



THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

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revisiting
Learning to Fly

- Attract More Students
- Ace the Intro Flight
- Lessons from Transition Training

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position Report

No Quitters

Keep your students flying

As a career flight instructor, sometimes I forget the simple things: Earning a pilot certificate is difficult.

Unless your student is pursuing a career as a pilot, he's not required to spend months (or years) working toward something that's completely voluntary—and not exactly required to function in society, like, say, driving a car. Flight training is expensive. It takes a lot of time, dedication, and effort, and, unfortunately, it can be too easy to quit.

It's no secret that part of our job is to help our students overcome these barriers and become certificated pilots, but it's a daunting task that requires a great deal of dedication. We serve as more than teachers; we are mentors, psychologists, and, in many cases, friends to our students. We balance these roles to help people get the training they want. That takes effort.

May 15 is the first incarnation of International Learn To Fly Day, and the other 30 days are quickly becoming the *de facto* "Learn To Fly Month." This is a good time to reflect on the role that we play, not

only in helping people get started, but also in helping those who take that first step to finish.

In my own instruction, I've had many students begin, stop, and restart training for many different reasons. A diminished desire to become a pilot was rarely one of them. Yet getting these students to come back was still a challenge. It took time and experience for me to figure out that I had to work within their personal circumstances for them to complete their training.

As we get to know our students, we have to learn why they've started this process and what might become a hurdle in their journey to finish what they've started. I make this a priority with my students; I engage them to understand their motivation and capabilities and what potential limitations may impede their training.

It starts on the discovery lesson. Don't schedule it for only half an hour; instead, spend time with the prospect, both before you fly and after. Take the time to get to know this person who has the interest in learning to fly, and "discover" for yourself

how to make it happen for him. You'll find that you're more successful in getting him to come back when his first interaction with flight training is more than a carnival ride—and you'll be prepared for training him when he returns.

It ends when—well, it never really ends. Even after a student pilot becomes a certificated pilot, there are flight reviews, instrument proficiency checks, aircraft transitions, and other opportunities for training. Sometimes students will come to us, but sometimes, we need to remind them. Sometimes, they'll have stopped flying, and we have to remind them why they went through all the effort to learn in the first place.

In the middle are those students who begin training, then stop coming back. If you've had a student who disappeared for a while, you should know why, and you should invite him to fly again. Certainly, students run out of time or money, especially these days. But reconsider whether you should let those students drift away. From a training perspective—and from a business one—having a student fly



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once or twice a month is better than letting him go completely. He may not advance his skills, but he won't lose them either, which will help when he eventually decides to resume training. But more critically, he won't lose his connection to flying.

Our goal for this month should be to move beyond just getting new people into airplanes and toward keeping our current students active. We have the greatest effect on pilot completions, so long as we keep their motivation—and their circumstances—in mind. Through attentiveness, understanding, and flexibility, we can keep them flying.

That's a simple lesson none of us should forget. ■