



Notes from the Lunch & Learn Forum

How to Write a Promotable EER

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Speakers:

Richard Buangan, Managing Director for International Media, PA

Kathryn Cabral, Director, Strategic Communications Unit, HR

Sharon Hudson-Dean, Acting DAS for Public Diplomacy and Nordic/Baltic Affairs, EUR

Jamila Moumeni, Office of Performance Evaluation, HR

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

- The purpose of the EER is to demonstrate, through examples from the past year's work, that you have the potential to serve at the next level and have developed the skill sets necessary to do so successfully.
- Don't be anxious or stressed out about writing your EER. Be excited! It's an opportunity and part of your career path.
- Each EER tells a story of how you are developing into a senior officer and adding to your skillset. That includes taking on increasing management and problem solving responsibilities.
- Show you understand what the EER exercise is actually about. If your EER reads like a list of tasks, all you are showing is that you completed a bunch of tasks.

EMPLOYEE NARRATIVE

- Be mindful of too much scene setting or context. They are important, but the majority of space should be devoted to showing your impact.
- Mention stretch assignments or long-term periods in an acting capacity. These are good indicators you can successfully serve at the next level. No need to mention in your narrative that you are doing an out-of-cone assignment or that it is your first time in DC. It's obvious to the board from your PAR.
- One of the trickiest transitions is from being an action officer to being a manager who gets work done through their team. Adjust your EER accordingly to show how you developed and led your team and how you solved problems that rose to your level.
- Make sure there is nothing in your EER that will cause the board to stop reading—anything that interrupts the flow, requires a second read to understand, or raises a flag as inadmissible or borderline.
- Mention your next assignment in your narrative. Selection boards like to see how this fits into your career development arc.

- If you are up for promotion this year, read through your last 2-3 EERs alongside the list of precepts and note which ones are thoroughly covered and where your gaps are. Make sure this EER fills in those gaps. It's harder to find examples of substantive knowledge and intellectual skills. Leadership and management usually come easy.

RATER AND REVIEWER STATEMENTS

- Make your supervisor's life easy when it comes to drafting the EER. Find out what they want, in what format, and when. Be mindful of your boss's style as you are drafting items for them.
- You do not need throw-away lines on EEO or protecting classified. Only address in an EER if there is a problem with either.
- Raters and reviewers should make honest assessments about ability to serve at the next level. O2 officers with significant gaps in experience or mastery of precepts should not be recommended for immediate promotion.
- Avoid those Foreign Service words that seem to creep into EERS – "aplomb," "seamlessly," etc.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

- Think of your professional development sessions (formerly known as counselling) as part of the regular dialogue you have with your supervisor. When you go in to discuss your work requirements, you should have an idea of what skills you need to develop in the next year and have a conversation with your boss about how to do that. Continue those conversations in professional development sessions. Always be conscious of how you are progressing.
- The professional development sessions are your sessions. You should feel empowered to help set the agenda. Have a self-assessment ready and ask for feedback. Try to always leave these sessions with a piece of "homework."

AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Candidly identifying weaknesses adds legitimacy to your EER.
- However, make sure your Area for Development is not at odds with your narrative.

INADMISSIBLE COMMENTS

- Once you have a draft, compare it to the list of inadmissible language in 3 FAM 2815. Things creep in that you may not realize are inadmissible.
- Be conscious of unconscious bias: If you would not use that language to describe a man, do not use it to describe a woman.
- If your rater/reviewer refuses to take out something that you feel is biased or inadmissible, enlist help –the DCM if you are a JO, the EEO counselor at post, etc.

SELECTION BOARD PERSPECTIVES

- Selection board members go through several days of training and take their work seriously.
- It's very important that you ensure your personnel file is in order and complete.
- Yes, you can get promoted out of details or language training. Your most recent EER is not the only EER the board reads.

- PD officers are natural storytellers and have gotten very good at connecting their work to policy objectives. This showed in recent 02 to 01 PD EERs.
- Be mindful that EERs are read by officers from all cones who don't inherently understand your work or why it is important. You need to be explicit.
- PD officers do a good job documenting management skills, but make sure you show how that work fits into the mission.
- There is a strong distinction between DC and field experience. PD jobs in DC are harder to explain, so break it down to basics.
- Avoid hyperbole if you can't back it up with examples. The boards never want to see "This is the best officer I've ever worked with" in an EER again.
- Selection board members are generally in agreement on which employees fall into the promote, mid-rank, and low-rank categories. A file that shows the progression of the employee is very important. For example, taking on different roles with increasing responsibility vs. returning to the same role, but perhaps at a slightly larger mission.
- However, every officer wants something different out of their career. If you make lateral moves because that is what you want, that's completely fine. But don't be disappointed when you are not promoted.
- The rater and reviewer statements carry more weight with the boards than the employee statement.
- People don't "deserve" a promotion. They are "ready" and "show potential."
- If you are not leaving a blank line in between paragraphs on the new form, you are doing it wrong.
- Make very limited use of the special circumstances box. The fact that there was a 3-month gap is not special.
- Boards do consider award narratives, but the EER narratives matter more.
- Out-of-cone assignments do not disadvantage you. You can demonstrate mastery of the precepts in any job. However, long periods of time out of cone can signal an issue.
- One bad EER does not necessarily spoil the bunch. It can have an impact if it is your most recent, but if it is a few years back and you've demonstrated that you've overcome whatever it was that was deficient at the time, boards will recognize the progress you've made.
- If you have a gap in service that falls under a protected category (FMLA, for example), you can request a gap memo that states it is a normal part of a FS career.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- [Bureau of Human Resources Office of Performance Evaluation](#)
- 18 STATE 22718 "Straight Talk: Ten Easy Ways To Avoid Mistakes and Strengthen Your EER"
- 17 STATE 112070 "STRAIGHT TALK 2017: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS FROM THE 2017 FOREIGN SERVICE SELECTION BOARDS"
- "Stress Test: How Pressure Can Make You Stronger and Sharper" by Ian H. Robertson