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Building Better Brag Sheets

Reporting seniors are charged with accurately documenting the performance of all members of their command. Reservists may encounter their reporting senior only once per month, sometimes less. To aid in the accurate recollection of a sailor's contributions, all leaders (and sailors) should keep written, ongoing records of performance. These submissions are often referred to as "brag sheets."

Fitness reports (FITREPs) serve three functions: they document performance, provide feedback, and serve as basis for decisions by selection boards. Poor FITREP inputs are the inevitable result of last minute recollections of the year's contributions written in haste. FITREPs and OSR/PSR breakouts are the **single, most important element in promotion** decisions made by boards. Your best influence over that process is quality input.

Early implementation of our current FITREP format in 1995-1997 often resulted in reports that provided a laundry list of actions with no qualification of the impact. Trying to interpret these reports still frustrates boards today. Today, the standard is to write concise, meaningful FITREPs that document what the sailor **did, quantifies** it, and shows the **impact** of the accomplishment.

Long-winded narratives are difficult to read during boards. The preferred format is a series of short, concise statements called "bullets." A poor bullet might be, "Served capably and superbly as AT coordinator, completing all assigned tasks on time." Remember the formula for bullets: it tells what the sailor did, quantifies it, and shows the impact. A better bullet might be, "Coordinated 50

simultaneous AT periods, enabling supported command to deploy to Iraq." Write brag sheet inputs in this format. Condense final FITREP bullets down to their essence.

The first rule of a good brag sheet is that it starts the day after the last reporting period ends. Make it a working document that evolves and grows from month-to-month. Take five minutes at the end of the last drill to write down the month's accomplishments before heading for the parking lot. Consider using the NAVFIT98 software itself; the limited comment space in block 41 will provide the discipline to avoid writing too much. If you run out of room, discard the least important bullet. That way, your input gets better over time.

When writing FITREPs, or even brag sheets, write for the board. Document actions that demonstrate why this person should be selected for promotion, or serve in a command billet, or receive a pay billet. A good question to ask when writing a bullet is "so what?" Is there a meaningful answer to that question? If not, leave it out. For example, "LCDR Bravo completed the PRT with a score of excellent (low)." So what? Would that influence a board to promote Bravo to CDR? Probably not. Leave it out.

Comments that help a board make promotion decisions are those that show demonstrated leadership and measurable results with a definite benefit – especially contributions to one's supported command. Always put significant accomplishments from AT into a regular FITREP. Many boards don't look carefully at AT FITREPs; many commands no longer provide them.

A concern many sailors face is that they have to dig pretty deep to fill in a list of accomplishments for the year. Sometimes, they pile it pretty deep, too. "Fluff" never promotes; nor do PRT

results; nor 100 percent drill attendance; nor being in a church choir. If you haven't done much so far this year, shame on you. Get busy, get to work, and start documenting. Reporting seniors should resist the urge to fill white space with drivel. Boards will see through it and will lose respect for the writer.

Use midterm counseling to document accomplishments to date, and get the reporting senior to endorse them in writing. The final, signed FITREP becomes a matter of record, so ensure that you validate any claims. It is rumored that we could balance the federal budget every year with the aggregated cost savings claimed on FITREPs.

Remember that brag sheets may route through several layers of unit management; allow sufficient time for Admin, XOs, and COs to prepare smooth FITREPs. Input submitted three months ahead of FITREP time nominally loses only six days of observation. If you anticipate additional significant accomplishments, leave space, and provide an update with the missing information.

Entrepreneur Nido Qubein reminds us that "garbage in, garbage out" isn't exactly true. Rather, garbage in, garbage stays. Then it gets pregnant and gives birth to triplets. Anyone who has had a "bad" FITREP in his/her record knows this is true. The best way to avoid bad FITREPs is to deliver performance and to provide good, substantiated inputs in a timely fashion. Remember, your FITREP will influence your career long after your reporting senior has retired or forgotten about you. Make sure it is the very best possible.

Next month, I'll introduce you to some of our newest flag officers, who describe what it was like to get that phone call saying, "Congratulations, admiral!" ♪