



The
10 **Commandments**
Of Skydiving...
by **Bill Purdin**

1. Be brave. When all is said and done (after we achieve peace with the statistics of skydiving), jumping out of that door at 13,000 feet still takes guts. So, thinking about it alone at home the night before, or in your car on the way to the dropzone, or even while waiting through a torturous 20-minute call, be brave. Those thoughts of “Why am I doing this?” are thoughts we all have. Whether it’s your fourth jump or your 400th jump, you are not alone in your trepidation. It’s normal. It’s healthy. *Listen to your apprehension, but be brave.*

2. Be careful. From your tandem on, remember one of the most salient and powerful skydiving sayings: “Only you can save your life.” In class, while watching the many training videos, in AFF, in debriefings, in the routines you establish, at exit, in freefall, at pull time, under canopy, walking back to the hangar, packing, moving your gear, driving back and forth to the DZ... in everything you do: be careful. *Never stop thinking about what you do.*

3. Be consistent. In skydiving, consistency is the mark of experience. Your proven pre-jump routines are vital and should be followed unflinchingly. If suddenly your routines are rushed, slow down, there’s always another load. If you find yourself taking shortcuts, start over from the beginning. There is a confidence that comes from gearing up, packing, planning, and jumping in a systematic and tested routine. Once you hit the airstream, anything can and does happen, but how prepared you really are for that awesome experience will greatly depend upon this. *So, be consistent in all the routine aspects of our sport.*

4. Be inclusive. Include others in your concerns, your questions, your triumphs, and your failures. Don’t worry if they will judge you or think less of you. Talk about skydiving with other jumpers and listen when others are talking about skydiving. Always include others in your jumping, expand your circle of skydiving companions. Everyone has something to learn, and everyone has something to teach. If you find yourself always jumping with the same people, get away from that exclusivity and be inclusive. *You will thank yourself for it, over and over.*

5. Be yourself. At its core, skydiving is an honest endeavor, because there is no way you can avoid its essential reality: what happens is up to you. Embrace that fact and be the skydiver that you really are, not the one you wish you were, or the one that others think you are, or want you to be. There is no excuse for joining a load that might jump lower than you are comfortable with. There is no excuse for making that “last jump” of the day when you are already tired and stressed. There is no excuse for jumping a pack job you are not confident of. So, relax. Don’t worry about who’s got how many jumps or what license level... be yourself. *It’s really all you’ve got anyway.*

6. Be studious. Skydiving is a physical and an intellectual activity. The history of skydiving is humbling and amazing. If you’ve got 1000 jumps and don’t know who Lew Sanborn, Ed Fitch, Ted Strong, Nate Pond, Bob McDonnell, Tiny Broadwick, and Faye Lucille are; if you don’t know the evolution of our sport from its beginnings to now... you’ve deprived yourself of one of the joys of being a skydiver. Plus, studying the USPA manuals and every evolving aspect of our gear design can only make you, first, a better skydiver, and, second, a better mentor for other skydivers. So study. As the poet said, “The more we study, the more we discover our ignorance.” *In skydiving, the discovery of ignorance is a true survival skill.*

7. Be patient. There are many skydiving elements that lend themselves to impatience. Resist them as you would thieves trying to break into your home. Standing in the exit, be patient in the count. During weather breaks, be patient in the hangar. During repetitive dirt dives, last minute load organizing, when the spot isn't right... be patient. When you're coming up on your designated pull altitude, when you're in line on final approach, as you near the time to flare at landing... be patient. When you're picking your landing spot, don't always try to be the closest to the packing area... be patient. When a newbie says, "How many jumps ya got?"... be patient. There is a substratum of intense anxiety in our sport and the only insulation there is for any of us is patience: with each other, with ourselves, and with all of the incredibly stimulating and complicated variables of our sport. *The rush will always be there, let's be patient on the way to the door.*

8. Be forgiving Things happen. When you think of how many things actually do happen from that first moment when you pick up your rig until that last moment when you close it up and put the pin back in again, it's easy to see that forgiveness will play a large role in your happiness in this sport. Jostling in the staging area, crowding into the plane, seatbelts, goofing around on the plane, screw ups on exits, taking out formations, rude or unaware canopy flying, crowded landings, no room in the pack area, annoying music... it's all there for you, and more. You can jump with a bad attitude driving yourself and others crazy or you can jump right over it all with a forgiving attitude. That attitude will really help you when you survive one of your own stupid mistakes. There is strength in forgiveness. *Start with yourself and then go forth and multiply.*

9. Be vigilant. Expect malfunctions. Expect packing mistakes. Expect mistakes in general. Expect mistakes in load organizing. Expect long or short spots. Expect the pilot to order everyone out at 1500 feet. Expect the bathroom to be full at final call. Expect you won't have an extra stow band for the first lock-and-stow. Expect to jump alone. Expect off-heading openings. Expect your toggles to bind. Expect the wind to change. Expect everything and assume nothing. *Be vigilant, ever vigilant. It's the skydiver's way.*

10. Be joyous. Every jump is a privilege and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Relish it. Enjoy it from start to finish. Freefall is the most exciting thing you can do on the planet. We are the first generation to do it in safety. We are the kings and queens of the sky. We play where others only gaze in wonder. We are only truly happy in freefall; we are only truly free in freefall. Our minds and bodies crave it, and once out the door there is a sense of relief and release that only skydivers know. Be joyous: there is no other way to put it. With all we put into this sport, all our preparation, training, experience, attention to detail; all the time we spend, all the sacrifices we make, and all each of us has been through to get where we are... we deserve it. So, just before you leap out into the sky ... remember to appreciate the unbelievable fact of being a trained, prepared, and good-to-go skydiver... *then jump with joy (and don't forget to pull!).*

And remember, the learning never ends.

Note: This article was originally written when the author had 96 jumps (B-24966), and was originally entitled: "Ten Things I've Learned In Skydiving," but it was published under this title (retitled by the editors) in Parachutist Magazine, July 2002. It is updated from time to time. The author, as of 6/30/07, had 1450 jumps (D-25555), is a USPA AFF, Tandem, IAD Instructor, Skydive University Coach, a freefall videographer, an S&TA, a Coach Course Director, AIC graduate and a frequent contributor to Parachutist Magazine.