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OFFICER
ADVISORY
GROUP

JO VOICE

Commissioned Officers' Effectiveness Reports (COERs)

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The information below, developed by CAPT George Durgin in collaboration with the Junior Officers Advisory Group (JOAG), is designed to serve as an unofficial guide. Please refer to USPHS websites for changes or updates to any of the below information.

Note: The responses to these JO Voice questions are the opinion of a single individual. It is recommended that officers use official sources (information from DCCPR on CCMIS, official communications from CCHQ, resources published by PACs) and consult with their designated agency/OPDIV liaisons for matters related to COERs.

Questions/Responses

1. What is a COER rebuttal? When should this be done? Please discuss and provide tips or examples on how to write a rebuttal.

According to the Commissioned Corps website, if an officer does not agree with a rating or comment on the COER, the officer may submit a rebuttal. A rebuttal is a narrative, limited to five pages, that clearly identifies and itemizes to which areas of the evaluation the officer does not agree. Officers are reminded that a rebuttal does not substitute as a remedy for a formal grievance. The Division of Commissioned Corps Personnel and Readiness (DCCPR) will not act on a rebuttal other than to include it in the eOPF adjacent to the associate COER. The rebuttal must only reflect comments or responses to the text and or scoring in the evaluation itself. Narrative comments that address personnel issues will not be accepted. The officer is required to sign and submit the rebuttal to his or her agency liaison. The liaison will sign the rebuttal and submit it to DCCPR. If the Rater and Reviewing Official (RO) wish, they may submit a response (limited to five pages) to the officer's rebuttal.

Before you take action, you should always review Commissioned Corps Instructions (CCI) and seek guidance before you concur or disagree with your COER. You should first go to CCMIS (<https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/>), review the links on the COER tab, and lastly click on the Rebuttal link. Read the current Personnel Operations Memorandum (POM) for the COER year and CCI 351.01.

Most often, if you actually talk to your Rater you may be able to get a better rating. If the Rater is not willing to modify your rating, then you should talk to your RO and provide examples of past COERs and other evidence of current work products that show you are performing above average.

You should also assess your ratings before submitting a rebuttal, as a rating of 5 or 6 is above average and may not be worth being rebutting.

After using your local resources, discussing with your Rater, Reviewing Official, and senior officers, then you should reach out to your agency Liaison. Reach out before you concur or disagree with your COER. It is easier to change your COER before it is finalized. In your discussion with the Reviewing Official, you can ask that they select one of the two options on the COER in Part IV c.:

- Although the evaluation is reasonable, the rater is somewhat more demanding than average; or
- I disagree with this evaluation

Make sure you the Reviewing Official justifies their selection in Part IV d.

If after using all resources and your Rater will not modify your COER, you have disagreed with your COER, and the Reviewing Official has completed their part, then you prepare your rebuttal. The instructions (https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/COER/COER_rebuttal_m.aspx) are clear and a sample is also provided.

I cannot over emphasize that you should resolve before you concur or disagree by talking to your Rater, your Reviewing Official, your third line supervisor, and lastly your agency Liaison. As a Liaison I have resolved COER issues using the following methods:

- Talked to the officer and explained that slightly lower scores by a new Rater is not career-shattering and that a score of 5 or 6 is above average.
- Talked to the Rater and shared past COERs for the officer.
- Talked to the Reviewing Official, shared past COERs, and reassigned the Rater per the Reviewing Official.
- Talked to the third line supervisor, shared past COERs, and reassigned the Rater to the Reviewing Official, assigned a new Reviewing Official per the third line supervisor.
- After a COER was completed, worked with institution leadership to have a paper COER completed by either the Rater or a different Rater and submit with an explanation why the COER should be substituted.

2. Should the COER include job-only related information or can you include some PHS-specific accomplishments? If PHS-specific accomplishments are included, what are some good examples that one should consider including in their COER?

Always refer to the COER instructions, Personnel Operations Memorandum (POM), and Commissioned Corps Instructions (CCI). The COER tab on CCMIS has the most up-to-date information and recommendations. Go straight to the source in lieu of word of mouth.

Section 2. Officer's Comments "Description" is related to your job. "Goals" can include work-related or long-term goals. "Accomplishments" are related to the eight performance elements (see link on CCMIS under COER tab). Review the descriptions of the performance elements on pages 3 and 4 of the COER (PHS-838) and use the examples to help develop your accomplishments.

When writing your Officer's Comments, list the most important accomplishments with the biggest impact first. List accomplishments during the rated period. If you received an award, look at the narrative and consider using language from the award. Do not only list items, rather, note what you did, what happened because of what you did, and the impact (e.g., money saved, lives saved, time saved, patient encounters saved). I recommend a short and concise bullet format with each bullet listing an act, the outcome, and the impact.

Finally, seek out your mentor, work colleagues, and senior officers to review your Officer's Comments, as you would do with your promotion Officer Statement or your draft Reviewing Official Statement. You may not be up for promotion next year, but a future promotion board will see your COER.

3. (A). When am I supposed to do my first COER? I commissioned on April 6, 2018, and was informed by my supervisor who transferred to another location in July that she would not need to do a transfer COER for me since I was commissioned less than 180 days by the time September 30th comes around. Does that mean I do not need to do a COER for 2018?

The first place you should seek your answer is on CCMIS, either the COER tab, the COER CCI 351.01, and/or the COER Personnel Operations Memorandum (POM). You should also consult with your Agency/OPDIV liaison. POM 821.68 (2018 Annual COER) says:

"4. Officers on extended active duty prior to 1 July 2018 are required to complete the 2018 Annual COER."

Therefore, you are required to complete the 2018 Annual COER.

(B). If so, my first COER would cover 10/1/2018-9/30/2019 year. Would that mean that my first COER would not be until the 2019 cycle?

If your supervisor transferred, you should do a Transfer COER that would be from 4/6/2018 to when your Supervisor transferred. This is a topic to discuss with your Agency/OPDIV liaison and within your work area as the second line supervisor may opt to do your COER from 4/6/2018 – 9/30/2018.

(C). Should I attempt to have a narrative made from my current or even past supervisor for the 2018 COER? My current supervisor is a civilian and may transfer in the next few months, so I feel that my supervisor may not be able to submit a narrative on my behalf.

This is a discussion to have with your past and current supervisor, along with your second line supervisor. I recommend an in-person discussion rather than emails that go back and forth. Provide the POM and CCI as a reference if there are any questions.