

These notes supported a presentation made to the Coast Guard's Washington, DC-area "Chicken Club" – a congenial gathering of O-6s ... Enjoy & learn!

Planning for Your Coast Guard Retirement...

I had a lot of fun on my summer vacation after my Coast Guard retirement ceremony. I had a four-month sabbatical that reinvigorated me. It was my first "summer off" in over 40 years. I did the things I *wanted* to do (travel, play baseball, visit friends & family, attend to our long-overlooked home), not what I *had* to do. It was the culmination of a year-long transition from Active Duty to Coast Guard retiree ...

- The following is important because it's a forensic analysis of my decision to retire and the process of retiring.
- These were the steps, or phases, I went through in my retirement "process" ...

My Steps to Retirement

...Living a CG Career

...Making the Decision to Retire

...A Year of Planning

...Saying Thanks

...Enjoying the Sabbatical

...Beginning Career II

- You will all go through this phenomenon called retirement.
- Some of you will be forced to retire at 30 years' service, or earlier for some other reason.

- Everyone will have their reason(s) to depart the service – and it's good to know what your parameters are beforehand. (What's your tipping point?)

Living a CG Career...

- I had a great career highlighted by wonderful experiences, lots of opportunities... and many, many friends
- Got my résumé checks: Shipdriver, shore ops, budgeting, planning, strategy development, personnel management in Honolulu, Alaska, Cape May, Governors Island, Monterey, San Juan, DC, Key West
- Picked up for O-4 in 1992, got tenure, then my choice to stay with the Coast Guard became a Go/No-Go decision, influenced by two senses ...
 - o *what's in my head* (the numbers & facts)
 - o *what's in my heart* (the emotion)
- Didn't aggressively pursue outside employment ... loved my career, my family was happy ... but I always knew the numbers & facts on what it'd take for me to leave the CG
- I was a poster child for geo-stability:
 - o 1992 - O-4: CGHQ (G-CFM)
 - o 1996 - O-4/5: Key West (Group Ops)
 - o 1999 - O-5: CGHQ (G-OPL)
 - o 2002 - O-5: Washington, DC (CSIS)
 - o 2003 - O-5: CGHQ (G-CPP)
 - o 2003 - O-6: CGHQ (G-OPF)

- 2006 - O-6: Baltimore (Sector)
 - 2009 - O-6: Ballston (PSC)
 - 2011 - O-6: Retired
 - (16 of 19 years with no move! Our kids, Brandy & Sean, will have gone from 5th & 4th grades through college graduation without having to move (Lori's goal)).
- I found that Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's "Stages of Grief" Model applies to retiring. You *will* go through the stages:

**Denial – Anger – Bargaining –
Depression – Acceptance**

- It's important to know what stage you're in
- Realize that your position may change from time to time.
- The goal is to get to Acceptance – and stay there.

Making the Decision...

- **Spring of 2010**
 - While CG PSC Deputy, tapped for Deepwater Horizon.
 - Spent my days in the UAC, learning quite a lot about myself (fatigue, sleep deprivation, visceral distaste for miserable poli-bureaucrats not playing nice) and others (morale DOES matter, misery does love company, mean people have no place in my life, BP people are humans, too.)
 - Returned from DWH in July and had my "toes in the sand" moment

- Topsail Island, NC, beach while vacationing with my family and friends.
 - Tuesday morning, 10am, with the kids frolicking in the surf, I had this wonderful feeling of contentment
 - Inspired by a *Sports Illustrated* article about Floyd Little and the Pro Football Hall of Fame.
 - I turned to my bride of 24 years and said, "I don't need to do anything else to validate my career – It's okay ... I'm going to retire." – *that was my heart talking.*
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- Lots of reasons exist for anyone to stay in the CG:
 - need the work
 - love the service & its missions
 - enjoy the security & salary
 - don't have anything else to do

 - I've always counseled my folks to trust their gut – and my gut (my heart) told me it was time to go.

 - **What conspired to get me to the "Go" decision?**
 - Confidence: Executive TAPS, April 2010, a series of reinforcements from my "influencers" outside the CG
 - Observation: Never heard of a retired O-6 on food stamps; watched several of my O-6 supervisors/colleagues retire
 - Positive reaction to my passive-aggressiveness from the private sector
 - Lack of incentive to risk a "lightning strike": Didn't want to be an "SLFO" (this fed my ego, helped me cope) – due to moves & jerk-around potential

A Year of Planning...

- **Writing your retirement letter – easy to do**
 - The format is in the Personnel Manual.
 - Have two dates in mind
 - When you take off the uniform (ceremony date)
 - When you move to the “back of the book” (retirement date)
 - The delta between the two consists of variables
 - Terminal leave
 - Admin time
 - Processing time
 - Leave sold
 - Find a YN who knows what they’re doing to help calculate, then independently verify it
 - Work with your AO – some retirement dates are better than others!
 - Signing & delivering your letter is a significant event!

- **After your retirement is approved, the Admin process starts**
 - Work through the admin check list – it’s not your typical check-out list! Don’t blow it off!
 - ***** Your DD-214 needs to be accurate! Hello – are you listening? *Your DD-214 needs to be accurate!* *****

- **TAPS: Personal assessment, Résumés, Networking, Dressing for Success, Interviewing, Negotiating, Transition Nuances**
 - If you haven’t gone to TAPS yet, go now!

- Capitalize on the CG's Executive TAPS session – O-6s go on a waiting list
- DoD services offer super Executive TAPS locally, too
- If not Executive TAPS, then regular TAPS, or both!

- **Personal assessment:** Know what you want before setting out on retirement (Factors: Compensation, Location, Time Requirements, Excitement, Fulfillment, Risk, Family)
- **Résumé:** The toll for traveling the road to your next job
- **Networking:** Your roadmap to your next job; use your existing, extensive network; LinkedIn.com can be effective
- **Dress for success:** Overcome your current disadvantages of wearing a uniform for 20+ years
- **Interviewing:** Practice makes perfect (what's your message?) Here's the transition you'll see from a prospective employer:
 - "Who are you?"
 - "We like you"
 - "We love you"
 - "We have to have you!" < This is where you want to be ... your best leverage position when negotiating compensation
- **Negotiating employment terms:** Getting to Yes – it's not just salary ... many other compensation benefits/considerations are in play
- **Transition Nuances/Choices:** Pay (SBP, Insurance, 401k), Medical (VA C&P, Tricare, Dental)

- **Medical/Dental preparations**

- The VA's Compensation & Pension process is cumbersome, time-sucking, quixotic
- Get your medical exam done 270-180 days before your retirement date
- Find an advocacy group (Purple Heart, DAV)
- Trust, but verify! Keep a comms log!
- Take advantage of the VA's expedited claims processing (while on AD, <180 days from actual retirement) – this program promises a 2-3 month determination; the normal route can take 2-3 *years!* (That means lost benefits – there is no back-pay following your disability determination.)
- A VA rep visits CGHQ weekly – make an appointment via CGHQ's Medical Clinic

- **Ethical preparations**

- Get an ethical determination from your servicing legal attorney
- Many legal considerations affect your post-retirement employment
- Be attentive to DHS ethics rules!

- **Personal preparations**

- Money – what will it take to sustain your standard of living?
- Insurance – SBP vs a personally-designed plan
- Savings – Cash on hand for when you don't have a job – you won't have your Active Duty salary cushion any more
- Taxes – lost tax advantages after retiring (BAH, subsistence allowances, State tax exemptions)

- Find a finance/insurance advocate (e.g., First Command, Navy Federal, etc.)
- PPC Topeka has wonderful personnel to help you
 - Visit PPC's web site

Saying Thanks...

- A retirement ceremony is a two-way street
- Big or small, enjoy your retirement ceremony ("It's all *about* you!")
- Your ceremony is an opportunity to thank many people, and allows them to say farewell
- A little planning goes a long way to a nice ceremony
- Have fun!

Enjoying the Sabbatical...

- Only you know how much time you need to take off – ***FALSE!!!***
 - You're probably not aware of how much you've drained yourself down the final stretch of your career.
 - Remember how much you enjoyed time in-between PCS assignments (No cell phone, no calls in the middle of the night, no constant focus on your e-mail)? You can have that freedom again!
 - Use this time to recalibrate your physical and emotional self
- Many wish they'd have taken more time off after retiring
- Your retirement choices play into what you do, so plan, plan, plan
- "Buy time" via spending Terminal Leave or selling accrued leave – various sentiments exist on which is best; choose what best suits your desires

- Overall, “Celebrate – Relax – Enjoy” (thank you, thank you, thank you, Trisha Kelley!)

Beginning Career II...

- **Stages of an O-6’s transition, based on my observation of many predecessors:**
 - Late Summer/early Fall – Deciding to retire – huge positive reinforcement from prospective employers (“You won’t have any problem finding work.” But... “Your retirement date isn’t close enough for any meaningful conversation.”) – Self-confidence: HIGH
 - Winter – very little comms from prospective employers (“It’s our slow time.” ... “We’re not ready for you to start work.”) – Self-confidence: LOW
 - Spring – max flood of offers (“When can you start?”) – Self-confidence: HIGH
 - Making a choice – finding the right niche (“Is this right for me?”) – Self-confidence: LOW-HIGH – Knowing *what* you want to do will help your confidence.
- **Attitude progression while on the hunt:**
 - Passive: Not ready to retire, but willing to listen
 - Passive-aggressive: Willing to share a résumé if asked, networking, setting up lines of communication, letting the word out
 - Aggressive-passive: Actively working your network (LinkedIn, e-mail, expos/seminars/conferences)
 - Aggressive: Hitting the street, going online (biggest risk of making the wrong choice out of desperation)

- **Time to have the talk with your Significant Others:**
 - Have the conversation – what do they expect?
 - Retirement comes with Opportunity
 - No unilateral decisions
 - Goal is to live longer in retirement than time spent on Active Duty, so you and your SOs all need to be happy

- **Find coaches/mentors/advocates:**
 - Someone you trust
 - Someone you can learn from
 - Someone who will force you to answer tough questions about yourself
 - Use personal assessment tools (another reason to attend Executive TAPS!)

- **Cultivate your network NOW!:**
 - Your network will get you hired
 - Don't "cold-call" your contacts – grease the skids with months/years of connectivity ... it's poor form to call an old friend/colleague after a long time of no contact to search for a job
 - ~85% of jobs come from networking, vice responding to job postings
 - Ask questions - Talk to people about their jobs, their lines of work, their organizations

- **Share your résumé when you're ready:**
 - It's your ticket to further conversations
 - It will travel places you'll never go
 - You never know where it will land

- Build a master résumé, then tailor individual, 1-2 page résumés to suit the circumstances
- **Career II starts now**
 - Awareness is your first step (Remember, get to EK-R's Acceptance stage)
 - Attitude means a lot – Remember, people are watching you
 - Be a happy Captain
 - Transcend the processes
 - Your patience will be tested
 - Set your successors up to succeed
 - You probably won't have an on-scene relief
 - Know when to let go
 - Communicate – with you Boss and Subordinates
 - Programs, projects, activities will go on without you ... let them be
 - You probably won't have an on-site relief, so be nice to your interim relief

Overall, your personal awareness (knowing what you don't know), preparation (learning what you don't know), and planning will carry the day.

- Most folks only get to retire from the CG once, and you deserve to do it right!

[These notes will be posted on the HRSconsults.com blog.]