

make a choice. As you move toward your goal, follow the ten rules. I can give you no guarantees, but they have been successful for me.

There are two more things that I have found vital to my career, and they may be vital to yours as well. First, I believe it is essential to have deep faith in a supreme being. Nothing else will help as much when things are not going as you have planned. Second, and of absolute necessity to me, is to have the

strength, support, and love of a family. This is a special kind of job, and most of us cannot do it alone.

The career you have embarked upon can be a wonderful one, full of challenge, reward, and deep satisfaction. You may notice that I have only touched on the subjects of ethics and integrity. My view is that if you don't have them, you'll run off your road anyway and won't need the ten rules.

Do your best, enjoy it, and have a

wonderful time serving your Nation and its soldiers.

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# Getting Promoted

## Advice for Staff Sergeants

LIEUTENANT COLONEL TIMOTHY A. SCULLY

Promotions to sergeant first class and above are now based on Department of the Army (DA) centralized selection instead of local boards. The 1993 Sergeant First Class (SFC) Promotion/Qualitative Management Program (QMP) Board reviewed thousands of records.

The board consisted of a brigadier general, who served as President, and 60 colonels, lieutenant colonels, command sergeants major, and sergeants major. Having served as a member of the board's Infantry-Special Forces panel, I want to offer my observations on the workings of this board, along with some advice on how you can improve your chances of being selected for promotion by a future board.

Actual selections for promotion were made by functional area panels. The Infantry-Special Forces panel looked at all soldiers in the promotion zone in career management field (CMF) 11 (MOSs 11B, 11C, 11M), CMF 18

(MOSs 18B, 18C, 18D, 18E, 18F), and CMF 37.

The panel members represented the entire spectrum of infantry and special operations forces: a former infantry brigade commander, two former battalion commanders (one infantry and one Special Forces), three command sergeants major (one major command, one division, and one Special Forces group), and two staff sergeants major (one major command and one field army). On the basis of this experience, needless to say, we had a pretty good idea of what we were looking for in our future sergeants first class, and possible command sergeants major for the Army of the year 2010.

The panel based its selections for promotion on written guidance from the Secretary of the Army, the proponent branches, and the panel's objective standards. Panel standards ensure that NCOs are examined only in regard to what is expected of their CMF contem-

poraries and that the voting standards within the panel were consistent.

Every record was then randomly selected and "blindly" voted on by three panel members, each of whom reviewed it separately. Each file was given a numerical score ranging from "6+" (Promote immediately) to "1-" (Do not promote—Select for QMP). The sum of the three scores produced a rank ordering of the files in each MOS, and promotions were made on the basis of the number authorized by DA for each CMF (select objective). Secondary zone files are voted on and rank ordered the same way and, when the quality of secondary zone files clearly outweighs that of primary zone files in that MOS, secondary zone promotions are made, up to the secondary zone select objective. In brief, every file is voted on and scored on the basis of its individual merits, and the number promoted in each MOS is based upon numbers established by DA.

Our panel rated each file on the basis

of its four components—the official photo; the Personal Qualification Record (PQR) (DA Form 2 and 2-1); the Performance Fiche (P Fiche) of the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF); and additional paper documents accepted by the President of the board.

The idea that a promotion board spends only one minute looking at a file is a myth. Normally, the first panel member “opened the file,” conducting a detailed look at the record and making notes on the Board Personnel Data Summary (PDS) sheet, which reflects the strengths or weaknesses of the file for the other two members. The others also review the entire file, using the PDS notes to cue them on specific places to look to formulate the vote. Early in the voting process, I took 15 minutes to “open a file,” but after a few days of looking at records I found that five to seven minutes was the norm for an average file. With the PDS notes as a guide, I spent significantly less time when I was the second or third voter.

#### Advice

Needless to say, being promoted to SFC is not easy. The competition is tough, and only the best make the cut. Your selection for promotion is not a reward for your past performance but rather a board’s vote of confidence that you will perform well at a higher level of responsibility. The board bases that vote of confidence on indicators of success as shown in your file.

This means that a board member shouldn’t be the first to review your records. You should. Your place on a promotion order of merit list will be determined by the strength of the panel vote on the components of your file. If you haven’t reviewed them recently, you should. Then have someone else look at them, someone who will tell you the truth about any shortcomings. You may be surprised. The four components are the following:

**Official Photo.** Your official photo is your personal appearance before the board, so look at it closely. Have a new photo taken as soon as you are promoted to each rank (between staff sergeant and command sergeant major), and then



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update it at least every five years. Make sure it is technically correct and that it reflects only the individual awards and decorations shown on your DA Form 2-1. Leave your unit citations, jump boots, blue cords, and backgrounds for jump wings at home. Get a good haircut, trim the mustache, and stand tall. After the photo is developed, look at it closely to make sure it is what you want the board to see. Even if you routinely need a waiver to meet weight requirements, it is better to have a photo in your file than to let the panel think you may be “too fat to photo.”

**PQR.** Panel members spend a great deal of time looking at the PQR (DA Form 1 and 2-1); it is the source document for cross-checking the information found in NCO evaluation reports and the photo. If the photo shows a Combat Infantryman’s Badge (CIB), the panel will look for the Combat Infantryman’s Badge on the DA Form 2-1. Likewise, the EIB is seen as a mark of individual excellence against which all infantrymen can be measured. Our panel looked closely at the DA Form 2-1 for a history of civilian and military education, promotions, and assignments. This form was seen as the most important document because of the candidate’s signature on the certification statement attesting to its accuracy. The panel was

not impressed when an NCO had not taken the time or effort to update and certify his records.

**OMPF.** The OMPF consists of three parts—service, performance, and restricted files—and the board is authorized to review only the performance fiche. The “P Fiche” contains both academic efficiency reports (AERs) and regular NCOERs, as well as commendatory and disciplinary (“C and D”) actions. All actions are on the fiche chronologically from oldest to most recent.

AERs are viewed as seriously as regular NCOERs because they reflect, not just a level of military education, but also professional excellence measured against contemporaries. NCOERs based on tough, high-risk jobs are worth far more than those based on relatively easy jobs. All jobs are important and should be done well, but the future belongs to leaders who go after the tough jobs and then do them well. In the infantry, the tough jobs are generally those that involve leading soldiers, and the more soldiers, the tougher the job.

The numerous documents in the “C and D” file often hide the really good things in the file, but they do not camouflage adverse actions. When a serious flaw is cited in an NCOER, the board member looks for a cross-reference

action in the "C and D." Although an Article 15 may be on the Restricted Fiche, the documents that revoke the Drill Sergeant/Recruiter Badge or deny a Good Conduct Medal definitely tell the board that the soldier has seriously crossed the line of good behavior.

While the panel members are reviewing NCOERs, they also look for a pattern of personal excellence. An NCO's real qualities are evident from his assignments and raters over a number of years. One great or poor NCOER will not make or break a career, unless it involves a Congressional Medal of Honor or a problem with "values." The panel members are bright enough to see through a personality clash and a "soft move" or obvious "love affair" between the NCO and his rating chain. The bullets on the NCOERs tell it all. Unsupported "Excellence" bullets are generally discounted by the board, and "fluff" bullets—which often mask real excellence—hurt the rated NCO far more than they help. A rater's comments should be specific and concise and should support the rating. Raters should just be honest and do what is right; the pattern of performance will outweigh or discount the "fluff" NCOER.

The final items considered by the board are the "hard copy" NCOERs and punitive actions that arrive after the zone cut-off date, and letters to the President of the board. This is not an invitation for an NCO to send a copy of each letter and certificate he has received since he came into the Army. Most of the documents I reviewed did more professional damage than good by highlighting blemishes on the record. Before sending a letter to the

President of the board, insist that someone else review it along with your microfiche to see whether it helps your cause or hurts it.

After all of these records are considered and voted upon, the file is scored and rank ordered by MOS, while the few NCOs with serious career flaws are referred to the QMP Board (a separate action).

Voting is difficult because only about 15 percent of the files clearly say "promote now" and another 15 percent say "do not promote." The remaining 70 percent are the challenge.

To gauge where you are professionally, you only have to look at your records and compare them with some obvious marks of professional excellence for promotion to SFC in the infantry:

- Success in a platoon sergeant, drill sergeant, or equally high-risk job.
- A pattern of well-documented excellence in NCOERs and AERs.
- Exceeding the standard in the Primary Leadership Development Course and the Basic NCO Course (AERs again).
- About two years of college credit; more would be better.
- An Army Physical Fitness Test Badge notation in NCOER/not needing a waiver to meet height-weight standard.
- The Expert Infantryman's Badge, which says it all.
- A pattern of awards recognizing superior service (Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal).
- Completion of a special qualification course (Ranger, Jumpmaster, Mortar Platoon Leader, Bradley Master Gunner, TOW Trainer).

These items are not absolutely necessary for promotion; the whole man is considered, and each has different opportunities. And if you have a blemish on your record, do not despair. If you've made a mistake, demonstrate that you know better and then recover brilliantly from that mistake. Go for the toughest jobs, and do them well.

You can always make yourself a better leader, a better staff sergeant, thus making yourself more valuable to the Army and individually competitive for promotion. Above all, don't quit. Ask yourself, "When was the last time I dug a defense or led the attack?" If it wasn't recently, get out where you can, and do it.

Getting promoted is not hard. You can be one of those selected if you do every assignment the best you can—even while attending service schools—keep working on college credit, make weight without a waiver, earn the Expert Infantryman's and Physical Fitness Badges, and go to the special qualification schools. Above all, stay out of trouble. Check and update your records, get your picture taken, and keep working on the hard jobs—the ones that lead to first sergeant. If you do, you will be well on your way to continued success.

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