

# Jumpseat

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## Aiming for Aviation Excellence

*Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence.*

—Vince Lombardi

Whether you're just beginning to fly or you're now logging your flight time in five-digit numbers, I think it's safe to say that you have yet to achieve the perfect flight. But, I hope you will never stop aiming for aviation perfection, because that is the key to excellence.

Excellence in aviation education and training is very much on my mind these days. You may recall that I wrote a few months ago about my dream for a United States Aviation Academy Program. Though this idea arose in part from my concern about the looming shortage of well-qualified pilots and aviation maintenance technicians (AMTs), excellence is at the very heart of the concept. To me, aviation excellence, like perfection, is not a destination. Rather, it is a lifelong journey that requires the traveler to be alert, open to new ideas, and passionately committed to learning as much as possible. And, I don't mean learning that is limited to technical stick-and-rudder skills. If aviation is your calling, excellence means making every effort to master both the art and the science of your chosen craft.

### (Aviation) Art Appreciation

Both the art and the science of aviation involve mastery of certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Let's start with knowledge and attitudes. It is certainly possible to physically operate an airplane without any knowledge of aviation history or acquaintance with the many aviation heroes and legends who pioneered the possibilities we take for granted today. But taking for granted any part of the privilege of flight is not consistent with aviation excellence.

Aviation history is fascinating. Its pioneers are amazing and inspiring. Aviation literature offers some of the best adventure stories in the English language (think Ernest Gann) plus authors who, like Anne Morrow Lindbergh and Beryl Markham, skillfully paint the beauty and poetry of the sky. An

attitude of gratitude for flight and an unquenchable thirst for greater knowledge are hallmarks of aviation excellence.

Appreciating the art of aviation also involves refining your technical skills. Strive to be silky smooth on the controls. Don't just muscle the aircraft around; instead, develop the art of "thinking" it into exactly the position you want it to go.

### (Aviation) Science Projects

Excellence in aviation science is another lifelong project. You can never have enough knowledge about the aircraft you're flying, the avionics you're using, the airspace you're flying in, the atmosphere around you, the airports you visit ... you get the idea. Aviation is never boring, because there is always so much more to know, to do, and to learn.

I also encourage you to pursue perfection by seeking excellence in every aspect of your technical aviation skill. Can you hold headings and altitudes exactly as assigned? Can you achieve and maintain your target airspeeds? Do you know the numbers for the attitude-plus-power-equals-performance equation specific to each phase of your aircraft's operation? Can you consistently and reliably land within or, better yet, exceed, the established standards for the level of your pilot certificate? Do you know how to operate all the systems in your aircraft, in both normal and abnormal or emergency situations? The list is endless, and so is the learning.

Then, there is the science of a proper and professional attitude. Do you consistently, and conscientiously, use the checklist? Do you take the "all available information" requirement in 14 CFR section 91.103 seriously in approaching your preflight planning? Again, the list goes on.

As you contemplate the many aspects of aviation excellence, let me close by recommending a favorite essay: "School for Perfection" in Richard Bach's *A Gift of Wings*. As the author observes, the goal (also my goal) is to foster "pilots coming along that know more about flying than how to steer an airplane." Enjoy!