crew member(s) and support genuine reasons for shipmates to remain and prevail. Manuals and procedures facilitate the mission; however, mentors can facilitate a member's effectiveness to execute the mission.

**2. Active Duty Support:** A Coast Guard unit that integrates a Selected Reserve force into the core mission of the unit presents an opportunity for a reserve member to contribute to the unit's success. Learn how the active duty works. Do your research. Discuss various specialties and then pick one or two. Again, write and execute your self-developed career plan. In the process of growing into a Coast Guard operational and leadership role, a member can achieve the greatest career growth if his/her active duty counterparts have an informed understanding of the Reserve program. Reservists are expected to meet many of the same standards as the active duty members. Educate the active duty on key reserve policies, typical reservist roles and responsibilities, pay, different types of active duty service and its use and know who is in your active duty OER rating chain. Speaking of your reserve OER, make sure your active duty chain of command knows your work accomplishments and highlights them in your OER.

**3. Understand the Coast Guard Reserve:** Be familiar with the Commandant's Guidance, the Commandant's Reserve Policy Statement, and the *Coast Guard Personnel Manual* (Chapter 10A and Chapter 14.A.3.a). Take time to research organizations and

associations that support the Coast Guard mission. Develop good professional relationships inside the Coast Guard and with its customers. Keep an organized personal file of your Coast Guard records and conduct independent annual reviews of your PDR that is maintained by CGPC-adm-3. In addition, be able to navigate the enterprise-wide software the Coast Guard uses like Direct Access. Participate, get qualified, research opportunities and diversify your Coast Guard experience. Accept assignments that are out of your "comfort zone." Be known as a proactive reserve officer that makes a solid contribution. Establish your reputation and image ... it's vital!

**4. Develop Your Leadership Ability:** A leader's success can be measured by those who support the leader. Leadership is the channel by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective. Leaders have a vision that they share with others. It is the leader who binds the organization with beliefs, values and knowledge. This can be accomplished by focusing on the following leadership traits: judgment, justice, dependability, integrity, decisiveness, tact, initiative, endurance, bearing, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, loyalty and enthusiasm.

**5. Have A Good Work Ethic:** This quality becomes **a major difference maker** in the promotion / selection process. Working smart consists of values-based effort grounded in the honest merits of hard work and diligence. Remember, members that work for you and members that you may want to work for are watching you. Belief in the moral benefit of work has the ability to enhance character and promote valor. Moreover, look good doing it; wear the proper uniform with distinction. You are a proud Coast Guard Reserve officer.

**6. Stimulate and Implement Your Civilian Career:** Combine and leverage your civilian career with your Coast Guard career; experience, qualifications and responsibility can offer dividends to a grand spectrum of your career's initiatives. Apply your civilian work lessons learned to your RJO career.

Critical success factors are areas that will require the ability to handle constant change. A one time or partial effort will not offer success in the long run; hold your chin up, shoulders back, chest out and put your best foot forward. Be proud to serve the Coast Guard and your nation.

About the Author: *LT Louis Dering is the Board Coordinator for the Reserve Personnel Management Division within the Coast Guard Personnel Command (CGPC-rpm). As Board Coordinator, he establishes all IDPL boards and panels selecting the future of 1300 reserve officers. His service began in the Marine Corps in 1989, transferred to the Coast Guard Selected Reserve in 2002 and was selected as an RPA in 2005.*