

Deep Thoughts

What does it mean to be a professional?

Folks around your national headquarters tend to throw about certain words and phrases in a rather cavalier fashion—*teaching knowledge, situational awareness, and stick-and-rudder* come immediately to mind. *Professionalism* is perhaps the most overused. While teaching an FIRC a few weekends ago, we threw the question out to the class: What makes a professional flight instructor? Once the CFIs present got past the obligatory jokes about instructors not being professionals because they don't get paid, several themes emerged.

The first element of professionalism is *punctuality*. Showing up late is slovenly and disrespectful of the person seeking instruction. Woody Allen once said that 80 percent of success involves showing up; a whole lot of professionalism is showing up on time.

The next element involves *dress and demeanor*. It is not crucial to wear a white shirt and tie while instructing, no matter what some 141 schools say. White shirts soil too easily, and ties inhibit free movement. But

dirty or torn clothes send a message of sloppiness. If a person is sloppy in presentation of self, where else is the person sloppy? And don't let me get started on flying in shorts. I know there are a few parts of the country where it gets warmer than here in Vermont, but safety is always the paramount concern in the cockpit. In the event of a fire, even thin fabric provides greater protection than the epidermal sheath of one's legs. All you need to be convinced to wear long pants is one set of legs burned in a cockpit fire.

A truly professional instructor thinks and plans techniques of *communication* with fellow pilots. Bear in mind that this involves far more than mere words. Body language, tone of voice, and facial expression play a major part in defining the message you give to your student. A pilot expressing difficulties encountered performing a chandelle receives much more reassurance from an instructor maintaining eye-to-eye contact than from one watching planes in the lo-

cal pattern. Selection of words is important, too. Most CFIs have heard the apocryphal tale of the student who freaked out when the instructor told him to "keep the ball in the center, lest a wing fall off." And low-time pilots can become confused if the instructor instructs them to "bring back the power" to mean *retard the throttle* on some occasions and *re-establish full power* on others.

By far the most important consideration in determining one's professionalism, however, is the question of ethics.

"From accountants to zookeepers, professionals of all sorts seem to have a code of ethics," writes Union College philosophy professor and medical ethicist Robert Baker. "It was not always so. Until about 1800, ethics, especially professional ethics, was about character, honor and dishonor, virtue, and vice. Ethics had nothing to do with formal codes of conduct. A true professional, being a gentleman, needed no written instruction in



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how to behave."

Times have changed, and recent years have brought written codes of ethics and codes of conduct to most professions, including our own. NAFI adopted a code of ethics in its early years and displays that code prominently on our website, www.nafinet.org. One may find an even more detailed code of ethical considerations for aviators in the Aviators' Model Code of Conduct, at www.secureav.com.

Read both over, and ponder what they mean. As we begin a new year of flying, remember we share the greatest profession in the world.

Keep your airspeed up. ■