

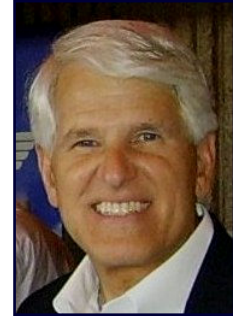


Final Approach

by Jerry Tobias

My forty-four-year association with the aviation industry has led me to conclude that there are two foundational elements that matter most: PROFESSIONALISM and PEOPLE.

Professionalism defines how we do what we do, not how much we are paid to do it. The same level of professionalism that would be assumed of a 20,000-hour airline captain should also be expected of every 200-hour weekend pilot, every airport employee, every maintenance technician, every scheduler/dispatcher, every tower operator, etc. Professionalism, after all, is an *attitude*, and that attitude is what enables and encourages commitment, focus, thoroughness, and consistent performance...while helping to combat the opposite qualities (inattention, arrogance, complacency, and the like). That attitude also motivates us to keep learning, to improve our skills, to do our best at each great or seemingly insignificant task, and - most importantly - to do it all as safely as possible.



The second foundational element is *people*. I have had the opportunity to fly some great airplanes during my career, but my best aviation memories will always be about people.

Some of those memories concern passengers. One example is Christmas Eve of 1971, a day that I spent shuttling troops back and forth to Bob Hope USO shows in Ben Hoa, Vietnam. I will never forget the changes in the soldiers' faces from before the shows to afterward. For a few hours, at least, their gloom and despair were lifted by knowing that someone actually appreciated their service.

I will also never forget the precious faces of the Make-A-Wish Foundation kids and their families that the flight attendants occasionally brought to our MD-80 cockpit during stopovers enroute to Long Beach or Burbank. The privilege of transporting those physically embattled children to Disneyland was always very humbling and very special.

I have also had the honor of encountering many remarkable individuals throughout my career. I have known Air Force three-star generals and desk clerks at three-star crew hotels, NASA space shuttle commanders and airport shuttle van drivers, airline executives and airport line employees. I have shared cockpits with some of the best pilots in the industry, flown airplanes serviced and repaired by the most thorough maintenance technicians around, been trained by incredibly dedicated instructors, and been served by countless aircraft fuelers, tug drivers, air traffic control personnel, housekeeping and wait staffs, etc. for years. Yes, my job was made easier and my life enriched by each and every one of these individuals.

So now, as I roll out on final approach after several decades of flight, here are two thoughts that I'd like to pass along to you: 1) *develop and maintain an unwavering professional attitude about everything you do*, and 2) *notice and value every person you encounter each day*. Then, when you park your airplane or leave your desk or work place for the last time, you will do so with more great memories, friendships and gratitude than you could pack into a 747 freighter...just as I do at this end of my career. ■