FY 2012 SGTMAJ THROUGH MSGT SELECTION BOARD COMPILED DEBRIEF

The Enlisted Career Counseling and Evaluation Unit (MMSB-50) provide a selection board questionnaire to every active duty enlisted promotion board prior to the convening date of the board. This allows the section to receive feedback from every board member to ensure we obtain as much detailed information as possible for this compiled debrief. We are then debriefed by all 21 board members at the adjournment of the board, at which time we go into more detail concerning various topics. This debrief is conducted in conjunction with the Manpower Management Promotions Branch (MMPR-2) and other MMSB Headquarters Marine Corps personnel. The information from these questionnaires are then combined with details gathered in the board debrief. Afterwards, it is compiled into a selection board compilation debrief, such as this FY12 SgtMaj through MSgt compiled debrief. The debrief gives our section an opportunity to distribute information concerning various aspects of the board to enable Marines to be best prepared going into future selection boards.

The compiled debrief results are posted to the Enlisted Career Counselor's official website and passed throughout the leadership of our Corps to ensure mass distribution to the Marines that it will benefit. The more details we collect from the questionnaires and final debrief offers Marines more information to act on.

These compiled debriefs provide a synopsis view of all of the board members answers to the specific questions posed. It is recommended that Marines utilize the last several years compiled debriefs consecutively to recognize the last several years' board members emphasis on certain aspects over others. This will give the Marine a more thorough understanding of the topics discussed with recent trends (positive/negative).

If you have any additional questions that you feel should be included in future promotion board debriefs, we ask that you let us know. Several Marines have asked certain questions to be posed to the board, and we have done just that. The value of the responses from the board members will be the determining factor in the question being placed on the compiled debrief, or not. You can reference the previous three fiscal year's debriefs found on our section's webpage on the M&RA web portal. Most of the questions stay the same; as they are relevant across the board regardless of the year or rank of the board.

These promotion board compiled debriefs are also intended to be used in conjunction with our quarterly Enlisted Career Newsflash (newsletter) which can also be found on our sections official website. Having these two sources of information provided to Marines alleviates the amount of Marines being uninformed regarding career related information.

We ask that Senior Enlisted Advisors of active duty enlisted career Marines, throughout every command in the Marine Corps help us push this information down throughout all levels of leadership. As leaders, we are responsible to take care of our Marines and ensure that they are setup for success within their careers.

These debrief results were compiled and completed by GySgt Robert Bell (Enlisted Career Counselor, MMSB-50). If there are any questions concerning this debrief you may contact him directly at: Robert.L.Bell@usmc.mil or MGySgt Randall Thompson (Head, Enlisted Career Counseling & Evaluation unit) at: Randall.Thompson@usmc.mil.

FY 2012 SGTMAJ THROUGH MSGT SELECTION BOARD

LETTERS:

1. **How did the board feel about personal letters or letters of recommendation that Marines forwarded to the board?**

ANSWER: Several board members mentioned that most letters that were sent to the board seemed to provide documentation for items already available in the Marines record. One board member stated, "they were welcome; however, letters should be limited and pertinent in nature, get to the point in a clear and concise manner. One or two letters, no more, any more wastes the allotted brief time. Care should be taken not to introduce adverse material that isn't in the OMPF". Another board member commented that, "the most useful letters were personal letters that explained, not complained. For example, explaining that a recent low PFT score was due to recovering from recent knee surgery and pointing out that they'd recently scored a high 1st class CFT. Then the briefer can look through the record and see that prior to the surgery the Marine typically ran a 1st class PFT".

The least useful letters were the 'I don't agree how I was marked on my fitness report, I was never counseled on it, etc', type of complaining letters. "Letters challenging the markings on fitreps were always viewed unfavorably. Letters by Marines singing their own praises also were viewed unfavorably".
Let's break down and discuss the different types of letters:

Letters of Explanation, Consideration or Clarification:
Several board members stated that at times these seemed helpful. In some instances; however, they were simply recommendations and had minimal effect due to an underwhelming record. A letter should only be submitted to explain something specific in a Marine's record (i.e. why you have not been to the range; why you have not been to combat, why the date gap, etc). Letters of clarification were sometimes useful. For instance, a letter that clarified how a PFT was low due to a cancer treatment or because of an injury sustained in combat was useful to the board. A letter clarifying why a photo wasn't taken could also be useful (i.e. a wounded warrior with an odd looking photo, was unable to get into the proper uniform or why you were leaning to the right – due to a prosthetic limb). These types of letters are typically beneficial for Wounded Warriors.

Letters of Recommendation:
Letters of recommendation generally did not add value to the Marine's package and "sometimes were viewed as a cry for help when Marines had average or marginal records". In general, fitrep content / comments far outweighed letters to the board. In general, letters of recommendation were a flag that the Marine had a weaker record than his/her peers.

2. **How did the board react to letters for Non-Consideration?**

ANSWER: Letters of Non-Consideration are sent to the board by Marines that wish to not be selected for promotion. Typically, Marines submit these types of letters when their intentions are to retire. Letters of non-consideration were taken into account and generally accepted as long as the MOS was well populated. "Sometimes situations change in Marines' lives". Letters of non-consideration normally caused the board to not recommend for promotion. However, on occasion if the letter was from a highly qualified Marine, the board still considered that Marine for promotion depending on what was available in the MOS. One board member commented that, "in all but one case,

a letter of non-consideration was 'granted'. In the exception, the MOS was weak and this Marine was one of the only ones eligible for promotion". In this type of case, the needs of the Marine Corps prevailed. The board usually tried to adhere to the Marines wishes, but the board had to consider the Marine regardless of his or her wishes. Another board member stated that, "generally, I think they were found to be useful and were appreciated".

PROMOTION PHOTOGRAPHS:

3. What was the board looking for in a photo and what was considered a questionable photo?

ANSWER: The answer that resonated with an overall consensus of the board members was that they were looking for a "current photograph with uniform correctness and appearance and a fit Marine that was within military standards". One board member summed up the importance of an updated promotion photograph by saying, "First, is it current? Second, height/weight and personal appearance. Was the picture taken in accordance with the Marine Corps Order? The picture weighed very heavily with the board. Photo submission is one of the primary ways eligible Marines communicate their desires, intent, and professionalism to the board. Though a photo is not required for promotion, failure to submit a photo, particularly since the MARADMIN directs photo submission, was viewed as unsatisfactory and wholly unprofessional- the board noted that many Marines had taken the trouble to submit photos despite severe combat injuries. It was highly unlikely that a Marine would remain competitive without a satisfactory current photo".

Several concerns of questionable and suspect photographs were apparent on this board and the following discusses those issues:

Photos with no date were definitely considered questionable. Weight control and appearance was the number one issue noted. "There were many instances where the Marine's photo stated that he/she was within body fat standards when the photo clearly showed a Marine who was not". Discrepancies in photos were viewed highly negatively by the board. Photos clearly show whether a Marine is overweight or close to it. When a Marine appeared to be obviously overweight with a low body fat percentage, it was questioned. At times the fitreps did not have the same percentage.

One board member commented that, "if the waist line was bulging the Marine was viewed less favorably regardless if he/she was within height/weight standards or had a strong PFT/CFT. A Marine who was 16% body fat but 25 lbs overweight was viewed skeptically unless he looked great and had a high PFT/CFT scores". Another board member stated, "Often overweight Marines with bulging waistlines but within body fat standards raised questions about a commands ability to tape properly". One board member commented that, "heavy Marines were viewed with great scrutiny, and the photos height/weight was compared to fitreps, particularly fitreps from the school houses. Marines who grew taller and Marines who clearly did not represent the height/weight & BF% displayed on the photos were viewed as having questionable integrity, along with (the certifier). Make sure your uniform fits! Don't even think about wearing the wrong ribbons- the board members look VERY closely".

Marines need to do a quality review of their promotion photographs. "Bad shirt tucks, short trousers, etc. were much more common than they should have been (probably 30% of the photos)".

4. How did the board consider photographs not received?

ANSWER: Many board members tend to be passionate about certain questions posed on these questionnaires. Several board members on this board summed this answer up with the following responses:

"Photos not received were viewed unfavorably and signaled to the board that the Marine was not willing to work within the system and follow Marine Corps orders. No photo was a sign that the Marine did not care to update his/her package for the board. How hard should a briefer work on a package when the Marine did not put forth the effort to update the package with a photo? The only exception might be if the Marine provided a letter explaining why there was no recent photo (i.e. wounded warrior)". Another board member stated that, "this is the first thing we look at when the Marines package comes up on the computer. Since most MOS' were competitive, the photo means a lot and when you have Marines who are amputee's getting their picture done it puts the other Marines to shame".

Several board members stated that there were Marines with prosthetic legs, broken bones, cancer and any number of other ailments who managed to submit a photo. "There are a few methods to communicate with the board, and not sending in a photo is one of them. With the exception of wounded Marines, outdated photos were considered negative". Old photos gave the perception that the Marine failed to show due diligence to update their records. If a Marine is battling weight on fitreps, this could mean the Marine did not submit a photo because they may look overweight.

One board member summed this question up best by saying that, "the board looks at your whole record, but as stated above, this screams to the board that you don't really care, and you are not professional. The MARADMIN told you to submit a photo. With technology as it is today, it couldn't get any easier. Also, you can go on MOL at your desk to verify that it is in the system. No excuse. No picture? Ninety-nine percent chance you are not going to make the cut".

ADVERSITY:

5. If a Marine had a DUI/DWI in record (or in-grade), was it recoverable and if so, what did it take to overcome the adversity?

ANSWER: Most board members commented that this type of adversity in record could possibly be recoverable with sustained superior performance and depending on how long ago the adversity was and what the Marine had done since the incident. One board member stated that, "time coupled with performance seemed to be what it took to overcome adversity. Most adversity as a young Marine was briefed but not too damaging. Recent adversity in particular a DUI/DWI however, is difficult to overcome as it shows the Marine is not leading by example". DUI/DWI's in record with the Marine having been promoted since had little effect on the next promotion. With most MOS's being so competitive, Marines with DUI/DWI's in-grade did not fair to well.

Most board members also stated that DUI/DWI in-grade was not recoverable. One board member stated, "For the senior ranks we were dealing with, a DUI in-grade was not able to be overcome. It would be hard to expect an E-8 or E-9 to be able to stand up in front of a group of Marines and attempt to set the example after a DUI as a GySgt. A DUI elsewhere in record had generally already been overcome with good performance since the incident and no repeated alcohol related incidents". While it might not be considered an automatic show-stopper, you will simply not be as competitive as the Marines around you with records as good as yours but without a DUI.

Other board members stated that a DUI/DWI could be recoverable if the MOS had room to allow the selection, but that very few to none were recoverable. Shortages in the MOS

were the biggest factor to making DUI Marines even close to getting promoted. One board member summed up the overall consensus of the others by commenting, "I think the board felt, as I did, I have all these other Marines eligible for promotion, so why would I select the one with a DUI or adversity in general, IN-GRADE".

6. For Marines who were previously assigned to weight control/BCP, what helped a Marine demonstrate recovery?

ANSWER: The majority of the board members agreed that it could be recovered from with "the obvious". Lose the weight, get off of the program and stay off of it. BCP is difficult to recover from. However, having more time and space since the incident, getting off of the program and now consistently staying within height/weight standards as well as getting consistent high PFT/CFT scores would be the best way to recover from BCP. Strong performance on fitness reports since being assigned was also key. Having an updated and RECENT promotion photograph (within a month of the convening date of the board) showing outstanding personal appearance and personal pride in wanting to be selected is another area mentioned that seemed to help Marines get over a BCP assignment. Showing that the Marine is going above and beyond in all aspects of being a Marine to attempt to overshadow the severity of the adversity is the key.

Having more than one assignment to the program tended to make Marines "Not Competitive" for promotion. Being assigned to BCP in-grade also was not looked at too favorably and did not present a favorable impression to many board members in voting for one individual over another. Especially, being more senior SNCO's which were looked at on this board. For a Marine that has been on BCP or those that have not been assigned but are constantly over their max weight, it is best to not have a Body Fat % reflected on the picture, if at all possible. If there is no way around it, based on the Marines body type, then it better be as low as possible and have as high of a PFT/CFT as possible.

7. For Marines who previously failed a PFT, what helped a Marine demonstrate recovery?

ANSWER: Consistently passing follow on PFT's is very important. The higher the scores were, the more improvement could be shown. Marines in this situation need to reflect a strong PFT/CFT history since the time of the incident, showing that they never have and never will let it happen again. One board member stated that, "repeated failures shows a trend which can be perceived as one who does not make an effort to stay physically fit". Failing a PFT/CFT in grade is an obvious negative thing and "likely made you uncompetitive", depending on the rest of the record. One board member commented that, "taking another PFT as quickly as possible with documentation in the same fitness report helped to mitigate the issue". Showing improvement in successive PFT/CFT's "to at least a second class PFT" helped, but "a 1st class score made it much more believable".

8. How did the board members view records with date gaps?

ANSWER: A date gap is a period of time missing from a Marines record that reflects on the Marines Master Brief Sheet (MBS) as a "Possible Date Gap". These periods are for 31 days or more. A gap in between fitness reports of 30 days or less is not technically considered a date gap. The existence of a date gap within a Marines record gives the board members cause to give the entire record a closer look for more

issues. If the timeframe was due to a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move, travel and proceed, and/or leave, it may not have been a big factor but it is still an issue Marines need to be aware of. One board member answered this question by commenting that, "date gaps with no explanation were viewed negatively. In some instances Marines provided documentation of trying to get the gap corrected and that was viewed in a good light. Marines who did not provide an explanation left it up to the board to interpret what went wrong". Date gaps often show a lack of due diligence on the Marines part. As just stated, several Marines submitted letters explaining the efforts that they had taken to correct the issue. "Those that made every effort to correct the date gap were (typically) given the benefit of the doubt".

Several board members summed up the severity of a Marine having a date gap in their record when getting looked at for promotion by saying that the date gaps were looked at, "suspiciously, particularly when the date gap occurred near adversity or negative trends in the record". Another board member stated that, "in most cases it breeds the appearance of deceit and the possible existence of an adverse situation yet to be uncovered". Date gaps longer than 60 days did raise concern with the board and showed a lack of attention to detail, which also would tend to make a Marine less competitive. Shorter date gaps could normally be explained. As with any negative aspect of a Marines record, the performance that the Marine had reflected before and after the date gap came into play with determining if the incident was severe or not.

One board member stated that, "there were a number of records that had date gaps of 17 months or more from their most recent missing fitness report but generally those were Marines pushing weight or body fat standards, so it indicated they were probably trying to hide something".

Reporting Officials:

9. How much weight was placed on the Relative Values (RV) and RAW Scores in assessing overall competitiveness?

ANSWER: Relative Values and RAW scores "were highly weighted and the basis of comparing subjective FITREP markings to actual performance". Most board members commented on the importance of the Relative Values vice commenting specifically on the RAW scores. One board member stated, "A lot was placed on the RVs broken down by thirds, especially in-grade. I didn't look much at the RAW scores unless the report was written by an RS without a profile. If an RS had a limited profile (3-5 reports) I didn't put as much weight to an 80 or 100 RV as I would from an RS with a more established profile. I generally used the RV breakdown in-grade to see if the Marine had established a trend; generally top third, middle third or bottom third. I would also look at the career overall, but mainly looked at it in-grade".

Relative Value scale - per the PES Manual (MCO P1610.7F w/ Ch 2):

* 93.34 to 100.00	(Above Average	=	Top third)
* 86.67 to 93.33	(Average	=	Middle third)
* 80.00 to 86.66	(Below Average	=	Bottom third)

(Editor's note: The Career Counselors recommend that the individual Marine write this RV scale on a Post-It note and put it in the Marines' personal counseling folder along with the most recent copy of the Master Brief Sheet. This way the Marine can always refer back to it).

Due diligence was given in regards to RS's with small profiles. Special duties were also taken into account and factored in by the individual board members. The board

was also looking at grading trends as well as the word picture. One board member stated that, "It was easy to see an RS 'walking' someone up or down their profile. It was also easy to see those that graded the way they are supposed to. A lot of Lt's and WO's need a better class on RS markings". Downgrades over time on fitness reports from the same RS were considered as an indicator of decreasing performance. One board member commented that, "RV's were looked at closely to assist in breaking out the Marine with their peers. RS profiles were closely scrutinized to ensure a fair assessment was made on the numbers". Another board member stated, "RV and RAW scores were extremely important in assessing overall competitiveness and even outweighed word pictures since word pictures are almost always positive unless the report is adverse". Put another way, "Everyone is a rock star in the write ups. RV and RAW scores tell the true story". Blooming where you are planted is the key since every selection board puts a certain amount of weight to RV and RAW scores.

10. How important was ***where*** the Marine was marked on the Reviewing Officer's Comparative Assessment, '*Christmas Tree*', and how much weight did this have?

ANSWER: The placement of the Marine on the Comparative Assessment held a significant weight to the board. One board member stated that, "placement on the Christmas tree was very important and was one of the most visible aspects of a Marines record on the MBS. Upward trends on the tree were good. Downward trends drew attention by the board. Recency is relevancy. High placement in the RO profiles on the most recent reports could outweigh Average to Below Average placements earlier on in the Marines career. Like RV, how the RO rankings stacked up against other Marines during a career was very important".

The most important factor to consider when assessing the RO's Comparative Assessment is how many Marines are Above, With and Below the Marine. One board member stated, "The physical location (block) did not really matter as the overall marking of the RO's was discussed. A 2 block marking with no one listed above would be routinely called out as 'not a negative marking'". Another board member commented that, "The value of the Christmas tree markings was dependent upon the experience level of the RO and the number of Marines in the RO's profile". The Christmas tree markings are also another way for board members to see an indication of ascending or degrading performance.

Some board members commented that this was an area to see if the RO really wanted the Marine to be promoted. "However, some RO's made this difficult because the Section K write up would be strong and it would state that this was the 'best Marine I have observed' and then the Marine would be marked in the 4 block (Average on the specific profile), contradicting what was written". The markings were very important, especially in conjunction with the word picture. "It is critical that Marines are educated more by the RS/RO on their ranking strategy". One board member stated it this way: "RO's vary widely on what parts of the tree they use, and how they use it. If an RO has the majority of Marines lumped into one block of the tree, then it didn't add much value in comparing the Marine with his/her peers". If this was the case, word picture would play a critical role in attempting to relay to the board, the RO's intentions.

11. How much weight was placed on the comments from Section I & K of the Reviewing Officer and Reporting Senior, and what were the board members looking for in these comments?

ANSWER: Capturing a consensus of the majority of the board members in regards to this question, one board member stated that, "comments in Section I and K were very important but rarely outweighed where someone fell in the Christmas tree or RV. Comments that broke the Marine out were useful (i.e. 'MRO is in the top 2 of 20 GySgt's in the BN' or 'MRO is the best GySgt I have ever observed'). Comments that were directed to the board also helped draw positive attention to the Marine (i.e. 'the board should mark this Marine a 6; make this Marine a SgtMaj'). Comments that restated Section C were not useful. Board members actually read RS and RO comments while briefing. Imagine standing in front of 21 voting board members and reading fitrep comments. Do they make sense? Are your comments what you want the board to hear"? This is very important and after all was said and done; this was the summarization of the brief. It was also stated that, "not as much weight was placed on the word picture if it didn't match the markings, which many of them don't. We looked for what the precept stated, 'innovative, creative thinking, calculated risk taker', etc." Thus, it is important that the RS and RO paint an accurate picture of their Marine's performance, good or bad (adverse). Velvet daggers did not help the Marine. Several board members talked about looking for "statistics, numbers, and actual quantifiable information".

Several other board members stated the importance of relevant comments, being clear and concise, and contrasting the MRO against his/her peers. "Simply telling us what the MRO did during the reporting period was useless". The board needs to see the general value of the Marine to the Corps. One board member commented that, "in general the majority of the Section I and K comments make most Marines sound very good since, unless the report is adverse, the worst the comments can be is lukewarm. What added value were comments that agreed with the RS/RO markings and broke the Marine out from his/her peers. It was also stated, "Help us make sense out of the markings. Describe the whole Marine and give us something to measure – 'top 10%', etc." Another board member stated that, "I also appreciated when the RS and RO stated something like top 20% of my GySgt's, however he/she is in the top 5% or 10% of (insert MOS) known to me". This helps when Marines are rated against a mixture of MOS'.

12. How important was a promotion recommendation from the Reviewing Officer and Reporting Senior?

ANSWER: Promotion recommendations from both the RS and RO are very important. One board member commented that, "As part of the summarization of the Marine's brief, those that stressed top 1, 5, or 10%; promote ahead of peers, promote now, etc. indicated a top tier Marine and was viewed as more favorable". Board members can tell how good or bad a Marine is by the strength of their comments, and their promotion recommendations are a big indicator of just that. Another board member stated, "One piece of feedback that the fleet needs is that the comment 'recommend promotion with peers' is not going to get a GySgt promoted to 1stSgt (or any other Marine in a very competitive MOS). If the RS or RO truly thinks a Marine should be a 1stSgt (or promoted in any other MOS), then they need to tell the board, 'recommend promotion ahead of peers' (or something to that effect) because the pool for 1stSgt is so competitive that the 'peers' aren't going to be the Marines to be selected". Also, "What you don't say also matters. No promotion recommendation with average to below average markings could draw negative attention and lower a Marines standing. One board member stated that, "when the RS or RO stated 'promote' and their marks were below their average or below on the tree, it showed me they didn't really want to say that the Marine was not ready".

RS's and RO's need to ensure that their comments are directed to the intended audience of the report. A fitness report is not written to the Marine (the report is not to be used as a "counseling tool") and individual commands send Marines to

schools, not the promotion board. If an RS/RO feels strongly about the Marines ability to perform at the next higher level, then the Section I/K comments need to reflect that, as well as the promotion recommendation. "Promote with peers" should not be a check in the box comment just because that is what the RS and RO has always been told.

13. How was one or two line comments from the Reviewing Officer and Reporting Senior viewed?

ANSWER: One to two line comments send several different messages to the board members. Dependant on the value of the comments depends on what message is relayed.

One board member commented that, "One or two line comments normally meant the Marine was not a performer and wasn't competitive unless the one or two lines stated the Marine was a 'water walker' or words to that effect". Several board members mentioned that if the RS or RO have little to say, then you probably didn't give them enough to work with. The general consensus answer was that most were not favorable due to the comments made. It did tend to hurt the Marine if the comments were weak, but helped if they have outstanding comments. Another board member stated that, "it depends on what was said and how extensive the Marines' record was. The RS/RO should make it their responsibility to accurately report as much as possible to the board". One board member used this comment as a good example of a comment that could be favorable, "This Marine is the best I have seen in my entire career. Board members make him a '6' and promote now"!

One board member stated that one to two line comments, "showed me they really didn't care about their Marines and that writing something that showed the Marines performance was more of a bother. The good news is this was few and far between, I just wish the RS's and RO's would write the truth and stop sugar coating the reports. There are Marines that should be 1stSgt's, for example, and there are others who shouldn't. Just because the Marine puts an F on their fitness report doesn't mean that they are (best suited for the job)".

WOUNDED WARRIORS / MEDICAL ISSUES:

14. Were there any issues concerning Wounded Warriors' records that may have made assessing their records and recommending them for promotion difficult?

ANSWER: Quite a few board members commented that a lot of Wounded Warriors were not able to attend required resident PME for their grade. It is important to note that many wounded Marines are still able to attend (and are attending) the SNCO Academy courses, even though they are injured/ill as Wounded Warriors. Wounded Warriors who are able to and make the effort to attend their Resident PME, regardless of their injuries/illness, shows board members their motivation, discipline and drive to continue further advancing their career, which is always a good thing. One board member stated that, "If the Marine was PME complete, then (there generally was not any issues). I would say that the board gave Wounded Warriors the benefit of the doubt if their record hadn't been kept up to date as well as their peers. There was one Marine who had recovered enough to deploy to combat again but whose record (mainly award information and things of that nature) wasn't as thorough as his peers. If a Marine has recovered to the point that he or she can deploy then I think they should be expected to take care of their record. If the Marine wasn't PME complete and had several periods spent in and out of the (Wounded Warrior Battalions), then

all the board could do was wonder what was going on in the Marine's life, but that was about it".

Several board members commented that many Wounded Warriors records were missing pertinent information concerning their situation, which was needed in some cases to fill the gaps of uncertainty. One board member stated that, "at times, it was difficult to discern if Marines were Wounded Warriors at all and then trying to determine if they were patients or stationed there became points of group discussion. Clarification is definitely needed". Several other board members mentioned that typically Wounded Warrior's packages had significant gaps in information with no explanation. Wounded Warriors need to understand that promotion boards can only see what is included in the Marines' Official Military Personnel File (OMPF). Promotion boards do not see any medical documentation or information unless it is provided in a letter or as documentation sent to the board from the individual Marine. This; however, is not a requirement, by no means and since Reporting Officials are not certified Medical Professionals they are not allowed (per the PES manual) to disclose medical assessments or diagnosis in fitness reports. If the Wounded Warrior has gaps of information concerning their circumstances in their record, it is up to the Marine on whether or not they want to disclose any or all details to Promotion boards for determination by the board.

15. In relation to ANY Marine with medical issues, was there any lack of information provided in the record or by the Marine, which left gaps of uncertainty for a proper recommendation?

ANSWER: Multiple board members commented on the fact that when it comes to medical concerns with Marines, a letter clarifying what the circumstances were was beneficial. "Any medical issues that affect performance that were not well documented were viewed as negative". The lack of information in some Marines' cases left room for speculation on the Marines' circumstances. The board looked favorably on those who submitted material explaining or amplifying their situation.

Marines who had NMED or partial PFT/CFT and the fitrep did not give any explanation then the board wondered what was going on, but as long as it hadn't been a trend then it generally wasn't an issue. A brief mention in the fitrep helped (back injury, knee, etc.). A good example that was shared by one board member was, "A Marine had mid to high PFT scores throughout the career then their last PFT is a 2nd class with a 300 CFT. Something in the fitrep or a letter to the board would have had an impact". Another board member stated that, "When you have Marines with cancer, amputations and broken legs sending in letters to the board to explain their issues and get a picture, they show they want to be promoted. There are others that made it a little hard but in most cases the RS and RO covered them. Again, letters to the board with an explanation was better than trying to guess".

TRAINING & EDUCATION:

16. How much weight did the board attach to Non-Resident & Resident PME that was above minimum requirements?

ANSWER: This is one of the many questions that get a wide array of different types of comments from the board members. The typical response was that it showed just how much a Marine wanted to get promoted and that going above and beyond is always a good thing. One board member commented that, "it tells me this Marine is ready and well trained for added responsibility and promotion". Regardless of the fact, the board did view this as more favorable than simply doing the minimums. When board members

are making their overall determination of their recommendation to recommend the Marine or not, this is an obvious factor. One board member stated that, "in MOS' that were really competitive, it showed the Marine was taking the extra step. I looked for courses that the Marine should have gone to, or some other advanced training. If I saw this, I gave them an above average rating. If they just did the minimums then they received an average rating, and if the majority of their peers had the advanced courses (and the Marine did not) then they received a below average rating".

Another board member commented that, "additional education was viewed favorably and could tip the scale in favor of the Marine if all else was equal. Additional education did not outweigh below average markings/comments, low PFT/CFT scores, poor appearance, adversity in-grade, etc". Showing effort in PME beyond the minimum shows a Marine wants to break out from the pack and continue serving.

17. How much weight was given to Marines that completed off duty education, such as college and trade schools?

ANSWER: One board member commented that, "College was nice to have and it did in some cases give the Marine a leg up as long as he/she was outstanding in their MOS. If I saw Marines that were below average in performance but had all kinds of college, they did not fair to well, as it showed me they cared more about their college education than their duties. As for trade schools, it was great to see Marines in technical MOS's getting their advanced training, since in some cases that is their advanced course that the Marine Corps does not have the ability to teach". It could significantly contribute to the competitiveness of a Marine's package if a degree had been obtained. A degree shows the discipline to go above and beyond but several board members stated that Marines should typically knock out their military education first, then focus on off duty education. Another board member stated, "A few classes on a transcript had little value. If a Marine obtained a degree in an area of study related to their MOS, this was also looked on very favorably". Another board member stated, "I would say that for about 75% of the Marines who had completed a college degree it strongly complemented their already above average record. The other 25% probably needed to spend more time focusing on their work performance to make them more competitive rather than completing a college degree".

18. How much weight was placed on advanced MOS schools in the Marines PMOS?

ANSWER: This depended largely on the MOS. As a whole, the board was very diverse and in some cases did not necessarily know what a "big deal" was and what was not, but they were given weight when properly called out. If a particular MOS was not represented in the board, it was up to an individual board member with some essay to clearly identify what qualified as advanced training for that MOS. They did help to break out the closely competitive MOS's and it could be a factor in breaking individuals out from others. If the majority of the MOS attended certain schools, then those that did not left questions to the board. These type of schools were however, more significant for the ranks of MSgt & MGySgt. One board member commented, "it reflected positively if they had been and negatively if they hadn't, but it wasn't necessarily a deal breaker. Performance still was the major component. For some MOS's if you hadn't been to the Advanced (fill in the MOS name here) course, then it broke the Marine out as Below Average".

19. How did the board view Marines who have not been to the pistol range for a number of years, when required?

ANSWER: This didn't play a vital role on the board, overall. There are generally several different reasons why a Marine may not be able to fire yearly, such as the units' Op Tempo or the lack of quotas. Fortunately, several board members stated that most Marines reviewed were current with this qualification. If there was an explanation of the Marine not qualifying on the fitness report or the Marine had sent a letter to the board, then it helped the board members determine if the Marine was being lazy or not. One board member commented, "I thought it did stand out when Marines communicated to the board why they hadn't been (i.e. duty station where they were exempt, lack of quotas, etc.); it displayed an interest in having a complete, squared away record presented to the board". Several other board members did state that this was looked at negatively if the Marine had not fired in several years and had no explanation within his/her record. Several of these same board members commented that this could have possibly lowered the Marines ranking. The bottom line is: When you come in zones for promotion, ensure you qualify on all training (if required) and ensure your record has an explanation if the opportunity has not been afforded. Submit a letter, if needed, but a comment in the last fitness report would alleviate the need.

20. How important was having a first class PFT/CFT?

ANSWER: This was a very important aspect for the vast majority of the board members. One board member stated that, "E8's and E9's are expected to lead from the front". Another commented that, "physical fitness should always be a priority and this could be a tiebreaker". When discussing tie breakers, several board members stated that when reviewing the overall total Marine concept, this was one of the biggest areas to either break a Marine out from their peers or negatively skyline the Marine which usually resulted in downgrading their overall marking (recommendation). The MOS's were very competitive and this helped show the Marines discipline, motivation and desire to want to be promoted. For the 1stSgt/SgtMaj allocations, this was that much more of an issue due to the fact that these MOS's were that much more competitive. If a Marine did not have a 1st class PFT then the record had to have something that stood him/her out from the pack. One board member stated, "I made note on every Marine who had either a 2nd class PFT or CFT. Marines, in general, really should have a 1st class CFT. I might not expect every Marine over 40 to necessarily have a 1st class PFT, but the CFT is not that difficult that somebody who is up for E8/E9 shouldn't be able to score a 1st class". Another board member summed this question up by saying, "The vast majority of eligible Marines have a decent first class PFT. If you don't, you will stick out negatively from the crowd and will need something strong in the rest of your record to make up for it. Remember, this is the Marine Corps – PT, marksmanship, and fighting are points of institutional pride for us".

21. How much weight was placed on the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) and how was an instructor qualification viewed?

ANSWER: A considerable amount of weight was also given to this training qualification, especially when breaking one Marine away from another. The minimum belt level expected within your MOS was expected. The board looked at Green belt as being average. Gray belt and beyond was looked at favorably. If you are a brown belt or higher, or if you are an instructor, you are demonstrating leadership in Marine Corps training = value added". Several Marines had never been qualified in MCMAP, with no belt. In these cases, the Marines were automatically not competitive for

promotion. Brown or black belts did stand out and would be briefed as going above and beyond. Martial Arts Instructors or Instructor Trainers were given more credit. Another board member stated, "an instructor qualification makes the Marine better trained and best qualified over one that is not an instructor of any qualifications". Marines that continued to advance their level of training (qualifications) within the MCMAP program were looked at a lot more favorably than those who had remained stagnant and did not attempt to progress.

DUTY ASSIGNMENTS:

22. What did the board define as MOS credibility, and how was it viewed in terms of competitiveness?

ANSWER: MOS credibility was generally derived from performance markings and comments when in the MOS. Lots of time away from the MOS could raise concerns. One board member stated, "MOS credibility was defined as an acceptable amount of time working in the primary MOS with all required MOS schools completed. Breaking away in SDA's was great, but staying gone too long was looked at with scrutiny. Being successful in the MOS and SDA's showed diversity and the ability to bloom where planted". Progression in ones MOS was viewed favorably. Marines spending excessive time outside of their MOS was not viewed favorably against another Marine who progressed within the MOS, particularly for Marines going the MSgt/MGySgt route. Several board members mentioned that a review of the entire record usually showed whether Marines had MOS credibility because the marks spoke for themselves. MOS credibility was also evaluated based on assignments reflected on the fitreps. Good marks within the MOS received high consideration. In regards to assignments, it is important to have at least one tour (if not a variety of tours) in your MOS (for every rank) and progress within billets to show diversity and the ability to excel above the rest of your peers. Excel not only in billets held but also the qualifications needed within the community. If the majority of your peers have combat, then to have as much credibility as possible, it is important to have combat as well.

One board member summed this question up by stating, "There was a trend with GySgt's going for 1stSgt that most had multiple billets as a 1stSgt and DI duty, and the issue I had was when the Marine returned to their MOS they were terrible. Every time they went back to the 1stSgt or DI billet they were great. The only issue was (the board) was looking for the GySgt who was great at being a Marine all of the time, being able to provide guidance to the Commander and when back in their MOS to be great in the performance of their PMOS".

23. How was a combat tour (reports) viewed in terms of competitiveness?

ANSWSER: This was held in high regard and viewed favorably. Whether or not it made a Marine competitive depended on their MOS and their performance while on the deployment. Some MOS's just do not get a lot of opportunities to deploy to combat and this was taken into account. For the MOS's that did have a large volume of combat deployments, the Marines with no combat deployments were not as competitive "unless something in their record spoke to the lack of combat time". All else being equal, the Marine who went to combat would be ranked higher than those that did not. Several board members commented that, "the billet held while in combat was also very important. Many Marines served in billets outside of their MOS and excelled. That was a plus. Overall, performance in combat meant a lot and the marks (typically) reflected that performance". One board member stated that, "good performance in combat was given extra weight, especially if filling a billet above your grade (several 0369's filling platoon commander billets definitely stuck out)".

Poor performance or downgraded markings in combat were viewed unfavorably. Adverse actions or material during combat was also considered highly negative since strong performance in combat is expected of Marines. One board member commented that, "there were Marines who you could tell the CO's did not want to take into combat and that was pretty easy to see. There were others who were doing everything they could to get to the fight but they were really great at what they were doing and the CO's chose for them to remain in place. Again, this was pretty easy to see. Marines in combat arm's MOS's who did not have combat raised my eyes a bit. Why a 0369 with 14 years in service has never gotten to the fight was a bit unnerving, but again the fitreps pretty much spelled it out".

24. What was the weight attached to the successful completion of a Special Duty Assignment (SDA)?

ANSWER: Any Marine who completed an SDA was considered highly QUALIFIED for promotion. The value given to the successful completion of the SDA did depend on the individual board members ranking philosophy and on how well the Marine performed on the SDA. One board member stated that, "the Marine was considered 'highly qualified for promotion,' however, that did not always equate to 'highly competitive' for promotion". SDA completion was given high consideration in accordance with the promotion board precept, which states that Marines who are currently on or have successfully completed a tour on an SDA on Recruiting duty, Drill Instructor duty, part of the Marine Security Guard Battalion, Marine Corps Security Forces, Combat Instructors (SOI) and Critical Skills Operators (CSO) as part of the Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) will be looked at as 'highly qualified' for promotion to the next higher rank. SDA's could definitely help break a Marine out from their peers, but was not always a 'golden ticket' or a 'get out of jail free' card for other areas of a Marines record that were lacking. Timing is always a critical aspect in an SDA either helping or hurting a Marines overall competitiveness.

Successful completion meant diversity, since to be successful outside of your MOS most often than not meant a Marine could succeed in their MOS. This also shows that the Marine is going above and beyond and was getting out of their comfort zone within their MOS community. One board member stated that, "in cases where the Marine had a successful tour on an SDA and did great things when he/she returned to the MOS they got a good rating. Those who had a successful tour and did terrible when they returned to the MOS got a low rating". Some MOS's are hard to get away from and that was taken into consideration.

25. How did the board consider SDA reports that were marked lower in the Reviewing Officer and Reporting Seniors profiles and/or had lack luster comments?

ANSWER: It is somewhat common in some SDA's to have lower marks from RS/RO's, along with lack luster comments. The board members typically agreed that if the SDA was completed successfully, then the reports were viewed favorably unless it was adverse. As with other aspects of a Marines record, assessing these types of reports came down to the performance reflected before, during and after the SDA tour. If the MOS performance was lack luster as well, then this was viewed negatively, since the in MOS performance tended to carry more weight. This is where the 'bloom where you are planted' concept was used in putting these reports into perspective with the overall entire record.

One board member stated that, "If they were rated below average for the whole tour then that was definitely viewed as a negative. Most of the DI's bounced around in the rankings, but as long as they showed improvement and weren't a bottom feeder the whole tour, then it didn't hurt them". Another board member stated, "While the board was well aware of the challenges associated with interpreting the value of SDA fitreps, particularly for recruiters, the board generally took the report at face value, unable to fairly do much else. Recruiters cause their own problems by the way they write fitreps. Due to the (high) number of Marines in the typical RO's profile population, one low fitrep on recruiting can devastate a Marine's profile". For Marines in this situation, the low markings were taken into account and not necessarily held against them.

Marines need to ensure that while on an SDA that they take that much more of a proactive stance at seeking counsel with their reporting officials in finding out what their overall expectations are and ensure that throughout their daily performance that they are doing their best to surpass those expectations. In SDA billets where RS/RO's change pretty regularly or there is a lot of type 'A' personalities, this should be that much more of an importance.

26. How did the board look at Marines who were "Relieved for Cause" (RFC) or "Relieved for Good of Service" (RFGOS) on an SDA throughout their career?

ANSWER: Both RFC's and RFGOS's were looked at and weighted on a case by case basis, situation dependent, from each board member. Both typically came with an explanation that assisted the board in their evaluation. RFC's were looked upon unfavorably from most board members. RFGOS's were not an issue as long as there was no adversity that came along with it. One board member commented that, "For me this was not an issue. Sometimes things happen that are out of our control. This goes back to how well did the Marine do after the RFC or RFGOS. Overall performance!!! The total evaluation of their record". Another board member stated that, "RFGOS for me had no relevance since there (typically) was a reason for the RFGOS supported by the Commander. As for RFC's in-grade, this is not a good thing. As for earlier in their career, the way I looked at it was the Marine got promoted with the RFC to their current rank so he/she already paid the price. For me, they had a clean slate". Several board members commented that if Marines returned to the (an) SDA and successfully completed it, then this could help the Marines overall competitiveness. Another board member stated, "RFC was bad, but recoverable (though more often than not they didn't recover). RFGOS made you look a little closer as to how they did when they got back to their MOS".

27. Were staff type billets, to include HQMC, considered less competitive than being in operating units?

ANSWER: The overall consensus answer here was, no. As long as the Marine was performing well in the billet assigned and blooming where they were planted, then the billet could be a benefit to the Marines overall record. Also, as long as there was not a trend of the Marine "hiding out", these types of billets were not looked at unfavorably. The board members know that there has to be Marines to fill Staff type billets (and other unique type billets) and that HQMC cuts orders. "Marines go where they are told", as a few board members put it. Broad experience can also be a plus to a Marines record. However, too many assignments out of the operating units were usually a negative thing. The MOS did dictate whether or not this was an issue, and

the board members were able to take the Marines performance before, during and after the tour into perspective in assessing the entire record. One board member stated that, "those who have never been in a staff billet will not understand the time and effort it takes to learn a complete and different job than ones primary MOS". It is important to understand that "excelling wherever the Corps needs you is what stands out". It has been said that it doesn't matter where HQMC sends you, but how you perform when you get there.

28. How did the board view Marines who had served in joint billets or joint IA billets?

ANSWER: Joint billets were viewed as very favorable and could help a Marine to break his/her record out as more competitive with their peers. Joint IA (JIA) and Transition Team (TT) billets were given more weight, in accordance with the board precept from the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC). One board member stated that, "Marines that expand their comfort zone for these types of duties show variety in different backgrounds". Another member stated that, "these allow Marines to represent our Corps with sister services". Overall it came down to performance and markings. Not all Marines can get a joint billet. One board member commented that, "sometimes you just get lucky, but you better perform while at the billet and the marks better reflect". One thing that was looked at was how well the Marine adapted to the other services. Another board member stated that, "it was sometimes hard to assess performance if there weren't Marine RS/RO's available to report on them". In this situation, comments were made regarding who had written the observation. Another board member stated, "the funny thing is, most Marines got glowing reports from their USA, USN, USAF counterparts; normally the Marines were commented as the top of all services". Marines who hadn't made it to combat yet and volunteered for a Joint IA or Transition Team were given a bit of extra consideration, according to several board members.

AWARDS/RECOGNITION:

29. How were awards briefed?

a. Impact and End of Tour

ANSWER: All awards were briefed. Impact awards and combat awards got more emphasis than EOT awards. All awards with valor carried more weight than an average EOT award. Impact and EOT awards were usually briefed whether or not they were earned in the PMOS, on SDA, etc… Awards in-grade made an impact and stood out.

b. How were combat awards viewed?

ANSWER: Combat awards were viewed favorably and were usually briefed with an excerpt of the action that took place. "With the time constraints, usually it was a very brief description of what the Marine did". Another board member commented that "the awards were a little tough. It took some discipline to remember to judge a Marine by the award. Total picture, complete record. There is no doubt we came across some dynamic, impressive war fighters that performed during combat but you have to look at the entire record and not just one incident or one tour of duty". Combat awards were given higher weight than non-combat ones, especially Navy Commendation medals and Bronze

stars. One board member commented that "our Marines have done some great things. Sent shivers up my spine".

30. Was graduating as Honor graduate, Distinguished graduate or Gung Ho from MOS schools or SNCO Academies briefed or just the completion?

ANSWER: One board member answered this question with the following: "All honor graduates, distinguished graduates and gung ho (awards) were briefed. (This) just showed the Marine was at the top of his/her game. It helped some since their fitreps were strong, others it did nothing since they were terrible in their MOS. It all comes out in the wash". If the briefer happened to not catch the achievement in a Marines record, another board member would typically catch it and let the other board members know at the conclusion of the 3 minute brief. The distinguished event was briefed favorable to demonstrate the Marines competitive nature and effort. These achievements generally reinforced an already above average Marine, but not in all cases.

FIRST SERGEANT/MASTER SERGEANT ROUTES:

31. Were there any challenges in recommending & selecting GySgt's for 1stSgt vice MSgt, & if so what were they?

ANSWER: The population of GySgt's competing for 1stSgt was much more competitive with far fewer opportunities for promotion, which made it hard for Marines to break out of the pack. One of the biggest challenges mentioned by most board members was the small number of allocations and the large population of eligible Marines (103 allocations with 1,126 Marines in zone = 9.1% selection rate). 1stSgt selection was so competitive that any adverse, lack of SDA, low markings, low PFT/CFT scores etc… could take a GySgt out of the running. One board member commented that, "We saw several Marines who didn't select 1stSgt on fitreps until just prior to the board. Without letters explaining why, these were generally viewed as negative".

Another board member stated, "It was difficult selecting Marines for 1stSgt who had not gone outside of their MOS. For example, the Marine who is a Combat Service Support Marine (without an SDA) and runs a shop had a hard time competing with a Marine who had been performing outside of the PMOS on an SDA or was serving as the Company 1stSgt and showing diversity. Also, many RS's simply did not know how to create a word picture that cast the Marine as 1stSgt material. Stating the Marine held many formations or set up the Marine Corps ball paled in comparison to Marines who led in combat". Marines need to realize that setting their record up for 1stSgt should be in conjunction with setting themselves up for MSgt. When the RS and RO fill the entire Section I & K boxes with information that is solely focused on the 1stSgt route and disregards the MOS proficiency comments for MSgt, this tends to make Marines less competitive for both routes. In some extreme cases, now these Marines may not get selected to E-8 regardless, if their record is below the competitive level of their peers in both communities. Another board member commented that, "Marines really need to stop putting F on their reports just so they can get a (free) look, when to be honest they (are not that competitive to begin with).

Another board member commented on this same topic with very valid points, saying, "Something has to be done about the size of the 1stSgt population. About 50-70% of the population is nowhere even close to being competitive for 1stSgt and merely wastes 2 weeks of the board's time. The most aggravating were the Marines that had put 'M' on all of their fitreps but their most recent, and then had the nerve to not even

submit a photo! These Marines should have never been in the pool. I know we don't want to crush a Marine's hope of someday being a SgtMaj, but it is obvious that a lot of Marines treat 1st Sgt as a free look at a promotion that they aren't anywhere near being competitive for, even if they are overall average or above average in their MOS". This point highlights the need for RS's to provide a true and accurate assessment when providing Directed Comments recommending what grade the Gunnery Sergeant is best qualified to fill. The RS can disagree with the Marines preference if the RS feels that the Marine is best suited to fill a different grade (i.e. MSgt vice 1stSgt). Senior Enlisted oversight into this matter is also key in helping to properly evaluate Marines who are best qualified as a 1stSgt.

32. Did the billets held, or being held, have a lot to do with the rank selected to? If so, which ones would have been beneficial/detrimental in going the 1stSgt route?

ANSWER: Most board members commented that currently serving in or having held a Company/Squadron GySgt or a Company 1stSgt billet (preferably in combat) was a plus for the Marine, as long as the Marine performed well in the billet. Most other billets didn't seem to have too much of an effect when the bottom line was, is the Marine "blooming where they were planted" by performing wherever the Corps assigns them. Being put in positions to be able to exercise leadership helped the board determine their 1stSgt/MSgt recommendations. One board member stated, "I like to see a Marine who was put in a 1stSgt billet and did great things, then when they returned to their MOS continued with doing great things". SDA billets seemed to help Marines out, since a vast majority of the population had an SDA within their career. Several board members did comment that Drill Instructors did seem to stand out, to them, as good candidates for 1stSgt, as long as they had the overall total Marine package. Meaning, just because someone is currently on or has successfully completed an SDA, it is not an automatic 'golden ticket' for selection.

One board member stated that, "Squadron or Company GySgt (billets) doesn't always make a good 1stSgt. Sitting in for the 1stSgt or SgtMaj with the RO wanting the Marine to be their 1stSgt or SgtMaj is good in my own opinion". Another board member commented that, "I didn't give a lot of weight to the plethora of GySgt's who were filling some kind of 1stSgt billet in their unit since so many of them seemed to be doing it, and it made me wonder if they were in that position because they weren't good at their MOS". A few other board members mentioned that Marines serving as a shop SNCOIC in a billet having nothing to do with leading Marines could be considered negative or detrimental for selection to 1stSgt.

33. Did having more advanced MOS schools or qualifications in a Marines PMOS make recommending some Marines for 1stSgt less desirable?

ANSWER: Most board members mentioned that having completed advanced MOS schools did not make someone less desirable for 1stSgt as long as they were going above and beyond in all areas of their record. One board member commented that, "Having more advanced PMOS qualifications did not sway me away from selecting them for 1stSgt. The overall picture of the Marines career determined their overall ability to be a 1stSgt. How they performed and having displayed the ability to handle future 1stSgt billets gave them a great chance at selection". Several board members stated that advanced MOS schools were always viewed as positive, and one board member stated that, "Not choosing to attend advanced schools in pursuit of 1stSgt is a bad idea". Another board member commented that, "Advanced schools/qualifications just told me that you were probably good and cared about your MOS, so I would expect that to carry

over to good performance as a 1stSgt. (This also showed) an interest in diving right in and learning the mission of your new unit, if selected to be a 1stSgt".

34. Were there any cases noticed where Marines were indecisive about their decision for the 1stSgt/MSgt route by being a "switch ball hitter", switching back and forth from F to M, & vice versa? If so, did this seem to hurt that Marine's chances?

ANSWER: As with many of the issues discussed on this questionnaire, some board members witnessed these types of issues, and others did not. Though some looked at this change in direction as negative, most of the board members did not. Several board members mentioned that a "switch ball hitter" might cause a board member to think twice about promotion to 1stSgt; however, selection to 1stSgt really boiled down to performance and how the Marine stacked up with all GySgt's in zone for 1stSgt. Several board members stated that there were a couple of Marines who were briefed as changing their minds, but most members didn't let that effect their decision for possible selection unless this added to the rest of the record which was already below the rest of the Marines peers. There were several Marines that changed from M to F or vice versa. There were a few that submitted letters explaining the change, which provided clarity, while others did not. One board member stated that, "It did seem to hurt the record, but if the Marine had the performance to back up either selection, he/she got selected. Several Marines sent letters to the board concerning this and in every instance, it helped". Another board member stated that, "I saw this a lot from Marines who attended the Advanced course. Most switch ball hitters had either just attended the Advanced course or after going, changed". Being a switch ball hitter was not as much of a factor for MSgt, provided the candidate displayed competitiveness within the MOS. A few board members did comment, again, that a lot of Marines are using it as a free look at promotion when they aren't even competitive for the route, when they may have been putting M on every GySgt fitrep and then finally decide to switch to F. As stated above, without a letter explaining the circumstances this was not always viewed as favorable, depending on the board member.

MISCELLANEOUS:

35. What seemed to make a Marine really stand out from their peers?

ANSWER: Every board member always has a different grading philosophy of what they feel is more important than other things regarding overall competitiveness. There is no way of ever getting rid of individual thoughts and perceptions when you have 21 different individuals on the board. The following is a synopsis of the most important factors that helped a Marine stand out on this FY12 SgtMaj through MSgt selection board. Ensuring an accurate and up to date record is crucial. Since Marine On-Line (MOL) now contains the Marines' OMPF, there is no excuse for Marines to not ensure that their record is continually audited. Performance was the most commonly referenced item when it comes to enhancing overall competitiveness. Knowing how to read and evaluate the RS and RO's assessments are key. Comments from both the RS and RO are very important as well and helps board members put the Marines performance into perspective in relation to their peers.

Ensuring that all training and education qualifications are up to date and as competitive as possible as well as ensuring that all fitness reports are included in the record is also extremely important. As discussed before, this shows the Marines

desire to be as competitive as possible. The more qualifications Marines have, the better. Ensuring an updated promotion photograph is in the system is also crucial.

36. What were the heaviest weighted items/areas in a Marines record that was used when assessing tie breakers?

ANSWER: A good example of a board member having to assess tie breakers is when the board members can only say 'Yes' to 15 Marines (15 allocations for a specific MOS out of 50 candidates) after having racked and stacked the potential candidates with the 15th and 16th Marines being tied. This is a really elementary example, but in this case one of the last two Marines will get a 'Yes' vote and the other a 'No'. EVERY board member uses a different aspect of a Marines record to determine their final decision for their recommendation for selection, based off of their recommendation numbers given to the Marines package when the record is briefed.

Recommendation numbers provided by the Promotions Branch (MMPR-2) through the Digital Board room (database used by the board members):

6 = Water Walker
5 = With Enthusiasm
4 = With Confidence
3 = With Reservation
2 = Not Recommended
1 = Show Cause (Used for Officers only)

Eleven of the twenty one board members stated that they used the Relative Value (RS) and Comparative Assessment (RO) values to help determine their tie breakers. That is not always the case in every MOS, from one Marine to the next. Sometimes, even in attempting to break one Marine away from the next with the RS/RO assessments, Marines are neck to neck. The second biggest response to what specifically board members used to assess their tie breakers was individual training qualifications. More often than not the members mentioned it coming down to a higher PFT or CFT score than the next Marine. Other board members used SDA's and combat tours as tie breakers and others would sometimes use promotion photographs.

These responses show why it is so important to break yourself away in all aspects of your record vice just one. Breaking away in both the RS's and RO's profiles is crucial in making yourself as competitive as possible, but that in itself won't get you selected if you have a Tan belt MCMAP qualification with 2nd or 3rd class PFT and CFT scores and marginal training and education completed, and other Marines don't. On the flip side of this same coin, having a Bronze Star with a combat V, a Black belt (6th degree) Instructor Trainer qualification, a 300 PFT/CFT, maxed out training and education qualifications with all Below Average fitness reports won't help you either. Performance does carry the most weight of your record and this is proven as relevant by the board members stating that in a lot of cases, "Performance trumps most everything else".

37. How were Marines with tattoos viewed?

ANSWER: The unanimous answer throughout the entire board was that tattoos were not a factor. One board member stated that, "Marines with tattoos were viewed no differently than those without (them)". Unless, the tattoos were eccentric or unprofessional and not keeping within the high standards of a Marine, they were not an issue. A few board members mentioned a few examples that they considered possibly

eccentric or unprofessional, such as "Angry clowns", "an excessive number of mermaids" or "clowns on the forearms".

38. What were some of the biggest issues (trends) within the Marines' records reviewed that showed a lack of knowledge or preparation on the individual's part, prior to the board convening?

ANSWER: Lack of updated promotion photographs and lack of PME completion were the top two answers provided. There were Marines with outdated photos (over 12 months old) and Marines with no photos. There were several Marines with an updated Photograph but not PME complete. Several board members commented on appearance. Poor physical fitness was another issue noted. If Marines have date gaps within their record they need to address them and explain the circumstances to the board. Also, lack of documentation of items in a record showed a lack of attention to detail on the Marines part. "Records were all out of order and it was hard to find information that was needed to brief. There is no reason why a Marines record should not be squared away". Make sure the promotion photograph is validated by a qualified Marine.

Multiple board members also commented on fat Marines with bulging waistlines. Senior enlisted leaders being overweight, at their max BF% or getting really close. "About 20% of the eligible population was overweight, despite the fact that many photo boards said they were within standards – the photos tell the truth". Another board member stated that, "this should not be the case for GySgt's. As young as they are, there are no excuses". It was also noted that the heavy Marines often had fitreps with NREQ for PFT or had recorded partial PFTs. Partial PFTs were looked at with great suspicion when Marines had a track record of weight problems. "Overweight or obese Marines or Marines with unsat appearance appears to be a Marine Corps wide problem that absolutely prevents some Marines from getting promoted". "Our senior leaders are overweight. We need to fix this. We have to make BCP work"!

39. What are your top recommendations for Marines preparing themselves for a SNCO selection board, (The big take a ways)?

ANSWER: All of the questions in this questionnaire were answered by all of the board members who obviously deliberated on all packages within this board. This question is a great litmus test to see exactly which areas of a Marines record are the most important to the individual board members. This gives the individual Marine the ability to re-confirm those areas of importance and ensure they are doing everything in their power to effect as many as possible. Each area discussed is broken down by category:

Promotion Photographs: The vast majority of the board members commented on pictures more than any other topic, for this question. It is important to always have an updated photo, regardless if you are in the Above zone, Promotion zone or Below zone. Take someone with you and ensure you scrutinize it yourself before a board member gets the chance to. Make sure that it is squared away and ensure that your Senior Enlisted Advisors review it, prior to the board. "Keep in mind that this is the first thing that board members see when they review your record" and "this is also one of the most important ways of communicating to the board". "The picture says a lot about the Marine whose record we are reviewing. Lack of a current photo speaks volumes to the board about how important the Marine's promotion means to that individual". Board members also commented on several occasions, "don't be overweight". Being close to BF% max does not help if the picture leaves questions. Several other board members commented that, "if you are overweight and your BF% is above 17% - lose weight".

RS/RO values: "Fully understand the RS/RO values and (their) impact on how your record is perceived". "Request your RS and RO to explain their profile and where you fall" out in comparison with your peers. When attempting to break yourself away from your peers, it is important to not only break away in your overall value within the profiles, but also to have strong break away comments with breakaway promotion recommendations.

Board Preparation: "Go through your OMPF/MBS with a fine tooth comb. Don't send in a letter to the board saying you want to be promoted". Several board members commented to, "Get to combat if possible and get to an SDA". Seek leadership positions. Start preparing for promotion two years out. Complete all required training and PME. Strive for the highest scores possible on all basic Marine training requirements. Fill in the gaps of your OMPF (missing award information, MOS school completion certificates, etc…). One board member commented: "It is so easy now with the OMPF online that there is no excuse for not doing this. If Marines are going to ever write a letter to the board or any sort of rebuttal, they need to have somebody else look it over before it becomes part of the record. They need to use spell check and have somebody read it to see if they are actually communicating what they think they are communicating. There was a Marine who had failed a PFT at the Advance course and spelled Marine Corps wrong in his rebuttal. It is very hard to take the Marine seriously after that. I also had an 0111 submit a personal letter with tons of misspellings". "Look in the mirror and ask yourself should I be promoted" based off of what I am providing to the board.

One board member commented on the lack of information provided by the RS & RO's in their Section I & K comments. "RS/RO comments regarding misconduct, adverse information such as BCP, sudden billet changes, or not taking PFTs due to medical, etc… The more information provided helps the board understand what happened. Otherwise, the board will have to interpret what occurred and more often than not, assumes the worst".

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