

by Jim McCormick

I GOT MY
LICENSE

OFFICIAL
LICENSE

WHAT'S NEXT?

After getting an A License, new skydivers face what is perhaps the most difficult phase of their skydiving career: They must suddenly transition from the hands-on student phase to the hands-off phase of being a new but inexperienced jumper. As a student, they were in "Stage One" of their skydiving career and received lots of attention and assistance. No longer a student, they are now in "Stage Two" and

can sometimes become almost invisible at the drop zone.

New jumpers are excited about skydiving, but it may seem that no one wants to jump with them. They may end up doing lots of solo skydives. Worse, they may feel unwelcome and stop showing up at the drop zone. In either case, passion for the sport may fade entirely and cause them to move on to another recreational activity. But this doesn't need to happen. New





jumpers are the future of the sport. New jumpers, experienced skydivers and drop zone managers and owners can all make this challenging phase a success.

THE BRAIN TRUST

Because it is critical to skydiving that as many new jumpers as possible become active and talented skydivers, seven highly accomplished and prominent skydivers were asked to offer their insights for this article. They were all asked the same questions: “What advice do you have for a new jumper just off student status, and what can we all do to facilitate his transition into a competent intermediate skydiver?” This article presents their insights.

HOW TO FLOURISH AS A STAGE TWO JUMPER

1. Engage

As a Stage Two jumper, “you will need to affect a mindset shift. You’re in the twilight zone, and only you can move yourself through it,” advises Dan Brodsky-Chenfeld, founding member of Arizona Airspeed and manager of Skydive Perris. Be confident and assertive by

introducing yourself, ask lots of questions, and solicit endorsements from jumpers who know you. As *Skydiving* magazine’s 2007 Skydiver of the Year Christy Frikken puts it, you “want to create a social network that will help you accelerate your inclusion in your local jump community.”

Through it all, it is important to know that you are welcome, even though it may not seem like it at times. Most experienced jumpers are happy you’re skydiving and look forward to jumping with you. They also enjoy offering advice. You’ll be honoring them by asking for it. Do it. Ask them what kind of jumps they think will help you progress most rapidly. Ask them about exit techniques, tracking subtleties, canopy flying—whatever it is you want to learn. It will start a dialogue and make it clear that you want to learn and advance.

Opposite page: Don Tudor (top) and Kim O'Donnell fly a 2-way over Carolina Sky Sports in Louisburg, North Carolina. Photo by Don Carrington. This page: Sally Adams works on her sit-fly at the Couch Freaks Boogie in Fort Dodge, Iowa. Photo by Dan Robertson.

What to Do as a New Jumper

- » **Reach Out**—Ask lots of questions, and introduce yourself.
- » **Socialize**—Get active in the social side of your drop zone.
- » **Know That You Are Welcome**—Your fellow jumpers want to see you have fun and be successful.
- » **Be Confident**—Share your goals and enthusiasm; be outgoing.
- » **Load Organizers**—Seek out those who work with less-experienced jumpers.
- » **Tunnel Time**—Get into a vertical wind tunnel to improve your flying skills.
- » **Get Advice**—Ask experienced jumpers what you need to do to improve.
- » **Get Endorsed**—Ask the instructors and coaches you jump with to tell other experienced jumpers about you.
- » **Travel**—If your drop zone has limited assistance for new jumpers, travel to training camps or bigger DZs that do.
- » **Connect**—Meet other new jumpers, stay in touch by e-mailing and texting, and plan days of jumping together.
- » **Build Basic Skills**—If you want to learn to freefly, develop basic belly-flying skills first.
- » **Be Resilient**—Your efforts to get on jumps will not always be successful; expect it and don’t let it ruin your day. If you are turned down when you ask to join a jump, ask about the next one, a later skydive or the next jump day.
- » **Promote Yourself**—Let experienced jumpers know how you are progressing, what kind of jumps you are doing and how much tunnel time you are getting.
- » **Invest in Your Future**—You may need to buy a slot every now and then so an experienced jumper will join you. If you choose well, it will be worth it.
- » **Keep Jumping**—Even a 2-way is typically a better learning experience than a solo.

What Not to Do

- » **Lots of Solos**—Don’t do an endless number of solo jumps.
- » **Give Up**—Don’t let a frustrating day or an unsuccessful jump cause you to stop skydiving.



Skydivers who Contributed

DAN BRODSKY-CHENFELD

- » Founding member, Arizona Airspeed
- » Seven world and 19 national championships
- » Organizer, 300-way world record
- » Manager, Perris Valley Skydiving



2. Connect

Make a point of meeting every Stage Two jumper you can. They are some of your best candidates for jump partners. One experienced skydiver explained that every jump he did from number 25 to 75 was a 4-way with two other Stage Two jumpers and an accomplished 4-way competitor. They scheduled their jump days in advance, split the cost of the experienced jumper's ticket and developed their flying skills rapidly. The experienced jump partner also endorsed them to other jumpers. It had a snowball effect and worked; this person was soon competing on local 4- and 16-way teams.

Ask the lead organizers at your drop zone when you can join them. Let them tell you what skills you'll need to have them feel comfortable with you joining a group. Make note of their requirements, and start working toward them. Keep them informed of your progress and continued interest

in joining them. They may be willing to do an occasional smaller jump with you or be able to direct you to a fellow organizer who specializes in working with Stage Two jumpers.

3. Expand

Use vertical wind tunnels to accelerate your learning curve. It's not a substitute for jumping, but it will definitely help you advance more quickly.

Take advantage of the training opportunities that are available for Stage Two jumpers. Many drop zones have structured programs for helping newer skydivers advance. Skydive Elsinore's Excel Basic Camp and Echelon Freefly Camp are just two examples. Skydive Chicago offers a New Wave Boogie that is specifically for jumpers with fewer than 300 jumps. If your local drop zones don't have these kinds of offerings, get on the Web and do some research. There are lots of resources out there.



to This Article

AMY CHMELECKI

- » USPA Nationals gold medalist, 4-way VFS
- » Organizer, Women's 20-way head-down world record
- » Holds three head-down world records and one additional women's head-down world record

CHRISTY FRIKKEN

- » Member, Perris Fury
- » *Skydiving* magazine's 2007 Skydiver of the Year

JOHN HAMILTON

- » 8-way gold medalist, world championships

- » Owner and general manager, Skydive Elsinore

LARRY HENDERSON

- » Sector Captain, U.S. World Team 1999, 2004, 2006

ROOK NELSON

- » Organizer, 69-way head-down world record
- » Owner, Skydive Chicago

GUY WRIGHT

- » Organizer, 120-, 121- and 139-way two-point sequential skydives
- » Former manager, Blue Sky Ranch

Painless Ways for Up-Jumpers to Assist New Jumpers

- » **Introduce Yourself**—Welcome new jumpers into the sport.
- » **Remember Your Early Days**—Recall how much it meant to have an experienced jumper take an interest in you.
- » **Take an Interest**—Ask a new jumper about his goals and offer to help.
- » **Invest in the Future**—Do a few jumps with less-experienced skydivers.
- » **Stay in Touch**—Monitor the progress of new jumpers at your drop zone so you can include them in your skydives when they're ready.
- » **Maintain Perspective**—Think about the people you jumped with one, two or five years ago who are no longer in the sport. The only way to keep your local community vibrant is to actively develop new talent.



4. Cover the Basics

Both of the highly accomplished freeflyers who were interviewed for this article strongly advised against going directly from student status into freeflying. When asked by new jumpers how to start freeflying, vertical world record holder and organizer Rook Nelson advises to "get good at relative work, and build awareness by doing 50 to 75 jumps flat-flying, then ask again."

5. Invest in Your Future

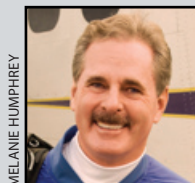
Traveling, buying tunnel time and paying for the help of experienced jumpers or coaches will all be additional expenses, which may well be justified. "Paying for coaching, whether in the sky or the tunnel, saves you money in the long run," is how vertical relative work gold medalist Amy Chmelecki puts it.

6. Don't Get Discouraged

Progressing through Stage Two will likely be frustrating at times. Don't let it

stop you. It will all prove worthwhile. You can look forward to moving beyond Stage Two and actively assisting new low-count jumpers who started after you. ♦

Opposite page, top to bottom: A 4-way team (clockwise from top center: Ron Hudson, Gregor Weeks, Arvel Shults and Scott Regina) dirt dives during a skills meet at Skydive Delmarva in Laurel, Delaware. Photo by Lance Lippencott. FS organizer Guy Wright sets up a base during Jumptown's Fall Festival Boogie in Orange, Massachusetts. Photo by Phil Roberson. This page: Ashley McNulty checks her altimeter while Nick Hersey deploys over Skydive Snohomish in Washington. Photo by Daniel Harmon.



MELANIE HUMPHREY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim McCormick, D-12379, is a speaker, author and PRO-rated skydiver with more than 2,800 jumps who has earned five formation skydiving world records. His most recent book, "The Power of Risk," can be ordered at www.takerisks.com. He is an active organizer at his home drop zone, Mile-Hi Skydiving in Longmont, Colorado, which is near his home in Estes Park. When not jumping, Jim is often climbing mountains in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Ideas for Drop Zone Owners and Managers to Consider

- » **Reduce the price of a jump for an experienced skydiver who helps others.** You may call it a "Mentor Rate."
- » **Have some of your load organizers specialize in working with new jumpers.**
- » **Make sure your organizers are really training and teaching.**
- » **See the cost of assisting newer jumpers as an investment in the future of your operation and the sport.**