



Under Canopy over Grim Reaper Drop Zone, Sheik Isa Air Base, Bahrain - Daniel C. Hodne, Colonel (USA, Retired)

By Daniel Hodne

Exiting an aircraft flying at 130 knots makes for an unnatural, turbulent, and adrenaline-charged experience.

Career change, in many respects, shares similar qualities.

In other words, the moment you've fully committed yourself to such a transition, you've exited the aircraft.

Military static-line parachuting necessitates actions, some of them reflexive, from properly stepping out the door (or off the ramp) to descending and landing safely. These actions may serve as metaphors for the checklist of a job transition process, with steps to be taken, and choices to be made when seeking a new position or industry.

They represent what you should *do*.

For example, checking your body position, checking canopy and gaining canopy control, and

keeping a sharp lookout during descent symbolize your inventory of skills and transition goals, expansion of your network, and conduct of your job search, among others.

However, with a rate of descent from *15 to 22 feet per second* (depending on the jumper's total weight with equipment), preparing to land in a manner that distributes the shock upon landing and reduces the impact or possibility of serious injury, warrants additional focus.

In preparing to land, head and eyes must be on the horizon, with feet and knees together and knees slightly bent, while pointing toes downward and waiting (not anticipating or reaching) for the balls of the feet to hit the ground.

It is a state of readiness, a position, and a posture.

It is your *landing attitude*.

It represents how you should *be*.

In transition, your landing attitude embodies your preparedness for the personal interactions, some of them being unexpected, that might lead to that next career or job position. These exchanges may be with members of your network, recruiters, human resource and hiring managers, or interviewers. First impressions not only matter, they could result in either success or failure depending on how ready you are.

This circumstance means that even with all of the correct steps in a transition process completed, proper actions taken, and good choices made, *your landing attitude can make the difference between a good jump and a bad one*.

Having recently retired from active duty military service to civilian life, *and* having completed a major change of industry (defense to healthcare), I've had some time to reflect upon what, at times, seemed to be an unnatural, turbulent, and adrenaline-charged experience. From this vantage point, I believe that *three traits made it much less so*.

Therefore, please allow me to suggest that when considering a career change or transition, your landing attitude should:

Be Open-Minded. The best opportunities may be those that you never could have anticipated, predicted, or ever saw coming. Even when you may think you are narrowing your focus to a particular industry or company, remain attune to potential breaks and other possibilities. Be self-aware, and mindful not to succumb to target-fixation, which may lead to missing the signs of other prospects.

Be careful not to self-select yourself out of a position. I recommend not ruminating over whether or not a specific opportunity is a perfect fit, especially if it involves changing industry. Perfect may become the enemy of good, and you may never find what you think you are looking for.

Rather, focus more on how your skills, expertise, and experience transfer and bring the most benefit to a potential employer. *Creating your own opportunities begins with an open mind.*

Be Alert. Your best break may occur at a time and place *not* of your choosing. As with your rate of descent, transition opportunities may emerge at a rate faster (or slower) than you expect. Do not allow yourself to be caught off guard! Your chance might be created from a simple introduction, an unexpected phone call, or an ordinary conversation.

Therefore, your response should be deeply ingrained in your memory, so much so that it comes off as natural and conversational, rather than memorized and stilted. *Always be ready to portray and describe yourself as the best-qualified candidate...*

which leads me to the last suggestion...

Be Articulate. *Your ability to eloquently, persuasively, and powerfully communicate your skills and value serves as your most important tool.* Capitalizing on a sudden opportunity depends on your proficiency to influence or shape someone's thinking about you. Using precise language to clearly articulate **who** you are, **how** you add value, and **why** you are the best choice will serve you well. Becoming fluent in how you talk about yourself may seem strange, but in transition, this fluency becomes essential. Your goal should be to be able to clearly convey that you are the right fit, at the right time, to bring the skills, experience, and expertise that a company needs.

Therefore, rehearse your introduction, retain talking points of your greatest strengths and accomplishments (not responsibilities), and be able to tell your unique story. Regarding strengths, I recommend reading Tom Rath's, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, and taking the assessment. The resulting "Strengths Insight and Action-Planning Guide" can help shape your narrative.

Update your LinkedIn profile and resume so they will tell more of your unique story, paint a more complete picture of you, and provide a means for you to be found by recruiters.

In Practice. I benefitted from participating in a networking program envisioned by Tampa

businessmen led by Mark Rosenthal. It started as a grass roots effort by the local Tampa business community to connect transitioning special operations personnel with highly successful individuals with broad-based experience in the civilian sector, and became known as the Special Operations Forces Transition Assistance Resource, or STAR, Program. The civilian partners range from entrepreneurs to Fortune 500 executives who all share a deep appreciation for our nation's military. In most instances, they are not the people in charge of hiring. They aim to help shape thinking and approaches to transition, and potentially make connections or open doors.

During one of the STAR networking dinners, I learned that one of the civilian partners, John DeMuro, worked for Moffitt Cancer Center. I already found this purposeful, cause-driven, and values-based organization to be very inspiring and intriguing. Therefore, sensing an opportunity in transition from military service to potentially contribute to another important and noble mission, I introduced myself to John, which led to a series of conversations.

For me, this landing attitude enabled seizing an opportunity and ultimately gaining employment in a manner that closely matched my expertise, experience, and skills, *and in a completely different industry*. I now proudly serve on the Corporate Planning Team for the only National Cancer Institute - designated Comprehensive Cancer Center based in Florida, and perhaps one of the most purposeful and mission-driven companies in the nation - Moffitt Cancer Center. #BeCourageous

Every transition story is different. Every jump is too. Either way, landing is inevitable, so I recommend carefully considering what your proper landing attitude might be.

Happy landings!

Colonel (Retired) Dan Hodne is the Senior Planning Consultant at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida. Prior to joining Moffitt's team, Dan completed a military career of nearly 26 years as an Army Special Forces Officer. Dan's career spanned infantry, special forces, and joint assignments, with operational experience gained from missions throughout the Middle East and northeast Africa, including combat operations in Iraq. While at the Pentagon and US Special Operations Command, he led critical planning efforts of national strategic importance for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense, and National Security Council.

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