The Best Practices of Good Pilots

by Jerry E. Tobias

What makes a pilot a *good* pilot? Yes, "stick and rudder" ability is important. But, I'd like to suggest that to be a good pilot you must also strive to be the following:

B – BRIEFED. To be briefed is to *be aware*. A pilot, of course, must be *fully* aware of many things. Aircraft performance characteristics and limitations, airspace requirements, human factors issues, regulations and weather factors are just a few of the many things that are "need to know" items. Remember, though, that *everything* changes! What you knew two months ago or, in some cases, even two hours ago isn't necessarily all that you need to know now.

E – EQUIPPED. Think "big picture" here. Certainly, traditional aeronautical equipment is essential. Navigational charts (that are current!), check lists, aircraft flight manuals, a good headset and other tools are all important to the serious aviator. *Understanding* and *proficiency*, however, should also be on every pilot's "Minimum Equipment List" (MEL). After all, neither what you fly nor how many advanced gadgets you have on board mean anything if not accompanied by study and training that lead to comprehension and expertise. And, while sometimes not included as "standard equipment" (unfortunately), I would also suggest that *wisdom* and *good judgment* are more than absolutely crucial. To be obtained, however, they must be continually and diligently pursued.

S- SAFE. I know it's a cliché, but safety really is an attitude. You either fly with it…or you don't. And, an accident-free flight is not necessarily the same as a safe flight. Just because you've "gotten by with it" on a regular basis doesn't make you safe. Safety begins and ends with deliberate and proactive thinking and actions. Proper preparation, appropriate compliance, a "no short cuts" attitude, a cautious and questioning mind-set, etc., are just a few of the commitments necessary for consistently safe flight operations.

T – THOROUGH. Do you ever rush through weather briefings or preflight inspections? It's very easy to allow pressures and distractions to keep you from being thorough. Don't let this happen! When you prepare for a flight, don't just scan, but *read and thoroughly process* what you need to know. And, when you preflight an airplane, don't just glance, but *look at and thoroughly examine* what you need to inspect. It's often the little things that can spoil your day. Being thorough is what helps you catch those little things.

So, remember "B-E-S-T Practices." Are you ***Briefed*** (do you know everything you need to know before each flight)? Are you properly ***Equipped*** (do you have everything available - physically and mentally - that you might need)? Are you ***Safe*** (do you approach each flight with the right attitude)? And, are you ***Thorough*** (do you take the time to do things right, or do you just "go through the motions")? Make these practices a consistent part of your routine. Eventually, you will either be very glad that you did, or very sorry that you did not. ■

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Jerry E. Tobias - P. O. Box 541236, Omaha, NE 68154 - theflightdeck@cox.net