



Mission Family: Make the most of every transition resource

By: [Karen Jowers](#), November 21, 2015 (Photo Credit: Thinkstock/Staff)

When separating from the military, check your ego at the door — along with what you think you know, an Air Force spouse advises.

Mina Baldinger and her husband, Ron, who retired from the Air Force in May as a colonel, spoke about their transition at the National Military Spouse Network's fifth annual career summit.

The couple soaked up every bit of information from every source — from “anyone and everyone,” Mina said.

Similarly, Ron's best advice for going through a transition is to “talk to the many people you know who have made the transition before you.”

That was critical, Mina said, because “we really didn't know what we were doing — and we're still figuring it out.”

As Ron put it in a later interview: “You don't know what you don't know.”

He said he found the transition course offered to all departing troops quite helpful. For example, he learned to seek the help of a veterans service group when filing for disability benefits. He did that right away, and took it to the VFW. “They did it all,” he said.

He also found solid assistance at his local Airman and Family Readiness Center, and local family center.

“They exist for that reason ... they want to help,” he said.

Through networking, he also found out about an Office of Personnel Management directorate that helps vets structure their résumés when seeking particular government jobs.

“The most important part of transition is being on the same page,” said Sue Hoppin, founder of the National Military Spouse Network, noting that the Baldingers indeed “were on the same page. They did it as a team.”

Mina Baldinger said her most important advice for couples is to support each other through the process. “It’s a team sport,” she said. “Don’t turn on each other. It can be very stressful. We have three kids, we bought this house. ... But we’d been together as a team in the military, and this is no different. We’re a team.

“If he was having a bad day, I had to have a good day,” she said, and vice versa — if she had a bad day, he’d do something to pick her up

“It’s a big transition. You can’t not go through it. You go through it well and be happy with each other, or go through it angrily and be miserable.”

They both were surprised about their ability — each other’s ability — to make the transition from the military lifestyle. “Can I ever be normal and get along with civilians? Yes, you can,” she said.

And now, in true military family fashion, Mina said she’s interested in passing along the benefits of what she learned.

“I would love to help other spouses in transition,” she said.