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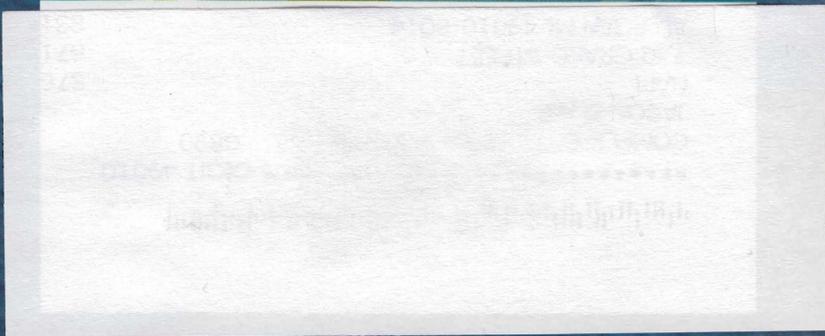
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BY PIA BERGQVIST

First Things First

What kinds of things do you as an instructor want to know about your student before the first lesson?

Jim Treadwell is the MU-2 program coordinator at SimCom Training Centers, where he has been employed for the past 12 years. Treadwell learned to fly in 1968, holds an ATP single-engine and multiengine license and is an accomplished flight and ground instructor. He is also an A&P mechanic with an IA rating. He says:

I provide initial and recurrent simulator-based training for high-performance aircraft. A common challenge for pilots operating these types of aircraft is bridging the gap between the current skill level and the anticipated ability at the end of a course. So before starting training, I find out what the student's current experience level is. For the pilot who has been flying a King Air 200 for the past five years and then purchases a Pilatus PC-12, it is a pretty straightforward task of presenting the material and working through the syllabus. However, the process may be vastly different for the pilot who moves from operating a Cherokee 235 to a PC-12. This student likely has no turbine time, no high-altitude endorsement and no complex endorsement. Satisfying the expectations of this kind of customer requires a different approach. In either case, before the start of class, I work with the student to establish goals for a realistic expectation of the course outcome. This, I have found, frequently results in achieving the desired goals.

In order for the training to be effective, I also need to find out what the student's learning style is. Not everyone is motivated to learn in the same

manner. Presentation methods should be adapted to the individual for maximum transfer of learning to occur. I determine the student's learning style by listening and watching how they respond to various questions. Asking about one's occupation and hobbies is a good start to gaining insight into the personality of the student. By making note of the student's reactions and asking open-ended questions, I can uncover which teaching mode will work best. Noting if the student's books are on the same page as I am, or if they are taking notes, or if questions are being asked after a reading assignment are good indicators for whether or not I'm getting through. These are some of the ways the instructor can determine the style that best benefits the student.

Jason Blair is the executive director of the National Association of Flight Instructors and an active CFI with more than 2,000 hours of instruction given. He is a NAFI Master flight instructor and an FAA-designated pilot examiner for Part 61 and Part 141 training providers. Blair achieved his undergraduate and master's degrees from Western Michigan University. He says:

As an instructor, I like to learn a few things about my students before starting teaching to help me relate and tailor their training experience to their expectations and abilities.

First, I ask why they are pursuing flight training and what they plan to do when it is completed. This helps

me determine if I should focus their training on personal or business use or toward a future professional pilot career. The two paths can include different motivating factors and realistic application of the training.

Second, knowing about their time availability allows me to plan my time appropriately and, I hope, to coordinate with theirs. A serious discussion about their available time is important. Family, work and other hobbies can compete for the time required to successfully train for a rating or certificate.

Third, I like to know about their personal study preferences. Flight training requires significant amounts of home study. Not all customers excel at self-study programs. Talking with customers about how they learn helps me select the best delivery mechanism for the ground portions of the syllabus such as books, DVDs, online training software, or if needed, suggesting additional hours of ground instruction time.

Last, I learn about the financial resources that they can dedicate to training. This can be vital when trying to plan training and considering the customer's ability to achieve the certificate. I know this is a difficult discussion sometimes, but it is critical to help determine the best approach to training efficiency. Proper planning in the context of available financial resources can help ensure training is not interrupted. Just knowing more about the student in these few areas can help me more successfully customize the training I provide, keep customers successfully on track to reach their goals, and even avert potential large future hurdles that can stop training efforts abruptly in their tracks. ✦