

From the Editors of

flight
TRAINING

FLIGHT SCHOOL BUSINESS



Flight School Business

SELECTED BY THE EDITORS OF *FLIGHT TRAINING* MAGAZINE

AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION
421 AVIATION WAY
FREDERICK, MARYLAND 21701
WWW.AOPA.ORG

© 2014, AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NO PART OF THIS PUBLICATION MAY BE REPRODUCED OR
TRANSLATED, STORED IN A DATABASE OR RETRIEVAL SYSTEM, OR TRANSMITTED IN
ANY FORM BY ELECTRONIC, MECHANICAL, PHOTOCOPYING, RECORDING, OR OTHER
MEANS, EXCEPT AS EXPRESSLY PERMITTED BY THE PUBLISHER.
PUBLISHED 2014 BY THE AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

ISBN: 978-1-940603-03-2 (AZW FORMAT)
978-1-940603-04-9 (EPUB FORMAT)
978-1-940603-05-6 (MOBI FORMAT)

COVER DESIGN BY MICHAEL E. KLINE

Five strategies to find and keep good instructors

JASON BLAIR

Finding and keeping good flight instructors has always been a challenge, and with aggressive hiring by airlines that are experiencing shortages of pilot candidates, that challenge is becoming greater. Flight training providers need instructors to keep their customers training (and their business generating revenue). In a competitive hiring environment, there are a few things a flight training provider can do to attract and keep good instructors.

Reward them (monetarily)—The first and most obvious tactic that most businesses consider is paying instructors more than other providers. This is an option, and flight training providers that pay at a higher scale actually force their instructors to have to consider carefully leaving a good paying instruction job to move on to an airline, which may result in a significant pay reduction (especially for their first few years).

Keep them busy—One mistake many flight training providers make is they hire too many flight instructors. That sounds impossible, but it's a problem. Isn't it good to have enough instructors that there is always one available if a customer wants to fly? Well, kind of, but not always. When flight instructors only get a few hours a week because they are competing against too many other instructors for too few students, they don't make enough money or gain enough flight time to keep them happy. This means they will leave to take jobs at places that will better serve their monetary or experience goals. Even in places with a good instructor/student ratio, the weather can be a factor in this (think winter in northern states) causing instructors to leave for places with better weather (and more flying). This is a good opportunity to help supplement their income by paying them for other functions such as working the line, helping with office work, or developing training materials or content to use with students at the school. An underutilized instructor who is bored will leave. The

transition of instructors is costly to the business and hard on the learning process for customers.

Offer medical benefits—Like other industries, training providers that can offer compensation packages that include medical benefits may be able to attract and keep instructors more easily. The cost of medical benefits for individuals (and more so for staff that have families) can be a significant factor in their employment decisions. While younger instructors who typically have fewer medical concerns and may not even choose to purchase insurance on their own may be less motivated by medical benefits, instructors with families or who are middle aged or older may strongly consider this as a reason to work for a company.

Help them reach career goals—When most instructors start working, they have basic single-engine privileges. If their goal is to fly in commercial or corporate operations they will likely need to gain multiengine experience. If your business has multiengine aircraft, consider rewarding staff instructors with “bump-up” ratings for multiengine, instructor, or ATP certificates as they reach set milestones in working for your company. This could be a “free rating” every 1,000 hours of instruction or on annual anniversaries of work to name only a couple examples. Get creative. Have a tailwheel aircraft? Offer them a tailwheel endorsement. Many instructors don’t have high-performance endorsements; help them get one. How about buying them an introductory lesson in a helicopter? Maybe sending them to training on a new avionics package would not only help them gain experience but also allow your business to have a trained professional whose services you can advertise to customers.

Provide housing—This may be a little outside the box from what most providers are used to, but attracting instructors may require you to have instructors move to your city. The costs of moving and the challenge of living in a city for undetermined periods of time can be a challenge that dissuades potential instructors from considering working for a company. This could range from a contract with a local apartment complex that provides furnished apartments to owning a house where multiple instructors might live. This is probably not a great solution for a local FBO that only employs one or two instructors, but for larger training providers with multiple instructors on staff it might be a way to attract and keep employees.

We know that not all instructors will stay around forever. Helping these instructors move on can keep them around a little longer if you are helping them meet their ultimate career goals while they are with you. When providing these types of benefits, it may be perfectly reasonable to ask them to sign a work contract that would require payback of expenses for these benefits if they leave early.

In a competitive hiring environment for flight instructors, a little creativity goes a long way. For minimal additional expenses, it is possible for a flight training provider to have a leg up on the competition that just pays instructors an hourly wage when

they are actually flying with a customer. These are just a few ways that might help.
What other ones have you seen or might you recommend?