

What is the secret to having a successful warrant officer career?

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Preface: In recent weeks, I have received a flurry of emails and phone calls from young warrant officers asking, "What is the secret to a successful warrant officer career?" As a result, I have decided to share my response, humbly and respectfully, for anyone interested, but I am primarily addressing young NCOs and warrant officers in my field.

I sincerely hope it helps.

What is the secret to having a successful warrant officer career? The short answer is that I don't know. The long answer is certainly inconclusive, mired in speculation, and based on my personal experience. Therefore, it should be considered less than credible, solely for its lack of scientific evidence, if not for its richly subjective predisposition.

Having said that...

For aspiring NCOs -- I would:

1. Clearly understand the role and lifecycle of the warrant officer.
2. Understand the Army's expectation of warrant officers as Soldiers, commissioned officers, leaders and technicians.
3. Exceed the minimum application requirements for one's WO MOS.
4. Be of good standing, meaning be trustworthy, loyal, physically, mentally, emotionally and fiscally fit.
5. Possess a deep, burning desire to serve a lifetime as a warrant officer.
6. Understand and accept future warrant officer pay, education, and promotion opportunities, including any perceived risks or disadvantages when compared to NCOs and commissioned officers.

For young Warrant Officers -- I would:

1. Recognize that being a warrant officer is a lifelong commitment to professionalism, including an expectation to pay homage and to actively contribute to a long history of service to our Nation by warrant officers.
2. Recognize, understand and contribute to the profession of arms. Study DA Pam 600-3 and other relevant Army literature that cite warrant officers. For example, study the history of your branch and discover how warrant officers contribute to the Army. Learn who the senior leaders are in your field. Study their careers and their "paths to success". A great place to start is the Hall of Fame for your branch; pay special attention to the warrant officer inductees.
3. Constantly study one's "craft". This requires a similar professional commitment to education that doctors use in the civilian world. Beyond our initial pre-selection training as NCOs, or our WO PME, one must seek opportunities for lifelong learning, e.g., attend conferences, participate in virtual networks/forums, confer with mentors, read professional literature, write for professional publications, and etc.

4. Continue to be a standard bearer in word, deed and appearance - on and off duty. Do not abandon the high NCO standards that helped contribute to one's selection as a warrant officer. This includes moral and physical standards.
5. Keep your relationship with long standing mentors that helped develop you, particularly with senior warrant officers and sergeants major. Don't disavow your special relationship with these senior leaders; rather, evolve it. Their sage advice will continue to help you grow as an Army leader, in similar fashion as their advice will most certainly shape future commissioned officer leaders.
6. Develop new mentorship relationship with commissioned, warrant, NCOs and DA civilians. Nurture these relationships and grow from them.
7. Serve your Family and unit. This implies that one understands what "serve" (a verb) really means, and will serve selflessly.
8. Attend Warrant Officer Professional Military Education (PME) courses at the earliest opportunity. Debate its worth after graduation.
9. Seek a minimum of an undergraduate degree, but not at the expense of learning your craft, or serving your unit. Consider degree completion and other degree producing opportunities, including graduate degree opportunities, e.g., Tlog. Express your educational goals with your rater, senior rater and career manager, especially for young WO1/CW2s, as a possible "second PCS option" (en route to second PCS location via PTDY).
10. Trust in our senior warrant officer leadership, particularly in terms of assignments. Serve where they ask...and serve well. Cheap advice: If given an opportunity to diversify one's career, I'd take it.
11. Learn early what right looks like on an ORB, IPERMs and DA Photo, and then simply maintain it. Develop a battle rhythm early to maintain one's permanent records and photos - and execute it throughout one's career. For example, review your ORB monthly, like your LES. Take a new photo whenever you update an award or rank.
12. Participate in all unit training and functions, e.g., APFT, ranges, OPD and social functions (and have fun!).
13. Serve the unit as a master "technical" trainer for your field and focus on the development of staff sergeants and senior NCOs in your field, if you will, teach them how to teach others "how to fish". Spend time coaching, teaching and mentoring junior officers, especially captains. Take time to listen to their concerns as they relate to your expertise.
14. Read and write often. Always seek improvement in your communication skills. Aspire to be published in your branch magazine.
15. Take pride in serving our Nation as a US Army Warrant Officer. Your outward display of professional pride will become contagious.

In short, I don't think there is a panacea for success as a warrant officer. Rather than trying to find one, I would focus my efforts on defining success -- as it means to my Family and me -- setting achievable goals and making realistic plans to reach them. Then, enjoy the ride trying to reach them.

Very respectfully,

Joel Lockhart