

HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
Enlisted Career Counseling and Performance Evaluation Unit (MMSB-50)
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**SEEKING COUNSEL
(ENHANCING THE COUNSELING PROCESS)**

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NOTE: (This e-mail address is intended for deployed Marines only. The preferred method of contacting our section is by the phone numbers above.)
- **INTENT:** The intent of this document is to help individual Marines make themselves more competitive for future promotion. The recommendations provided in this document are “above and beyond” recommendations that have been proven to work for various Marines, but aren’t necessarily written within the Performance Evaluation system (PES manual) Marine Corps order (MCO P1610.7F (w/ Ch 2)), but are in keeping with the spirit and intent of the order. The Counselors provide these recommendations to individual Marines in nearly every counseling session conducted.
- The Enlisted Career Counselors provide counseling services to individual Marines throughout our Corps. Through our observations of Marines’ records, in every corner of our Corps, we have been able to see Marines from the full spectrum of performers; from stellar “Water walkers” to average and the below average, throughout every Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). By assessing different types of Marines and seeing what tends to work for the good majority of them, there is typically always something that can be done to better yourself as a Marine. By ensuring that their records are updated and maintained, as well as performing their duties to the utmost of their abilities, some of these Marines have been able to separate themselves from the pack and enhance their future promotion competitiveness. By continuing to seek counsel from your Reporting officials, a Marine can tweak what counseling system they already are utilizing and refine what may better enhance the outcome of their final fitness report. This document will be able to give the individual Marine additional tools for their “Toolbox” to be able to do just that.
- The bullets below are recommendations given by our section, daily. By telling a Marine that KEEN COMPETITION (Not enough allocations for the great number of Marines in zones) is the only reason that someone could have been passed over, or telling a Marine that he looks “good-to-go” when in reality everyone has

- areas that they can improve, as a Marine; doesn't give that Marine anything to do in order to better their records and career for future acceleration.
- The MROW is one of the most useful tools to use in seeking counsel with the Reporting Senior (RS). By being proactive vice reactive and seeking counsel with your reporting officials, you can ensure that you get a fitness report that reflects your performance throughout the current reporting period.
 - The PES manual in Appendix D, section B states:
 - “INTENT OF THE WORKSHEET. The worksheet provides:
 - a. A tool to assist the RS and MRO in establishing a clear understanding of the RS's expectations.
 - b. A means for the MRO to provide his or her RS a summary of major billet related accomplishments during the reporting period, PME accomplishments, awards, and other significant actions of which the RS may not be aware.
 - c. A tool for periodic counseling sessions to review billet descriptions, establish new goals, and develop performance”.
 - In order to try to get a fitness report that reflects your performance throughout the current reporting period, which could possibly break you away from your peers, a Marine needs to perform above and beyond with the overall goal of breaking away into the top of the Reporting Seniors (RS) profile. By assessing your Master Brief sheet (MBS) or asking the RS personally, you should strive to reach the RS High. Without having that tangible goal in mind, you are basically just blindly shooting at the target and hoping that your rounds hit paper and preferably the black. The same concept goes for seeking counsel with your Reviewing Officer (RO). Strive to hit the eight box, which you may never do, but at least you may be higher on the ROs profile (comparative assessment) by striving to reach it.
 - One important concept to remember is that every RS and RO has a different profile (for every rank observed) and grading philosophy (grading system). One RS may be a hard grader where the next may not be so much. One Marine may be an RS and RO and will have a different RS and RO profile for every rank that he/she has observed. In the RS and RO profiles, you are always graded with Marines the same rank as you.
 - In chapter one of the PES, in paragraph 1005, KEY CONCEPTS, it states:
 - “Focus: The fitness report is a documentation of observations and assessments of individual performance, personal qualities, character, and potential to serve at a more senior level. The fitness report is not:
 - a. A disciplinary tool.
 - b. A lever to exert influence.
 - c. A counseling document for the MRO”.

- Since the Fitness report is not a disciplinary tool, a lever to exert influence, or a counseling document for the MRO; it is imperative that the MRO have a way to get guidance and counsel throughout the reporting period, so that there are no surprises when he/she sees the completed report for the first time.
- In Appendix D (as stated above) in section A, it states:
 - “**BACKGROUND.** The MRO Worksheet on page 2 of this Appendix is a tool for use by the RS and MRO in developing the MRO’s billet description and documenting his or her accomplishments during the reporting period. **The CMC directs the use of this form.** The worksheet is available for download from MMSB’s website. **NOTE:** Commands should produce the worksheet locally”.

Now that we use the MROW on APES, it is easy to go ahead and either print a blank MROW or print out the working document (continuously being saved) throughout the reporting period.

- In order to ensure that you are breaking yourself away from your peers within your current RS’s profile, there are some important concepts that you should keep in mind and implement along with the MROW. The concepts that follow are recommendations from the Enlisted Career Counseling and Evaluation unit, which will help you better enhance the relationship between the MRO and the RS throughout the counseling process. The below recommendations can also be utilized with current existing procedures a Marine already has in place. These recommendations are as follows:

- 1) Start your MROW on the Automated Performance Evaluation System (APES) via Marine On-Line (MOL) at the **BEGINNING** of the reporting period, **within the first fifteen days!!!** When you initially complete the MROW, click Finish and go through the spell check process. After the spell check process is complete, a box will show up informing you that “the RS can now create a fitness report from this worksheet”. Once you click “OK” it will bring you back to the “My Personal MROWS” window. All you have to do is check the MROW status at the right and change the “Fitrep Pending” to “MRO Working”, to leave it in your box saved so you can continue to adjust it. If you leave it on “Fitrep Pending” the RS will be able to see it in his/her APES account, and the fitness report can be created at anytime. The bottom line is that you do not want the report to be created prior to you finalizing the document, so you may want to leave it on “MRO Working”. The key is to start the MROW prior to talking to the RS for the first initial “Official” counseling and continue to update it throughout the reporting period (every several weeks or so) to keep track of all of your accomplishments and achievements.
- 2) In Appendix D of the PES, under the PROCEDURES FOR COMPLETING THE WORKSHEET, in paragraph one; it states:

- “The RS and MRO must meet at the beginning of the reporting relationship (within the first 15 days) to establish and formalize the MRO’s billet description”.
- 3) In order to use the MROW to its fullest potential in helping you to get a report that would help break you away from your peers, we need to dig a little deeper into the specifics of what would truly help you in that regard.
Additional recommendations to implement into the counseling process:
- You may have to setup the initial meeting with your RS (as well as any and all future meetings) – ultimately showing that you are being proactive and taking responsibility for getting the information needed to continue and excel as a Marine throughout the reporting period. Many Marines wait to have their RS’s sit them down and talk to them about their fitness report, which usually never happens, with other things to accomplish besides sitting down with an individual for 15-30 minutes. Since this usually never happens (for whatever reason) the Marine has drastically limited his or her potential within that reporting period and has ultimately left the fate of that report into the RS’s hands. All Marines must understand that throughout a specific reporting period; it is not your RSs report, career, and future selection to the next higher grade; it is yours!!! Depending on how much effort that you put into the outcome of that report will ultimately affect the overall value of that report, when it is compared to your peers within that RS’s profile.
 - You may need to do all of the talking, by asking questions needed to be able to head the conversation in the right direction. You need tangible answers (items that can be accomplished within the reporting period) to be able to act on, in order to be able to perform above and beyond your peers. Basically, you can’t expect that just because you think that you are an above average Marine that that is always relayed to your RS, who may have a complete different perception of you through how you perform your duties on a daily basis. “Be a professional, take care of your Marines and accomplish the mission” should not be tangible comments that you are looking for, when you should be already doing those things, as a Marine, on a daily basis.
 - You must have an agenda of topics to discuss before going into this initial meeting, as well as any other follow on meetings, with the RS. Your billet description on the MROW is what the RS expects of you, “through your billet”, but tangibly this is the only information that you can get from the MROW in relation to what the RS expects of you. By understanding this concept, you now need to piece together some kind of script of how you want the conversation to go. If you set up the meeting and finally sit down with the RS, he/she may very well be expecting you to do all of the talking. So, if you are expecting that he/she will do all of the talking and he/she is expecting that you want to do the talking, then nothing will be accomplished and you will walk away from the meeting with nothing tangible to act upon.

- If you know what the RS expects of you, through your billet, then what do you need to do to at least be an average Marine in the profile? What do you also need to do to break yourself away from your peers as being above average in the RSs profile? Your goal should always be the highest report in the RSs profile, but you must ask what you specifically need to do to make that happen. You aren't asking for the answers to the test, you are asking for good quality expectations that you can then take and surpass with your "above and beyond" performance, showing the RS that you took the advice and ran with it.

- When taking notes of the conversation with your RS, a few bullets to add, in addition with your billet description expectations are: general expectations, above and beyond, accomplishments and concerns. You should write these note headings on an additional page, or on the back of the MROW to have a record of your discussion with answers needed in each of those areas. Remember, you need to get tangible bullets from the RS to be able to actually act on the information given. Lets break these bullets down even further:
 - **General expectations:** You need to know what that RS expects of you as an average Marine. Looking back at your billet description, this gives you the expectations of the RS through your billet; however, we all know that there is more to being a Marine than just performing in your billet. What do you need to do to at least get an average report in the RSs profile?

 - **Above & Beyond:** You also need to know what the RS expects of you to be able to break yourself away as an above average performer. Now you could say, "Okay sir, I understand what you expect of me through my billet (billet description), as well as a Marine in general (General expectations), but what do you specifically expect of me to be an above average performer within your profile?" The key here is to not sell yourself short. It is always great to be an above average performer, but don't stop there. "What specifically do I have to do to break myself away from my peers as being the top rated report in your profile?" Some Marines may look at going this in depth as "sucking up" etc... Marines must realize that your RS and RO may be with you for a year or so, but that report will be with you for the rest of your career.

 - **Accomplishment:** This is the area where you keep track of what you have accomplished from the first 2 bullets. In your billet accomplishments, you are keeping track of everything that you have completed in regards to your billet description. If you are keeping track of those tangible accomplishments, you don't want to short change yourself by missing all of the great things that you are doing beyond just performing in your job at your work section. General expectations and above and beyond recommendations are equally as important to show the entire picture of how you have performed throughout the entire reporting period.

- **Concerns:** This is the area that you can bring up anything additional that wasn't discussed in previous sections of your counseling script, by bringing up topics that have some weight or bearing on the conversation. If one of your concerns is that you are lacking in reports that are strong enough to help you in your goal of breaking yourself away from your peers, you may need to bring this up to the RS so that you can discuss the relevance of this specific report towards your overall performance trend.
- You also need to follow up with your RS periodically throughout the reporting period to be able to back brief the RS on what you have accomplished since the last time that you both talked, as well as find out what direction you need to continue in, throughout the rest of the reporting period. You could say, "Okay sir (or Ma'am); this is what we discussed last time we talked, and this is what I actually have accomplished. This is the direction that I am headed in now, so what recommendations can you give me to reach my overall goal". You should never assume that the RS has seen or annotated every accomplishment that you have ever accomplished throughout the reporting period. A lot of Marines tend to not start and complete their MROW in APES until the very end of the reporting period and then they end up missing critical things completed that don't end up on the final report. You can't blame the RS for your lack of initiative after the fact, when you could have prevented the problem by seeking counsel periodically throughout the reporting period.
- Follow up with the RS roughly every 2 months or so, depending on your units OP TEMPO. Every time that you sit down with the RS, to be counseled, print two new copies of the updated MROW off of APES (the one that you already have typed out and updated). The Date-Time-Group (DTG) is always on the top left, which always reminds you what day that you both talked and conducted that counseling session (as long as you print it out on that date, or adjust the date prior to printing it out).
- During a new counseling session, you should always take new notes on the back of the MROW or on an additional notes page and attach it to the MROW. This way, you have a chronological record of what you have previously discussed on past MROWs from prior counseling's, along with your accomplishments throughout that portion of the reporting period. Another good habit of getting into is to start taking note of how long your conversation lasted during that counseling, and write it down at the top of the page, along with the DTG. This way, if you get counseled within the first 15 days (initially) and follow up roughly every 2 months, by the end of an Annual twelve month report, if you saved all of your notes, you would have sat down and saved on average six MROWs with all notes attached. You then can tell your RS towards the end of the reporting period what days that you talked and how long throughout the reporting period that you actually discussed that specific fitness report. By being proactive in this regards,

you can actually eliminate a lot of common mistakes seen by our section, on a daily basis.

- Keep all of your documentation of these counseling sessions in a folder, to be able to refer back to at any given time. Nothing should ever be a surprise to you if you consistently have talked to your RS about the Fitness Report. Remember, it is your report, your career, and your possible future promotion; not your RSs.
- Another way of ensuring that your report is factual and true to the spirit and intent of the PES manual is to ensure that the RS gives you a copy of the report prior to him/her submitting it to the RO. When an RS submits the report to the RO there is a box that pops up that has the RS confirm that he/she has provided the Marine Reported On (MRO) a copy of the report as completed by the RS. This provides the MRO an opportunity to be able to look the report over and be able to discuss any issues or concerns of the RSs portion of the report with him/her before the report is submitted to HQMC. This way, if something is wrong and the RS agrees with you, then he/she can make that change while the RO still has the report, locally, vice having already submitted it to HQMC. This would also alleviate possible date gaps in the future, as well.
- If you have never received a report by a new RS before, then there are some basic questions you should ask, to start out in the right direction. By knowing this information, you know the information that you need off of the Master Brief Sheet and can have a goal to set at the beginning of the reporting period, vice the end. If you have already received a fitness report by your current RS, then you already have the information needed.

These questions (as seen on the Master Brief Sheet) are as follows:

- How many reports are in your (ranks) profile? (Reports box)
- What is your RS profile? (RS Average box)
- What is the highest report you have written? (RS High box)
- How many of those high reports have you written? (Rpts at High box)

By knowing these questions, you have some sort of direction in how you need to proceed, from within the first 15 days, all the way through any and all follow on counseling sessions, which will also help find some initial starting questions to use.

- If you do not know how to assess your Master Brief Sheet and what every box means, you are minimizing your potential to perform at a higher level. You can learn how to read and understand the MBS by sitting through Career briefs by your leaders as well as our section, reading the PES manual, or reading the articles on our sections website.
- The overarching intent is to be proactive vice reactive and to take the counseling process seriously. Too many Marines will go an entire reporting period, having never once discussed the expectations from the RS and also assume that what they are doing is enough.

In summary, being proactive within the counseling process tends to be more beneficial in not only getting a report that reflects your performance throughout the reporting period, but also to ensure that the RS and the MRO are constantly in the loop on what the MRO is accomplishing and how well they are accomplishing it.