

MSG Selection Board

— a reviewer shares his findings

By CSM John N. Roberts

I would like to share with you my views on the files I reviewed of SFCs in the zones of consideration for master sergeant, specifically 54B. I looked at the records of career management fields (CMFs) 76, 94, 77, and 54. We [Chemical] are in much better shape overall than the other CMFs. Nevertheless, I encountered some significant problems that hurt the chances of our soldiers for promotions.

Many personnel (mainly officers) believe that it takes excellence ratings to get their NCOs promoted. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, an unjustified excellence rating immediately puts the NCO at a disadvantage if no credible information exists that substantiates the NCO's performance as outstanding. The most suspect of all was excellence ratings, except under PT. We promoted success!

The lack of rater bullets was suspect. The other side of the coin was bullets that said nothing: "Usually passes the PT test." "Always meets Army standards of appearance." "Has the *potential* to be a real leader."

Specific leadership comments from the senior rater are a must to help the panel select the best qualified. Potential doesn't count for much at the SFC level. Demonstrated potential is what counts!

Officers and senior NCOs ought to believe what they write on those NCO-ERs. If the NCO truly has demonstrated the leader characteristics of a platoon sergeant or first sergeant, then we as leaders should do everything we can to get him or her into that position. All too

often I read comments by leaders on division/brigade staff praising the leader skills/potential of NCOs who, incidentally, didn't have the leadership time. Those soldiers had remained in their present positions for three and four years. Platoon sergeant or equivalent time is a must for master sergeant promotion.

A significant problem: the height/weight information. Too many soldiers were 20 to 40 pounds overweight; yet the

NCO-ER indicated that these individuals met the tape test. My panel made inquiries for this very thing, and in the majority of cases, the individuals were overweight. Because there were plenty of NCOs who consistently met the screening table weight, overweight NCOs were not competitive for promotion.

I saw instances where an individual was overweight on one NCO-ER, all right on the next one, and overweight again on a third—all within a year. This reflects on the credibility of the chain of command. I believe we're too lenient on such soldiers and tend to view excess weight as an insignificant problem in an otherwise competent individual. But the fact remains that

this, too, is a standard that must be upheld—right along with PT and other professional requirements.

Far too many soldiers showed only high school graduation, a serious detriment for today's and future promotion opportunities. It's unfortunate, because most colleges participating in the Servicemembers Opportunity College program award service members at least one year college



credit in our CMF after completion of only one or two courses and an application for official evaluation. Offices and NCOs must seriously encourage off-duty college participation.

The absence of strong recommendations for leadership positions by the raters and senior raters sends a clear message to the panel: Don't promote!

I noted two particular phenomena dealing with non-54B jobs:

- The job of recruiter is a double-edged sword. Solid performance as a recruiter was a plus. Relief-for-cause NCO-ERs were common for failure to "meet mission." Those instances were generally viewed with a jaundiced eye. But in those clearly-defined reliefs-for-cause NCO-ERs associated with integrity, the NCO was at a big disadvantage.

- Too much time spent working outside one's CMF can be detrimental. There seemed to be a general consensus that more than two years out of the primary MOS hurt those NCOs who were going head-to-head for promotion position. A low SQT score only reinforced that conviction. [See page 17 for a letter from a 54B working outside the MOS. — Editor]

I believe that many raters and senior raters alike have turned ambiguity into a fine art. The whole premise of the bullet comments is to get to the heart of the what's being said. Too many comments left us guessing. We must do a better job of stating the facts, good or bad. It was particular-

ly refreshing to read the remarks by one lieutenant colonel who stated that "this NCO has reached his potential in the Army." Another officer said the NCO was not up to the required standards of appearance and military bearing. Conversely, many comments were positive and to the point: "NCO has proven his leadership ability through the success of his soldiers..."

Although I can't discuss specifics, I can tell you that the QMP effort during my board was substantial — both at the SFC and SGT level. Repeated weight offenders, driving under the influence, misconduct in areas related to integrity and/or professional standards, and history of poor performance were the target population.

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