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Managing Reporting Senior Averages

I have found no written guidance on managing reporting senior averages. As a result, I am consulted by commanding officers that have painted themselves into a corner by setting their averages too high. Avoid this error by planning for the future.

Fitness reports (FITREPs) and evaluations (EVALs) may be the most important document you sign as a commanding officer. The effects of a poorly written or graded report may persist for decades, perhaps years after you have retired. Learn how to manage your averages now so you don't leave a legacy of doomed careers.

The write-up made the difference. My first class made chief with a 3.86 EVAL in a peer group with a trait average of 3.35.

If you start at 4.50, you may find yourself in extremis if selected to subsequent command. I have seen RSCAs above 4.90 at selection boards. That makes it tough for your Sailors – either they're 5.00 or they're toast. More importantly, there is no way to differentiate superior performance.

I recommend starting your average at 3.50, and walking it up. An RSCA is "frozen" in time after 90 days; subsequent reports do not affect what is already recorded. Thus, the second group average could average 3.70, then 3.90, and so on. Each subsequent group fares slightly better than the historical norm. This creates the "Lake Wobegon effect," where "all the children are above average." This is not cheating; 4.1 percent of line O-5 applicants received a command

performer should be at least two "clicks" above your average; that's sufficient differentiation to catch the attention of a board.

Don't hesitate to use 3.00 reports for retiring Sailors as "ballast" to help keep your average in check. BUPERSINST 1610.10 permits these reports "to make the performance a matter of record." There is no prohibition against positive comments in block 41 on a 3.00 report.

If there is evidence of misconduct or a Sailor is being separated without being recommended for reaffiliation, don't hesitate to go well below 3.00. This is "dirtball ballast" and can rapidly bring down a previously inflated RSCA to a manageable number.

Keep in mind the relative importance of individual trait scores. Leadership is the most important. Leadership grades for CDRs and CAPTs other than 5 are often considered down-ticks. Professional

Poor performance			Avg	Good performance			Great performance			Superior performance		
3.00	3.17	3.33	3.50	3.67	3.83	4.00	4.17	4.33	4.50	4.67	4.83	5.00

Obtain your reporting senior cumulative average (RSCA) by paygrade at <<http://www.bol.navy.mil>>. This average updates on the first day of the month, 90 days after receipt of new reports. This provides sufficient correlation time for reports from the same marking period that arrive on different dates. Consult your average before writing any EVAL or FITREP. Although block 45 requires only summary group average, provide your RSCA to your Sailors. I recommend sharing this information with your unit when you take command. It helps set expectations and diminishes anguish at report signing.

If you are a new CO, or are recently promoted, you have a clean start in at least one paygrade. A common error inexperienced COs make is setting their initial summary group average too high. The trait average on a reporting senior's first report is irrelevant (provided it is not below 3.0). The first O-4 report I signed was a 3.50 for an officer who was then selected above zone for promotion.

billet this year; 77 percent of line captains received no pay billet. You need every advantage to take care of your Sailors. Officers who have worked for me have a disproportionately high promotion and command selection rate. What's your reputation?

There are 13 non-adverse trait averages on a FITREP, and 15 on an EVAL. I define non-adverse as not below 3.00. Using the FITREP as an example, we see that with a trait average of 3.50, there are three ways to break out negative performance, and nine ways to break out positive performance.

It is of much more value to a reporting senior to be able to identify clearly the top performers rather than the poor performers. You lose that ability with an inflated RSCA.

Avoid 5.00 reports. They usually are not credible to a board, and may actually hurt rather than help the Sailor. If you manage your RSCA correctly, you'll never need it. I've signed over 200 FITREPs and EVALs; my highest report to date is a 4.67. Your top

Expertise and Mission Accomplishment are a somewhat distant second. Equal Opportunity is a hygiene factor – a 3 is completely acceptable.

Remember that boards like to see progression "to the right." This means not only moving from P to MP to EP, but also a steady increase in trait scores from the same reporting senior (except upon a change in paygrade.) Do not try to cheat the system by splitting up a peer group to create multiple 1-of-1 reports. BUPERS is very adept at catching these, and a 1-of-1 report is not very useful anyway, since it doesn't show relative performance. If you're in command, make the call, and rank all of your Sailors appropriately.

When everyone follows these guidelines, any advantage will equalize. Meanwhile, manage your average, before it manages you.

Effective 15 June 2006, submit reports for E4 and below in the same manner as E5 and above reports.