

# OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FLIGHTDECK

- LIFE LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH AVIATION -

by Jerry Tobias

*"I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw."*

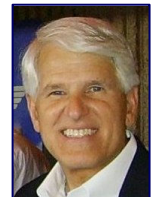
*Proverbs 24:32*



Ford Trimotor flightdeck

## INFLIGHT EMERGENCIES

### *...TAKING CRUCIAL STEPS TOWARD RECOVERY*



Inflight emergencies are rare. That, of course, is a good thing. When emergencies do occur, however, pilots (or crews) must take appropriate actions to minimize the impact of the failure and, if possible, correct the situation. While proven checklists outline the measures necessary to cope with every conceivable emergency, the procedures required to resolve most serious situations include the same three steps: recognition, response, and recovery.

**1. Recognition.** An inflight emergency must be recognized and identified before appropriate actions can be taken. This recognition can occur in several ways. An abnormal aircraft response is certainly one major clue. An engine failure in a multiengine aircraft during takeoff is a good illustration. Such an event is easily recognized because of the significant aircraft yaw created by

asymmetric thrust. Warning systems, such as the red flashing lights and aural alarms that typically announce engine fires, are also very effective attention grabbers.

**2. Response.** While *reactions* to inflight emergencies might be expected (panic, confusion, etc.), pilots are trained, instead, to *respond* to emergency situations. And, these responses must be both accurate *and* timely. An engine failure during takeoff, for example, requires instantaneous recognition and an immediate response, as the appropriate rudder input to counter the aircraft's yaw motion (multiengine aircraft) must be made within one or two seconds.

Training for critical inflight emergencies, therefore, is an important requirement, and pilots must demonstrate (usually in a flight simulator) an ability to proficiently respond to all such emergencies before qualifying to fly a particular aircraft.

**3. Recovery.** The goal of inflight emergency recognition and response, of course, is a successful recovery. This might first involve regaining control of the aircraft. Ultimately, however, it means the successful conclusion of the flight (a safe landing at a suitable airfield).

So, what do recognition, response and recovery have to do with you and me? Well, we all encounter "life emergencies" of one form or another on a regular basis. I would suggest that the same basic principles that apply to inflight emergencies also apply to the emergencies of life.

First, we can't ignore a life emergency (medical, relational, financial emergency, etc.). It won't just "go away." We must *recognize* and acknowledge that a critical, life-impacting situation does, in fact, exist.

The next step that we *all* usually take in such situations, though, is to *react*. Typical reactions to medical emergencies, for example, are things like shock, disbelief, denial, uncertainty and fear. Reactions to other serious situations might include anger, frustration, anguish or despair. It's very easy to get "stuck" in such reactions. However, not only do reactions drain, discourage and disable us, but they also diminish our ability to properly process the problem.

In aviation, the critical element that prepares and equips pilots to correctly respond to inflight emergencies is *training*. In life, the critical element is *choice*. We cannot *respond* to life-impacting emergencies until we are *willing* to let go of and move beyond our reactions. We must *choose* to replace fear (reaction) with faith (response), uncertainty with expectation, despair with hope, and anger with forgiveness. These choices free us in many ways, and enable us to modify our attitudes, regain proper perspectives, accurately process emotional, informational and relational issues, and move toward potential recovery and restoration. How quickly we shift from reaction to response, therefore, is very important.

Remember, too, that a problem-free life is neither possible nor the goal. *Wholeness* ("recovery") - in spite of our circumstances - is the goal. The good news is that we *have been given all that we need* for wholeness in and through every emergency or failure we will ever experience by Him who gave His Son to purchase and redeem us, through whom we might - ultimately - also be cleared to our final, eternal destination.

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*The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.* Psalm 9:9

*I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*  
Psalm 16:8

*I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.* Psalm 34:4

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THE BOTTOM LINE? Some inflight emergencies may be impossible to fully resolve and some failures may be impossible to completely restore. How pilots respond to such situations is critical, as they must still do everything possible to get even less-than-perfect airplanes safely back on the ground.

The same thing is true in life. Our cancer may not be cured, our salary may not be replaced, and the poor choices made by someone we care about may not improve. How we ***choose to respond*** to these and other crises, though, is critical, and greatly impacts both our lives and the lives of those around us. ■

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