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Above and Beyond

Attitude Determines Your Altitude

I have often wished I could mandate professionalism. It is true that the FAA can require some of the behaviors that are indicative of professionalism, and the thickness of the rulebook is evidence of how we've tried to do that. The reality, though, is that true professionalism is a lot more than just rule-driven rote behaviors – *pro forma* does not make a *professional*. Indeed, most definitions of professionalism call it a level of excellence above and beyond minimum standards or basic legal requirements. That's why you don't become a professional simply by earning certificates, adding ratings, or getting a paycheck for flying.

Rather, professionalism is a mindset. It comes from having the attitude, the ethics, and the discipline to do the right thing — every time, all the time, regardless of who's watching.



Photo by Susan Parson

Training and Education

We tend to use the words “training” and “education” interchangeably, but they’re not actually the same. Training is the acquisition of practical skills relating to specific useful competencies. Training is teaching someone how to do something. Don’t get me wrong. When it comes to teaching pilots how to aviate in terms of good ol’ basic stick-and-rudder skills, training is an accurate term and an important activity.

But the trifecta of professional airmanship also requires pilots to navigate and communicate as well as to aviate, and that’s where education is so important. Education is an experience that has a formative effect on an individual’s character, intellect, or physical ability. There is certainly a training aspect to aviation, navigation, and communication, as those terms are narrowly defined. But education is about teaching a person – in this case, a pilot – how to think, how to aviate no matter what, how to navigate through problems that are not just rote experiences from the textbook or maneuvers guide, and how to use crew resource management (CRM) and single pilot resource management (SRM) to communicate effectively with everyone who can render information or assistance.

To use flight instructor terms — I can do that, because I was one — training alone can take a pilot to the rote and understanding levels of learning. But it takes the formative experience of education to reach the application and correlation levels essential to true professionalism in flying.

Educating a Professional

So how do we educate someone to be a professional? Here are several ideas. And you don’t have to be an instructor to put them into practice.

Develop aviation citizens. In civic terms, a good citizen takes actions that strengthen our heritage or contribute to the political process. The concept of aviation citizenship is similar, as it implies actions that respect and strengthen our shared aviation community. Proficiency in aircraft control is only the beginning of aviation citizenship. As outlined in the FAA *Aviation Instructor’s Handbook*, the aviation citizen is a pilot who acts to:

- Make safety the number one priority.
- Develop and exercise good judgment in making decisions.
- Recognize and manage risk effectively.
- Be accountable for his or her actions.



- Be respectful of the privilege of flight.
- Act with responsibility and courtesy.
- Adhere to prudent operating practices and personal operating parameters.

Use Codes of Conduct. These concepts are also part of the *Flight Instructor’s Model Code of Conduct (FIMCC)*, recently published by a group of aviators who are passionate about professionalism. I am a real believer in the value that a formal code of conduct can have as a tool to promote safety, good judgment, ethical behavior, and personal responsibility – all components of professionalism. The code offers a vision of flight education excellence, and it recommends operating practices to improve the quality and safety of flight instruction. The FIMCC is one of several similar codes, such as the *Aviator’s Model Code of Conduct* and a *Student Pilot’s Model Code of Conduct*. You may want to keep these codes in your flight bag as a reference and reminder.

A personal minimums list is another kind of code that marks a professional. In formal terms, personal minimums refer to an individual pilot’s set of procedures, rules, criteria, and guidelines for deciding whether, and under what conditions, to operate (or continue operating) in the National Airspace System.

As the FAA has suggested, however, you might think of personal minimums as the human factors equivalent of reserve fuel. When you plan a flight, regulations require you to calculate fuel use in a

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A professional uses a checklist every time, whether it's the first time or the 1000th.

Photo by Raymond G. Stinchcomb

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way that leaves a certain minimum amount of fuel in the tanks when you land at your destination or alternate. The reserve fuel is intended to provide a safety buffer between fuel required for normal flight and fuel available. In the same way, a professional sets personal minimums that provide a solid safety buffer between the skills *required* for the specific flight you want to make, and the skills *available* through training, experience, currency, and proficiency. (For more information, please see the May/June 2006 issue of the FAA Aviation News.)

Use scenario-based training. The FAA is a strong advocate for scenario-based training (SBT). SBT is an approach that uses highly-structured scripts of real world experiences to meet flight training objectives in an operational environment. The goal is to help the pilot develop judgment and

decision-making skills. For SBT to be effective in educating a professional:

- Real world experiences need to have a real world context.
- SBT needs to use real world experiences.
- Those experiences need to be realistic.

Here's an example. Cross-country flight training can be structured as planning for a family vacation that the pilot might really want to take in an airplane. The importance of comprehensive flight planning and managing external pressures becomes very real when the pilot has to put it in specific terms such as: how many people and how many bags can be carried, how they have to be loaded, and whether the trip can be safely flown.

Participate in mentoring. Another part of developing professionalism is mentoring. There is a tendency to think of mentoring as a relationship between an older person and a younger one. In fact,

mentoring is a *transfer of experience* from a pilot with more experience or expertise to a less experienced colleague. In today's GA environment, for example, you may have thousands of hours in your logbook, but still have a lot to learn from a newer pilot who happens to be a whiz with the latest glass cockpit avionics. Bottom line: the goal is to help the person being mentored learn things that he or she might have learned more slowly, less effectively, or not at all without the mentor's assistance. I learned a lot from the pilots who mentored me in the various phases of my career as a pilot, and I tried to pass it on by mentoring my students when I was a CFI and my first officers when I was an airline pilot. As I see it, being a professional and a solid aviation citizen means taking advantage of mentoring opportunities, both as a mentee and as a mentor.

The Front Line is the Flight Line

We in the FAA can make rules, write policy, and issue guidance. But those who are on the front lines — or maybe I should say the *flight* lines — in the GA community are the people best placed to make a difference — not just today, not just tomorrow, but for the entire future of aviation. The way you fly, whether it is multiple legs every day or a recreational flight every month, should be consistent with the aviation citizenship principles outlined here. Consistent and disciplined use of practical tools like codes of conduct, scenario-based training, and mentoring are actions that give life and meaning to the concept of professionalism, and can help make professional behavior as natural as breathing.

I'm counting on you to help.

Randy Babbitt is the Administrator of the FAA.

Learn More

FAA Aviation Instructor's Handbook – FAA-H-8083-9A

www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aviation/aviation_instructors

handbook/media/FAA-H-8083-9A.pdf

Best Practices for Mentoring in Flight Instruction

www.faa.gov/training_testing/training/media/mentoring_best

practices.pdf **Aviator's Model Code of Conduct**

www.secureav.com/

FAA Aviation News – May/June 2006

www.faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2006/media/mayjun2006.pdf



Calling All Mechanics

Keep Informed with FAA's Aviation Maintenance Alerts

Aviation Maintenance Alerts (Advisory Circular 43.16A) provide a communication channel to share information on aviation service experiences. Prepared monthly, they are based on information FAA receives from people who operate and maintain civil aeronautical products.

The alerts, which provide notice of conditions reported via a Malfunction or Defect Report or a Service Difficulty Report, help improve aeronautical product durability, reliability, and maintain safety.

Recent alerts cover:

- cracked rudder horn weld assembly on the Piper PA28R-201
- cracked oil cooler on the Continental IO-550B powerplant
- fractured L/H side pilot's window on the Piper 46-350P

Check out Aviation Maintenance Alerts at:

http://www.faa.gov/aircraft/safety/alerts/aviation_maintenance/