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1st AF Airmen get ‘mocked’

By Angela Pope, AFNORTH Public Affairs

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – For active duty enlisted Airmen, promotions hinge largely on the Weighted Airman Promotion System, and assignments are typically luck of the draw based on the needs of the Air Force. On the Air National Guard side of the house, it’s an entirely different story.



When enlisted Guardsmen seek promotions or new assignments, they normally have to compete for it by facing a selection board, which is basically the equivalent of going on a job interview.

On Feb. 8, 1st Air Force (Air Forces Northern) hosted a day of mock boards to help prepare its enlisted Airmen for that crucial stepping stone in their careers. Chief Master Sgt. Carl Collins, chief enlisted manager of the 702nd Computer Systems Squadron, was the driving force behind the effort.

“The board process is important in finding holistic Airmen who possess the skills and experience needed to ready them for the next stage of their careers,” Chief Collins said. “So it’s critical for enlisted Airmen to know how to sell themselves when they face that formal board. Through these mock boards, we are helping our members learn how to do just that.”

Airmen going through the formal board process face either an in-person board or a telephone interview. The mock boards covered both possibilities.

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The first half of the day was dedicated to in-person boards where each Airman interviewed with a three-member board panel, which usually consists of officers and senior noncommissioned officers.

For this round of mock boards, three senior NCOs from 1st AF sat on the panel: Chief Collins; Senior Master Sgt. Sandra Guillebeau, A-1 senior enlisted leader; and Senior Master Sgt. Harmony Thomas, A-6 superintendent.

The boards were conducted just as if they were true formal boards, but with one key difference: feedback.

“There is no immediate feedback from a formal board,” Chief Collins said. “Today, the mock board panel will provide the Airmen with feedback on their verbal and non-verbal communication skills, their effectiveness in answering the panel’s questions and their military bearing.”

One of the Airmen who took advantage of this opportunity was Senior Master Sgt. Kevin Thomas, Aerospace Ground Equipment superintendent.

“This is the first time I’ve ever participated in a mock board,” Sergeant Thomas said. “I jumped on the chance to do this when I found out about it. I’m looking forward to the complete, open and honest feedback the panel is going to provide.”

Sergeant Thomas reported into the room and introduced himself. The panel then dove into their questions. Each panel member asked three questions, taking notes as they listened to his answers. Once the question round was complete, Sergeant Thomas took one last chance to sell himself to the panel before exiting the room.

Normally, this is where the board would conclude. The Airman would wait impatiently to hear if they were selected for the promotion or assignment, their only real feedback being selection or non-selection. This time, however, Sergeant Thomas was allowed to come back into the room after just a couple of minutes to hear the panel members’ thoughts on his performance.

The panel evaluated Sergeant Thomas on everything from the way he entered the room, to the posture he maintained while he was sitting, to the answers he gave. Question by question, Sergeant Thomas received praise for the things he said well and advice on how to better incorporate key phrases and messages.

After receiving his evaluation, Sergeant Thomas felt positive about the experience.

“I feel today’s mock board helped prepare me for future interviews better than anything I could have done on my own,” he said. “The feedback was priceless.”

Throughout the morning, another senior master sergeant and two technical sergeants took part in their own mock boards.

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to telephone interviews. During these practice sessions, the panel members focused on verbal communication skills and the content of the participants’ answers.

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Though these mock boards don't have an impact on any of the participants' careers directly, Chief Collins said the boards should still be treated as the real deal.

"The key for these mock boards is for the Airmen to use them as if they are a true formal board," he said. "Once they step inside that door, they should act as though they are going up for a real promotion or assignment."

Mock boards and formal boards provide far-reaching benefits to the Airmen.

"Even if Airmen separate from the Guard, they can use the skills obtained here and apply them to the civilian world," Chief Collins said. "If you've completed several boards during your time in the Guard, you will be very well versed in the interview process, giving you a leg up when competing for a civilian job."

The mock boards were the first ones conducted by 1st AF. Chief Collins is working on standardizing the process here with the goal of holding mock boards approximately every two months, with the hopes of eventually including officers on the board panel and holding boards for officers.