

## **Fulfill Your Potential To Fly Higher**

Donald W. Mitchell

Young people have always looked upward and outward . . . seeking opportunity, freedom, adventure, and guidance. But they rarely search for practical routes to fulfill their high-flying yearnings. Dr. Roy Rissanen is an exception. His experiences show how you can grow beyond your starting point to live up to your high-flying ambitions and potential.

Growing up in his native Finland, Dr. Rissanen was a typical boy, enjoying mechanical devices from flying models to motorbikes. After finishing his A-levels, he completed his national service in the Green Berets in the Finnish army.

Two years after that, God's spirit descended upon him, and Dr. Rissanen became a newborn Christian. That call changed everything.

Within two years, he felt called to begin training as a missionary pilot. Four years of hard work followed during which he earned private and commercial pilot licenses and an instrument rating.

A missionary pilot needs to know about more than how to fly airplanes. To prepare for his calling, Dr. Rissanen took a missionary training course and also earned a certificate in business studies so that he would know more about organizing flight operations. To prepare for a post in Africa, he attended an orientation program for missionary pilots in Africa and began to study Swahili in earnest.

Dr. Rissanen's work as a missionary pilot began in 1993 and involved flying single-engine planes in undeveloped areas to transport missionaries, patients, and supplies to churches, missions, and humanitarian organizations. Dr. Rissanen kept learning. He completed an air transport pilot's course in 1996 and continually updated his earlier pilot training. In 1999, he took courses in pilot training and instrument instruction. In 2000, he was trained to be a check pilot for his organization, Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). In 2002, additional training led to him becoming a training captain for MAF.

His ground responsibilities also expanded beyond pilot training to include serving in a number of roles including base manager, operations manager, and program manager. During those years, he flew extensively in Tanzania and Kenya and helped with humanitarian flights in Rwanda during the strife there.

In his spare time, Dr. Rissanen and his wife co-authored *Iron Bird* in 1998 and *Flight over Yurts* in 2001.

A new continent and a challenge attracted Dr. Rissanen in 2000 when he was asked to establish a new branch of MAF in Mongolia, requiring that he learn yet another language. When this task was accomplished amid much praise, he returned to Africa where he flew extensively in delivering aid to south Sudan during the civil war there.

Feeling the need to add even more management and leadership skills and knowledge, Dr. Rissanen began to study management in 2002 at Rushmore University (an online school). He was fascinated by what he learned and decided to study for a Ph.D. after earning his M.B.A. in 2004. During the Ph.D. program, he did highly original research and thinking concerning the best ways to train bush pilots.

Encouraged by his new knowledge of leadership and management, Dr. Rissanen began looking for a new position and new opportunities after 2004. He founded three new companies, one each in business consulting, book publishing, and graphic design, to see what could be accomplished in private business.

Through the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, in 2006 Dr. Rissanen gained a new leadership position as regional representative for the Middle East based in Jerusalem, putting an end to his years as a missionary pilot. To commemorate those flight accomplishments, he published an autobiography in 2006 called *Heavy Metal Wings* and sponsored a traveling exhibition by the same name that was seen by over 5,000 people.

In the new role, Dr. Rissanen works on developing strategies for promoting local churches, peace, and social justice in the Middle East. Much of this work is done through partner organizations and requires much coordination made more difficult by challenging political, religious, and ethnic tensions.

Dr. Rissanen reports that his business and doctoral studies prepared him well for these new challenges. He says:

“Regarding leadership capability, the Rushmore education has enabled me to jump to an entirely new level. It is satisfying to notice that the people seem to listen carefully to what I say. This is not because of my personality or the position in the organization but because there is constructive no-nonsense substance in the message.

“My thinking is geared to resolving business problems and how to produce the best possible practical results effectively and efficiently. The Rushmore education has molded my brain to apply this conceptual question to all areas of my life. Because my thinking revolves around it all the time, it is also inevitable that I speak it aloud in whatever context I am.”

What’s ahead for this high-flying man? He comments that: “Life is very exciting and there is no limit in sight to how far we could explore.”

As you think about his successful example, realize that Dr. Rissanen followed several sequential paths that many people don’t explore including:

1. Becoming clear about his religious faith.
2. Acting on his faith.
3. Learning new skills needed to fly higher.
4. Moving to where those skills can be most fully developed.
5. Using his spare time to learn more.
6. Stepping up to new challenges.
7. Keeping an open mind about what else he might do.

Are you ready to act on your desire to fly higher?

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