

MENTOR

THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

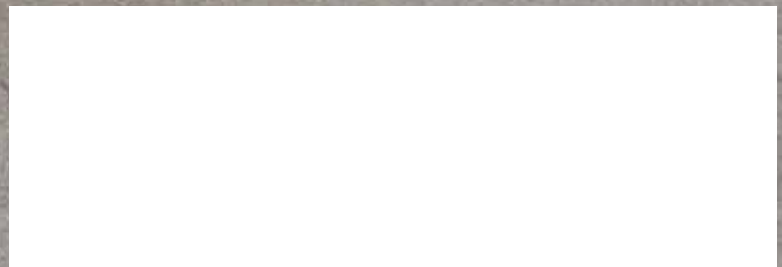


May 2011

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 5

'Learn to Fly' Month: 21 Ways to Sell Flight Training

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MENTOR

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Mentor is a how-to magazine dedicated to improving the teaching skills of aviation instructors of all disciplines

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Cover photo: Jason Blair

position Report

Fighting for Survival

Quality flight training takes on new significance



Jason Blair, MCFI
Executive Director

Summer is almost here, and we're all starting to ramp up our learn-to-fly efforts. As flight instructors, we've got our work cut out for us, too; even with hard work by many well-intentioned industry associations, pilot organizations, and flight-training providers, the U.S. pilot community continues to shrink, and the half-empty glass is in need of a refill.

Recent AOPA research showed that more than 70 percent of student pilots drop out of training prior to completion; when interviewed, many said they didn't finish because of the relationships they had—or rather, *didn't have*—with their flight instructors and flight schools. The rest of the industry has taken notice, and suddenly, we instructors are the biggest obstacles to general aviation's recovery.

Houston, we have a problem.

We like to think we're skillful teachers, knowledgeable pilots, and capable professionals who provide the best service possible to our customers. Our interactions with our customers show us that they have many reasons for stopping their training, including family commitments, work obligations,

and financial limitations, so we don't like to hear—much less believe—that it's our fault customers don't finish their training.

But while we may not believe it, perception has become reality, and these days a good instructor isn't just an educator but a motivator, too. We should be proficient in both flying and counseling, capable of working well with different personalities, know the marketing triggers that keep customers coming back, and be able to sell the vision that participation in aviation is priceless—and we have to do this even after our students get their certificates and move on to whatever they'll do next. That's a lot of weight on the shoulders of an instructor, but it's exactly what seems to be expected lately. It's no wonder we're stumbling under the industry's expectations.

Still, none of us would argue the fact that our role is vital to the success of training, and we know we're the point of contact for anyone who's pursuing an aviation career, hobby, or first-flight experience. If our efforts aren't positive, effective, and valuable to those customers, we can, and occasionally do, turn students away before

they complete training. We have more influence over—and responsibility for—these new pilots than anyone, or anything, else in aviation. Sure, the businesses that provide rental aircraft are important, but they're mostly infrastructure. Association membership and magazine subscriptions provide connections to the larger flying community, but they lack the personal advice that comes from a trusted instructor. Fly-ins and air shows may build short-term excitement, but they can't keep a pilot active throughout the year. And with so many interactions, we get the greatest number of opportunities to either create a positive experience or inflict one that turns students away.

Today, more than ever, we face a challenge: We need to make each student start count and, as a community, find a way to address the concern that we're failing the industry. By doing the first, we'll start to fix the second; NAFI has always been an association for professional instructors, and it's you who will inspire your colleagues by sharing your insight, your best practices, and your success stories.

Last year, we had more

We have more influence over—and responsibility for—these new pilots than anyone, or anything, else in aviation.

certificated flight instructors in the United States than student pilots; if the aviation industry doesn't rekindle enthusiasm for flying and send more prospects our way, we'll see even more disappearing infrastructure, attacks on pilot access, and faster-growing costs that may eventually mean pilots won't be able to afford recreational aviation. There's enough blame for all of this to go around, and it shouldn't fall solely on the instructor community, but we're the focal point. If we don't lead, we'll be forced to follow.

As you focus on training your new crop of students this summer, reflect on the vital role that you play in aviation's future. Treat every customer contact as the event that could make or break that person's future as a pilot. More than ever, we can't afford to lose a single one. ■

your Feedback

'Other' Issues, Revisited

I feel compelled to respond to the letter written by Brad Schroeder in the January *Mentor*. It's not often that what is in *Mentor* is so completely on target, and what he has written is simple and to the point.

I found your response to his letter troubling. I would also add that the so-called "benefit" from Falcon Insurance Agency for professional liability insurance is far too expensive for independent instructors in rural areas to afford. If I charged \$300 to \$400 per hour, I just might be able to afford the cost. Tort reform must happen soon, or independent instructors will not exist—or they'll teach with no liability protection.

As for the FAA looking to re-evaluate its method of renewing flight-instructor certificates, why does it have to be every two years? Pilot certificates are not. It serves no purpose, and it is not cost-effective. I have mixed feeling on flight instructor refresher clinics (FIRC); the online versions are terrible and provide no benefit. I find the classroom type more productive, only because I get to meet other instructors and the discussions that are possible.

The actual need for the FIRC is questionable. I do think that time building by instructors to obtain higher ratings is one of the things that has caused great harm to the professional instructor industry.

The article by Chuck Copley shows he gets some of this, but he's missed the rest of it. He presents some weak conclusions in some parts of his article. I am glad you printed both of them, and I hope a lot of discussions result from these articles.

Eric L. Lindley

Successful Selling

Jason Blair's Position Report for the February *Mentor* was excellent. Eighteen years ago, I pondered the purchase of a Tampico trainer, but I

balked at the price. The salesman, who was very smart, gave me some advice: He suggested I read a book called *How to Sell at Margins Higher Than Your Competitors* by Lawrence L. Steinmetz. The book is still in print (it's around \$20 at Amazon.com). Blair doesn't seem to need to read this book, but I think it's essential reading for anyone who desires to succeed in business—whether it's flight training or other endeavors, and it deserves mention in *Mentor*.

Patrick B. DeLacluyse

TSA Documentation Errors

Regarding "TSA Identifies Top Documentation Errors" in the February *Mentor*, which describes where the Transportation Security Administra-

tion gigs flight schools for non-documentation or non-compliance with security awareness training. Hasn't the TSA anything better to do? When are we going to tell the TSA to get their heads out of the sand and do real security work? It's a fact that they don't check all flight schools, and they don't check independent flight instructors because, as told to me by TSA officers, "We don't know some flight schools exist, and it's hard to get in touch with independent instructors." I wrote my senator complaining about their logic, and the TSA's reply was that the "threat is coming from the flight schools." There are more holes in their logic and security than the Dutch boy's dike.

Woody Minar ■

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Lighting the Fires

Study shows pilot boost from EAA's Young Eagles program

Kids who take Young Eagles flights are 5.4 times more likely to become pilots than those who don't experience those first-flight opportunities, according to a joint EAA-FAA research study that examined the long-term effects of the program. The study matched the names in "The World's Biggest Logbook" and the FAA pilot rolls; since 1992, 1.1 million young people have participated in the program.

Nearly 8 percent of pilots below the age 35 were Young Eagles, the data indicated. That's notable because early participants in the program are just approaching the points in their lives where they can afford to learn to fly, according to EAA. Additionally, 9 percent of those pilots are female—a 50-percent improvement over current demographics, where only 6 percent of pilots are females.

The data also suggest that the older a Young Eagle is at the time of his first flight, the more likely that young person is to become a pilot; those ages 13 and up are especially more likely to pursue a pilot certificate, and two in 100 who take their flight at age 17 become certificated pilots. Furthermore, the more flights a Young Eagle takes, the more likely that person will become a pilot, according to EAA.

"Since the Young Eagles program began, it has become the most successful youth aviation education program in history," said EAA Chairman Tom Poberezny. "Now with nearly 20 years of flights by EAA-member pilots, the numbers show that Young Eagles is making an impact on the pilot population that is unmatched by any other single program." ■

NAFI NEWS

Runway Safety Concerns

At an April Runway Safety Council meeting, the FAA noted that pilots caused two-thirds of this year's runway incursions, and of those, 80 percent involved general aviation (GA) pilots. While serious incursions are down for the year-to-date, the overall rate is slightly higher than the agency's targeted rate, even though total GA operations are down.

The FAA's focus on runway-incursion prevention will soon lead to a change in practical tests. Incursions will no longer be a special emphasis item; they'll be an area of operation in the future. This is expected to begin with the CFI practical test standards (PTS), followed by the private pilot, instrument pilot, and commercial pilot PTS.

NAFI supports this change, and we recommend that instructors emphasize this material with their students, even before it becomes an area of operation on practical tests. As instructors, we have a responsibility to help our students and customers remain vigilant in avoiding runway incursions. Take the time to work with your local airport users; this isn't a positive trend, and the flight instructor community has the ability to reverse it for the remainder of the year.

Member Receives FAA Award

Stephen K. Brown, an aviation safety inspector at the FAA's Boston Flight Standards District Office, a longtime NAFI member, and a

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two-time NAFI Master Instructor, recently received the FAA's Eastern Region "Excellence in Public Awareness" award. The award honors a flight standards employee who most effectively publicizes and promotes the FAA story to the public through sponsoring or attending public forums and media events, participating in aviation education activities, authoring articles, and briefing aviation user groups.

Brown was recognized for his assistance with the FAASTeam and associated CFI workshops; promoting, speaking, and instructing at Junior Achievement; aviation career expos and the EAA AirVenture Learn to Fly Discovery Center; flying Young Eagles; and assisting with Runway Safety Action Team activities and air shows. As a pilot, Brown actively participates in the FAA WINGS program at all levels and maintains currency in light-sport aircraft and aerobatics.

Bose Supports NAFI as a Corporate Supporter

Bose Corporation has extended its support for the flight-instruction community and for NAFI by renewing its corporate sponsorship; as part of this, the company will continue to offer special prices to NAFI members and a referral program for members whose customers purchase Bose products. You can take advantage of the special pricing and referral program Bose offers by logging into the members-only section of www.NAFINet.org or more information. ■

Giving Professionalism to the Pros

NAFI seeks member input on career-pilot NPRM

by Phil Poynor

At the recent National Training Aircraft Symposium at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, participants discussed the upcoming notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) that will cover the 1,500-hour experience requirement for airline first officers, anticipated issues it creates, and brainstormed ways the industry might respond. While it's too soon to know what NAFI's official position on this NPRM will be, all four of the participating regional airlines clearly defined one significant problem: a lack of professionalism in new-hire pilots. NAFI would like to explore this issue and find ways that flight instructors might address the problem.

This is the kind of issue that our Member Professional Standards Committee is designed to work on, and with that in mind, I'd like to ask for help from three or four members to address this concern. In particular, the input from instructors who work in the air-carrier training environment—either for a regional airline or a simulator training facility that does Part 121 training—would be especially helpful. If you're interested, and you have time to commit to regular discussions and activities, we'd like to hear from you. Contact NAFI's executive director, Jason Blair, at NAFI headquarters, and let him know of your interest, and we'll get back with you.

Phil Poynor is chair of NAFI's Board Professional Standards Committee. ■

Status Updates cont. from pg. 4

out marketing efforts to reach consumers across a variety of touchpoints. The truth is, there's no one silver bullet to influence people that are choosing local businesses on or offline."

Customers go to different sites as they research a business, the study showed. More than half of adults visit two or more websites before checking out a business. Of those, two-thirds start at Google, a quarter start with Facebook, and 21 percent go to review sites.

Regardless of the social-media outlet your customers choose, they said they value seeing the business owner's feedback, comments, personality, and thoughts on the store's fan page or blog as they're deciding whether to do business there; those comments carry as much weight in the customer's decision as input from friends or reviewers. In fact, 47 percent of respondents said they were more influenced to try a business because they liked the owner's online persona rather than from the referral of a friend.

In the end, that makes these relationships come full circle. Not only does that increase the likelihood that they'll do business with you, it'll also build their loyalty to your brand, according to researchers at the University of Southern California. The greater that attachment, they found, the greater "sacrifices" a consumer will make to connect with or remain connected to you—including spending more time, money, and energy to purchase your services, defend your brand online, and promote you through these social-media communities. ■

Writing Wrongs

Studies suggest writing exercises boost student learning

Students beginning flight training may find they're entering what's almost a foreign culture—one with its own language, traditions, and customs. Add that to what can be complex book knowledge they must master, and they may find the challenge more intimidating than they expected. Worst case, it may drive them away from learning to fly.

By looking at how students approach similar complex subjects—including university science courses—researchers who completed two recent studies determined that having students do informal writing tasks as they learn can help them digest and analyze material before classroom sessions and lessons and increase their comprehension of the material. Such “reflexive writing” is “a way of getting students to wrestle with materials and grasp their meaning, rather than just summarizing,” said Calvin Kalman, a professor of physics at Concordia University, whose study was published recently in the journal *Science & Education*.

The process works like this: Students read a section of their textbook before they discuss it in class, underlining or highlighting key material. Afterward, they free write on the section, with the intent of examining the concepts. In their writing, they can explore how they'll use the information, connect knowledge to what they've already mastered, and determine what areas they need to ask questions about later. In addition to classroom study, it can also be used to describe flight lessons or other learning experiences, learning that's occurred in the course to that point, or critical incidents they've encountered.

In broad terms, students use reflexive writing to describe their responses

to new information, their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings about new experiences and their reflection on their mistakes, successes, or areas where they were unprepared, instead of just repeating information from the text or lesson, summarizing the lesson or their course notes, or making straightforward observations. Likewise, it's not a formal essay; it's more of a 15-minute journal entry or self-assessment done after each study session or lesson. The process works because it allows students to form a personal response to experiences, situations, events, or information, and it serves as a “processing phase” where critical thinking and learning can take place. It also links past experience to current learning, connects practical experience and theoretical book learning, and clarifies what the student is learning and why. In that sense, it builds critical thinking skills and decision-making.

For his study, Kalman interviewed science students three times during a semester to determine how the process helped their learning. “They felt that they had to put the information into their own words, which really helped them refine key concepts,” he said. “Reflective writing gets students to initiate a self-dialogue about texts and ask: ‘What do I understand?’ and ‘What do I not understand?’”

Those results are similar to those in another study by Ann Marie VanDerZanden, an associate professor of horticulture at Iowa State University, who found that students' quiz scores increased nearly 58 percent after they completed similar reflexive-writing exercises.

The writing assignments are appropriate for any technical training, VanDerZanden said. “This method of teaching provides an opportunity for the instructor and students to approach a technical subject in a creative and engaging way.” ■

Industry News

Program Promotes GA Airports

Pilots can participate in “Explore Maryland by Air,” a program sponsored by the Maryland Aviation Administration, to experience that state's airports, aviation museums, and aviation-safety events. The program starts May 14 and provides three levels of recognition for pilots and passengers with stamps in passport booklets and unique awards.

By visiting 10 different public-use airports, one aviation museum—including the College Park Aviation Museum, the Massey Air Museum, the Glenn L. Martin Aviation Museum at Martin State Airport, and the Patuxent River Naval Air Station Museum—and attending one FAA Safety Team seminar, pilots can receive a “Fledgling” level award and a baseball cap. Those who visit 20 airports, two museums, and two FAASTeam seminars will receive an “Albatross” award and a set of glassware, and those who visit all 36 airports, all four museums, and four FAASTeam seminars will receive an “Ace” level flight jacket. For more information, visit www.MarylandAirportManagers.org.

Cessna Partners for New Sim Program

Cessna, King Schools, and Redbird Flight Simulations have developed a program that couples video instruction with simulator training called Guided Independent Flight Training (GIFT). It will launch exclusively to Cessna Pilot Centers in

cont. on pg. 8

Negative Stereotypes

Women customers wary of service providers

Women prefer female service providers in situations where they might fall prey to stereotypes about their math and science abilities, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. When faced with male service providers, they may wonder if they will receive unfair treatment or become an easy target for manipulation.

“One of the most widely held stereotypes in North America is that women’s competence and aptitude in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) domains is less than men’s,” wrote the study authors, who demonstrated that stereotypes about women’s STEM abilities shape women’s consumer behavior. They found that women shun situations in which they fear they will be the brunt of the stereotype—especially those that involve male service providers in transactions that call for STEM abilities.

In the study, female consumers who are reminded of their gender identity expressed lower intentions to purchase service from firms that advertised themselves with male service providers; in this case, this pattern occurred for a tax firm that touted its service with male investment advisors and in automobile repair and purchases.

“When the threat of being stereotyped is in the air, consumers become anxious,” the authors wrote. “A rise in consumer anxiety, in turn, is the very driving force behind women’s disinterest in transacting with male service providers or salespersons.” ■

School News

UND Adds Skyhawks to Fleet

The University of North Dakota (UND) has ordered five new Cessna 172 Skyhawks to add to its training fleet for delivery in July and August. The order is part of a multi-year deal to modernize the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences’ fleet of single-engine piston aircraft. The additions will bring the training fleet to 63 Skyhawks, the largest single fleet of G1000-equipped Skyhawks in the United States.

ERAU, DSU Add DA42s

Diamond recently announced fleet sales of DA42 twin-engine aircraft to two U.S. collegiate aviation programs. Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University–Prescott will take delivery of four DA42 NG aircraft before the new school year begins in August. The DA42 NG incorporates twin turbo-diesel AE300 engines from Austro Engine.

Delta State University, in Cleveland, Mississippi, will take delivery of three DA42-L360 airplanes. The aircraft, outfitted with counter-rotating Lycoming IO-360 engines, will be delivered this summer.

Cessna Adds Flight Training Schools to Cessna Pilot Center Network

Cessna Aircraft Company has added three flight-training organizations to its global network of Cessna Pilot Centers. The new members include Integrated Innovation (dba Stinson Flight Training Center) in San Antonio, Texas; Springbank Air Training College, in Calgary, Alberta; and Exploits Valley Air Services, in Gander, Newfoundland. ■

Industry News cont. from pg.7

May and works with the entire line of Redbird simulators. The program is designed to lower the time and cost of training while exploiting technology to improve instruction. Students can choose from any maneuver required in private pilot training, watch a video demonstration, and fly each as many times as they wish, allowing them to perfect their aircraft-handling skills at their own pace in a low-cost simulator.

Sporty’s Highlights “Community” as Best Practice

To overcome the potential loss of student pilots, Sporty’s Academy engages these newcomers into the airport community through a multi-prong approach that helps inspire and support them, says academy President Eric Radtke.

The academy hosts Saturday lunch cookouts year-round to serve free hot dogs and allow student pilots to interact with other community members, and its Learn to Fly blog is written by school instructors who post on a broad range of aviation topics—from training to just enjoying the freedom of a pilot certificate. Combined with safety seminars, open houses, and social media outlets, including Facebook and Twitter, these programs help customers stay involved in the airport at all times, Radtke says.

Sporty’s Academy also honors learn-to-fly milestones by presenting awards and plaques, as well as signage, newsletters, and news releases about student accomplishments. Soloing students also participate in the aviation tradition of having their shirttails cut and framed, Radtke says. ■

instructional Tools

V:ONE Pilot Sunglasses Offer Substance, Style

The V:ONE Classics Collection consists of the Magneto and Altitude lines of sunglasses and fuse practicality with contemporary styling for pilots. Slender metal frames, narrow side arms, and high-grip rubber temple tips reduce blind spots and maximize comfort, and the frame's curvature ensures that your eyes' entire field-of-vision is protected from every angle. Both lines are available for \$157.95 at www.AircraftSpruce.com.



Book Answers Questions About Learning to Fly

Flight instructor and NAFI *Mentor* contributor Chris Findley wants to encourage more people to become pilots and become aviation advocates, so he's written *You Can Be a Pilot*, which answers the 25 most-common questions about flight training.

Findley discusses everything from the initial desire to fly, to the first solo, to the checkride and beyond to provide a plain-language overview of the training process. "It's really a book I hope CFIs and flight schools can make available to new or potential students," he says. "It'd be a great gift after a discovery flight or for those who have a friend or acquaintance they want to introduce to the world of flying." The book is available for \$12.99 at Amazon.com and from the book's site, www.YouCanBeAPilot.com. An unabridged audio version is available as a free download with purchase of the book.

Logbook for Apple Products Available

Users of Apple Mac computers and iPad and iPhone devices can seamlessly keep an electronic logbook with Coradine Aviation's LogTen Pro software. The fully customizable logbook allows you to rearrange columns to match old paper logbooks or tune everything for your specific operation. You can track custom currency and duty limits, compile reports for most official formats, and even export your schedule to iCal or Google calendar. Logbook data can be quickly imported from Windows-based systems as CSV or tab-delimited files, and it can even import crew schedules for airline pilots. The software is free for student pilots; for others, it runs \$149.99 for Macs, \$49.95 for iPhones, and \$79.95 for iPads. For more information, a guided video tour, or to purchase, visit www.Coradine.com.

Sporty's Offers iPad Cockpit Accessories



Two new Sporty's iPad accessories add in-flight functionality to your iPad tablet device. The iPad Kneeboard holds the iPad securely on the left side, and it has an adjustable stand to provide the perfect viewing angle for the screen. A right-side organizer includes mesh pockets and a zippered compartment for storing charts, flight plan forms, or checklists, and on the outside, it has an exterior storage pocket, an ID holder, an adjustable leg strap, and a padded back so that, when closed, it protects your tablet.

The iPad Flight Desk has room for in-flight essentials while also firmly holding the iPad at an adjustable viewing angle. A left-side organizer offers pockets for storage and a notepad, and a built-in leg strap holds the desk steady. The desk zips completely closed to protect the tablet, and it has a handle for carrying. The kneeboard is available for \$39.95, and the flight desk is available for \$57.95. Both may be ordered at www.Sportys.com.



21

ways

TO SELL

training

(honestly)

By Greg Laslo

The prospective student pilots who venture into flight schools this “Learn to Fly Month” arrive with a wide range of experiences with aviation. For some, particularly those with close friends or family members who are already pilots, aviation has already sold itself; they’re ready to learn with few questions that need to be answered. For others, though, aviation is merely a long-held fascination, and for all their good intent and motivation, they might as well be buying water-purification systems for their homes—only without *Consumer Reports* reviews to guide their way.

These students come to you at a considerable knowledge disadvantage, and according to AOPA’s research report, *The Flight Training Experience: A Survey of Students, Pilots, and Instructors* conducted by APCO Insight, that’s a stumbling block to them starting—much less completing—their training. To recruit these customers, you’ll have to not only sell your services, but also educate them about what it takes to be a pilot and teach them to be informed, educated aviation consumers.

That’s the goal of these 21 tips for selling training. They’ll give you not only ideas to improve your flight-training sales strategies, but also insight on consumer behavior drawn from current research by experts in the field. The goal is to help you package the information prospective students need to enjoy, and embrace, an aviation lifestyle—and make you their flight-training provider of choice.

1. Answer customer contacts quickly and personally. A recent study by Pied Piper Management Company indicated that, while nine in 10 companies respond to customer e-mails in less than 24 hours with auto-responder replies, only 64 percent answered custom-

ers with specific, personal responses to their questions within that time. That’s the equivalent of ignoring 36 percent of the customers who walk through your door, according to the study, and not only might that push a prospective customer away, it also hinders the creation of trust that new customers need to do business with you. Return calls and e-mails promptly to start the relationship on the right foot.

2. Create social-media conversations. Engaging your customers in social-media marketing through Facebook or Twitter is a useful tool to get linked customers to visit you more often, spend more of their recreational dollars with you, and call themselves “loyal” customers, according to a recent study in the *Harvard Business Review*. But these “conversations” also get existing customers to vouch for your service, share their enthusiasm, and defend you against posted complaints or concerns. Start these interactions by asking questions about flying—and flight training—that your “friends” can respond to, and welcome newcomers in.

3. Compile statistics on hours to certification. There’s no verifiable empirical data that describe the mean time to certification for student pilots in the United States, and according to student-dropout research by AOPA, that’s something that prospective pilots find disconcerting and frustrating, mostly because they’re unable to determine what kind of a commitment they’re signing up for—and how they measure up. While your school can’t do much about industrywide numbers, taking the time to collect actual data for your school on

average time, average for different demographics of students, and factors that contribute to above- and below-average performance gives customers critical information they can use for planning and budgeting purposes. It also creates transparency that overcomes concerns that instructors are inflating training times to log their own flight time.

4. Compile statistics for individual instructors. Like mean time to certification, data that evaluate individual instructors—such as pass rate, training times, and the number of customers who pursue additional training—give customers perspective that may overcome reluctance to train with, say, new, low-time instructors. At the same time, it gives you some insight into the performance of each employee you can use to develop best practices, continuing education programs, mentoring, promotions, and merit pay for your staff.

5. Sell in plain language. Flight training’s piecemeal pricing structure can confuse prospective customers because it includes a number of line items—flight-training devices, different aircraft models, instructor time, and solo time—as well as a litany of technical terms. According to a study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, that complexity stunts customers’ interest and causes them to “freeze” and not consider other information that can help them decide to learn to fly—or fly with you. Worse case, they could sign up with you, even if you don’t offer a training program that fits their needs, which will eventually lead to dissatisfaction with your services. Instead, researchers say, offer easy-to-process

and unambiguous information that helps them make sound judgments about purchasing decisions.

6. Offer references. For consumers new to flight training, the school-selection process seems like a minefield, particularly if they have several choices in their local area. To help them sort out the wheat—you—from the chaff, offer references of other successful students. Ideally, those will be flight students who have something in common with this new one, such as their

career, professional associations, neighborhoods, or even church membership. That takes advantage of what researchers call “cluster networks:” social networks where both pilots are likely to have friends in common, which increases their credibility over random customers, according to Jon Bohlmann, associate professor of marketing at North Carolina State University.

7. Employ pre-application consultations for customers. Use this opportunity to put an experienced

staffer who understands how to communicate the ins and outs of learning to fly with a prospective student. But be sure that person knows a couple of important things that can affect a student’s expectations. Most importantly, this meeting should happen after the discovery flight; in the moments when the customer’s emotions run high, he’d be better off letting those emotions guide him, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Participants tended to make more consistent choices when they were

Fair Market Value On treating customers well

By Bob Meder

One of the biggest issues that instructors face is managing their students’ expectations. This manifests itself two ways: how quickly they will absorb the material and the cost of learning how to fly. These issues are interrelated.

Many students come into aviation with no idea of how long it will take to learn to fly. Obviously, that’ll vary by the individual, and there are strong opinions in the field as to when a pilot “should” solo or take a practical test. However, what is rarely told to a student pilot is that these are variable, and that the FAA minimums are just that: minimums.

The problem with not telling a student—who is, after all, a customer—that his total time might go beyond the bare minimum is that this can feel like a bait-and-switch. Take the Part 61 40-hour private pilot requirement; a student has to be aware that the instructor’s responsibility is to present a prepared candidate for the practical test, and if he believes it’s just a matter of checking off some boxes on a list of tasks he must demonstrate, he may never understand the delay in getting to his checkride.

Similarly, we often neglect the hidden costs—both in time and money—that the student will incur. Those include things like books, the medical exam, the FAA knowledge test, designated pilot examiner fees, headphones, plotters, renter’s insurance, and so on.

So how do we combat this?

First, the instructor and flight school have to tell the student what he’s getting into as far as training requirements. Too often, flight-training providers talk only in terms of the minimum time requirements, and this becomes a real issue later when the student exceeds those times. Wouldn’t it be far fairer to tell him, “This is the best we can do under the current rules, but my students average more like 60 hours.”

That does three things: It prevents you, the training provider, from either looking like a crook or an incompetent instructor; it’s an incentive for the student to beat that average; and if he goes beyond it, he realizes that an average is made up of people on either side of the mean. Emphasize to the prospect that a good instructor will make sure he’s well trained and ready to take the practical test, whenever that happens.

Second, give all of the costs. Too often, I’ve heard, “I have to pay for that, too?” Lump in every reasonable piece of equipment that the student might want or need: plotters, E6B, headphones, charts, flight bags, books, medicals, designated pilot examiner, meals on cross-country flights, magazine subscriptions, and anything else the typical student would acquire. Itemize what’s in that list and provide it to the prospect, and over-estimate the cost. To the extent possible, if you’re operating a flight-training organization, build a comprehensive kit for the student with all of the basic needs for a particular program.

Third, match the airplane to the student. Although the customer is in some ways the boss,

encouraged to trust their feelings when making choices—in effect, trusting their heart, their excitement, and their desires.

8. Script the sales process. If your flight instructors are the ones closing the deal with new students, know this: these “experts” may be wrong as often as they’re right, according to research from the University of British Columbia. Even experts who rely on their memories to compare complex options can make mistakes, especially when

they’re asked to explain “why.” Then, they fill in the gaps with prior knowledge, which might be incorrect and reduces the quality of their responses. Provide instructors with the information they need—the script—and let them know it’s okay to tell the student “I don’t know” and refer them to a senior staff member who does.

9. Focus on the outcome. Good sales technique says to sell the benefits, not the features, and that’s especially true when you’re selling

something that won’t happen until some time in the future—such as a student earning his pilot certificate. By using “backcasting,” you can help prospective customers imagine their feelings in the future and consider how the process of learning to fly will make them feel then. That is, they’ll be a year older next year, but how would they feel about that if they were *pilots*? According to researchers at the University of Minnesota, Harvard, and the University of Virginia, backcasting

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you’re still the expert. If it’s clear that a student’s needs would be met by a less expensive aircraft on your line, you may want to point him in that direction. That can pay dividends down the road with a loyal customer who will come back and rent after his training is completed. Furthermore, there is an unquantifiable benefit in having a satisfied customer spreading the good word about your place of business.

Fourth, develop a plan of action for the student. At a Part-141 school, that’s a given. For an individual or FBO teaching under Part 61, not so much. The material can be taught in any order as long as the requirements are met before solo and certification, though it’s clear that, say, jumping ahead into pattern work before working on the fundamentals will actually hinder the student rather than expedite his training. Still, having a plan of action allows the instructor and the student to work together to assess his progress; it’s amazing, particularly if the training is a little slower than the student might expect, how a simple, objective standard that you explained prior to training can save a lot of heartache. An honest evaluation by both the student and instructor will reveal where things aren’t up to standard, and that will help emphasize those areas that need work.

Fifth, emphasize to your students that this isn’t a race. I’ve seen too often—particularly when families train together—where someone says, “Well, she soloed, how come I haven’t?” It shouldn’t matter how someone else performs, it only matters how he does; in fact, from the start, have him challenge himself to live up to a standard,

for example, the Practical Test Standards, as the minimum completion standard for each task. You can set higher standards later, so long as you inform the student in advance. Either way, use those standards to jointly evaluate a student’s progress. That way, the competition is internal to him, and quality becomes the goal, not total hours.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, don’t work for short-term revenue. Ultimately, this is a customer-service business, where long-term relationships are important. Even if you only fly with a former student once in a while after he gets a rating, he will refer others to you if he believes you treated him well.

If you’re an FBO, a loyal customer base is priceless. I’ve seen one case where the loyalty was so strong—thanks to the positive relationship the owner had with the local pilots—that the customers got together and bought block time to get the company through a rough cash-flow situation.

Remember, aviation is a small community. Treating people well is important, not only because it’s the right thing to do, but also because a poor reputation will spread like wildfire. It hurts the training community as a whole, not just the individual CFI or flight school, because of the bad feelings it engenders.

And, like a wildfire, it’s very difficult to extinguish. Doing the right thing by our students will move all of us in the right direction.

Bob Meder serves on NAFI’s board of directors. ■

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makes customers predict stronger emotions that make them more likely to buy.

10. Help students narrow down their choices. Discussing each customer's specific needs not only helps you create a personalized training regime, it also helps you help him narrow down his choices when it comes to which certificate to pursue, which airplane to fly, or even which instructor to use. That's important, because when so-called naive customers have too many choices that are difficult to compare, they can't easily choose which is right for them so they may decide not to purchase at all, according to a study in the journal *Psychology & Marketing*. Instead, suggest a solution that will get them to the point where they're more educated aviation consumers, when they can choose for themselves.

11. Use a syllabus. Not only does a syllabus allow you to plan lessons effectively and provide organized, interesting instruction—the two most important factors in students having positive training experiences, according to AOPA's research—it can also increase your students' satisfaction about their training decision. According to a study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, consumers estimate they'll spend more time enjoying activities when the tasks are broken down into components, and they're more likely to make a purchase decision if they foresee spending a lot of time doing an activity they enjoy. That said, as you review the syllabus avoid giving value judgments about each

task—such as “students usually have trouble here.” Negative sentiment primes students to expect hard times to take longer and be more unpleasant.

12. Under-sell and over-perform. You may think you're helping a student by giving him “our best instructor,” but that superlative may backfire. According to researchers at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business, people notice when they feel worse about a product than they thought they would—for example, when they perform poorly in spite of having that “best” teacher. That hype hurts you because people feel like their expectations haven't been met, which can affect how they evaluate their training experience. Avoid it by creating a realistic expectation of the future, they say, and putting the commitment of training into the context of effort, regular training, and study.

13. Maintain a cordial environment. How your employees treat one another can tell your customers a lot about how'll your treat them, so rude behavior between employees can negatively affect customers' perceptions, according to research from the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business. Researchers there found that people witnessing employee incivility—such as one instructor calling another an “idiot”—were faster to jump to negative conclusions about the company than those who witnessed employee incompetence, even if the rude employee was trying to help them. Greet the customer warmly when you see

her, and make sure your people treat each other properly, too.

14. Build rapport with customers. When customers have positive emotions toward their instructors, they're happier with their training experience. That rapport can come through similar interests and experiences, and it can also come through other interactions, including buying students lunch, presenting congratulatory gifts at training milestones, doing personal favors, and even flattering the student about accomplishments outside of flying. By building a friendship, even if it's only a professional one that exists within the confines of the flight school, an instructor can create thoughtful interactions and influence his students to train even when their personal motivation is low; that's how drug-company salespeople influence doctors, according to a recent paper in the journal *PLoS Medicine*.

15. Create training partnerships. Students expect the aviation experience to be social; indeed, many became interested in flying from their peers. Use that to improve their training, first by introducing them to other students at every opportunity, and second, by extending each lesson so they can observe the lesson either before or after theirs. According to researchers at Northwestern University, doing so reduces the time needed to learn new tasks considerably. “It's as though once you get your system revved up by practicing a particular skill, the brain acts as though you are still engaged in the task when you are not, and learning still takes place,” they said.

It doesn't matter whether they learn first or watch first, either, so long as one session was conducted within four hours of the other.

16. Schedule regular student meetings with management.

Not only do these meetings offer managers a chance to evaluate training progress and discuss potential problems, they also build a relationship between the customer and the school that goes beyond an individual instructor—which is important if that employee were to leave. Indeed, that misplaced customer loyalty leaves the school vulnerable, according to a study in the *Journal of Marketing Research*. “Companies that believe they understand loyalty among their customers may be fooling themselves,” the authors write. If the instructor ends up leaving, so too may that student if another relationship isn't in place.

17. Plan how to transition students to new instructors. Customers may have personality conflicts or their primary instructor may leave, but according to AOPA research, changing instructors mid-training creates significant frustration among student pilots. Since both are predictable events, incorporate a standardized training syllabus that records where students are in their training, employ stage checks to validate that progress, have new instructors observe lessons before the transition, and streamline how new instructors resume training so students don't have to repeat lessons they've already mastered, which increases their time and expense.

18. Create an “I love me” wall for each instructor. The environment of the instructor's cubicle or work area offers subtle signs that make customers like their instructor more. Sure, frame those diplomas, flight certificates, professional awards, thank-you letters, and pictures with other happy students, but extend that to pictures of kids, birthday cards, and other personal items, too. Research from the *Journal of Consumer Research* suggests that when customers share a birthday, hometown, or other real personal coincidences with their service provider, they're more likely to feel more confident about their purchase decisions.

19. Provide additional resources to students. As new consumers in the flight-training market, student pilots are unaware of nearly everything “every pilot knows.” That includes aviation organizations, such as AOPA or EAA, magazines, useful websites, and local safety seminars; according to AOPA's research, only 68 percent of respondents had ever been to www.AOPA.org, only 13 percent had been to www.FAA.gov, and only 2 percent had been to www.Sportys.com. They depend on you to help them discover this information, so provide online links to videos, simulators, and articles, handouts, and recommendations for medical examiners, aviation books, online flight-planning applications, shops selling pilot supplies, and testing centers to take written exams. While you're at it, register them at www.FAASafety.gov for safety seminars and other free training events.

20. Host test-prep study groups and mentoring. Student pilots told AOPA that they wanted more assistance from their flight school to prepare for written exams. Along with formal ground schools and lending libraries, ongoing informal study sessions with other students provides a chance to review, meet other pilots, and enhance their learning. According to a recent study at the University of Colorado, students who discussed sample test questions together learned from the “wisdom of the masses” to not only score better on the group test, but also on subsequent tests they took alone that asked different questions, demonstrating that they'd learned effectively from one another, researchers said.

21. Help dissatisfied customers move on. Students who aren't a good fit for your school—particularly because they've had bad experiences—can be your worst enemies if they're outspoken on online forums or social media sites. Some students identify so strongly with learning to fly that it's already become part of their identity, and like a breakup with a significant other, they feel shame and insecurity about their bad experience. To calm these jilted customers, a study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* suggests helping them move on; instead of trying to win customers back, you may consider promoting forgiveness and effective disengagement by directing them to another school. The sooner they get over you, the faster they'll lose their motive to burn you.

Greg Laslo writes about business and management for a variety of magazines. ■



learning, to fly

**Develop a continuing-
education plan to
grow your school.
By Greg Laslo**

No one needs to tell you there's a lot of room for continuing education at a modern flight school. Like any training endeavor, there's always something more you'd like to know—or that you'd like your people to know—about topics that range from operating specific avionic suites, to flying new aircraft, to more efficiently transferring knowledge to customers through the latest teaching techniques.

But your school is also a business, so you've got to stay ahead of those issues, too. In today's economy, customer expectations, marketing strategies, and all sorts of financial issues can change nearly as fast as an airplane goes through a tank of gas. That means everyone at your operation needs to keep up, and the best flight-training providers know they have to invest in the knowledge and skills of every one of their employees.

To manage that challenge, you need a solid continuing-education plan for your company. According to AOPA's research report, *The Flight Training Experience: A Survey of Students, Pilots, and Instructors* conducted by APCO Insight, even students recognize schools must train their staff to ensure they provide a quality training product.

But while that looks like one more line item you have to budget for—both in time and money—recognize that this one can pay a dividend toward the success of your company. To make proactive professional education work for you, consider what you stand to gain from the effort, how you can determine what training to provide, and how you should pick options that

will deliver the best results for the effort. When it comes to learning to fly, it's possible that your school has some learning to do, too.

Training Trends

The reasons to have a continuing-education program can vary by the flight school and its circumstance; it could be the addition of a new aircraft to the line, an update to the avionics in high-end trainers, or just a refresher in good old customer-service training. The key part, though, is that you make that training part of a thought-out program; that's how you'll ensure you get the best results—and the best return.

According to the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), U.S. businesses spend more than \$100 billion on employee development each year. About three-quarters of that goes toward internal training, while the rest is spent on external classes, seminars, and the like. Today, a typical employee in a typical company—or maybe it's an atypical company that has a solid dedication to learning—spends nearly one hour a week in formal continuing-education training.

What those companies get in

return is both a business edge and a competitive edge. When it comes to the former, they get increased productivity, knowledge, and contributions from each employee. The ASTD figures that the publicly traded companies who spent more than the average per-employee cost on training see an above-average boost in their stockholder returns—and get this: the top one-quarter of companies in employee spending actually earned more than 200 percent more per employee than the bottom quarter.

From your perspective, a dedication to learning can do more than boost your share price; it can boost your marketing efforts—particularly in a cutthroat industry like flight training. It turns out that all those hours of training can help you stand out among your potential customers. When you tell them about your company's dedication to staying at the top of your game—and a step ahead of your competitors—they perceive extra value in your services. You've just got to let them know it's going on. That is, make it a part of your marketing message alongside guarantees, testimonials, accreditations, and other devices.

But even if that weren't the case, a comprehensive training program has several benefits that are hard to ignore. The Society for Human Resources Management found that 59 percent of employees said having meaning in their work made the job better, and they defined "meaning" as working in a place with a learning culture, where they were challenged, and where they were allowed to grow in their jobs. And according to a poll by the Gallup organization, eight in 10 employees

considered the availability of company-sponsored training programs to be a factor in whether they changed jobs.

For these reasons, quality training is one of the most important things you can do to keep your staff motivated. They'll do their jobs better, they'll be more loyal to you as an employer, and they'll stick with you longer. Consider that if you're inclined to tighten the purse strings.

While you're focusing on skills training, you might also consider developing a cross-training plan, too, so that some—or all—of your employees are able to perform not only their jobs, but also other key roles in the company as needs arise ...

If these weren't reason enough to develop a company continuing-education program, maybe this will do it for you: Your employees probably spend a lot more time with your customers than you do. Wouldn't you want them to know everything that you do about your business and, for that matter, maybe more?

You get to choose whether you want employees who are indifferent, because it's not their job to learn, or those who are engaged and thinking. When it comes down to it, poor productivity has a price, too.

Training Plan

Those are all good reasons to develop a training plan for your company, but here's another: According to the

AOPA research, your customers think you need to support and train your instructors, find a way to measure their success, and ensure standards of professionalism are met. The question begs, though, how you do that. By analyzing what you hope to accomplish with your continuing-education program, reviewing your employee skills gaps, and evaluating that post-training learning has occurred, you'll have the information you need to get started in developing your training agenda.

Note that we're not talking about going off all willy-nilly. It's important for you to determine what you hope to get out of a companywide training strategy. In this sense, it's not an exaggeration to give a learning plan the same significance as a marketing plan, or even your business plan.

You've got two ways to work through this. You can either simply focus on enhancing the skills of your employees, or you can help them with their "professional development." The difference isn't as subtle as it sounds.

The former involves helping them to do their job better by polishing their core and non-core competencies. Conversely, the latter includes blending both technical job skills with personal enrichment—that is, giving them the kind of skills that implies you're willing to keep them around for the long haul and even move them into leadership positions.

Your goal with this second path, if you choose to follow it, is to help them develop solid skills, as well as instill a solid understanding of how their performance fits into the greater scheme of the organization. To flesh

out how to move them toward this goal, review the job descriptions for each position within your company—and for each position that your current people will be promoted into—to develop a list of core competencies for each position, including hard knowledge skills, soft interpersonal skills, and experience requirements.

With those hairs split, you can conduct an assessment to find the holes that you need training to fill. Here, again, you have two choices.

First, review patterns in past annual reviews, performance evaluations, and customer comments to find performance issues that need to be resolved. Depending on the employee's experience, there may be a lot of work to do. Don't fret. Instead, prioritize; rank each type of training you'd like the employee to pursue so she takes the training in an efficient, critical-to-not-so-much order.

While you're focusing on skills training, you might also consider developing a cross-training plan, too, so that some—or all—of your employees are able to perform not only their jobs, but also other key roles in the company as needs arise, such as having an instructor fill in as a dispatcher or office manager in a pinch. In particular, every employee should be able to solve a customer problem, every employee should know the basics of selling—you never know when your part-time bookkeeper will have a conversation with a customer that could potentially turn into a new student—and every position should be replaceable. That is, you never know when you'll have an employee on short- or long-term leave

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Coaching Success

Take an active role in your students' flying plans

Aviation offers, literally, a world of opportunities for new pilots. But after the thrill of a new certification or rating wears off, customers are often left with the feeling of “What next?”

These new pilots could sure use a guide. Or, more to the point, a coach.

If you wanted to, you could help your students figure out where they want to go as pilots, as well as help them create a blueprint to make those goals a reality. And—again, if you wanted to—you could make sure they have the tools to get there.

All it takes is some motivation—yours and theirs—and a plan to get them moving in a direction that makes their flying ambitions a reality.

The difference between “training” and “coaching” is that the one-off instructor in a pilot mill doesn't worry too much about the 70-percent dropout rate that AOPA quotes for student pilots. Why would he? There will always be more students coming along. The coach, on the other hand, assumes the obligation to help each of her students reach their potential. If that means keeping them around until they do, that's all the better.

Start by helping students design a blueprint for their flying career, and what it'll take for them to feel successful. For some, that will mean “going all the way” to professional pilot, but for others, it may mean just to simply have fun with a variety of rental aircraft.

That gets to motivation and success—in their mind, not yours. Consider that a coach understands a student's real happiness comes by putting in the effort to be the best they can be, not from collecting certifications, or aircraft types in their logbooks, or whatever. One leads to confidence, the other to keeping score. Yet satisfaction and confidence is what keeps them active, psychologists say.

Your part in that is to help them check off each milestone as if they were flying cross-country. There's actually an acronym for this; it's called “SMART,” and it involves setting goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. For example, if they want to fly to Alaska next year, they need a plan to achieve that, step by step.

This may sound like a tall order, but you can accomplish a lot of the work by just building a trusting relationship with your students. This implies that you're taking the time to get to know each one. Start by opening up a discussion with each student about where he would like to go, and let the student know you'd like to help make that desire,

however lofty or lowly, a reality, and that you'd like to help the student plan his success.

Also, let him know that you'd like to hear about any concerns or apprehensions that might come in the way of that goal, or any frustration he feels, too. Two-way communication is essential; this may be a good time to start handing out your e-mail address or phone number to your students. As legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden used to say, “They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

The point of all this is that you're trying to gather clues that tell you what it's going to take to help each student excel. Watch how he responds to instruction, compare him with other students you've had, and ask other instructors this student might have trained under. You want to figure out how this person “works” so you know how to motivate him, how to critique him, and how far he can be pushed so you can help him overcome the incidental learning hurdles he may experience down the line.

That's important to helping students overcome their “barriers to performance.” After all, if they're afraid of flying beyond the confines of the local area, but they don't feel comfortable admitting that to you, it's going to cause a hiccup in the problem-solving department. That's the relationship. Students know that whatever you say, you're doing it for their good; they know you're not going to ask them to do something they're unable to, and at the same time, they know they'll only make it happen if they listen to you.

As a result, feedback isn't about finding fault, it's about finding a solution. That positive approach is important; you're not attacking the person, you're attacking the performance. To that end, you'll be interested to know that there are five levels of proficiency: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. Novice, of course, is no experience, and it moves up through the ability to demonstrate and evaluate skills. As they progress, from basic training to specialty training, you're trying to make “good” into better, and, ultimately, best.

As they progress, so does your feedback, which becomes less about right and wrong—unless, obviously, safety is an issue—and more about tweaking, adjusting, and suggesting.

That's the beauty of being a coach. You get to “craft” pilots, not just crank them out. And who knows where they'll go. But one thing's for sure; you'll get to go along for the ride. ■

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for medical, personal, or professional reasons. Having someone who can fill that empty space will save you trouble, headaches, and sore feelings.

Your second option comprises conducting a training-needs assessment, which involves asking your employees where they see deficiencies. This way, you can be cued in to training shortcomings in

Take this informal, self-directed training one step further by building a professional library for your company—basic, and not-so-basic, books on topics of interest to your employees—and require them to read during downtime.

customer care, innovation, or new technologies that haven't appeared on your radar yet. After all, by the time you've found out about it, it's probably a problem that needs fixing instead of an "opportunity."

Ironically, all the classes in the world won't make a difference if your shop doesn't have a culture of continual improvement. That means, from the top down, there has to be unambiguous enthusiasm that training is essential to meeting your school's long-term goals—and that may require some uncomfortable in-class or in-cockpit evaluations and follow-on conversations to discuss performance. It also means making sure your people know how the new skills you want

them to learn will help them do their jobs better and make the company more successful.

Just make sure that, as you move forward, you build in some mechanism to collect feedback from participants about whichever training options you choose. This will help you tweak future objectives and courses so they include more useful content or a better format to ensure your people get the most out of the experience. If you don't see cost savings, improved training rates, better customer service, or some other movement toward a business goal, then the training wasn't successful, and you need to know that.

Training Options

So you're on board with the idea of creating a training plan for your school, and you've identified areas where your people need development. The next step is finding the training mechanism that will deliver that knowledge in the most efficient, cost-effective way possible.

You'll find that it's easier when you follow a couple of guidelines. For instance, choose training opportunities that have measurable objectives and outcomes that will transfer back to the employee's job, even if that means simply creating an action plan that incorporates what's been learned in a public-speaking course into an employee's day-to-day work. Improve that outcome by stressing with the employee what you hope he achieves in his training session—including what he can expect, what pre-training preparation he needs to complete, how he's expected to participate in the session, and how he's expected to use

the training in his job later. That also sets the tone that success in training is important to you. And keep in mind that you're probably going to need to cover some subjects more than once—such as sales presentations—and in most cases, repetition is your friend. At the least, that means you're going to have to make continuing education a habit, so budget for it, schedule it, or even delegate it to ensure it occurs. In fact, that last part's not a bad idea; effective training programs succeed when managing them is somebody's job. That way, one person is charged with keeping coworkers current on company policies, ongoing marketing efforts, and other dynamic topics—and they're evaluated on it.

When it comes to the actual training, though, you've got several tactics you can choose, and each fits a particular budget. You may find that you'll need more than one of these to serve employees of various learning styles.

The easiest, cheapest, and fastest method of training is the employee alert, which is effective for passing along information that you want everyone to know, such as how to turn off the new alarm system. It can be e-mailed to each employee, distributed as a hard copy, or posted on a break-room bulletin board.

Another relatively low-cost way to train is through on-the-job training, provided the "student" and mentor are committed to the process. In fact, this can be a logical follow up to a formal training session, particularly if you're trying to replicate the skills of one particular good employee. According to a recent survey by the Center for

Workforce Development, employees say they learned only 30 percent in formal training programs, but as much as 70 percent informally while working side by side with an in-house “expert.” That’s particularly handy with new hires, after their indoctrination training. By matching new employees with mentors in a “buddy system,” they not only learn about your processes, but also about your values and vision.

Take this informal, self-directed training one step further by building a professional library for your company—basic, and not-so-basic, books on topics of interest to your employees—and require them to read during downtime. Better yet, create a company book club; buy members copies of well-regarded business or teaching books, and give them space to talk for 30 minutes each week about the chapter du jour.

Budgeting Training

Beyond those basic steps, your best bet for work-related continuing education is trade groups and other professional organizations—and not just NAFI or other aviation associations. Your accounting folks need to stay on top of their game, too, and a local, if not national, professional group can help them keep apprised of new trends in their fields.

And, of course, there are trade magazines that cover the various tasks in your business. Encourage your staff to read these, and to share articles with their coworkers—and with you—about trends in consumer behavior, innovations in payroll solutions, and other issues relative to their jobs. Suffice it to say, these

subscriptions and memberships are a worthwhile employee benefit that shows your interest in your employees’ improvement, provided you actually let them engage with them.

Moving up the scale of cost and operational inconvenience are trade shows and conferences. Describing them that way sells these forums short, though; aviation-association events offer a wide-range of avionics,

According to a recent survey by the Center for Workforce Development, employees say they learned only 30 percent in formal training programs, but as much as 70 percent informally while working side by side with an in-house “expert.”

aeronautics, and airframe-specific training that make them a bargain for the price, and even sessions at your local chamber of commerce can add a variety of other business skills to your repertoire. Beyond that, each also lets your employees see what’s up in the aviation and business world outside your front door, as well as lets them network with their peers, which gives them additional resources to pull from if a work-related issue has them stumped.

You—and your people—will be hard-pressed to come back from one of these shows without at least one idea that will help your people work better, so give a presentation about what you’ve learned. That way, all of

your staff benefits, and you foster a team environment. Of course, when your employees see that you’re willing to invest in them by sending them to a conference, that can’t help but keep their morale high, which eventually nets you happier customers, too. To test this idea, make exploring successful schools’ staff training programs your goal at this year’s AirVenture.

Lastly, know that you’ve got packaged seminars and workshops that provide formal professional training. They can be expensive, but effective, and in many cases, the trainer can personalize material to your situation. These seminars can occur in person—either with an in-house facilitator or outsourced to a seminar provider—they can occur online, or they can occur through a local university or community college’s adult/continuing-education department. If your staffer chooses to enroll, help her out; she is putting in the time and effort to improve her work performance and skills, so cut her a deal to reimburse some part of her tuition. Again, ask for a post-course presentation to share whatever she’s learned.

There are plenty of opportunities to develop your people—if you look for them and you understand that gaps in your collective knowledge are slowing your school down. By systematically planning how to fill those gaps, you’ll improve your customer service, your employees’ motivation, and, in the end, your bottom line.

Flight school success doesn’t come easy. The good news is it’s something we can all learn; all we have to do is take the time. ■

professional Development



Teaching accelerate stop distance

BY ALEXANDER BURTON

“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”

—T.S. Eliot

During basic flight training, we teach students numerous bits and pieces of the art and science of piloting a flying machine. Many of these bits and pieces are retained, and as students move on to gain experience and, perhaps, continue their training, they begin to see how some of those bits and pieces begin to coalesce into a coherent picture. The dots begin to connect. They learn that there are real-world applications for the concepts developed during basic training.

As a pilot examiner, I’ve been afforded a valuable window on the progress of aspiring pilots at various stages in their development as they piece together the world of aviation. One of the most interesting application problems emerges out of a series of questions around takeoff- and landing-distance calculations. Most students can pro-

duce reasonably accurate calculations for these distances, factoring in the real-time wind and runway conditions—but not all of them.

The “interesting” part emerges when I ask whether or not the candidate would feel comfortable using a particular airport for operations—particularly, if I ask that question right after a discussion on landing-distance requirements. For almost all small aircraft used in training, the landing distance is approximately half the takeoff distance required under the same conditions, but just because an aircraft can be put down in a given length of runway or landing surface doesn’t mean the machine can be returned to the air. This reality came as a surprise to at least one person I know after he safely landed his Cherokee Warrior on an 800-foot grass farm strip.

With that in mind, I might ask a candidate, “What is the shortest runway from which you would feel comfortable operating given today’s conditions?” And I might continue with, “If your airplane requires 1,200 feet to achieve flight, would you be comfortable operating from a 1,300-foot takeoff surface?”

Remember, we’re talking about normal operations here, not delivering vaccine to dying children.

Unfortunately for these pilots, regardless of their experience, there’s not yet an “app” that can answer the question, “Is this safe enough?” We all have our own, personal risk-tolerance level, and as we move up into larger and more complex aircraft and operations, much of that decision-making is taken away from us because companies who actually bear the long-term risks aren’t willing to exceed certain defined levels. They achieve this by reducing the discretionary decision-making of their line pilots. Large airline operations and the military are prime examples of this process, and their reduced accident/incident rates support the effectiveness of their proactive approach. The stats

clearly show that general aviation flight is considerably more prone to accidents and incidents than airline flight.

So, what are the factors that limit use of a runway or takeoff surface?

If students can’t inquire of their iPhone about the appropriate decision, they can use a little acronym often taught in the first dozen hours of flight training: OWLSS. The five limiting factors when judging whether a takeoff and landing surface is usable include obstacles, wind, length, surface, and slope. Those are the factors. However, the real question is against what standard do we evaluate? Just because the aircraft’s pilot operating handbook (POH) or aircraft flight manual (AFM) says the machine is capable of landing or taking off in a given distance in given conditions, that does not mean that distance is our only limitation or that our risk-tolerance level is being met.

We can only imagine how the first person to discover the concept of accelerate stop distance (ASD) came by his or her realization. If it was accomplished the way the majority of new realizations are achieved in aviation, I suspect it involved a pile of wreckage that had come to an abrupt stop somewhat past the available takeoff surface shortly after the engine noise abruptly diminished.

While ASD is a term we don’t normally encounter until we start flying multiengine aircraft, it’s a very useful concept to work with even with smaller, single-engine machines. It’s also an excellent tool for helping students and instructors manage risk.

ASD is the distance required for an airplane on takeoff to accelerate to flying speed, encounter a problem, have the pilot realize there is a problem, close the throttles, apply the brakes, and stop on the remaining runway. Larger aircraft’s AFMs provide ASD information in the form of tables or charts, enabling pilots to easily and quickly evaluate the usability of a particular takeoff surface

cont. on pg. 25

Transfer of Knowledge

Communication is the core of aviation

BY JOHN NIEHAUS

Every industry has its strengths, and sometimes professionals in that field have an opportunity to share them with others. Over the past two years, I've had the opportunity to do just that by applying some of the expertise that's taken as a basic skill in the aviation industry to the world of medicine.

During a research project that started at Western Michigan University and now continues to move forward on its own, we were involved with researching how crew resource management (CRM) techniques can be transferred into other high-risk industries. Our team of aviation and medical specialists went into a hospital and watched as actors pretended they were having a heart attack or a baby or were in need of surgery. Each case simulated a high-risk, high-stress event, and the research part investigated the staff's response to the "patient" and how different resources and professionals work together and communicate with each other.

The key to the event is that when our team arrives, only the department's administrators know that it's a simulation; everyone else does exactly what they'd normally do in that situation while our team records everything that occurs to computer. A CRM expert analyzes the events for teamwork and communication, good or bad. To add to the realism, we use

tablet computers and simulators to dictate almost everything that doctors and nurses see, controlling the entire scenario by manipulating patient "vital signs" on the tablets.

This is a flight-instructor magazine, so you're probably wondering what this has to do with training student pilots, or even aviation education in general. In these medical simulations, there are multiple teams, usually composed of three or four individuals, who communicate and work together. These teams often include an emergency medical system transport team—and sometimes two different ones—the regional hospital's emergency department team, and a larger hospital's catheterization lab team. The goal of all of these teams is to get this patient through the system as quickly and safely as possible; if they don't all communicate effectively, to pass along such vital information as allergies, medical history, and current progress of the patient's health, the patient may not survive. Would a pilot survive if air traffic control (ATC), flight service stations (FSS), and the pilot were not communicating effectively about a developing line of thunderstorms in the pilot's flight path?

Sometimes pilots take for granted exactly how complicated and effective our system is, in particular, what it takes to get an aircraft on a cross-country flight, especially in actual instrument conditions, from one place to another without causing an incident or accident. The transfer of proper information among the variety of agencies and individuals involved is a testament to just how effective our communication process has become.

All of the pieces in the aviation system, ATC, dispatchers, pilots, FSS, and more, need to work correctly together every time. To ensure that

the information a pilot transmits to both other pilots in the area and to the controlling ATC facility is properly acknowledged, we all need a common understanding of the processes at work. Lapses in communication in any of these instances could lead to catastrophic results.

We're taught all these things early on, we learned CRM techniques, especially in the collegiate environment, and we know that proper communication and teamwork are key to the safety of our flight. Yet, many times experienced aviators take these principles for granted. We're so conditioned to these concepts that we forget not only how important they are, but also how imperative it is to pass them on to our students.

As instructors, we need to be able to recognize a communication breakdown at its earliest signs, if only to make sure that our students still understand the message we're trying to send. It's also imperative that we teach our students not only to navigate this system, but also how the system works as a whole. With that knowledge, students can fully develop the skills to operate safely within it.

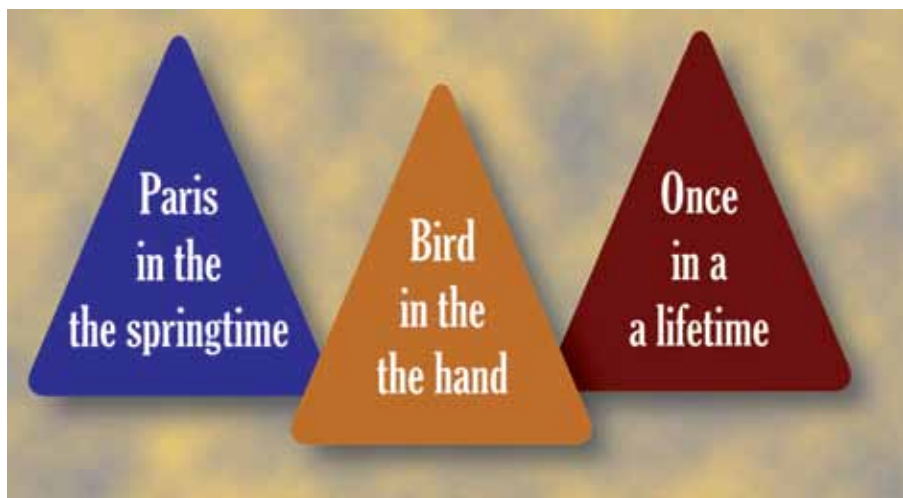
Seeing and participating in medical simulations that apply aviation techniques into that profession has made me better understand how teams function and communicate. It's also shown me that these skills aren't innate abilities; they need to be learned, preferably early on in a person's training.

We're on the front line of helping our students learn how intricate our aviation system has become. The skills we teach will be applied in their own career, and hopefully passed down to the next generation of pilots. There's no greater legacy than promoting safety—in the sky, or beyond. ■

professional Development

Sensory Stimulation

Complacent is the enemy of safe



BY ROB MIXON

See anything wrong with the five words in each triangle of the illustration above? We often see what we believe to be there instead of what is actually in front of us. If you read “Paris in the Springtime,” “Bird in the Hand,” or “Once in a Lifetime,” you’d better read them again.

Seeing what we believe to be true not only applies to our belief system, but also to optical illusions of aircraft instrumentation, runway visual effects, outside cloud layer horizons on top slanted from level flight, and runway incursions. Just as we believe who we are, we also know what we believe we know; what other reality could there be?

It has been said the job of an airline pilot is hours of boredom interspersed with moments of absolute terror. In fact, experiments have explored that kind of isolation from sensory stimulation that’s due to routines and boredom.

During the space race of the 1960s, researchers at the Applied Technology Center of the U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine tested four volunteers by putting each into a small altitude chamber that simulated orbital flight for 36 hours. They had no visual contact with the outside, and except for 10-minute progress report every 90 minutes, they had no audio contact with the outside, either.

Only two subjects completed the study; the first thought he heard a radio and various other “mystery” sounds at the 25th hour. Shortly afterward, he perceived a deep hole opening up below his feet. The other perceived monitor meters as “Indian faces” during the latter half of the experiment, and as he fought sleep, he imagined himself back in the barracks talking with friends.

The third subject terminated the study because of visual problems; af-

ter seven hours, he complained of poor focus on the monitors, then of blurred vision. The fourth quit because he felt severely agitated and anxious; after 22 hours, he stated that the monitor was smoking and turning brown.

In another study on flying with low sensory stimulation, more than half of a group of eight subjects experienced visual and auditory aberrations attributed to sensory deprivation and fatigue after 18 hours. Of course, you and your student don’t fly for 36—or even 18—hours in a sterile environment. But you, or they, may fly after a long night, including one of partying, studying, or working.

And that’s where this applies to general aviation pilots. Pilots who fly with less sleep, low sensory involvement using GPS, autopilot, severe-clear weather, and, just for fun, two hours at or above 10,000 feet without oxygen may experience similar results to low-sensory stimulation. That results in a belief system that’s not only inaccurate—but also dangerous.

Just like the three triangles, we may find that we’ve missed critical information during our preflight because things have always been the way that we expected them to be. After, all there is no sensory stimulation to tell us otherwise. That is, until it’s too late.

Rob Mixon is 20,000-hour pilot and instructor. He has a graduate degree in counseling and offers a special pre-solo program integrating aerobatics in his Citabria at Felix Varela High School in Miami, Florida. He may be reached on his website www.BetterPilot.com for free consultation with student training problems. ■

Stop and Go, cont. from pg. 22

under particular conditions. For light aircraft, ASD isn't normally provided by the manufacturer, but we can make some fairly useful estimates if we analyze the component parts. This can be both a useful and interesting challenge for student pilots working toward understanding the how's and why's of aviation and risk management.

The first part is easy: How much distance do we need to get from a standing start to flying speed? Most light aircraft POHs provide that information in the form of a takeoff distance chart or graph. Some—the Aeronca Champion comes to mind—do not. For aircraft that only provide distance for short-field takeoff, it might be an excellent plan to add a safety margin for a normal takeoff—what we normally would use—of perhaps 15 percent.

The second part, the distance required to notice a problem and respond, is a bit harder to work with. Some of us are quicker and less afflicted by denial than others. At 60 knots, we cover approximately 100 feet every second. For the average training aircraft with the average pilot, perhaps 300 or 400 feet would be a reasonable guess. Sometimes, empirical data is the best we can do. Pick a nice, long runway and tell your student you will announce an engine failure on the takeoff run. See how long it takes him or her to respond. For the third component, the one after the throttle is closed and the brakes are applied, we can refer to the POH's landing distance charts.

By adding the three components together, we can reasonably approximate the distance required to minimize the risk of running off the takeoff surface in the event of an engine failure. Note that I used the word minimize rather than the word eliminate. This is a salient point to make with students: Our goal is to minimize risk and keep it within our risk-tolerance parameters. With this

process, we're developing a tool to help us evaluate the level of risk we're willing to accept when deciding to make use of a particular runway surface to achieve the miracle of flight.

For one example, under no wind conditions at 3,000-foot pressure altitude and 20 degrees Celsius, the POH indicates a fully loaded Cessna 172P will become airborne in 1,230 feet. Using my makeshift system for calculating, that same machine would require approximately 2,145 feet to accommodate a reasonable ASD. A reasonable minimum takeoff run available (TORA) might start looking a lot more like 2,500 rather than, say, 1,500 feet.

The chances of having an actual engine failure on takeoff in a well-main-

tained, modern aircraft are slight. As the stats tell us, a small percentage of accidents, approximately 15 percent, result from machine failure. It's normally the weak link between the stick and the rudder pedals that causes all the problems.

Taking into account potential, known risk factors and taking positive steps to mitigate them to an acceptable level is always a reasonable decision, and the process of evaluating risk level is an important tool students can take away as one of the "bits and pieces" they retain from basic flight training.

Alexander Burton is chief flight instructor for Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. ■

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Praising Performers

Using rewards to increase motivation

BY GREG LASLO

As a flight school leader, you have a powerful tool at your disposal to recognize your people and keep them engaged in their jobs: rewards. They can range from physical gifts, to “fun” assignments that can surreptitiously help your business grow, to one that doesn’t cost you a dime but is worth a king’s ransom, and each helps you motivate employees and show them they make valuable contributions to your school’s operation.

But like any tool, you’ve got to know how to use it right.

Certainly, there are a couple of “don’ts” that come with rewarding employees, assuming you want them to have a motivational impact. For one, trophies, “employee of the month” awards, banquets, and things like that are all “old school,” so to speak. They don’t mean much to today’s employees, who expect real-time recognition. “It’s got to be an ongoing thing,” says Bob Nelson, author of *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*.

For another, you don’t want to get caught in the trap of making people feel good and buying them donuts just to be their buddy. Instead, you want to do it to make them more successful. For a third, “celebrations,” even if they’re just pizza on Friday, should be based on reaching some kind of performance mark, not because it’s, say, dreary out, and no one’s flying so *what the heck*. Do that too many times, and they’ll start to expect it, and there goes any benefit to you. The best recognition is contingent, Nelson says.

Instead, be on the lookout for people doing things right, and ask your people to bring those wins to your attention so you can recognize them—either when they do something great themselves, or when they spot someone else doing so, too. If nothing else, start staff meetings with an open forum where everyone gets to share one thing that’s gone right, or that they’re excited about, or even the two or three things that motivate them.

You might be surprised by their answers to that last item, and it’s good information to know. For some, motivation may mean more money, but for others, it might be personal time off, with or without pay, additional training to advance their skills, or even just the chance to make a difference in their job.

That means you’ve got a wide range of “rewards” to offer your people for jobs well done, regardless of your budget. You can give gifts, such as gas cards, restaurant gift cards, or even doggy day-care gift certificates, for finishing a student up in a clutch. You can give them a day off and the use of an airplane to attend a fly-in, too. You can let them spend a half-day at a charity, or split the cost for additional training, or pay their aviation-organization membership dues, as well. If you’re feeling particularly wild and crazy—and you’d probably have to be—you could even give a particularly promising employee stock in the company in return for really exceptional performance.

But rewards don’t have to cost you anything. In fact, they can make

you money and let your folks have some fun, stretch their skills, and teach them something. This is a biggie. In surveys, one-third of employees say they don’t think they’re using all their skills, and it’s a huge drag on their motivation.

Counter this by asking your staff to look for opportunities to do things differently, and let them problem-solve ways to tighten your operations. Additional training to do that isn’t a half-bad idea, either, so help them learn something that makes your business better—and them more successful.

If a box of donuts is stretching the budget these days, you’ve still got one last tactic in your toolbox to keep your people motivated. It’s simple, free, but amazingly effective. It’s the “thank you.”

According to Nelson’s surveys, most employees want nothing more than personal thanks and praise when they’ve done a good job. Use meetings as a chance to point out someone’s hard work, post appreciative letters from customers on the school bulletin board, include staff accomplishments in your newsletters, and send out press releases highlighting their professional achievements to local newspapers and trade magazines. You’ll make them feel good when you show that their success is important to everyone, and they’ll stay motivated when they know you’ll acknowledge their efforts.

In the end, it’s your business that will reap the biggest rewards. When they look good, you look good, and so does the organization. That’s worth a celebration every time. ■

Weaving a Website

How to create your online presence on a budget

BY HELEN WOODS

If your flight-training business doesn't yet have its own website, you're missing one of the best tools for student recruitment. Fortunately, creating a website need not be complicated or expensive.

Point-and-click software packages allow you to design a good-looking website without having to learn any sort of computer language or pay a professional. If you have the skills to make a PowerPoint slide, you can make a website without much additional training.

That said, you do need to know a few things to get started, and a few tips will make your site even more effective.

1. Software to Create Your Website. Point-and-click software comes in two flavors. A page template and editor that comes with the web-hosting service you purchase is the most simple, and a quick look at Yahoo's Small Business web-hosting service (<http://SmallBusiness.Yahoo.com/webhosting>) shows templates that allow you to quickly add personalized photos and text. Most other companies offer a similar service.

Your other option is stand-alone software. I use a software package called Namu WebEditor, which, for less than \$100, gives me complete control over the design of my site, and it has more features than I've ever used. Go this route, and you'll have to learn a handful of basic skills, but even these can be learned in a few hours.

2. Basic Graphic and Photo-editing Software. A good photo editor can make or break your site. I'm sure you've seen photos online that look pixilated, or you've encountered web pages that take forever to load. Both make a website seem unprofessional, and they're caused when the creator fails to properly size a photo before inserting it onto the page. A good photo editor will also give you a chance to enhance and add creative elements to the photo. I like Photoshop Elements.

3. A Place to Host Your Site. Every website has a "host server" where the files live. You may already own web-hosting space and not even realize it, as this space often comes unadvertised with your account at your Internet service provider. If you're on a budget, this is a good place to start. Otherwise, there are hundreds of web-hosting companies that offer their own hosting services and templates.

4. Domain Name Service (Optional but Helpful). Domain names are the easy-to-remember "names" for websites—for instance, www.NAFINet.org. They typically can be purchased from the web-hosting company you choose. They cost a few dollars extra per year on top of your server space, but they're worth it; they make your website easy for students to remember.

When it comes to designing the site, there are a couple of things to keep in mind to make it easy to read. Use different font sizes, styles, and colors to make your text stand out, just don't mix and match *too* many styles.

View your site from about 5 feet away; you should still get the idea of what it's all about. This is also a good way to check the design and color of your layout. Likewise, view your site on different computers and browsers; what looks good on one may not on another.

Make your site practical. Most people use Google to search these days, and Google uses the number of times a site is visited to compile its rankings. If you have practical information on your site, such as downloads and readings your students use on a regular basis, your site will be well traveled—and well ranked.

Avoid dead links or "under construction" signs, too. Nothing says "amateur built" like these incomplete pages. Along the same lines, update the site regularly; customers interpret outdated websites as an indicator of a poorly run company.

Lastly, check your e-mail regularly. You'd be amazed how many customers my flight school gets through our web page e-mail link; they often tell me, "I contacted several companies, but yours was the only one who responded." That, after all, is a message you never want to send. ■

my View

The XX Factor

More women pilots will grow flight training

BY PENNY RAFFERTY HAMILTON, PH.D.

As only 6 percent of certificated pilots, women are an underserved market in general aviation. You can change that in 2011 with a historic opportunity to capitalize on the 100th anniversary of Harriet Quimby becoming the first U.S. licensed female pilot on August 1, 1911.

To attract more female students, the aviation family needs to welcome them to join. According to the authors of *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*, to get someone to do something, she must not only see that she has the ability, but she must also recognize the benefits of pursuing it; that is, she has to believe you'll improve her quality of life, enhance her self-confidence, and provide her with new social opportunities.

Other industries know this. Kawasaki Motorcycle Co. didn't redesign its motorcycles and paint them pink to attract more women; it employed an advertising and direct-marketing campaign that showed women riding, with the message, "The show's much better when you're sitting up front."

Obviously, that message was targeted at existing motorcycle passengers; general aviation can do the same. Studies of women pilots in-

dicating that having a pilot in their lineage contributes to their success in training; having a pilot in the family may "normalize" the flying experience so that it's perceived as safe and enjoyable. Seize that familiarity by scheduling frequent "View From the Left Seat" seminars at your flight school to encourage non-pilot family members to learn themselves.

Creating a "female-friendly" training atmosphere is important, too. Electronics stores and manufacturers found women control 88 percent of all purchases, but while men want to know about a product's speed, size, and options, women relate to how it makes their lives better and easier. In 2005, retailer Best Buy changed its in-store signage to target women by describing how a product is used. You can do the same. For example, gender research shows male babies dart their eyes and follow moving objects, while female babies immediately focus on people's faces; to complement those nicely framed photographs of jets barreling through the sky in your reception area, which appeal to men, have photos of successful, smiling female pilots at the controls of airplanes to appeal to women.

Since women are interested in people and relationships, the importance of the social aspect of flying shouldn't be overlooked during their concentrated flight-training experience. Furniture, even if it's only a table and chairs, needs to be placed to encourage communication, and mentors—especially female ones—significantly increase a woman pilot's success rate.

Enlist your female students and pilots to help you recruit, too; Travel Industry Association research reveals 70 percent of women prefer to learn about new products and services from someone who already uses or owns that product, and they are three times more likely to learn about products from another woman. Likewise, incorporate testimonials from and photographs of women pilots in your school's brochures and website, and target female risk-takers, such as members of parachute, motorcycle, gun, and martial arts clubs, with your invitation to fly. Just remember, your invitation needs to focus on how aviation can improve their life. We welcome all in general aviation, but to get women to act, we need to provide messages that clearly show it offers benefits to them.

Start by joining the ex-

To attract more female students, the aviation family needs to welcome them to join.

panding network of flight schools and instructors signing up as a "Women of Aviation Week (WOAW) Certified Woman-Friendly Flight Training Facility" at www.WomenOfAviationWeek.org, which communicates that women are welcome at your school. Then use this year's aviation's milestone to promote flight training to the women in your community.

The volunteers of the Teaching Women to Fly Research Project (www.TeachingWomenToFly.com) have set a goal of increasing the number of female general aviation pilots by 1 percent; in theory, only 368 more women would need to earn their private pilot wings to reach this goal. However, we know the flight training success rate is only 30 percent; doing the math, 1,227 new female starts are needed to increase the number of female pilots in 2011 to 7 percent. That's fewer than 25 more in each state.

Why shouldn't at least one of those women become your student? ■

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