

My View of KRWA: “Be Here Now!”

It is a privilege to serve at the President of the Board of Directors of KRWA for the next year. I appreciate the confidence other directors have placed in me and I take the role of President seriously. KRWA's board establishes policies and goals and it's up to the staff to ensure that those are carried out. KRWA provides outstanding services – from training to technical assistance on all aspects of water and wastewater utility management, operation and maintenance. KRWA's services are unmatched – and KRWA will continue to provide the best service possible because KRWA operates with a staff of 16 who have more than 410 years of experience. That's unparalleled.

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Having a successful organization – and one that doesn't fear standing up for systems, requires a level of dedication and, yes, at times persistence. I liken the matter of

persistence sometimes to perseverance. I am reminded of the comments that Jen Sharp related during the keynote address she presented at the KRWA conference back in March in Wichita. Jen explained the tragedy that occurred to her in a skydiving event and how she had to meet the challenge. I've asked her to summarize her comments. I personally cannot imagine being in the situation of personal crisis that she found herself in. While Jen did not deny the life/death urgency of the situation, water and wastewater utilities might ignore problems. Attending operator, administrative and board/council training is parallel to Jen's training which helped her cope with the crisis that confronted her. I hope you read her experience on page 5; it's spell binding.

Last, I want every member and non-member system operator, manager, administrator, board or council member to never hesitate to call KRWA. The KRWA staff members are ready, willing and able to provide help. If they cannot do so directly, you'll be promptly referred to someone who can. I am proud to represent an organization that is known and respected both across Kansas and the nation for its integrity and “kan-do” attitude.



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How NOT to Break a World Record

By Jen Sharp, from the KRWA conference keynote address



Calm inner awareness amidst outside chaos. A realistic view of your situation and your current resources. A clear vision for the most important goal.

Be... Here... Now!

That mantra I teach for succeeding in skydiving and in life may seem like useless rhetoric, but in the sunny skies near Chicago a couple of years ago, while falling at the earth at 120 miles an hour with less than a minute working time, I was challenged to put my own advice to the ultimate test.

I had met with another woman skydiver to try to set a world record for the most number of points, or times we could touch each other in freefall, for women over 40 years old. It was going to be easy, so I thought, because both of us were very experienced and skilled flyers. I was positioned in the door outside the airplane, hanging onto the plane with the wind in my face, ready to go. But as we left the plane together, my arm got pinned very briefly, for a split second, with my elbow against the frame of the door of the airplane, and my wrist pinned against my partner's shoulder. There wasn't a lot of force, but because we had so much speed leaving the plane, this momentary pinch put enough pressure on my forearm to snap my radius in half, like a toothpick! Instead of breaking a World Record, I broke my arm!

In extreme pain, I was confused and in denial at first at such an unexpected, fluke event. Injuries happen on opening or landing, not on exit. While my partner was looking around for our photographer, I took a look at my arm to assess what really happened, to wrap my mind around the reality that I was now in freefall with a broken arm. I now only had about 30 seconds to figure this out, and that hand was the one I use to pull my parachute open.

I took a breath in then out, resetting my body position, becoming neutral in the sky, not maneuvering, simply falling calm and stable. This effectively helped me slow time down in my head so I could decide what to do next. I could not problem solve. There was no way to "fix" a broken arm in freefall. Besides, I knew that focusing on a problem wastes valuable time and distracts you. So I focused on the main goal: get a parachute open. I couldn't survive without it. A broken arm couldn't kill me, but having no parachute open

would. This is where I had to use creativity quickly and persistently. I reached back with my broken arm and felt the handle but I didn't have any grip. I could not pull it out. I thought, **BE**: look inside and remember, I've handled difficult situations before, I can handle this, too. **HERE**: you go where your eyes go, so focus on what works on the positive, what I have available right in front of me. I have two parachutes in my container: my main and my backup reserve. I have two hands, although one works better than the other at the moment. And I had a little bit of time. **NOW**: Don't fix anything, just remember the main goal of getting a parachute over my head. I had ideas. I reached back with my good left hand and I could feel the handle, but my arm wasn't long enough to pull from the wrong side. I could reach around the front with my good arm, but I might go unstable which would get me entangled with the parachute as it opened. Another idea: I could pull my reserve parachute open with my left hand. I thought, I'll give it one more try with my injured right hand, but since I can't grip it, I could just push it out however I could manage. I reached and used the broken end of my bone to push out the handle into the air. The air took the pilot chute and the canopy started to deploy.

I did it! I had an open, functioning canopy over my head. But now, I faced another interesting situation... how to steer and land a parachute with a broken arm? Because it was painful to use my right arm, I steered to the ground only turning left the entire time. (In other words: two wrongs don't make a right, but three lefts do.)

In that life and death situation, I did not consciously decide to use Be Here Now. It was a habit from using that approach for years, consistently, every jump, and in my teaching. It was an attitude of persistence in the face of challenges. It was an approach of using creativity and positive thought processes instead of getting inundated with problems or complaints. It was a decision made long before to focus on what's really important and keep going until the goal is met. And while that approach literally saved my life in a skydiving incident that particular day, developing and using it had long before saved my life metaphorically.