

DIRECTOR OF THE NOAA CORPS

GUIDANCE TO FY11 0-2 & 0-3 OFFICER SELECTION BOARDS

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

Aristotle

It is an historic time to be serving in the NOAA Corps. On April 20, an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico caused the rig to sink and oil began leaking into the Gulf. This significant event posed a serious threat to wildlife and the fishing community along the large coastal area of Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, and Florida. NOAA Corps was called upon, during this national emergency, to play a vital role in the oil spill response. The versatile and adaptable men and women of the NOAA Corps serve in an increasingly complex world that continues to present new threats and challenges. At the same time, demand for our unique capabilities and leadership in responding to these dynamics has never been greater. To meet them proactively, we must cultivate and promote officers who possess the leadership skills and competencies to achieve mission success. At the same time, we must recognize that service as a NOAA Corps officer is more than a job. It is my expectation that all officers will demonstrate a commitment to the culture and Core Values of the NOAA Corps.

The NOAA Corps today is more visible, trusted, and respected than at any time in our history. It is our agility, adaptability, and strong leadership that makes this possible. To sustain the public's confidence and our superior mission execution, while evolving to meet national and even global demands, we need officers who can do the following:

- a. Continually Reinforce Core Values. Character is a fundamental condition and represents a standard of excellence. Officers must consistently reflect the NOAA Corps core values of Honor, Respect, and Commitment. Integrity and transparency are foremost among the traits that we expect in our leaders. Through personal example, conduct, and decisions – every day, on and off duty – officers must instill the culture of our core values in their people. Our people have come to expect transparency and we must continue to make this part of our culture.
- b. Strategic Execution. We need to promote people who have the necessary technical expertise, management, and leadership skills to bring the NOAA strategy to life in our operations, support, training, and workforce development, regardless of their mission. Officers you select for promotion must be our best leaders and managers - capable of reacting and adapting to a dynamic operating environment and committed to igniting passion, motivation, and innovation in our people. They must ensure that all NOAA men and women, whether in operations or support, NOAA Corps or civilian know their critical role in mission execution.

- c. Think Innovatively and Act with Conviction: When confronted with a crisis, our people do not hesitate to assess risk, develop a plan, and take swift and appropriate action. We must select officers who have this bias for action, who can think on their feet, and be innovative in solving problems. We need leaders who are team players, who exercise on-scene initiative and flexibility, and who can take and manage risk, while exercising appropriate restraint. Look for major accomplishments and discount minor errors. Officers should be out in front, even if their methods or ideas seem unconventional, as long as those methods comply with law, regulation, doctrine, and core values. Officers should also apply these principles to those who work with them, encouraging innovation, and helping their people apply the lessons learned for continuous systemic improvement. We must focus on the effects we are trying to achieve rather than activities and levels of effort.
- d. Be Capable of Operating in a Dynamic Environment: We are ready today, and always preparing for tomorrow. Officers must be adaptable and flexible to meet these evolving challenges and should demonstrate those traits in all that they do. They need to see opportunity in change, be able to readily adjust to changing circumstances, and lead with optimism and energy. Change is a permanent feature of our Service.
- e. Embrace Partnerships and Unity of Effort: We need officers who can operate and support operations in a linked and seamless fashion with partners, whether it is part of a major response to an event or in better serving the American public. We need officers who know how to form key and successful partnerships and coordinate efforts with NOAA and DOC components; DOD; other federal, state, and local agencies; and the private sector. We value the experience gained in joint and interagency assignments when those experiences are applied to improve the NOAA Corps. We must also be effective in the face of organizational stovepipes and hesitant partners.
- f. Build the Future Workforce: To sustain superior mission performance and best position the NOAA Corps for the future, we need an extremely well-trained, educated and diverse workforce. Diversity is not limited to the traditional areas of ethnicity, gender, color, and creed. Diversity is also the diversity of thought, experience, perspective, and culture. We need officers to lead the NOAA Corps who value differences, who are culturally attuned to the world in which we operate and the people in it, and who teach and mentor their people. Our officers must also be firmly committed to equal treatment and opportunity for all personnel, and through their actions, must promote diversity and foster cohesiveness and equal treatment in the workforce.

Regardless of the board, you should consider whether an officer has made meaningful or extraordinary contributions within his or her area of responsibility, either in supporting or executing NOAA Corps missions.

- a. Our selection board system (commonly referred to as promotion boards) uses either a fully qualified or best-qualified standard for selecting officers. Selection boards are

designed to select those officers meeting the appropriate standard without regard to their particular career paths.

- b. Assignment panels and selection panels may consider career paths in the context of the specific panel's purpose as part of broader selection criteria.

In addition to looking for those qualities I mentioned above, these are some of the things you should watch out for as you evaluate officers' records:

- a. Description of Duties: Given the changes in our organization over the past several years, many officers are serving in assignments that may not be fully understood solely by their titles. In your evaluation, ensure understanding of the full scope of the officers' duties and assignments; carefully review the "Description of Duties" block of the officers' OERs (block 2). You should pay close attention to the overall scope of authority and responsibilities for all positions, command and non-command, operations and support.
- b. Assignments:
 - (1) Board members are reminded that while officers give input in their assignment process, ultimately, they are issued orders based on the needs of the Service. Boards should not base decisions on speculation as to why an officer was assigned to a certain billet or duty status.
 - (2) The NOAA Corps' operational excellence requires an array of skills and expertise. Every community contributes to our overall success. Each community is essential and provides its own path to leadership and technical proficiency, though opportunities for command may come at different levels and numbers depending on the community. Boards should consider operational or command assignments in the context of the composition of the current fleet, i.e. 299 officers is the absolute minimum number of officers needed to properly operate the current fleet. All officers must go to sea or fly, without exception. The board must select the best for the job, and therefore the board members shall place the appropriate weight on the operational or command assignment, whether it is based upon past performance or for future consideration. However, staff experience shall be a consideration as officers advance in rank because they must have the experience and knowledge to lead people, programs, and organizations.
- c. Officer Evaluation Reports:
 - (1) Numerous officers are serving throughout NOAA and interagency positions where they may have non-NOAA Corps supervisors. In reviewing performance for these officers, do not discount these records based upon the perception of unusually high or low marks or comments. Rather, consider the overall value these experiences bring to the NOAA Corps as we look to build our NOAA and inter-agency experience and talent. Reviewer comments are critical in

these assignments.

- (2) Officers may be detailed to full time university or advanced/specialized training. While assigned to these duties, the majority of OERs will consist solely of their course grades. There will not be, nor is there expected to be, detailed performance information while assigned to duty under instruction.

FOR BOARDS CONSIDERING SELECTION TO O-2 AND O-3:

You should seek to promote officers to O-2 and O-3 who are consistently demonstrating the enduring core competencies and leadership qualities set forth in my above guidance. Look for leadership, accomplishment, and adherence to our Core Values. Discount minor errors, as long as subsequent performance reflects lessons learned.

Officers primarily develop their specialty/ technical/professional expertise in the O1- O3 pay grades through assignments, on-the-job training, and formal education, or any combination of these. By developing expertise as junior officers, these officers not only contribute the expertise they have acquired, they lay the foundation for contributing to the Service at more senior levels. These officers should also be developing and honing their leadership skills.

SELECTION BOARDS:

NOAA Corps officers work within a military structure and our promotion system constantly renews our leadership ranks through the selection of our best qualified officers for service in the next higher grade. While many officers will be offered the privilege of continued service, the unavoidable reality of this system is that there will be very good officers who will not be offered the opportunity for promotion and in some instances continuation in the NOAA Corps. This situation creates an obligation for the members of the Officer Personnel Board to be mindful of the trust they bear for not only the future of the Corps, but also the future of the individual officer under consideration.