



IT'S NOT FOR EVERYONE Learning for the wrong reasons

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Life is full of challenges, dreams, and goals. Throughout our childhood we are taught to finish what we start no matter what. Good advice, but what if it turns out not to be the best thing? Most endeavors have a purpose or they would not be considered worthy of our time and effort. But sometimes our goals and aspirations are misplaced. We may think that we know what we want to do or perhaps we just react to what we think that others want for us. We are especially vulnerable to the wishes of others when we are young and undecided about our future. If we leave our career goals to the wishes of others we are setting ourselves up for disappointment.

Having instructed for years and years and years I have had people of every age, size, and description approach me for flight training. One of the first questions I ask during the initial interview is, “why do you want to learn to fly”. Their answers include, ‘it’s something that I have always wanted to do’, ‘I would like to fly Charter’, ‘I want to become a missionary pilot’, ‘I want to fly for the airlines’, or ‘I am going into the military’. These are all excellent reasons to put forth the time, money and effort to become a pilot. To say that this is a lofty goal is an understatement at the least. However, if a person attempts to learn something as demanding as becoming a pilot because a parent wants them too, that may not be such a good thing.

Many years ago I was introduced to a young man by his father. He wanted to learn to fly and seemed very excited to get started. Although he was too young to solo he still wanted to take a few lessons each summer and learn as much as he could until he was 16 and qualified to take the plane up by himself. During that first summer, Jake – of course this is not his real name – was a good student and remained enthusiastic for each of his lessons. He flew once every couple of weeks and did fairly well.

When Jake returned the next summer things had changed. He did not seem happy to be at the flight school. When he said goodbye to his Dad he barely looked in his

direction. We would prepare for a lesson with a discussion on the ground before going out to the airplane to pre-flight. He hardly talked and I began to notice that he became more and more distracted and was not paying attention to holding heading and altitude. I would give a gentle correction and get no responsive action or verbal comment. I noticed him looking around inappropriately and just not flying the plane. Finally after a couple of these lessons I talked to him to try to assess what was wrong. He gave me a couple of excuses such as being tired or he had too much homework. The next lesson was no better. I decided to get tough and ask him for the real reason that he did not seem to enjoy his flying like he had the summer before. Getting no reason from him, I asked, "Are you learning to fly because you want to or because your Dad wants you to?" With his head down and not looking at me, he answered, "A little of both".

Jake did not return for any more lessons. This was very sad for me because I take pride in helping every potential pilot achieve their goal. I will do whatever is needed and spend as much time as is necessary to give that little extra training and encouragement to this end. But if the self motivation is not there, if a person is learning something because someone else wants them to, there is no success. Even if the training is finished and a pilot certificate is obtained, chances are that the new pilot will not continue flying. And if they do, their heart is not in it and that can be an accident waiting to happen.

Another example of learning for the wrong reason occurred with another young man. Eric was a brilliant pianist and accomplished ice skater. Both of these talents enabled him to be an instructor/teacher himself. He even coached professional ice skaters and was so happy to be doing something so meaningful with his young life. Even with his full schedule he carved out enough time to study and take flying lessons. He was very high energy.

Over the course of two years he was able to complete all of the requirements for a Private Pilot Certificate. I prepared him for his Practical Test and tried to schedule the exam but Eric always had a reason not to set the date for the test. I found out that the goal Eric had set for himself was not to ever take a test, but just to get to that point.

Learning for the wrong reason? Maybe. To me, this was another disappointment. If I had known before hand what his plan was, would it have made a difference? Perhaps, but I will never know. I still wonder what became of Eric. What is the rest of the story?

Flight training is a very rewarding endeavor and there is a lot of satisfaction in instructing. But, if someone is training for the wrong reason, no one wins.

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