

Promotion Non-Selection Counseling Lessons Learned

The following observations were discovered by AFPC/DP2S while conducting promotion non-selection counseling to Captains through Lieutenant Colonels from 2019-2020. Subsequently, the division developed these **recommended actions and talking points for mentors to use when advising officers competing for promotion.**

Captains seeking promotion to Major

Observations about Captains not selected for promotion to Major

- OPRs provided little insight into performance—poorly written, lacked stratification, job, DE pushes, awards and recognition
- Incomplete record met board—missing OPRs, decorations.
- Few had adverse information in their record

Recommended talking points to better prepare Captains to compete for promotion to Major

- Seek experience as Flight/CC
- Volunteer for challenging Exec & staff positions -- exposure to top talent and mentors with right insights to guide personal development
- Understand your Assignment Team's vision for officer development -- what's considered "essential experience" to serve as Squadron/CC
- Understand what performance measures your career field values, i.e. operators need to earn their Instructor rating ASAP
- Consistently compete for Awards and Recognition as individual/team
- Seek counsel from FGOs and senior mentors about what AF values in performance reports

Majors seeking promotion to Lt Colonel

Observations about Majors not selected for promotion to Lt Colonel

- Most are surprised they were not promoted; indicates a lack of mentoring about quality and competitiveness of their records
- Most recognize obvious strengths of their own records, but unaware of the competitiveness of peers. Little sense of "strength of the herd"; i.e. multiple quarterly/annual awards are common among certain Dev Cats; lack of quarterly/annual awards stands out
- Most lack consistent stratification, job, and school pushes on OPRs; do not understand importance of these indicators
- Many lacked awareness of how certain words/phrases in job pushes were negative indicators, i.e. groom for Flt/CC (while sitting in Flt/CC position), ready for increased responsibility, send to OPSO when ready, etc. Pushes that recommend officer for same position are vague/lack enthusiasm send message that officer needs more development
- Many lacked awareness of importance of **both** mentoring and self-advocacy, assuming "the system" would take care of them, i.e. did not advocate for themselves with local leadership or compete for awards

- Most don't recognize importance of breadth of experience, especially serving at higher organizational levels. Air Force considers outstanding performance at premier staff positions, i.e. HAF, OSD, JS, as a strong quality indicator. Strongest records for operators come from staff duties, not at squadron level
- Many excellent Captains became anonymous Majors--especially in 2nd tier staff roles and those outside the rhythm of Air Force life (no quarterly, annual, AFSC-specific awards).
- Officers who change AFSCs are in a tail-chase with peers, lagging in career progression and leadership experience. Without a track record in the new AFSC, it is difficult to assess officers' potential to serve at a higher level. Most officers are aware of this risk

Recommended talking points to better prepare Majors to compete for promotion to Lt Colonel

- Seek experience as Squadron/CC. If your AFSC doesn't offer command opportunities for Majors, understand your Assignment Team's vision for officer development and what's considered "essential experience" for a squadron commander then seek that experience
- Seek experience in premier staff positions, i.e. HAF, OSD, JS. They provide breadth of experience and outstanding performance in those roles is a strong quality indicator
- Ensure OPRs reflect the scope of your leadership impact in terms of people and dollars. If your primary role is tactical with limited leadership, be entrepreneurial and create an avenue to lead
- Awards are just as important for FGOs as they are for CGOs. Consistently compete for Awards and Recognition as an individual/team. These important signals in your record demonstrate consistent outstanding performance compared with peers.
- When meeting the Lt Col board, stronger records will include pushes for Sq/CC and SDE. Many career fields have sitting and/or graduated Sq/CCs meeting the Lt Col promotion board.

Lt Colonels seeking promotion to Colonel

Observations about Lt Colonels not selected for promotion to Colonel

- At this point, most officers have a good sense of the likelihood of their promotion. Explanations for non-selection focused on a nuanced reading of records & strength of officer corps as a whole.
- Small number of officers remain unfamiliar with AF writing standards and organizational culture.
- Many lacked Sq/CC experience and/or spent significant time outside their career field

Recommended talking points to better prepare Lt Colonels to compete for promotion to Colonel

- Seek experience as a Sq/CC
- Seek experience in staff positions and outshine peers. Consistent, strong, peer-level stratifications signal outstanding performance and leadership potential. A record of top stratifications while serving at a MAJCOM can read stronger than a record with middle of the road stratifications at HAF
- Awards are just as important for FGOs as they are for CGOs. Consistently compete for Awards and Recognition as individual/team. These important signals in your record demonstrate consistent outstanding performance compared with peers

Recommended talking points applicable to every grade

Mentoring

- Seek counsel from senior mentors (O-6+) in your career field about professional development

- Request specific feedback from your rater and additional rater; It's ok to ask, "Would I get 1 of your top strats?" If the answer is no, your supervisor can provide feedback on what you can improve
- Ensure you understand your boss's priorities and work them
- Engage your assignment team about how your records compare with your peers

Assignments

- Volunteer for challenging roles in organizations your career field values highly...outstanding performance there will be a strong quality indicator.
- Organizational level matters. ***Bloom where you're planted.*** Understand blooming in demanding roles among your most competitive peers in key leadership positions and premier staff assignments makes a stronger impression than blooming in less competitive roles
- Higher education, joint, and special duty assignments must be balanced w/quality AF leadership and operational experience. Seek counsel from senior mentors regarding timing of broadening experiences, opportunity cost compared with other developmental assignments, and impact on promotion potential

Performance Reports & Decorations

- 1 OPR doesn't make or break a record. Rater and Additional Rater push lines on your top OPR send a strong signal to the board. If stratification, job, and school pushes are omitted, whether intentionally or unintentionally, it sends a message to the board
- Consistent outstanding performance matters. Losing a stratification, especially from the same Rater or Additional Rater as records go to a board sends a strong message. For example, if an officer is working for the same O-6 for 2 years and 1st year was #1/42 Maj's, then 2nd year is "One of my best..." speaks volumes. Losing a stratification along with a position change is less critical
- Consistent decorations matter. Missing a decoration for an assignment sends a message something went wrong, i.e. fitness failure, inability to get along with people. Missing decorations are rare among officers.
- Job pushes for leadership track positions, i.e. Flt/CC, DO, Sq/CC, premier staff, signal raters recognize and want to develop an officer's leadership potential. Pushes for vague next steps, i.e. "staff next", are less valuable
- OPR bullets should be written in plain language that is easily understood by readers who are not experts. OPR has multiple purposes: documentation (past performance), advertising (potential)...and must be clear to multiple audiences, i.e. raters, development teams, hiring authorities, future bosses, and boards. OPRs are only as good as they are understandable
- Officers serving in joint and special duty communities must be cognizant of their primary AFSC community's developmental priorities. OPR bullets earned in these assignments must be written to resonate with Airmen/Guardian readers

Air Force Culture

- Be familiar with evolving PRF and OPR guidance to advocate for yourself, especially with regard to stratification, job, and school pushes (AFI 36-2406)
- If your Rater or Additional Rater is a civilian or from another service, take responsibility knowing what's important in your OPRs/PRF and they know. You may need more senior AF leadership to talk with your supervisory chain to deliver the message. For example, if you're working in a joint organization for a retired Army Lt Col who is newly serving as a GS civilian, they may not recognize the emphasis the Air Force puts on OPR push lines--stratification, job push, school push

- If PCSing prior to a promotion board, be aware of PRF accountability date. It may be beneficial to receive your PRF from an organization where you've already demonstrated consistent outstanding performance. Consider requesting a change to RNLTD if on the cusp of PRF accountability date
- If more than 6 months of a reporting period will NOT be captured prior to a board, work with local leadership to generate an OPR via a change of rating official (CRO). This is particularly important if something significant happened during that period (major award, successful inspection/exercise, etc.). If leadership does not support CRO, consider writing a Letter to the Board to ensure the board is aware of the significant accomplishment
- In 2019/2020, several news articles were published noting the Air Force is exploring a 5-year promotion window for officers. While the AF is researching this and other changes to its promotion processes, we have NOT established a 5-year promotion window. Under current policy, officers who are 2x non-selects for promotion will meet a Selective Continuation board. If ineligible or not selected for continuation, a mandatory date of separation is required by law. Read more about this on MyPers at https://mypers.af.mil/app/answers/detail/a_id/7242/p/9/c/656.

Records Management

- Check your records annually for accuracy
- Prior to meeting a promotion board, check your records to ensure your OSB is accurate and all performance reports and decorations are in your record
- Be familiar with Air Force promotion info: <https://mypers.af.mil/app/categories/c/656/p/9>