Observations & Best Practices

FY23-24 IWC Milestone, Command, And Leadership Boards

The below provides professional development feedback from our two most recent administrative boards – *the FY23 Information Warfare Community Captain and Commander Command and Milestone Screening Board* and the *FY24 Information Warfare Community Lieutenant Commander Milestone and Leadership Screen Board*.

Intent is to provide a self-improvement and mentorship tool **for Reporting Seniors and Eligible Officers**.

We've divided the below into two categories: *Board Observations* from Members and Recorders…and *Best Practices* for Reporting Seniors and Eligible Officers.

Board Observations

The talent of the IWC officer corps remains exceptional. Sustained superior performance in all positions, and especially as demonstrated in milestone, operational, and leadership billets, remains fundamental to meeting the Best and Fully Qualified standard. Diversity of operational experience remained a key discriminator as well.

Sustained Superior Performance (SSP) translates very practically in a board and is demonstrated in the following ways:

- FITREPs consistently above Reporting Senior Cumulative Average (RSCA)
- "Trending to the right" (P to MP to EP) at each command/over time as viewed on the Performance Summary Report (PSR)
- Competitive breakouts – Hard (block 43) and soft, where possible (e.g., breaking out against other officers outside the IWC in your grade category, *"#X of Y LTs, all designators"*; or at a Joint Command against other Joint Force officers of the same grade *"#X of Y O-3s, all services"*)
- Consistent Milestone/Leadership/Command recommendations from Reporting Seniors in blocks 40 and 41
- Strategic Competition related performance characterized in block 41
- Increasing scope of responsibility and complexity over a career; this is often quantified by numbers led, budget managed, and complexity of work/projects/initiatives…

For *Raider Cutlass* officers, the same SSP standards apply across all assignments leading up to milestone and leadership assignments. It is vital to work with your Reporting Senior and/or a Raider Cutlass mentor to ensure these performance metrics are quantified at the appropriate level. The best course of action is to strive to clearly communicate the Best and Fully Qualified characteristics throughout every Raider Cutlass assignment.

Defined leadership assignments (e.g., OIC, XO, CO, etc.) are limited in the IWC, but <u>every officer has an opportunity to lead</u>. Think broadly about how to reflect leadership outcomes and your influence as a leader in your FITREP – <u>who and what are you influencing and how</u>? Once you sort that, make sure you are quantifying that leadership in blocks 29 and 40. More on that below…

Your career choices – and their timing – matter at a board. Not having observed FITREPs should be carefully timed. Officers should work with mentors and detailers to understand the risk incurred by non-observed time vis-à-vis statutory and administrative board timelines. COs can and should communicate with detailers to try get officers to graduate education and other milestone prerequisites early to allow for the run time to get observed performance into the PSR.

All assignments provide an opportunity to demonstrate SSP; milestone tours often become critical discriminators for selection to leadership opportunities. As such, officers should not pass up the opportunity to get to milestone as soon as possible as documented performance in milestone is critical to achieving Best and Fully Qualified for Leadership selection.

Best Practices

Advice to Reporting Seniors (RS)

As you know, FITREPS are the primary tool used by board Members to determine if officers meet the high standard of Best and Fully Qualified. Ambiguity in the report or non-alignment of RSCA with blocks 40 through 43 can send a confusing message to the board. Make sure there is alignment between Individual Trait Average/RSCA, your block 40 recommendations, any soft break out at the top of block 41, and the hard breakout in block 43. Anything needing explanation should go near the top of block 41 (see below).

- Block 29: This is a place to quantify leadership variables such as numbers of personnel led (civ/mil/contractor? Joint? Active Duty and Reserve Corps?) and type, budget, portfolios, etc.

- Block 40: This is an essential place for the RS to give the board a clear recommendation on whether the officer is ready for key community opportunities like Milestone, OIC, XO, CO, IW Commander, and Major Command. Ensure recommendations are reserved for the most qualified. Members focus on block 40 recommendations – **only give recommendations you legitimately support –** we are counting on your judgment of an officer's FITNESS for these key opportunities.

- Block 41: When earned and appropriate, a soft breakout is very helpful here. Also note anything pertinent about your RSCA ("managing my RSCA" or "First O-4 reports") or whether an officer is "stuck in traffic" or "no daylight" etc. Make these notes clear at the top portion of block 41. Where appropriate, close out the bottom of block 41 with a push for the same leadership recommendations in block 40. Again, if earned and if you can stand by them.

A few notes on Reporting Senior Cumulative Average.

- We have noted in the last several boards that some Reporting Seniors have a "policy" to make Selects a 3.0. This is not helpful. In all cases, it breaks a trend in performance for your hot running officers and leaves board Members uncertain as to how the officer is continuing to perform. Also, this "policy" is not executed consistently across all Reporting Seniors and as such your strong performing 3.0 select now is competing with officers whose RS continuing to track them above RSCA. It just isn't helpful in sending a clear message to the board, and doesn't help your officers.

- Any decline in individual trait average should be explained in block 41 (resetting RSCA, summary group growth etc.). Without any explanation, it assessed as a decline in performance rating. When you are giving back to back Ps or MPs, if the member is doing all the right things, show upward movement with an increase of Individual Trait Average. Not doing so sends a negative message to the board.

- For the O-4 Leadership and Milestone Board, Reporting Seniors should consider providing RSCA Letters to officers following periodic O4 FITREPs leading up to the board – this can highlight performance in milestone and also ensures that RSCA is known before the board (in the event the overall FITREP ingestion process at Millington is slow and PSR does not generate the RSCA).

Finally, Concurrent (CC/CR) FITREPs: CC/CR FITREPs *can* do more harm than good. All the same FITREP-writing 'best practices' listed above need to be applied to CC/CR FITREPs. If, as often happens with a CC/CR FITREP, the Reporting Senior is of another service, make sure you engage a senior Navy officer to review and engage the Reporting Senior to ensure "translation" of other service assessments into board recognized language and that the Reporting Senior understands block 43 distribution (e.g., it is not the USMC Christmas Tree, nor are there limits on "right blocking" per Army standards).

Advice to Officers Eligible before the Board

Ensure your record is up to date. We recommend reviewing your record annually and six months before a board. Identify anything that is missing or should be noted in a Letter to the Board (LTB). A recent gap in FITREPS or missing your latest FITREP is viewed negatively by Board Members. A LTB if free (!), the first item in your record briefed by a Member, and most effective when clarifying information or adding missing data. Generally you will want to be as objective and concise as possible and avoid "explaining" or evaluating your performance. In some cases, you may also have a letter from a previous Reporting Senior who is clarifying marks on a FITREP or what they intended to convey. This is often the exception rather than the rule, but is allowed and would be submitted via a LTB. Strongly recommend a mentor review the LTB before you hit send to make sure the tone is right. When in doubt, send to the Detailer for their review.

Statutory and Administrative Board Convening Orders are available online and a wealth of information on what the Navy, IWC, and your specific community are looking for as they select the Best and Fully Qualified. Even understanding what is fully qualified (e.g., criteria for consideration) is important and differs between statutory and administrative boards. You will do a better job writing your FITREPs if you understand the language in Convening Orders. Take the time to read them and discuss with your mentor.

A few specific notes for your FITREPs:

- See note above about reading the Convening Order and ensuring you are calling out your performance and competence in any of the key areas identified by Navy or your community.
- If you are in a milestone billet, call it out in block 41. The milestone lists change over time and it is best to clarify when you are in a milestone billet.

- The same block 29 guidance applies to you as to Reporting Seniors – see above.

- Remember that FITREPs are about your readiness for promotion, not your annual performance. You can have a great year but not yet be ready for promotion. A "1 of 1, EP" is not a guaranteed promotion, and an MP report can still get you selected if the circumstances are well documented.

Final Thoughts

Your Detailers are available to conduct records reviews, edit your LTB, and generally help you as you prepare for your next board – whether statutory or administrative. That said, you as an eligible officer must do your part – and that starts with a solid record review to identify missing information. More broadly, a records review can and should lead to a strategy session with your mentor and Detailer about career choices and how we can set you on a path for success.