

Aviation Career Guidance

Aviation is the flying and practical utilization of aircraft. It encompasses the design, development, production and operation of aeronautical machines. Aeronautics is “air navigation”, or “sailing through the air.” Aviation is not a career path and I would hope anyone involved in it would understand this. There are hundreds, if not thousands of paths to take. As a matter of fact, it’s ironic that you don’t even have to fly to be apart of the industry. Think about that the next time you fly!

You should be informed before making a decision. You may have heard “think before you act.” Like a deaf person that listens, it’s unfortunate that many people don’t think before they act. Please understand to do so when plunging into an aviation career. In this industry there are intended routes and back up routes. I’d succumb to say most pilots stick with their intended route. Your choice will lead you on a path. It’s up to you to make sure the path is plowed, otherwise, a career in this industry will have you literally all over the map. So how can we go about pursuing an aviation career?

Interests and Exposure

Aviation has two types of people: those who fly (pilots) and those who don’t. This is the start in determining your education path. You need to know if you enjoy being in the air or on the ground. Can you handle spending time in the air? Don’t know? Take an introductory flight. Some people get sick, some people get confused, and some people get sick of being confused. Believe it or not, people who are passionate about learning to fly will find ways to overcome, tolerate and enjoy their fears of flying. Don’t always let your first experience be your last experience. Acceptance and tolerance can take time.

Okay, so you really don’t like to fly? That’s fine, because there are actually many more ground opportunities. You can be a mechanic, dispatcher, line tech, aircraft broker, service representative, insurance broker, financial broker, event coordinator, charter broker, service provider, and a lot more!

What background do you come from and what have you been exposed to? Does your family work in aviation? Maybe a family member owns a plane you have access to or a monthly subscription to a magazine that you could start to read. Have you been to a local air show or visited your small and friendly airport? Make sure it’s not the big and ugly international airport where the only thing going on is business and uniformed fast paced passengers. Have you thought about a job in the industry and most importantly, did you research it? Do you know what your typical workday will look like or will you create it? Find out about a local fly-in and find a pilot to go with. This is a great way to get exposed to the industry to see general aviation in action.

When considering what you know and what interests you in the field, figure out if the desire is temporary or long term. This is extremely important. Can you handle working your dream job for life? Could you handle your day in the life for years to come?

The Goals

What is your main goal and why? Do you want to sell airplanes to make a living while flying for fun? How about flying in air shows and working as a mechanic on the side? Maybe you have an idea to instruct in your airplane at your home located on a grass strip in northern Wisconsin. Do you want to retire after flying for US Airways for 20+ years? How about hiring a couple of pilots to fly your chartered jet? You could even run your own FBO and provide services to pilots and passengers. Will it take six months, one year, five years, or ten years to reach your goal? Maybe your goal is ongoing for life.

Your goals may be affect by factors such as having access to airports, instructors, flight schools, or money. Will you have to fly to work or work to fly? Are you able to continue your job where you live

or will you have to travel? Will you be satisfied traveling every week or month for a few days? Will you miss your social life, maintaining your home, paying bills, your husband or wife, etc? Does vacation mean anything to you? My idea of vacation is everyday and I hope it stays that way. Are you going to be comfortable in your work environment? Can you handle the people you will be around and do you like the lifestyle?

Goal Possibilities, Limitations, Needs

Are you able to pursue your goals physically? Do you have any problems that may hinder your performance? Are you limited with finances? Aviation is not cheap because of the inherent responsibility and liability of the industry. It will cost you a lot of time and money to educate yourself in this industry. There are ways to avoid, share, and reduce your expenses although. Do you know what you will need in order to accomplish your goals? Unfortunately, it can take hundreds, if not thousands of hours of flying or working under supervision to receive the proper certifications to legally do business. I don't think the FAA will every stop writing limitations, regulations, sanctions, or compliance documents. I laugh when I say, if you haven't done something illegal in this industry, then you aren't doing anything at all. If you are currently working, how will you be able to fit in time to pursue an aviation career path? Perhaps, you can work in a lower position that will help you build time to reach your desired one. For instance, you can work under the supervision of a mechanic and use that time toward your own certification rather than having a part-time job and going to school for it. Are you willing to work different positions to build your portfolio? It is not a bad thing to work multiple jobs as long as the jobs are related to what you plan on doing. That should be obvious. Whatever you decide, position yourself around the industry rather than around a paycheck. This is your career and your life, so enjoy it.

Plans of Action

Plan your work and work your plan. Most of us have heard this and rightfully so. Know your goal and work backwards. If you have the goal, but don't know the steps to take, get help. Find someone you aspire to be and talk to them. These people are your mentors, instructors, team, family, industry friends, and teachers. Use them, thank them, and if you can, pay them in any way that seems fit.

Find a flight school, talk with an advisor, attend a seminar online, spark your interest, motivate yourself to take a step forward and then act. Accept spending the time needed to gain an extra hour of flight or attend class, even if it costs you. Don't let the cost stop you because it will pay off! So what if you can't afford it. Just do it and find a way to pay it back. If someone is willing to give you a loan, take that as a gift. View it as an investment and don't look back.

Use website information and books to learn from and formulate a plan with that knowledge. Know exactly what you need to do to get where you want to be. You will fail and you will succeed. If you couldn't get the investment you needed, try again. If you don't have the money for additional training right now, now is the time to find a way to get it. Do what is needed to get one step further to your goal. It works! A career here must be sought with patience. There is no easy or fast path to success. In reality, you are always growing in this industry.

The Help

The more the merrier! Get all the help you can. As stated before, find mentors and learn to take time to read. Educate yourself, have others educate you, and attend seminars, webinars, events, and expos. Build up your network and retain the info. You don't necessarily have to use the contact now, but maybe you will in the near future. Keep an inventory of contacts that relates to everything aviation. Make sure that this file is separate from your personal contacts. Knowledge is only power when put to use. Your inventory is your supply and your supply is essential when demands need to be met. Please remember this!!

Learn to deal with yourself, have patience, use information to find information, and connect what you know with whom you know. Help is there; sometimes it just takes a little research and persistence.

Afterwards

Are you prepared to extend your goals beyond your goals? What happens when you finally become the pilot, mechanic, or service provider you intended? Do you now need to find a company to work for or can you start your own? Was it worth it to you? Is the job what you expected? Regardless of your expectations, you have accomplished something that should make you proud. You can always use your skill to develop another one in aviation. Many times, your accomplishments will be the qualifications for other positions of interest to you.

The best way to overcome dissatisfaction in your accomplishments is to expect it. Be prepared to feel pain and give yourself another plan of action. Find ways to give back your new skill to help others. This is a wonderful way to stabilize your emotions and will give you power to market yourself.

Now get working!

Trust in Flight,

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