

CAREER LEAP ONLINE COURSE

Turbulence and What to do About It

Transcript

Welcome back. At this point in the cycle we are still in-flight, and that may mean we encounter some turbulence.

Not every flight will be smooth. In fact, most are a bit bumpy! When you hit bad weather, it can be easy to start to lose confidence in yourself and wonder whether you will ever land safely. Stay strong and remind yourself why you decided to board the plane in the first place. Strap yourself in and focus on your destination. It helps to have in place something that makes it harder for you to turn back.

If you've ever worked on the implementation of a major IT system, you'll know that one strategy for dealing with resistance is to quickly shut down the old system once the new one has been launched. By doing this, people have no choice but to get over the discomfort of learning to use a new system. Forced to overcome their fear of the unknown, they adapt faster and keep moving forward.

When things get tough and you're searching for the exit, what do you need in place to make it harder for you to go back to your old work ways? If you've quit your job or you've been made redundant, it's likely you don't have the option of going backwards. The reality is your best way forward is to make your leap work for you.

For others, the solution may be going public. When you tell others about what you are doing it becomes harder to turn back — so tell everyone! Better still, get an accountability buddy to check in with your progress each week. At those check-ins, talk about what you committed to do during the past week, and what you actually achieved. Then set new commitments for the following week. A buddy can help keep you on track by challenging you when you default on commitments and encouraging you to navigate through them.

If you think having an accountability buddy will help you, take a moment to identify who that could be.

When you leap, you leave some things behind.

For Sandy Hutchison, CEO and founder of the startup Career Money Life, it was a successful corporate life as the Asia Pacific Human Resource Director of Marsh & McLennan Companies, a New York-based global professional services firm of 60 000 people.

While this wasn't her first leap, it was her biggest. As we spoke, she admitted that going from being part of a large, prestigious company to being alone with an idea and not much else is daunting. And

she stressed you need to draw on a great deal of inner resilience and self-belief, much more so than you would imagine. She found that with the lack of regular contact with others and as the structure

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and routine that is your daily life in a corporate falls away, you need to create new routines and structures that are entirely self-imposed. It can be hard to be both employee and boss, with only you to hold yourself to account.

In her experience, she said she found the most challenging stage of a career change is at the point of departure, when you are still connected to the past and what was, and not yet clear on what the future will be.

Sandy found she needed to create external structures to support her, including an advisory board. Her advice is you need to know your strengths and focus on those, getting other people to do the rest, otherwise you can spend a lot of time unproductively. Sandy learned a lot though the process, including the need to be simultaneously patient and persistent.

Before attempting to land the plane, the pilot runs through a landing checklist to ensure nothing has been forgotten. There are lots of variables to consider: the weather, crosswinds, visibility and turbulence, plus the pilot's experience, all combine to affect how well the plane hits the tarmac. Interestingly, a good landing isn't always a smooth landing. Too soft a touchdown may indicate that the plane has not fully landed and can still be pushed back into the air. The landing is complete, not when the wheels first hit the tarmac, but when the plane has slowed down and is taxiing towards the gate.

It's the same with your career landing: it doesn't stop until you're well and truly at the gate. You need to be prepared for this. You may think you're about to land (and start your new job), when the plane suddenly bounces up again because the conditions aren't quite right (your new job falls through). I've been through this before, both on a plane and in my career, and it's not fun. You feel you are so close, then you're not! Just as you trust the skills of the pilot to land you safely, trust your own skills and capabilities to see you through to a safe landing — eventually. It just may mean you'll be in flight a little bit longer than you expected.

However many attempts it takes to land, you may have mixed feelings once you have done so. There's the initial thrill of 'Yeah, I've got this,' then in the next breath, 'Wow, there's so much to prove now.'

Don't jump up, grab your stuff and jostle your way to be the first off the plane. You still have to collect your baggage and pass through customs before you can explore the destination. Take the time to congratulate yourself on a safe flight, because there is a lot more work to be done now you've hit the ground.

As part of my research, I interviewed Helen Silver. Helen has made multiple leaps in a career she describes as 'a serious wander — sideways, upwards, downwards and around'.

She has held senior positions in both the Victorian and Commonwealth public services. As Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Victoria, she led the Victorian Public Service through significant events; managed the transition of an incoming government and Premier; and led

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negotiations on a range of Commonwealth–State issues.

After 25 years in the public sector, she leapt to the private sector. To her, she said, it felt a bit like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute. In her experience there were fundamental differences in the machinery of the business that she knew she needed to manage. She said she didn't understand who she needed to talk to. This was in contrast to the public sector where she had no network or close colleagues to seek advice from.

Her response? She got out the organisation chart and set up meetings with anyone above or below her and with her peers. She set up meetings with anyone she thought might be connected with her business or who could benefit from her government experience.

Her advice also included being kind to yourself as you leap. She said too often you end up blaming yourself when things don't go completely right, rather than focusing on the circumstances and opportunities.

When you shift careers, you may assume the role of the adventurous tourist and relish exploring the new world you are in. You may wake up every morning, jump out of bed and think, 'This is awesome!'

Alternatively, either quickly or over time, you may find yourself stuck in a state of culture shock, wondering what on earth you have done. Your expectations of your new role and the reality that unfolds may be completely different. You may feel frustrated and constantly challenged or think, 'I've invested all this time and energy getting here and now I'm not sure this is what I want.' Whether you are happy playing tourist or are struggling with your new digs, your leap isn't yet complete.

To not find yourself stuck in a permanent transit lounge, there are two key steps to make your leap work: you need to embed your leap and then expand your leap.

Ok, so how do you embed your leap?

When you change careers, it can take a while to find your groove. At the start, you'll feel like the new kid on the block. You need to prove to yourself (and perhaps others) that the leap was a good decision. With a new career comes a new language, customs, expectations and challenges. It's natural for this to feel uncomfortable. It's your brain's way of telling you that you are learning something new.

So be kind to yourself and give yourself time to adjust. Explore the new terrain with an open mind, be a bit adventurous and ask lots of questions to get more clarity. In your early days you have the great advantage of being able to ask anything you want, because you're learning.

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Also remember to take the time to thank the people who helped you make the leap — your support crew, advisory board and network. It could be a hand-written thank you note or a public acknowledgement through LinkedIn. It's amazing how many people forget this small but important step. If you don't thank people for their efforts, they won't want to help you next time. Remember, you're still in a transition period, so anything can happen and you may need further support.

Whatever career you are now in — whether working for an established organisation or for yourself, in a startup, a not-for-profit or a government agency — there will be expectations about what you do and how you do it. You need to understand what these are quickly, and set about executing on them. It can help to focus on what you want to achieve in the first quarter.

An outstanding book on this subject is *The First 90 Days* by Michael Watkins. While written in an organisational context, it has applicability for lots of different working environments. I have read it multiple times during my career. It sets out the key steps to take to make sure you come through your first 90 days in good shape.

This is a critical time. Studies show that 35 to 40 per cent of senior hires fail within their first 18 months.⁴⁶ The figures are even higher for lower-level roles. A global talent management survey over three years, involving 5000 hiring managers and 20 000 new employees, found that only 19 per cent of new hires went on to achieve success.

Depending on the career you have moved to, you may or may not have a boss. This can be one of the most critical relationships to nurture. If you get off on the wrong foot, it can be very hard to recover.

Drawing on Michael Watkins advice you need to:

- Take 100 percent responsibility for making the relationship work.
- Clarify mutual expectations early and often.
- Negotiate timelines for the work you are doing.
- Aim for early wins in areas important to your boss.
- Seek good feedback from those whose opinions your boss respects.

You also want to take other deliberate steps to land your leap well. When you think about it, in your previous career, you were known for something. It's going to take a while to become known in your new career.

There are 10 key things you need to do to embed your leap. When you have been in your role for a couple of months, you can use the activity in your workbook titled "Embed my leap" to see how you are tracking.

Once you've embedded your leap, you want to expand it.

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You'll know when the leap feels embedded. You'll feel settled, but not too comfortable — just enough to feel like you know your way around the streets. Now is the time to be grateful that you took the risk, invested the effort and made the move to leap. It is such an awesome feeling — well done!

This is your Rocky Balboa, Jerry McGuire, Elle in Legally Blonde or Peggy Olson in Mad Men moment. Celebrate your success and reward yourself for all the effort.

Reflect on the progress you have made and what you have learned along the way. Consider what you might do differently next time, because there will be a next time. Remember, things change quickly. Jobs come and go. Throughout my career, the most successful people I have encountered never cruised along, doing the bare minimum. They were always on the lookout for ways to proactively expand the pie.

What have you learned as a result of this leap? What else do you need to do to further your career and add value at work? At the appropriate time, you'll want to set aside time to work through each of the questions in the 'Expand My Leap' page of your workbook.