



This final CAREER SPEAK article highlights two successful Reserve Junior Officers (RJOs), and how they developed a better understanding of the service and its expectations of them as members. The idea of a successful career is elusive, although promotion and retirement are often cited as hallmarks. This final article in this series will tell their stories (in brief), how they achieved that success, and what they learned along the way. Enlisted members are also encouraged to read this article to gain insight, especially if considering the Selected Reserve Direct Commission program in the future.

Part 6:

Two Reserve Junior Officer's Success Stories

By LT Russell Mayer, CGPC-rpm-1

Now that we're at the end of this six-part series, it's time for some success stories. The two reserve officers herein were recognized by the Reserve Officer Association (ROA) as Outstanding Junior Officer of the Year as lieutenants. They were subsequently promoted to lieutenant commander. Even with different careers in the Coast Guard Reserve and civilian employment, their stories have much in common. The lessons they learned below will be familiar to many readers, as achieving success in the Coast Guard is akin to any non-military role.

Story 1 — LCDR Phillip Snodgrass, Answering the Call Overseas

Supporting IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003, PSU 308 was readying for overseas deployment to the Middle East. As the Training and Boat Division Officer, LT Phillip Snodgrass created a Personnel Qualification and Certification System that helped the unit attain the highest readiness rating in less than six months. While deployed, he was responsible for 49 officers and enlisted members' lives and safety. PSU 308 was able to complete its mission safely and effectively, because personnel were trained and ready for the demanding deployment. LCDR Snodgrass is a police lieutenant in his civilian life and is extremely active in local community service outreach programs. He was named the Coast Guard Reserve Outstanding Junior Officer in 2003.

Story 2 — LCDR Richard Brannon, Helping Those in Dire Circumstances

Serving at Gulf Strike Team, LT Richard Brannon created a major preventative maintenance program performed entirely by reservists. In response to Hurricane Katrina, he coordinated the multi-agency response to over 500 sunken or grounded vessels and saved the U.S. government over 1 million dollars by wisely negotiating service contracts. The Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve's ability to respond to one of the worst U.S. natural disasters has been lauded all around. LCDR Brannon is a fire chief in his local community with extensive response

experience in and out of the Coast Guard. He has also helped his community through volunteering and training, and was named the Coast Guard Reserve Outstanding Junior Officer in 2005.

Take Aways

Your priorities, performance, and accomplishments should revolve around the supervisor's requirements and your assigned billet. Echoing CAPT Michael Price (CGPC-rpm) in the first CAREER SPEAK article, a critical distinction between the Coast Guard Reserve and other employers is the importance of each member's record, most notably the Officer Evaluation Report (OER). All personnel management decisions, including assignment and promotion, revolve around the OER. If you are performing in line with your rating chain's high expectations, putting good information and justification for marks in the OER is relatively simple, but imperative.

The Coast Guard is undergoing massive change and understanding your role in the Reserve is more critical than ever; this is true on both a micro and macro level. At the unit level, you fulfill a vital function that allows your unit to perform its duties and accomplish the Coast Guard's missions. Your subordinates, peers, and superiors all depend on you to meet the public's high demands on the Coast Guard, from saving lives to cleaning up oil spills. At a more general level, you are being groomed for higher levels of responsibility and authority. The Coast Guard demands the very best from its members, and officers in particular are in the "up or out" promotion scheme, to ensure top-notch performance.

Goal Setting – Priority ONE

As a reserve junior officer, goal making (and goal attainment) are possibly the most important driving factors in making the next promotion. Officers who qualify as watchstanders, inspectors, or complete important staff work can all point to what they have accomplished in a marking period. You need to become the best expert possible, and always look to increase your shipmate's knowledge (as a teacher) as well. LCDR Brannon's expertise with Incident Command System (ICS) made him

a natural choice for representing the Coast Guard to other agencies during the Katrina response.

The Coast Guard Reserve is not a new organization and few RJO jobs are new or unique. There are other, more senior officers who have “been there and done that” who can offer career advice, general counsel, and important tips on how you are doing and what to look for next. Both above officers spoke of the importance of mentorship, and the ability to say, “I’ve done all I can do, what should I do next?” Wisdom, of course, does not come solely from officers; be sure to get input from senior enlisted and civilian staff as well. Many successful RJOs can point to a significant subordinate who helped the RJO get the job done.

Your Reputation

In line with mentorship, every Coastie knows how small the Coast Guard really is compared to other federal organizations. When tasked by the President to head to New Orleans, the Commandant called people that he knew would deliver results. These were all people he had worked with in the past and had a personal connection/respect beyond simply being assigned at the same unit. In short, he had a network of highly skilled and experienced people that enabled him to affect the Coast Guard’s largest Search and Rescue (SAR) effort and response mission in our history.

At the reserve junior officer level, you need to build relationships with all members of the Coast Guard family, because no RJO operates in a vacuum or depends solely on rank and position. Can you imagine the pride those individuals experienced when they were called to a higher duty by the Commandant of the Coast Guard? Hoping for *that* call someday defines who you really are: committed, loyal, superior work ethic, solutions/results oriented, and above all, an officer known for taking on those high-risk jobs that your peers likely will not volunteer for and possibly seek to avoid at all costs. Those qualities and values identify who you are and your work ethic DNA. Once your reputation is established, almost everyone knows *your* name. And the great part is you don’t have to sell your name — your work sells itself. These two RJOs, simply put, “get it.” And now you know their names as well.

Who Are You?

Continually practice self-introspection, because no one will care about your career and success, as much as you do. At a minimum, you should be asking yourself: Are you meeting your supervisor’s requirements?

How have you made your unit and the Coast Guard at large a better organization?

Have you put the taxpayer’s money to good use?

Are you accomplishing what you set out to do in the beginning of your tour?

How are you distinguishing yourself from your peers?

Are you building your reputation, your name brand, your success stories?

Your Experience — Sell It!

Remember that as a reservist you often bring a different perspective and skill set to the table. So be sure to respectfully put that at your unit’s disposal. In the words of MCPO-CGRF Jeff Smith, “Be Bold.” LCDR Snodgrass points out that indecision can be the death nail for an RJO,

and they must continually push for additional opportunities and challenges, after completing their current requirements, of course. Senior officers often have one or two events that truly shaped their careers,

and you should be prepared to meet those opportunities every day when wearing the uniform.

Conclusion

While it is never too early to plan ahead, junior officers often do not know what they do not know. Specifically, they may not know their supervisors requirements, general Coast Guard expectations, or their own life and career goals. The lessons above should

resonate for every Reserve Junior Officer, both in the Coast Guard and civilian life. To succeed, you need to understand and actively accept your own role in the organization and the larger impacts; plus, build a personnel and professional network (including

mentorship). You also need to routinely evaluate your performance in line with what your supervisor, the Coast Guard, and you yourself expect.



About the Author: *LT Mayer is the Reserve Officer Status Manager for the Reserve Personnel Management Division at Coast Guard Personnel Service Center (PSC-rpm-1). He is responsible for career counseling for Reserve junior officers, handles Command Screening Panels, and assists with captain and commander assignments. As the previous OES Manager, he was responsible for validating all IDPL officer’s OERs and training the Rating Chain and Reported-On Officers in accordance with the OES. LT Mayer is a graduate of the Coast Guard Academy and served with reservists at Marine Safety Office Port Arthur, Texas immediately following Sept. 11, 2001. He started serving as a Reserve Program Administrator in 2007.*