

TIPS ON WRITING AN EFFECTIVE DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE AWARD NOMINATION

NOTE: The tips presented in this paper were written by Gary Howe, Class of '69, who as Executive Vice President oversaw the Distinguished Graduate Award program for many years. Given his long-time involvement in the process, I thought his insights would be useful for nominators to see. Steve Simon

Most nominations fail because the nominator is a poor writer, the case is not compelling, and/or there is little evidence of having given back to the school.

Tip #1. You need to “sell” the nominee to the selection committee. Too many people assume that their nominee is so great that his/her reputation speaks for itself and it doesn't. I sent a package back to a former department head because he had written it like an OER performance report. A recitation of just the facts makes for dull reading.

Tip #2. Don't give a laundry list of jobs held. Usually, many people have held those jobs, especially in the military. Don't just tell what he did but tell how well he did it. Don't assume that everyone will understand what a job title implies. Likewise, if you are writing about civilian accomplishments, don't assume the retired military guys will know what the civilian jobs are all about.

Tip #3. Pretend you are writing a novel. My wife is an educational counselor and consultant and conducts seminars on how to write letters of recommendation for college admission. She says this: When you pick up a novel, the author will present the lead character who is, at that moment, a total stranger. If the book is to become a best seller, the author, in the space of a few sentences or paragraphs, must make the character come alive and make you, the reader, care what happens to him. The same is true for a college admissions officer or, in our case, a selection committee. You, the author, must make your nominee come alive.

Tip #4. Making 4-stars won't get someone the DG Award and building a business won't necessarily do it either. You need to say how Integrity, Service and Excellence have propelled your nominee.

Tip #5. Several worthy candidates have been nominated and not selected because although they did great, unique things, they sort of dropped off the radar after they retired and have not stayed connected with the Academy through time, talent or treasure. How well connected with the Academy your candidate is may be as important as his/her life's accomplishments.

Tip #6. The quality of the writing counts. The written narrative has no format but if you fill the entire space, you will lose the main thrust that you are trying to achieve. Divide the work into paragraphs, use white space to highlight your points. If you write it conversationally as though telling a story that will sell the candidate, you'll be giving your candidate his/her best shot.