

# Flight Training

## BE THE LEADER THROUGH CFI PROFESSIONALISM

by Matthew T. Elia

Being a flight instructor brings a lot with it from various responsibilities to many opportunities, plus the ability to have a lot of fun doing something very rewarding! But there are a couple quick things that every flight instructor should strive to personify in order to provide the best training environment for their students and clients.

Similarly, if you're a student pilot (or even a certificated pilot) presently working with a flight instructor to reach your next training goal, these are some traits you should look for in your teacher, who by default is oftentimes your aviation guidance counselor. This piece will be written towards the flight instructor/flight instructor candidate audience, but for non-instructors you will see the traits to look for...

### 1. Set the tone

As the flight instructor, whether it's during a one-on-one flight, a ground lesson or in a large-class group setting it is vitally important that you set the tone for the training experience. This happens almost immediately and has long-lasting, far-reaching impacts over the course of training.

During a one-on-one training session, setting the tone for what's to come provides a clear example for the student to follow. If you as the instructor take the training event seriously, so too will the student. It is important to hold an inviting, but also firm (when necessary) setting where the student can succeed!

When faced with a training event featuring an audience of more than one student, you will encounter a situation where multiple individuals, each with their own unique personality will participate. This makes it all the more important that the instructor provides a clear course for the group and fosters a serious, yet enjoyable learning environment.

In a prior time, I had the opportunity to teach "Learn to Fly" ground school courses with another instructor. The other instructor and I worked well together ensuring the

presentations were lively and comedy in appropriate amounts was utilized to encourage a positive classroom experience for the groups of 8 to 20, depending on the session. We each had unique traits so we could balance each other and provide an example for the students.

### 2. Be on time

This item transcends working as a flight instructor, and is really a life lesson. Being on time is of vital importance to everything we do. Often times, flight lessons are constrained because of multiple scheduling factors including student, instructor and aircraft availability. Add in unpredictable weather, maintenance concerns, etc... and things get even more strained.

One of the toughest challenges for a busy flight instructor is jumping from lesson to lesson. Providing quality instruction, being intimately familiar with various aircraft and moving from one lesson to the next are all challenges. But as instructors, we serve as our students' aviation example and as such, it is critical that we lead by example. If we as the instructor are on time, it is reasonable to expect our students to be on time. It would not be fair to require our students to be prepared and on time if we were not. Granted, in aviation we work in a dynamic environment where things change and challenges come up, so being late on occasion may happen, however it should be a rarity as opposed to a trend.

Beyond the items listed in the paragraph above, an effective flight instructor must be totally familiar with his/her students as well. If you are asking a student to do homework and be prepared for X, Y and Z on the next lesson then you should be prepared to receive them and be ready to go when they arrive. Sure, asking to glance at the student's logbook before the lesson is an effective way to confirm where you left off or what has and hasn't been covered recently, but you should also be familiar with the student beyond the training.

A few commonalities and talking points go a long way in building a relationship. If your student is a college student, try to keep pace with what courses they are taking — this could provide effective training parallels. Similarly, if your student asks to fly over their home to take a couple pictures during a lesson and you see their grass is burnt to a crisp because they don't water it, even though ALL of their neighbors do, this could be a good joke to have in your back pocket when needed down the road (Sorry Will, I still remember the lawn...). The point here is to be on time and be prepared to provide an effective training for your student, this takes many forms beyond simply beating the clock.

### 3. Be consistent

Consistency is the final item within my flight instructor 'big three' traits. Having a consistent approach, providing a consistent learning experience and ensuring there is a consistent environment all are critically important to helping our students succeed.

A consistent approach will ensure that students have the benefit of hearing and seeing things the same way throughout their training. This will aide in students' development as the learning experience is a known commodity. On a basic level, we can look at steep turns. If during the maneuvers on one flight lesson the student hears one message over and over and then on a follow-up lesson about steep turns the student hears something different, this could create a challenge. If keeping the center of the cowling just above the horizon is the main message on multiple lessons then on another lesson the student hears more about the "ball" in the attitude indicator being just above the horizon line, this could cause confusion. Of course, if a student is struggling to grasp a concept or maneuver, then a different approach may be just what the doctor ordered.

Over the course of a student's flight training journey it is vital that messages don't change. To use an analogy, imagine your



# Flight Training

favorite football team is driving down the field. Suddenly, upon reaching the 5-yard line, the officials change the width of the field goal posts. This wouldn't be very fair as the team knew what it was up against the entire time and then upon reaching their present location, the context changed... Let's ensure we don't change the field goal posts on our students!

For a period of time I was fortunate enough to teach collegiate aviation courses at two New England colleges. Prior to my first experience teaching in this new setting I looked for counsel from an instructor role model of mine who also happened to be my favorite former professor from when I was a student. It was all the more exciting that I would be teaching "his" classes following his retirement at my alma mater. I will never forget the lesson he shared with me. In short, when it comes to teaching a class (especially a class made up of younger students) you can always ease up as

the semester goes along but you can never become more strict. Once a class learns your style they will not be able to adapt effectively and learn in a new "harder" setting. So, as he explained, you start off strong and then loosen up, because going the other way is a disservice to your students.

This wasn't to say that we have to be drill instructors in the classroom or the cockpit, but the point is that consistency is key. Going from lackadaisical to strict is not going to provide a good setting for your students, thus it is key to make the expectations and "rules of the classroom/ cockpit" known up front and provide a consistent approach. Then as a student gets further along, demonstrates internal motivation and has clear focus, the instructor can loosen the reigns and let the student really learn... Think of this as how guarded you are as an instructor during landings training. Early on when a student is first learning landings your hands hover close to the yoke, ready

to take over when necessary. As the student becomes more consistent, you're still 'on your game' on each approach and landing, but by the time the student is close to soloing, your hands are in your lap. You're ready to climb out and let them go at it alone!

It doesn't take much to set an effective tone, be on time and provide consistent training but the impact of an instructor living these three traits goes a very long way towards student success.

---

Matthew Elia is the Assistant Airport Manager at the Barnstable Municipal Airport in Hyannis, MA. A 10-year flight instructor Matt has specialized in training initial flight instructor applicants. Matt holds an MBA from UMass Dartmouth in organizational leadership and taught aviation management at both Daniel Webster College and Bridgewater State University.

## NBAA's 2019 WHITE PLAINS REGIONAL FORUM



June 6, 2019  
White Plains, NY

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

June 6, 2019 White Plains, NY

NBAA Regional Forums bring current and prospective business aircraft owners, operators, manufacturers, customers and other industry personnel together for a one-day event at some of the best airports and FBOs in the nation. Regional Forums incorporate exhibits, static displays of aircraft and education sessions into one-day events located across the country to help introduce business aviation to local officials and prospective owners and operators, and to address any current issues in the regions.

For more information, call event registration 202-783-7770,  
registration@nbaa.org or visit [www.nbaa.org](http://www.nbaa.org)



**Dedicated to helping  
Business Achieve its Highest  
Goals**

**Event Date**  
June 6, 2019

**Event Location**  
Westchester County Airport (HPN)  
White Plains, NY

**Registration Fees**  
NBAA Members  
\$110.00 Advanced Registration  
\$135.00 On-Site Registration

Non-Members  
\$135.00 Advanced Registration  
\$150.00 On-Site Registration

Register to attend the 2019 The  
NBAA's White Plains Regional  
Forum by visiting  
[www.nbaa.org](http://www.nbaa.org)