

THREE VITAL ELEMENTS OF PILOT SAFETY

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Every year, air transportation statistics continue to show that a large percentage of aviation accidents could easily have been avoided.

These accidents are all the result of poor judgment on the part of the pilots involved.

This month, I'd like to discuss the three main areas that influence our decisions as pilots and how you can improve yourself in these areas to avoid ending up as part of next year's "pilot error" statistics.

Attitude

The foundation of all your actions and decisions as a pilot is your attitude. Clearly, this is the most important element of being a successful pilot.

As a pilot, your attitude can be defined as a combination of your character and your outlook on the flight at hand. We all have a unique set of personality traits and many of these traits can lead to negative piloting results.

For example, some people are impulsive, acting quickly before thinking things through; others are resigned and give up easily when things go wrong. Perhaps you have a macho streak and think you can do anything and enjoy taking risks; or maybe you have issues with authority and think that rules are made to be broken. There are many character types, and many different ways to categorize them, but the most important goal is to develop a greater understanding of yourself so that you can avoid the pitfalls that might otherwise face you.

Whatever attitudes you may have, you either have to learn to deal with them—or they will deal with you. Beside becoming aware of your own characteristics, you should consider attending courses such as Transport Canada's "Pilot Decision Making" or "Crew Resource Management" in order to improve your abilities.

Knowledge

Every step of your decision-making process involves putting your knowledge to work. Your knowledge at a specific moment during a flight is called "situational awareness" or knowing what is going on around you. The more aware you are, the safer you are.

To make a smart, informed decision about beginning or continuing a flight you need to focus on obtaining knowledge in four different areas:

The Aircraft: The type of aircraft you are flying and the equipment you have on board will largely determine the level of risk involved in flying.

The Pilot: Obviously, your physical condition as the pilot is critical. Factors such as illness, medication, fatigue, alcohol, and stress can all influence your ability to perform at a high level.

The Environment: Evaluating the weather conditions and making the right flight decision sounds easier than it really is. A substantial number of accidents occur when conditions were supposed to be VFR but were not.

The Situation: Determining the risk factors for any given situation involves sifting through all the facts and asking yourself a variety of questions. How much daylight is left? How tired am I? Is time pressure forcing me to make the wrong decisions? Is the aircraft in top shape?...

Skill

If it takes a lot of your effort and attention just to control your aircraft, you'll be distracted from other important tasks such as looking out for other aircraft, getting information from ATC or Flight Service, and observing the terrain for navigation or possible emergency procedures.

There are really only two ways you can improve your skills: practice and training. Making the commitment to these two simple acts will make you a safer and more confident pilot.



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